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Blanche Selva: her pianistic legacy

Maite Aguirre Quiñonero

(0803004)



Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Guildhall School of Music & Drama, London
Research Department
October 2023

Abstract

Blanche Selva (1884-1942) was an eminent French-Catalan pianist, pedagogue, author, editor and composer. She acquired a formidable technique that allowed her to give the first performance of important works such as Albéniz's *Iberia* while being equally comfortable playing all of Bach's keyboard music, 32 Beethoven Sonatas and copious amounts of new music. She held prominent positions as a teacher, first at the Schola Cantorum in Paris, then the conservatoires in Strasbourg, Prague and the École Normale in Paris. She wrote several books, including a treatise on piano technique and her catalogue as an editor comprises nearly 200 works. Selva also composed pieces for solo piano and organ as well as chamber music and choral works.

Despite such a versatile and successful career, Blanche Selva's role in the development of twentieth-century pianism has been seriously overlooked. This thesis provides the first comprehensive, English-language account of her career, addressing her under-representation in modern scholarship of the period. Further, her unique trajectory and exceptional musical and technical insights offer viable solutions applicable to the modern pianist and piano teacher.

The thesis is based on extensive documentary evidence, most notably concert programmes, letters and her own recordings, as well as practice-based research. Her seven-volume treatise on teaching piano technique — *L'Enseignement musical de la technique du piano* (1916-1925) — has been examined at a practical level by applying its precepts to my own piano practice and in lessons with my students. I have also conducted interviews with pupils of former students of Selva to understand better what aspects, if any, of her method, have permeated later teaching practices.

Blanche Selva emerges from this research as a remarkable musician and personality whose study will better inform our views of early twentieth-century performance practice, where some women had a more influential role than they have been given credit for. Her technical proposals are unique in their scope and the amount of detail that she provides for their study is likewise remarkable. Her method is sound, and its

study will help modern pianists and teachers alike. Likewise, a thorough examination of her recorded work provides a tangible testament to her technical and musical abilities as well as the modernity of her approach, opening avenues for pianists of the twenty-first century.

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Acknowledgements

There are many people to whom I owe my wholehearted gratitude for assisting me throughout my doctoral studies. In the first place, my supervisor Professor Sir Barry Ife. Thank you for steering me along the way with kindness, patience and humour. You have been an integral part of this project helping me develop and structure my ideas, as well as assisting me with every small detail. Not least, patiently helping me with all the translations in this work. Thank you for every extra minute that I know you have taken to make sure Selva's words were adequately conveyed in English, and not lost in my less than idiomatic translations.

Barry, your input during this process goes much further than the content of this thesis and the lessons I have learned from you will remain with me for the rest of my life.
¡Gracias!

I also want to thank Guy Selva, the President of the Association Blanche Selva for his assistance throughout and for allowing me to visit the rich and unique collection of the Archives de l'Association Blanche Selva. The copious amounts of primary sources I have had unparalleled access to are a fundamental part of this thesis. Thank you for your time and generosity.

I am also indebted to Christiane Marandet, Ludovica Mosca, Jordi Camell and Cecília Serra for sharing their memories with me. Your recollections are an important testament and I thank you for your openness and willingness to be a part of this project.

I could not have done this work either without the support of several people within the Guildhall School of Music & Drama. Thank you to Ronan O'Hora and Pamela Lidiard for all the pianistic and musical guidance throughout the last years; Dr Maria Razumovskaya and Laura Roberts, for the valuable feedback at my upgrade; Knut Maseide and Ainara Urrutikoetxea from the Guildhall Library for your support throughout; and last but not least Sarah Bell for your assistance with all the

administrative matters. I am also most grateful to my examiners, Dr Natasha Loges and Dr Richard Baker whose valuable input reshaped this thesis into its final form.

I also want to acknowledge and express my gratitude to Marisa Ruiz Magaldi, from the Museo de la Música de Barcelona; Marta Grassot Radresa from the Centro de Documentació de l'Orfeó Català; Marga Ruiz from the Biblioteca de Catalunya; Alicia Torra the daughter of Alicia de Larrocha and custodian of the Alicia de Larrocha Archive, and Dr Trudi Darby for their collaboration with the primary sources; the pianists María Lorenzo, Jasper van Der Klis and Ricardo Gosalbo for our pianistic and musical discussions together; and Albert Nieto and Luca Chiantore, for taking an interest in my research and putting me in touch with Ludovica Mosca and Guy Selva respectively.

Eskerrik asko to my parents for teaching me both never to forget where I come from, as well as to chase my dreams wherever they take me. Ama, thank you for encouraging me to carry on when I was ready to give up! I would have never been able to complete it without your encouragement and belief in me.

Gracias to my 'Bilbainitas' for the more than 30 years of friendship. We are always close despite the distance.

Most especially, thank you to my husband, Jon and my daughter, Nahia.

Jon, I would not have been able to write this thesis were it not for your unwavering support. Thank you for keeping our household running during the last, very hectic, four and a half years and for being always there for me, making me laugh when I most need it. You are my rock. I could not have wished for nor have found a better life partner. Thank you for believing in me and showing me your support every day.

Nahia, your Ama carries on embarking on crazy endeavours that often take her away from you. Thank you for being patient with me. I look forward to telling you the story of Blanche Selva when you are a little bit older, and I hope that you find that the time I spent away from you writing this thesis was worth it.

This work is dedicated to both of you.

A Jon y Nahia, con todo mi cariño

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work, except where I have clearly referenced the work of others. I hereby grant powers of discretion to the Guildhall School of Music and Drama's School Librarian to allow this thesis to be reproduced in whole or in part without further reference to the author with the understanding that this permission is limited to single copies made for study purposes, subject to normal conditions of acknowledgement.

Maite Aguirre Quiñonero, October 2023

Introduction

I first came across the name 'Blanche Selva' as I was leafing through an old edition of the second cahier of Albéniz's *Iberia*, which is dedicated to her. I was 19 or 20 years old, and I remember thinking that she must have been a pupil, or a patron, or a socialite, and did not give her a second thought.

I stumbled upon her name again more than a decade later, as I was researching the pianist Ricardo Viñes (1875-1943). I am glad to say that this time around I was more curious to find out who she was. It was very soon apparent to me that Blanche Selva (1884-1942) was not the amateur socialite pianist I had thought she might be. She was a fully-fledged virtuoso who had written her own seven-volume piano treatise, *L'Enseignement musical de la technique du piano* (LEMTP), edited more than 200 works, composed works for piano, organ and chamber music and taught in prominent institutions such as the Schola Cantorum and the École Normale de Musique in Paris, the Conservatoires in Prague and Strassbourg and established her own academies in Barcelona. She had also actively contributed to the early dissemination of Isaac Albéniz's (1864-1909) *Iberia*.

Initially, my research focus was on the application of her treatise to the repertoire of Albéniz. Later, I expanded the framework to include the works of Déodat de Séverac (1872-1921), whom I had discovered through her own recordings. She had been the first performer of many of their works and I proposed that examining her technique and pianism would be an ideal way to gain a better understanding of Albéniz and Séverac. There is also a musical affinity between the three of them, which I felt offered the project an overarching musical cogency. However, some months into my doctoral studies, it became apparent that Selva's pianistic work and personality needed, and deserved, a larger canvas on which to be fully examined. I therefore changed the focus of my research to put her at the centre of the project, rather than using her as a vehicle to understand the work of others.

The following research questions gradually emerged, propelling the enquiry forward:

1. Who was Blanche Selva, and how close can we get to answering this question through the surviving evidence?
2. What does her treatise say? Can we learn about Selva's own personal technique through it? How does it fit within the chronology of the evolution of piano technique and is it relevant to a pianist and teacher nowadays? Analysing the work empirically, that is by applying its precepts to the best of my understanding from her own written explanations, what does it feel like? Has my pianism changed through her work and, if so, how? Can it be taught, and do I feel that any modifications or concessions need to be made? If so, which?
3. She left very few recordings. What do they tell us about her playing? Can we ascertain whether these are representative of her pianism? From a performer's point of view, are her interpretations relevant to a pianist in the twenty-first century?
4. Given that she worked closely with Albéniz and Séverac, what is the extent of that collaboration? What does it tell us about her? Why is she generally not given credit for this?
5. Given that she taught over 2,000 pupils, would it be possible to trace some students of her students? If so, is there something from her teaching that has permeated through to this day?
6. What is therefore the extent, if any, of her pianistic legacy?

The overarching aim in answering these research questions has been to provide a comprehensive understanding of Blanche Selva as a performer, teacher and scholar.

Initially, the study of her small compositional output was also intended to form part of this research. However, I finally decided not to focus on her compositions. For several reasons that are discussed in the first two chapters of the thesis, Selva did not devote much of her career to composition. Her resulting output is therefore small and, I suggest, pales in comparison to her other musical endeavours and accomplishments. One of the fundamental concerns of feminist musicology has been, understandably, to increase the visibility of female composers within western classical music (WCM),

precisely because of the importance the canon plays in our cultural values.¹ I argue, however, that continuing to centre and anchor musicological studies around composition, an activity in which for many reasons, women have generally been excluded from participating, prevents us from discovering meritorious work by many female musicians. These reasons are outlined by Citron as being: a lack of adequate music education (p. 105); restricted access faced by women to publish their work (p. 106); lack of access to the musical establishment, that is the 'corps of professionals consisting of other composers, and of performers, conductors, impresarios, and board members of major performing organisations' where 'women, in general, experienced enormous difficulty in forging those necessary contacts, largely through gender-specific conditions' (p. 106); and issues arising at the reception stage, where 'women have been subjected to gender linked evaluation' to their detriment (p. 108). These, however, Citron notes 'are symptoms of a more basic reality: pervasive philosophical bias against women as creators' (p. 110).²

If we change the frame and cast a brighter light on studies of other musical activities, such as performance or teaching, we allow many more outstanding female musicians to take the central position they deserve. The outcome leads to a greater representation of women and a broader and richer understanding of our societal, musical and cultural past.

Quoting Professor Susan McClary, a specialist in feminist musicology and wider cultural criticism of music:

[...] I am especially drawn to women artists who, like myself, are involved with examining the premises of inherited conventions, with calling them into question, with attempting to reassemble them in ways that make a difference inside the discourse itself, with envisioning narrative structures with feminine endings. The work of these women broadens the range of possible musics, as it comments both on the assumptions of more traditional procedures and on the

¹ One of the most important and seminal books on this issue is Marcia J Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

² Marcia J Citron, 'Gender, Professionalism and the Musical Canon', *The Journal of Musicology*, 8.1 (1990), 102-117.

problematic position of a woman artist attempting to create new meaning within old media.³

I argue therefore that it is crucial to challenge the inherited convention of foregrounding composition and to study performers and performance in their own right, both as a way of incorporating music-making as a legitimate cultural object worthy of study in and of itself, and as a way of redressing gender imbalance. When the scope of study is widened to include performers, teachers and patrons, women suddenly become far more prominent and can be seen, as in the case of Selva, undertaking leading roles within the musical fabric of their time. Reframing the narrative in this way allows us to 'broaden the range of possible musics' as McClary suggests.

It is worth noting that, leaving gender issues aside, other scholars are already making performance their main object of study, arguing that the role performers undertake is far greater than simply being a transparent window into the composer's intentions. Amongst them, Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, who writes:

This is what WCM ideology seeks to control, pursuing the fantasy that performance can be transparent, leaving the listener in direct communication with the composer. [...] I argue during this book that the process is much more collaborative; that the size and shape of the field of possibilities for the affordances of any score cannot (at the moment, perhaps ever) be known; and that performers may always, if they wish, be explorers at and beyond the known boundaries of that field. They have much more to show us about the identity of a piece, indeed about the variety of identities it may sound, than has been recognised. The identity imagined, even performed, by the composer, each time they imagine or perform that piece, is just one of those.⁴

Nevertheless, it would not be an accurate representation of Selva's legacy to ignore her compositions altogether. I discuss them briefly in the context of her biography, where other tensions in her life that encouraged or discouraged her composing are also discussed. Further, despite taking this stance for the purpose of this thesis, I do

³ Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality* (Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 19.

⁴ Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, *Challenging Performance: Classical Music Performance Norms and How to Escape Them* (Version 2.04 (10.iv.21) at <https://challengingperformance.com/the-book/>), pp. 26-27.

not deny the impact that the written score can have in disseminating the work of a musician: when the Guildhall School of Music & Drama hosted part of the global marathon of music by Spanish and Latin-American women composers organised by the Festival Internacional de Música de Tecla Española, I welcomed the opportunity to present two of Selva's works, *Cloches dans la brume* and *Cloches au soleil*.⁵ A link to a recording of my performance of these two pieces, is provided in Appendix 1.

This research is a multidisciplinary project which draws on historical, musicological and practice-based methodological approaches. The thesis is also supported by a feminist musicological framework that strives to contextualise better Selva's life and work within early twentieth-century pianism as well as to understand her reception since. However, on this last point, as Pekacz notes, caution must be exercised so as not to succumb to predetermined ideas and outcomes:

feminist biographers manufacture stories of suppressed female geniuses in a way that demonstrates the unreflective adherence of these authors to predetermined explanatory schemes and political agenda, to familiar nineteenth-century plots of heroic and masculine biography, as well as their disregard for historical context, let alone evidence.⁶

Indeed, when studying the life and work of Selva holistically, the picture that emerges is that of a strong and self-sufficient woman who enjoyed a successful career on her own terms. She was able to provide for her family dependants out of her professional earnings without the financial aid of a family legacy or a husband. As is shown in the first chapter (Chapter 1: *Blanche Selva, outline biography*), she was, on the whole, well received and admired by audiences, critics and peers, held prominent teaching positions and was a trusted advisor to several composers in her circle who relied on her for her unquestioned expertise. Together with her treatise, she also devised a comprehensive study programme for her students and for those pianists who aspired to publicise themselves as teaching under her method. She held examinations and summer courses where the syllabus went beyond learning to play the piano, and included gymnastics, harmony and Gregorian plainsong, amongst other activities. She

⁵ Recorded live in Milton Hall Concert Hall (London) on 1 October 2021.

⁶ Jolanta T Pekacz, 'Memory, History and Meaning: Musical Biography and its Discontents', *Journal of Musicological Research*, 23:1 (2004), 39-80 (pp. 44-45).

was meticulous in her approach, and although she had received no formal schooling in her youth, her written works are extremely well researched and thorough.

To explain her trajectory and particularly her relative obscurity since, there are other factors beyond being female that also need to be considered. A stroke with life-long consequences, the semi-permanent paralysis of her left arm as well as speech impediments, halted her performing career in 1930, and she died in the middle of the second World War, in 1942. By contrast, others of her peers who have enjoyed far more scholarly attention, such as Alfred Cortot (1877-1962) and Marguerite Long (1874-1966) — both also older than Selva — outlived her by two decades. As a result, they left behind a more prolific recording catalogue than Selva, who only started to record in 1929, shortly before her illness, and both remained in Paris, leaving behind a more established trail of pupils and followers. By contrast, Selva left Paris for Barcelona in 1925, cutting her ties with one of the most important cultural centres of the world.

Another aspect that is explored in Chapter 1, and which also goes a long way to explain her later absence from musicological research, is her association with the Schola Cantorum, and one of its founders, Vincent d'Indy (1851-1931). Chapter 1 contextualises the musical and quasi political role of the Schola Cantorum, and situates Selva's work within the institution as well as beginning to explore her relationship with d'Indy, her teacher and lifelong associate. Given the greater attention that both audiences as well as academic scholarship have given to other French composers, broadly centred around Fauré and the Conservatoire as opposed to the Schola and its affiliates, it is not surprising that, despite her accomplishments and influence, Selva has not permeated mainstream music historiography as much as the other two pianists mentioned, or even as much as Ricardo Viñes (1875-1953).

Nevertheless, deploying a feminist musicological framework throughout has facilitated understanding her life and work more deeply and in a more nuanced, sometimes conflicting way. It is a lens that has highlighted tensions and inconsistencies in her own view of herself and brought to the fore gendered expectations that were typical of the

time, and which are unfortunately not yet entirely anachronistic at present. This approach helps to contextualise her reality in a more holistic manner.

In Chapter 2: *Blanche Selva in the Concert Hall*, I give an account of the repertoire and the venues in which she performed throughout her career. Both Chapter 1 and 2 rely heavily on primary sources found at the Archives de l'Association Blanche Selva (AABS) in La Touche, France as well as the Museo de la Música de Barcelona (MMB), the Centre de Documentació de l'Orfeó Català (CEDOC) in Spain and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF).

I am most indebted to the AABS. This is a private, family archive, assembled in large part by M. Guy Selva, and I take this opportunity to thank him most warmly for opening this comprehensive collection to me, and for assisting me in my research. The AABS is a unique, wide-ranging collection of documents comprising all of Selva's correspondence known to date, concert programmes and reviews, as well as books and printed scores prefaced or edited by her, many of which are now out of print. Notably, thanks to the AABS, I was able to access a copy of the entire 1,000 pages of Selva's seven-volume treatise on teaching the piano, which is now out of print and not readily available in public libraries.

Although the contents of the AABS are not open to the public and remain uncatalogued, Guy Selva has published several volumes (*cahiers*) that serve as a guide to the collection: most notably his monograph *Une artiste incomparable, Blanche Selva, pianiste, pédagogue, musicienne*,⁷ and eight of the ten *cahiers* about the artist published by the Association Blanche Selva.⁸ Taken together, these texts provide a

⁷ Guy Selva, *Une artiste incomparable, Blanche Selva pianiste, pédagogue, musicienne* (Nice: Association Blanche Selva, 2010). In order to distinguish between Guy Selva and Blanche Selva in second and subsequent references, as recommended by the Modern Humanities Research Association Style Guide ('*MHRA Style Guide: A handbook for Authors*, 3rd edition (London: Modern Association, 2013), this thesis will use the forms 'Guy Selva' and 'Selva' respectively.

⁸ Guy Selva, *Blanche Selva, actrice du renouveau de Jean-Sébastien Bach* (Nice: Association Blanche Selva, 2012); Guy Selva, *Blanche Selva, un répertoire exceptionnel* (Nice: Association Blanche Selva, 2014); Guy Selva, *Blanche Selva-Déodat de Séverac, entre musique et amitié* (Nice: Association Blanche Selva, 2015); Guy Selva, *Blanche Selva, un professeur, des élèves* (Nice: Association Blanche Selva, 2016); Guy Selva, *Musique française, Musique tchèque, Blanche Selva, double ambassadrice* (Nice: Association Blanche Selva, 2017); Guy Selva, *Blanche Selva, par-delà les notes, les écrits...* (Nice: Association Blanche Selva, 2018); Guy Selva,

comprehensive overview of Blanche Selva's life and work, although without the in-depth analysis of her pianism and its legacy that this thesis aims to provide.

From the early stages in her career, starting in 1899, Selva kept performance albums in which she collected her concert programmes. The AABS had two of these, comprising the years 1905-1908 and 1910-1913, and a third handwritten album containing exclusively concert details of Selva in partnership with the Catalan violinist and friend Joan Massià (1890-1969) between the years 1924-1929, all of them donated to the archive by an heir of Massià. There was no trace of the other missing volumes. I was able to locate two of these at the Museo de la Música de Barcelona, which has published them online for public inspection. These two albums from the years 1899-1905 and 1912-1921 contain a total of 489 concert programmes between them. These albums had not been studied by either Guy Selva or Montserrat Font Batallè, whose thesis 'Blanche Selva y el *noucentisme* musical en Catalunya' is one of the few principal scholarly texts on Selva. Taken together, all these albums and additional concert programmes traced by the AABS provide nearly 1,500 concert programmes.⁹ Their analysis offers a rich insight into Selva's programming and musical activities throughout her career. The influence of Vincent d'Indy is also analysed in this chapter through the prism of her pianistic activity. Other aspects that have not formed part of previous studies of Selva such as performance anxiety, her preference for certain pianos or her prolific activity in salons of the time, are also brought to the fore. Finally, this chapter also draws on performance reviews to evaluate her reception at the time.

Among other secondary sources deployed, the collection of essays edited by Jean-Marc Warszawski, *Blanche Selva, naissance d'un piano moderne*, has proved the most useful.¹⁰ Consisting of fourteen chapters commissioned from different musicians and

Beethoven, el nostre cantor i germà (Nice: Association Blanche Selva, 2020); Guy Selva, *Blanche Selva, héritière spirituelle de César Franck* (Nice: Association Blanche Selva, 2022); Florence Launay, *Blanche Selva compositrice* (Nice: Association Blanche Selva, 2019); Gilles Saint-Arroman, *Aux sources d'une nouvelle pédagogie du piano: lettres de Blanche Selva à Guy de Lioncourt 1910-1913* (Nice: Association Blanche Selva, 2013).

⁹ Montserrat Font Batallé, 'Blanche Selva y el *noucentisme* musical en Catalunya' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Universidad de Granada, 2011).

¹⁰ *Blanche Selva, naissance d'un piano moderne*, ed. by Jean-Marc Warszawski (Lyon: Symétrie, 2010).

musicologists, this book provides valuable insights into Selva's life and work. Nevertheless, significantly, it lacks any study of her treatise. I argue that understanding pianistic technique is crucial to our broader understanding of the impact of her work, not only as a performer and teacher but as a collaborator and editor and this is a lacuna that needs addressing.

Three previous doctoral theses have also handled different aspects of the French-Catalan performer. The first is 'Piano fingering: an approach based upon the imprint analysis of Blanche Selva', by Paul Spicuzza (1980).¹¹ However, this work offers no real insight into Selva, her pianism or her treatise and pedagogical work. In his thesis, Spicuzza extrapolates the notion of 'imprint' (see Chapter 3) from Selva's *L'Enseignement* and builds his own theory around it.

In 2011, Montserrat Font Batallé submitted 'Blanche Selva y el *noucentisme* musical en Catalunya'. Her thesis focuses extensively and almost exclusively on Selva's work in Catalunya, an aspect that the author considered under-represented in Guy Selva's work. Like the other works cited, this doctoral dissertation does not study Selva's pianism nor does it assess her pedagogical impact in the region.

Most recent of the theses is that of Ghada Simon Hakim, 'Französische Klavierschulen im 18th und 19th Jahrhundert', defended in 2015.¹² Regrettably and despite alluding to Selva's treatise as a whole, the only book that is dealt with and is referenced is Selva's *Livre préparatoire* of 1922, and thus an analysis of the overall *L'Enseignement musical de la technique du piano* is also missing from this doctoral dissertation.

For this reason, and despite the number of books and theses published hitherto, the conclusion of Pérez Colodrero (2009) appears to be still valid:

La mayor parte de los trabajos que abordan su figura y su trayectoria contemplan esencialmente el aspecto biográfico, quedando por abordar aún el

¹¹ Paul Joseph Spicuzza, 'Piano Fingering: an Approach based upon the Imprint Analysis of Blanche Selva' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Ball State University, 1980).

¹² Ghada Simon Hakim, *Französische Klavierschulen im 18ten und 19ten Jahrhundert* (unpublished doctoral thesis, Eberhard Karls Universität, Tübingen, 2015).

estudio de las aportaciones metodológicas o de las innovaciones técnicas de la pianista francocatalana.¹³

[Most of the works that approach the artist and her trajectory deal largely with the biographical aspects. A study of the methodological contributions or technical innovations of the French-Catalan pianist is yet to be undertaken.]

With the exception of Hakim's thesis, the texts mentioned above centre solely on Blanche Selva, but others, including Hakim's, mention her as part of a group. However, Hakim is the only one to have addressed her treatise other than Luca Chiantore in his *Historia de la técnica pianística*. In this work, Chiantore presents a historical overview of the evolution of piano technique. When writing about Blanche Selva, Chiantore states that:

Tras la experiencia aislada de Blanche Selva, ningún otro pianista ha sabido hacer de la variedad de ataque el emblema de una propuesta pedagógica precisa y de una teoría técnica convincente capaz de trascender los enfoques de Breithaupt y Ortmann.¹⁴

[Apart from the single case of Blanche Selva, no other pianist has been able to establish a precise pedagogical proposal centred on variety of touch and build a convincing technical theory able to transcend the focus of Breithaupt and Ortmann.]

However, Chiantore's text only presents a short summary of some of her ideas, rather than an in-depth analysis and study of the viability of their application.

For these reasons, in Chapter 3: *L'Enseignement musical de la technique du piano* I provide the first comprehensive study of her treatise. The chapter begins with a contextualisation of her treatise within the French piano school situating it by reference to her predecessors and contemporaries. This chapter is grounded on a practice-based research methodology. Quoting from R. Lyle Skains, in this thesis, the

creative artefact [piano technique] is the *basis* of the contribution to knowledge. This method [practice-based research] is applied to original investigations seeking new knowledge through practice and its outcomes [...] The creative artefact is accompanied by a critical discussion of the significance and context of the claims, and a full understanding can only be achieved

¹³ Consuelo Pérez Colodrero, 'Cuando el pianista es el que investiga: Blanche Selva (1884-1942), un estado de la cuestión', *Revista de musicología*, 32:2 (2009), p. 765.

¹⁴ Luca Chiantore, *Historia de la técnica pianística* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2001), p. 701.

through the cohesive presentation of the creative artefact and the critical exegesis.¹⁵

I focused my enquiry on those questions ‘generated through the work of practice’, which Darla Crispin considers a ‘novel terrain’ in the emerging field of ‘Artistic Research’.¹⁶ Even the research questions that I formed at the outset before I began the real ‘practice’ of her treatise are grounded in my accumulated practice-based pianistic knowledge as a professional concert-pianist and I therefore still consider those to be questions that are ‘generated through the work of practice’ as Crispin defines it. It is important to underscore the wide-ranging meaning that the word ‘practice’ means to me in this context.

On the one hand, I ‘practised’ Selva’s exercises in the narrow definition of the word, that is I ‘tried them out’ for a full year. On the other hand, I extrapolated her teachings, that is the overarching ideas of her treatise, and the novel ways in which her exercises were changing my own way of playing in my own repertoire, which I also further carried on to the stage for two years. Finally, I was also active as a piano teacher during that time, and once I began to comprehend her method, and became convinced that it had placed my own playing and overall understanding of piano technique in a far stronger position, I also began incorporating her precepts into my own teaching.

As such, my analysis of her treatise is also a cumulative record of this experience. It has been suggested to me that the fact that I have adopted so much of her work into my own playing and teaching is a disadvantage that potentially discredits my conclusions because my experience is subjective and would appear to be tainted by bias. I would like to refute this assertion from the outset. Drawing again on Skains’ work, ‘[w]hat emerges [...] from this methodology [practice-based methodology], is the *exegesis* that accompanies the creative work: that knowledge that has remained implicitly within the artist, made explicit and seated within the context of the scholarly field.’ My personal experience and findings in this study are therefore not something that can be

¹⁵ R. Lyle Skains, ‘Creative Practice as Research: Discourse on Methodology’, *Media Practice and Education*, 19:1, 82-97 (p. 86).

¹⁶ Darla Crispin, ‘Artistic Research and Music Scholarship: Musings and Models from a Continental European Perspective’, in *Artistic Practice as Research in Music: Theory, Criticism, Practice*, ed. by Mine Doğan-tan-Dack (Oxford: Ashgate, 2015), pp. 53-71 (p. 57).

separated from the research itself, they *are* the research process as well as the research product. Moreover, my work in this thesis also relies on autoethnographic methodology. In particular, reflexive ethnography. As explained by Carolyn Ellis *et al*, this research project documents the way that I, the researcher, have changed as a result of undertaking this research.¹⁷

Further, as is noted by Crispin, '[t]he artist-researcher's internal dialogue between subjective musical instinct and cognitive rationale is both a valuable methodological tool and, potentially, something that can contribute to the output of the research process.'¹⁸ On why there is still resistance to this methodology, I also echo Doğantan-Dack's words for this purpose,

[...] corporeal-performative thinking is still not integrated into the dominant music analytical discourse as a fundamental form of musical understanding. This is largely due to the fact that expert music-instrumental knowledge that drives artistic performance making is not commonly recognised as a valid methodological tool that could give rise to novel musical insights and signification.¹⁹

However, this thesis endeavours precisely to champion music-instrumental knowledge as a valid methodological tool. Further, and by extension, I argue that this is not only concerned with the artistic practice-based processes in and out of the practice room or concert hall, but can and should be extrapolated to auditory perception of artistic processes in the analysis of recordings. This is the object of Chapter 4: *Blanche Selva in the Recording Studio*. This chapter offers an analysis of her recorded work, situating her output historically and assessing the applicability of her pianism to the contemporary performer. As introduced above, the methodology in this chapter rests first and foremost upon the premise that expert music-instrumental knowledge is a valid methodological tool. There is no greater working tool for musicians than their own ears and this thesis further suggests that analysing recordings without computer-

¹⁷ Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams, Arthur P. Bochner, 'Autoethnography: An Overview', *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 12 (1), (2010), paragraph 19.

¹⁸ Crispin, p. 61.

¹⁹ Mine Doğantan-Dack, 'The Role of the Musical Instrument in Performance as Research: The Piano as a Research Tool' in *Artistic Practice as Research in Music*, ed. by Mine Doğantan-Dack. SEMPRE Studies in the Psychology of Music (Oxford: Ashgate, 2016) pp. 169-197 (pp. 170-171).

assisted methods is a cogent and valid way of deriving musical meaning and contributing to the performance practice research process.

In relation to the study of Selva's recordings, there are only two texts that have provided a robust analysis of her work, those of Luca Chiantore²⁰ and Richard Langham Smith.²¹ However, both authors have only made a partial analysis of her recordings, and as such, a comprehensive analysis of her entire catalogue has not been attempted until now.²²

Chiantore rightly points out that one of the general difficulties when analysing recorded works from before the Second World War is that it is not always possible to compare and contrast them with other sources.²³ However, in Selva's case there are indeed several valuable written documents available to us from which to draw further insights into her recorded work which have not been considered by other authors until now. Chiantore bases his analysis exclusively on one element of Selva's teaching, the *neume*, a concept that will be introduced to the reader in Chapter 3. Despite arriving at some insightful and sympathetic conclusions, I argue that his methodology is too reductive. This is because he gives a disproportionate attention to a single element in the vast armoury of Selva's interpretative resources to the detriment of all others. I argue that Selva's musical and interpretative understanding is far richer and more nuanced than it appears in Chiantore's work, and that by focusing on a single, small detail of her pedagogy without the wider context, his analysis does not offer a true understanding of her work as a performer.

²⁰ Luca Chiantore, 'La théorie du *neume* dans les enregistrements de Blanche Selva', in *Blanche Selva, naissance*, pp. 105-121.

²¹ Richard Langham Smith, 'Style, Performance Practice, and Reception in the *Prelude, Chorale and Fugue*: Placing and Performing César Franck' in *Perspectives on the Performance of French Piano Music*, ed. by Scott McCarrey and Lesley A. Wright (Oxford: Taylor & Francis, 2016), pp. 105-123.

²² Chiantore only discusses the *Partita*, a section of the Beethoven violin duo with Massià, and very briefly her recording of Franck's *Prélude, Choral et Fugue*; whilst Langham Smith focuses solely on her interpretation of the latter.

²³ Chiantore, 'La théorie du *neume*', p. 105.

Langham Smith undertakes a comparative approach between Selva's and Cortot's recordings of César Franck's (1890-1822) *Prélude, Choral et Fugue*, concluding that

I had thought Selva would have been more classical, Cortot more fanciful. But both were musicians balanced between respect to a composer's style and the necessity to imprint an interpretation [...]²⁴

While I also use the comparative tool in this thesis, and use Alfred Cortot (1877-1962) as the comparator, I argue that neither Chiantore's nor Langham Smith's texts go far enough in providing a holistic understanding of Selva's pianism nor in answering the questions posed here. The main object of enquiry was to ascertain whether her recordings are representative of her style of playing. To this effect, I have compared her recordings, where available, with her own editions of those works as well as contrasting her performances with written instructions given on the performance of those works to one of her students. To answer the other ancillary questions, namely how her style compares to our understanding of early twentieth-century performance practice and its relevance from the perspective of a twenty-first century performer, a comparative approach where relevant has been used. In answering these questions, this multifaceted approach brings several elements to the fore which enhance our understanding of her pianism and performance praxis at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Selva's former pupil Marguerite Gauthier-Villars (1890-1946) wrote in a document entitled *Adieu à Blanche Selva* that her recordings 'ne le contentaient pas' [did not please her].²⁵ However, there is an unfinished letter from Selva to her pupil Andrée Vidal (1899-1980)²⁶ written in 1938 in which Selva refers her student back to her discs

²⁴ Langham Smith, p. 122.

²⁵ Marguerite Gauthier-Villars, *Adieu à Blanche Selva*. Letter dated Paris 20 January 1943, addressed to Patrice Coirault (1875-1959). I thank Guy Selva for a copy of this document. The original can be found in the BNF.

²⁶ Andrée Vidal wrote an article in 1978 giving an account of her studies with Selva: 'Durant mon enfance et mon adolescence, les leçons avec elle ne furent pas très nombreuses, mais régulières, environ six ou sept par an. Ses explications et ses indications mises par écrit étaient si précieuses et si claires que le travail d'une élève isolée, même très jeune, pouvait se réaliser et se concrétiser en de bons résultats, malgré quelques lacunes d'assiduité du travail personnel...' [During my childhood and teenage years, lessons with her were not numerous but regular, approximately six or seven each year. Her explanations and indications put in written

for the two pieces in the student's programme that she had also recorded — Johann Sebastian Bach's (1685-1750) first Partita and Séverac's *Baigneuses au soleil*:

'D'ailleurs pour ces 2 œuvres (Bach et Séverac) tu peux avoir les indications les plus exactes en te servant de mes disques' [besides, for these two pieces (Bach and Séverac) you can have more precise indications by using my discs as a reference.]²⁷

As such, at least to the extent that she was recommending them as an aide to study the interpretation of the pieces more thoroughly, it can be inferred that she must have been reasonably pleased with the outcome. This letter was written in response to Vidal's performance on Radio Nice some days earlier, and in it Selva effectively gives her student a class in written form. This is a valuable document as it provides a direct insight into Selva's interpretative understanding of several pieces: apart from the two works by Bach and Séverac discussed above, the 6th *Nocturne* by Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924) and Emmanuel Chabrier's (1841-1894) *Bourrée fantasque*. It also contains some fine details on the pieces as well as other remarks of general application. By contrasting Selva's own editions and recordings with these recommendations it has been possible to gain a greater insight and depth into Selva's playing and to make valuable inferences regarding her pianism and interpretation more generally.

In Chapter 5: *Testament of students*, drawing from autoethnographical methodologies further explained in the chapter, I have recorded the testimonies of four pupils who can trace their piano instruction back to Selva. Although other authors have discussed Selva's role as a teacher and have provided a comprehensive overview of the biographical details of some of her students at the time, no enquiry has been made into what has happened to that body of knowledge after Selva's and her pupils'

form were so precious and so clear that the work of a pupil working alone, even if very young, was possible and could produce good results, despite some periods of less frequent personal work...] Andrée Vidal, 'Blanche Selva. Artiste, pianiste et pédagogue', *Revue Musicale de la Suisse Romande*, 31.5 (1978), 239-244 (p. 243). Vidal also completed her training by attending Selva's own summer courses in Brive during the 1920s, later undertaking private lessons in Barcelona, and visiting her in Moulins-sur-Allier in the summers after 1936. They also remained in touch via correspondence throughout.

²⁷ Unfinished letter dated 23 May 1938. The original is in the Bibliothèque du Conservatoire de Genève and a copy was given to the Association Blanche Selva on 7 February 2018 by Jacques Tchamkerten. I thank Guy Selva for providing me with this valuable material.

death.²⁸ This thesis accepts from the outset that it is impossible to quantify what passes from generation to generation of piano teachers and pupils and that there are many reasons for this. A crucial one is that someone may arrive at the same conclusion independently and direct attribution may therefore be misleading. However, I argue that it is a legitimate research question to enquire about the embodied knowledge that passes from teacher to student and that this is a cultural object in and of itself. Further, the resulting interviews provide another layer of meaning against which to assess the viability and applicability of Selva's teaching over time and have opened further avenues of enquiry in my own practice.

As will be explained with greater detail in the chapter, the interviewees are pianists who studied with pupils who had obtained an accreditation to teach her method from Blanche Selva herself, or with pupils of theirs. These are Christiane Marandet, who studied with Cécile Piriou-Kunc (1884-1973), a close associate of Selva; Ludovica Mosca, who worked for ten years with Guillem Garganta (1886-1973), a former pupil of Selva who later became her assistant in Barcelona; as well as Cecília Serra and Jordi Camell. These two musicians were students of Carme Flexas (1925-2005), who had been a student of Garganta, and are thus a link to Selva, twice removed. The interviews were semi-structured, each lasting between 60 and 90 minutes.²⁹ I take this opportunity to wholeheartedly thank all of them for sharing their experiences with me.

Finally, chapters 6 and 7 discuss the relationship between Selva and Albéniz (Chapter 6: *Blanche Selva and Isaac Albéniz*) and Séverac (Chapter 7: *Blanche Selva and Déodat de Séverac*) respectively. These two composers have been retained for the reasons discussed earlier but the focus is on the examination of Selva's multifaceted collaboration with both of them as a springboard to provide further insight into her own musical activities. Further, much of the work she did for them was invisible at the time and, I argue, has remained invisible due to a systemic lack of enquiry into her work. This is not uncommon for women musicians, as is noted by Jane Bower:

²⁸ Most notably Guy Selva and Font Batallé.

²⁹ The interview questions are presented in Appendix 2. Ethical approval was granted on 23 October 2019 by the Research Ethics Committee of the Guildhall School of Music & Drama (Appendix 3).

We have observed that no matter what kind of musical activities women have engaged in, and no matter how vital or distinguished those activities might be, a historical process of making those activities invisible has nevertheless been at work.³⁰

Having analysed her life and work in this thesis, and notwithstanding the fact that mine is not the first work on Blanche Selva, I still propose that she has been seriously overlooked by other researchers and scholars dealing with the early twentieth century as well as by many researchers specifically dealing with feminist musicology. Further, many sources that do mention her do so with inaccurate information which evidences a lack of rigour when studying her life and work.³¹ Her absence from important books about the period is also notable. For instance, in Roy Howat's *The Art of French Piano Music: Debussy, Ravel, Fauré, Chabrier*,³² Selva is not mentioned once in the main body of the text and only once in a note.³³ This contrasts with mentions of others of her peers, such as 27 mentions of Ricardo Viñes and 19 of Alfred Cortot. Whilst it is true that the composers that are mainly dealt with in Howat's book were not Selva's closest professional contacts, she gave the first performance of works that are discussed by him, such as Fauré's last *Nocturne*, or his 13th *Barcarolle*, as well as Albéniz's *Iberia* and copious amounts of Séverac's music, which are also mentioned in the text.

She is also absent from important texts that have studied piano technique, such as Gerig's *Famous Pianists & their Technique*³⁴ or seminal texts dedicated to women

³⁰ Jane M. Bower, 'Feminist Scholarship and the Field of Musicology: I,' *College Music Symposium* 29 (1989), pp. 81-92 (p. 87).

³¹ Elaine Brody, *Paris: The Musical Kaleidoscope 1870-1925* (London: Robson Books, 1988), p. 123 mentions that Selva was 'another student of Franck'. However, César Franck died when Selva was only six years old. Jonathan Bellman, 'Frédéric Chopin, Antoine de Kotski and the Carezzando Touch', *Early Music*, 28:3 (2001), 399-407, states on page 402 that Selva was a student of Marie Jaëll, which is also incorrect.

³² Roy Howat, *The Art of French Piano Music: Debussy, Ravel, Fauré, Chabrier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

³³ Howat, Chapter 21 note 14: 'The relative absence of Steinway from this catalogage [sic] is probably explicable by Paul Loyonnet's description of it as 'le piano des riches' (Giraud, Paul Loyonnet, p. 230), as page 288 above tends to corroborate. René de Castéra, as it happens, was persuaded by Albéniz and Viñes to buy his Steinway in preference to an Érard; it soon became a favourite of de Castéra's friends, notably Blanche Selva who teasingly contrasted its malleable colours with Albéniz's and d'Indy's 'rattly' or 'clanky' old Érards (de Beaupuy et al., René de Castéra, pp. 100, 184 & 186).'

³⁴ Reginald R. Gerig, *Famous Pianists & their Technique* (Devon: David & Charles, 1976).

musicians: *Women Making Music. The Western Art Tradition 1150-1950*, edited by Jane Bowers and Judith Tick; *Women in Music. An Anthology of Source Readings from the Middle Ages to the Present*, edited by Carol Neuls-Bates or *Women & Music. A History*, edited by Karin Pendle³⁵ which shows that her work is unknown even in highly specialised literature.

Even texts dealing with composers with whom she had a well-known association only deal with her marginally. See for example, Norman Demuth,³⁶ who in his book on d'Indy only mentions her twice in passing, or Walter A. Clark's book on Albéniz,³⁷ that has only very brief references to her. His conclusions on the merit of her work as an *albeniziste* are challenged in this thesis in Chapter 6.

Andrew Thomson gives a little more attention to Selva in his work, *Vincent d'Indy and his World*:

Not least significant was d'Indy's discovery of the 16-year-old pianist Blanche Selva. Enraptured by her playing and extraordinary musical feeling, he reckoned that she was the only woman in his experience who played Beethoven well. Very soon, a spiritual father-daughter relationship grew up between them, and, in due course, she became a distinguished professor of piano at the schola. By no stretch of the imagination, however, could her physical attributes inspire visions of Dante's Beatrice or Fra Lippi's angels: even d'Indy ungraciously referred to her as 'la grosse Selva'.³⁸

However, the text stands out for a lack of appreciation of her work and even the excerpt quoted is unnecessarily uncomplimentary, with the author prefacing d'Indy's remark with his own sexist comment.

Even when Thomas discusses Selva's performance of Johann Sebastian Bach (p. 126) he fails to mention that she is most likely to have been the first pianist to perform the

³⁵ *Women Making Music. The Western Art Tradition 1150-1950*, ed. by Jane Bowers and Judith Tick (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987); *Women in Music. An Anthology of Source Readings from the Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. by Carol Neuls-Bates (New York: Harper & Row, 1982); *Women & Music. A History*, ed. by Karin Pendle (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991).

³⁶ Norman Demuth, *Vincent d'Indy 1851-1931 Champion of Classicism* (London: Rockliff, 1951).

³⁷ Walter Aaron Clark, *Isaac Albéniz: Portrait of a Romantic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

³⁸ Andrew Thomson, *Vincent d'Indy and his World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 118.

entire output of Bach's keyboard music, which she did in her youth, in 1903-1904.³⁹ Her work and relevance are not mentioned, nor is her tireless role in actively promoting d'Indy's compositions and exporting the mission statement of the Schola Cantorum throughout France.

Blanche Selva is now a relatively unknown figure from the early twentieth century, and although there have been a small number of studies, predominantly by French and Spanish authors, they have not entered the mainstream musicological literature. Selva is therefore absent from or dealt with only marginally in most recent books that relate to the period: for example, Clark's text on Albéniz discussed above, or Stephen Walsh's recent book on Debussy⁴⁰ which does not mention her at all. Consequently, we lack a comprehensive and informed assessment of her individual contribution to pianism or the impact of her ideas through her students, written texts, and recordings.

In this work, 'Blanche Selva: her pianistic legacy', I propose to break that silence. From its inception, this research has endeavoured to produce a holistic study of the artist. I echo the words of Claudia de Vries in her important work on Clara Schumann when discussing her methodological approach and the objective of her research:

Ein Verstehen von Zusammenhängen, nicht das Präsentieren von eindeutigen und anwendbaren Ergebnissen ist das Anliegen dieser Arbeit. [...] In der Behandlung des Quellenmaterials steht weniger die statistische Vollständigkeit als die Auswahl treffender Beispiele in Vordergrund. [...] Dies ist ein Versuch, aus verschiedenen Perspektiven die Gesamtheit der künstlerischen Tätigkeit Clara Wieck-Schumanns schrittweise zusammenzustellen.⁴¹

[An understanding of contexts, not the presentation of clear and applicable results is the concern of this work. [...] In the treatment of the source material, statistical completeness is less important than the selection of suitable examples. [...] This is an attempt to gradually compile the entirety of Clara Wieck-Schumann's artistic activity from different perspectives.]

³⁹ This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

⁴⁰ Stephen Walsh, *Debussy: A Painter in Sound* (London: Faber & Faber, 2018).

⁴¹ Claudia de Vries, *Die Pianistin Clara Wieck-Schumann. Interpretation im Spannungsfeld von Tradition und Individualität* (Meinz: Schott Musik International, 1996), p. 21.

But, unlike Clara Schumann, Selva is largely a 'forgotten pianist'. In which case, can she be said to have left any 'legacy' at all? I suggest, as I have set out throughout my work, that she did leave a mark amongst her peers and students, and as I found through my interviews, some of her ideas may have been passed on to this day, although usually without acknowledgement of their provenance. However, ultimately, in answering the proposed research questions, the aim of this thesis is to become itself part of her legacy, bringing her work to an English-speaking readership and filling gaps in our understanding of early twentieth-century performance practice.

Finally, by contributing to scholarly work on less well-known female musicians, an area where there is a great deal of work still to be done, I aim to help redress biased assumptions about the historical contribution of women in music. I hope that by raising the visibility of female musicians, other people, when leafing through a score and coming across an unknown female name, do not jump, as I did, to the conclusion that she must have been a pupil, or a patron, or a socialite.

Chapter 1 Blanche Selva, outline biography

Blanche Selva's lifetime (b. Brive-la-Gaillarde, 29 January 1884, d. Saint Amant-Tallende, 3 December 1942) coincided broadly with the French 'belle époque'. In the first chapters of his seminal work, *La belle époque de la musique française, 1871-1940*, François Porcile juxtaposes the 'religion franckiste' and its apostles — César Franck (1822-1890) and his followers, most notably, Vincent d'Indy — with the 'clan rival' of Fauré's class at the Conservatoire.¹ Although Selva studied as a child in the Conservatoire, years later premiered and played duets there with Fauré and often performed the music of the 'rival clan', her world was that of Franck's heirs and her musical career was in many ways shaped by her relationship with Vincent d'Indy and the Schola Cantorum.

Founded in 1894 by D'Indy, Charles Bordes (1863-1909) and Alexandre Guilmant (1837-1911), the Schola Cantorum was a rival musical centre to the Conservatoire, founded in memory of Franck² and so nourished by the 'esprit franckiste' [franckist soul].³ Jann Pasler states that, despite the differences, the dichotomy Schola – Conservatoire has been exaggerated:

Free vs. official, Catholic vs. secular, private vs. public – yes, the Schola differed from the Conservatoire. Its statutes, its conditions of admission (no age limit), and the everyday life of its students contrasted with those of the Conservatoire. But can we really oppose their attitudes through such binarism as art vs. skills, morals vs. virtuosity, counterpoint vs. harmony? Whether used to gain visibility, attract students, or enhance d'Indy's importance as its Director, certain oppositions have been exaggerated.⁴

¹ François Porcile, *La belle époque de la musique française. Le temps de Maurice Ravel (1871-1940)* (Paris: Fayard, 1999), chapters 1-3. Porcile uses two contrasting class photographs of both schools to contextualise the reader and emphasise their differences.

² Elaine Brody, *Paris: The Musical Kaleidoscope, 1870-1925* (London: Robson Books, 1988), p. 123.

³ Porcile, *La belle époque*, p. 23.

⁴ Jann Pasler, 'Deconstructing d'Indy, or the Problem of a Composer's Reputation', *19th-Century Music*, 30:3, 230-256 (2007), p. 245.

Both establishments were in fact ‘prominent centres for training young musicians’ at the turn of the century.⁵ As Brody also explains, the Schola had been founded

[...] to combat the stifling atmosphere of the Conservatoire. Ironically, the Schola Cantorum ultimately became more reactionary than the institution which it had opposed.

One of the positive effects of the teaching and orientation at the Schola Cantorum was its emphasis on French nationalism, its enjoinder to faculty and to students – paralleling Wagner’s intentions – to explore their own musical backgrounds, to research their musical patrimony, and to build new works from these fresh musical resources.⁶

However, this French nationalism was definitely not always a benign influence. As noted by Jane Fulcher,

[c]onsciously defined against the ahistorical approach of the Conservatoire, the Schola emphasized tradition, which included the “true” (meaning indigenous) French tradition. It was within this context that anti-Semitism figured prominently, and most consistently, perhaps in d’Indy’s disquisitions on opera in nineteenth-century France.⁷

Furthermore, as noted by Porcile, the greatest ‘franckist paradox’ is that this renewed impulse for French music embodied by the Schola Cantorum, rested upon three German pillars: Bach, Beethoven and Wagner.⁸ As will be seen in Chapter 2, when extrapolating this foundation to Selva’s own performing career, she carried through the Schola’s mission statement by basing much of her own programming on Bach, Beethoven and Franck. To these she added the music of the Schola’s associates, amongst whom her mentor, d’Indy, appears profusely in her programmes.

⁵ Brody, *The Musical Kaleidoscope*, p. 184.

⁶ Brody, *The Musical Kaleidoscope*, p. 232.

⁷ Jane F. Fulcher, ‘The Preparation for Vichy: Anti-Semitism in French Musical Culture between the Two World Wars’, *The Musical Quarterly*, 79.3 (1995), 458-475, p. 461. Porcile, *La belle époque*, (p. 39) provides a counterbalance to the Schola’s reputation of excessive nationalism by pointing out several of the foreign teachers or pupils of the establishment, the Cuban Joaquín Nin, the Hungarian Lazlo Lajtha, the Turk Adnan Saygun, the Spaniards Albéniz and Joaquín Turina or the Rumanians Marcel Mihalovici and Stan Golestan.

⁸ Porcile, *La belle époque*, p. 19.

The French-Catalan⁹ pianist, teacher, writer, editor and composer Blanche Selva was born into a family of relatively modest means. She began her first lessons aged four, later enrolling in the preparatory class of Sophie Chéné at the Paris Conservatoire (1893), where she received a *première médaille* in 1895. She subsequently transferred to the 'superior' class with Alphonse Duvernoy (1842-1907).¹⁰ However, she withdrew from the Conservatoire before finishing the academic year (June 1896), and later described this time in her life as her 'années noires' [black years]. She was in such despair that she contemplated suicide.¹¹ From a passing reference in a letter to her friend Carlos de Castéra¹² in 1906 it is clear that she had suffered considerable discouragement during her time at the Conservatoire, with the then principal Théodore Dubois having declared her 'inapte'.¹³

⁹ Selva highlighted and identified strongly with her Catalan heritage particularly from 1925 onwards, when she relocated to Barcelona. However, this Catalan origin dates back several centuries and is therefore, in reality, quite remote. According to her biographer, Guy Selva, Blanche's ancestry can be traced back to the branch of the Selva family established in France (Los Masos in Prades, Rousillon) already in the twelfth century. Selva's father was Gaudérique Selva (1844-1905) who worked as a sales representative in the fabric industry. On her maternal side, her mother Eugénie Barbe Henry (1853-1932) came from Grossbliederstroff, in the north-east of France, close to the German border. Guy Selva, *Une artiste incomparable, Blanche Selva pianiste, pédagogue, musicienne* (Nice: Association Blanche Selva, 2010), pp. 1-2.

¹⁰ Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 6. Victor-Alphonse Duvernoy (1842-1907) was a pianist, composer and teacher at the Paris Conservatoire, where he had previously studied under Antoine-François Marmontel (1816-1898). Duvernoy taught the women's class between 1886 and 1907.

¹¹ 'Je revois les noires années du Conservatoire où j'ai vu et connu le mal et où le désespoir devint si profond en moi qu'à 13 ans j'ai voulu me tuer.' [I look back on the black years at the Conservatoire, where I saw and experienced distress and where the despair became so profound that at 13 years of age, I wanted to kill myself.] Letter to Guy de Lioncourt dated 4 November 1910 in Gilles Saint-Arroman, *Aux sources d'une nouvelle pédagogie du piano: lettres de Blanche Selva à Guy de Lioncourt 1910-1913* (Nice: Association Blanche Selva, 2013), p. 33.

¹² Carlos d'Avezac de Castéra (1868-1942) painter, photographer and art critic, brother of René de Castéra (1873-1955) composer and publisher. Both were intimate friends of Blanche Selva.

¹³ Letter from Blanche Selva to Carlos de Castéra dated 20 November 1906, transcription from the Archives de l'Association Blanche Selva (AABS). In this letter, Selva refers to a performance of Schumann's piano concerto within the Colonne concert series. There was an open rehearsal, and Dubois went backstage to congratulate her. 'Il m'est arrivé la chose la plus drôle du monde, à la répétition de ce même Concert, j'ai été félicité par M Théodore Dubois ! Oui, ledit Théodore est venu dans la coulisse me faire force compliments et a terminé en me disant ceci : « Je m'incline devant vous, Mademoiselle, vous êtes une grande artiste. » Or, le même Théodore en Juin 1896, pour le même concerto de Schumann avait déclaré que j'étais inapte à faire de la musique ! Ne trouvez-vous pas cela une belle histoire ?' [The funniest thing in the

After Selva's withdrawal from the Conservatoire, she and her family left Paris for Geneva. There, she began teaching at the age of thirteen, as well as receiving lessons from Georges Humbert (1870-1936). It is unclear what role Humbert played in Selva's musical education. In later years Selva refers to him exclusively as a harmony teacher but discussing her official debut recital on 29 January 1897 the local press refers to him as her piano teacher.¹⁴ After this first official engagement, other concerts in Switzerland ensued with very favourable press reviews.

M^{lle} Selva est, malgré son très jeune âge, une pianiste hors ligne, et encore une pianiste doublée d'une artiste. En vérité, à entendre cette enfant prodige qui n'a pas encore 14 ans accomplis, exécuter des œuvres de nos grands compositeurs pour piano, tels que Saint-Saëns, Liszt, on est stupéfait, fasciné et il ne sait qu'admirer le plus dans son jeu, le mécanisme impeccable, ou la force mâle, la sûreté infaillible, la délicatesse du toucher ou enfin la fougue, le feu sacré, modéré par le sentiment d'un vrai artiste.¹⁵

[Mlle Selva is, despite her very young age, an exceptional pianist, and even more, an artist. In reality, to listen to this child prodigy who is not yet 14 years old execute the works of our great piano composers, such as Saint-Saëns, Liszt, one is stunned, fascinated and does not know what to admire most in her playing, her impeccable technique, or the masculine strength, the infallible security, the delicacy of her touch or finally the ardour, the sacred fire, moderated by the sentiment of a true artist.]

Two years later, in January 1898, she heard Vincent d'Indy's *Symphonie sur un chant montagnard français* for piano and orchestra. Such was the impression this work made on her that she asked her father to arrange for the composer to be her teacher. They met over a year and a half later, in August 1899 in Valence.¹⁶ D'Indy recognised her talent and agreed to become her mentor.

world happened in the rehearsal of this very concert, I was congratulated by Mr Théodore Dubois! Yes, said Théodore came backstage to pay me many compliments and ended up telling me that: "I bow to you, Mademoiselle, you are a great artist." But, the very same Théodore in June 1896, for the very same Schumann concerto declared that I was unfit to make music! Don't you find that a good story?]

¹⁴ *Gazette de Lausanne et Journal Suisse*, 20, 25 January 1897 Chronique Musicale, 'Le concert Selva' (not paginated). This concert and its programme are further examined in Chapter 2.

¹⁵ Review in *La Feuille d'Avis* of Montreux, March 1897 referring to her performance of a Saint-Saëns piano concerto (Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 10).

¹⁶ Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 12.

From January 1901 onwards, Selva began appearing in the Parisian halls and salons. The first concert that marks her return to the capital took place at the Salle Érard on 19 January 1904, when she performed *Poème des Montagnes* op. 15 by d'Indy, and *Islamey* op. 18 by Balakirev.¹⁷ Some months later, in December 1901, at the behest of d'Indy, Selva settled permanently with her family in Paris at 13 rue de Varenne. She was appointed piano teacher, 'professeur de piano de deuxième degré', at the Schola Cantorum in January 1902, just short of her eighteenth birthday.¹⁸ As Jean-Marc Warszawski writes, d'Indy offered Selva the validation and recognition she did not yet have from any establishment, such as the Conservatoire, nor from public opinion.¹⁹

Over the following years, Selva increasingly became one of the pillars of the Schola Cantorum,²⁰ performing, in Paris as well as the rest of France as an ambassador for the institution, the core repertoire that represented its values — Bach, Beethoven and Franck — as well as playing the compositions of her colleagues, students, and of course, Vincent d'Indy himself.

Her role as an advocate for the composers of the Schola often went beyond merely being the interpreter of their pieces. Selva took an active role as an advisor in the gestation of many contemporary works, was a proof-reader, editor, and in some circumstances acted as a de facto sales agent, taking orders over to the publishers. This aspect of her collaboration with Vincent d'Indy is more closely discussed in Chapter 2. The other two most notable and fruitful partnerships are those with the French composer Déodat de Séverac (1872-1921), and the Spaniard Isaac Albéniz

¹⁷ Museo de la Música de Barcelona, programme BS001/18.

¹⁸ Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 14.

¹⁹ 'Pour Blanche Selva, la reconnaissance de son talent par un personnage tel que Vincent d'Indy est une investiture artistique qu'elle n'a pas encore reçue, ni de l'opinion, ni d'un cursus académique.' [For Blanche Selva, obtaining the recognition of her talents by a figure of the stature of Vincent d'Indy is an artistic endorsement that she has not yet acquired from public opinion or from an academic institution.] *Blanche Selva, naissance d'un piano moderne*, ed. by Jean-Marc Warszawski (Lyon: Symétrie, 2010), p. 4.

²⁰ Rémy Campos and Nicolas Donin, 'La maîtrise artistique de Vincent d'Indy : de quelques relations nouvelles entre composition et analyse au début du XXe siècle', *Schweizer Jahrbuch für Musikwissenschaft*, 25, 2005, p. 156.

(1864-1909), whom she met in 1902 and 1904 respectively. These collaborations are studied in greater detail in Chapters 6 and 7.

From around 1903 Selva began her work as an editor in earnest, collaborating with Vincent d'Indy in his endeavour to replace the German editions of Peters and Breitkopf with French editions. In *Blanche Selva, naissance d'un piano modern*, Warszawski presents the most up-to-date catalogue of her musical editing work, which comprises nearly 200 works,²¹ most of them included in the collections *Les maîtres classiques de la musique* published by Benjamin Roudanez or the *Nouvelle édition française de musique classique* published by Senart.²²

However, Selva also worked as an editor for the Schola's own publishing house, the Édition Mutuelle, which was directed by René de Castéra (1873-1955), who had founded it in 1902 and became a close friend. Letters in the spring of 1903 make clear that she worked on the manuscripts of Prince Edmond de Polignac²³ and that she acted as an intermediary between the widowed Princess de Polignac and the publishing house.²⁴

²¹ Warszawski, *Blanche Selva, naissance*, pp. 249-69.

²² Senart was a French firm of publishers, founded by Maurice Senart and Benjamin Roudanez in 1908.

²³ Prince Edmond de Polignac (1834-1901) was a French aristocrat and composer. He married Winnaretta Singer in 1852, who became the Princess de Polignac. Both shared a passion for music and the arts, but their marriage was 'un mariage blanc'.

²⁴ Letter from Blanche Selva to René de Castéra, dated 11 April 1903, transcription from AABS. 'Je viens de déjeuner chez la P^{esse} de Polignac (ceci vous est bien égal !!) et nous avons causé de l'édition des œuvres du prince. Il y en a 3 qui sont bonnes à tirer. 1. Le Chant de Blanche Flor ; 2. Lamento (partition d'orchestre) ; 3. Robin m'aime. Vous serez bien aimable de venir les chercher chez moi, tous les jours sauf Mardi et Mercredi prochain où je serai absente. Je ne vous les fais porter chez vous en même temps que cette lettre, parce que j'ignore si vous êtes chez vous, ou envolé au loin comme Sévérac ! J'ai les épreuves d'autres œuvres que je vais revoir. Dès qu'elles seront prêtes je vous les remettrai. En tout cas, venez chercher celles-ci le plus tôt possible, la P^{esse} semblant trouver que cette édition traîne singulièrement en longueur.' [I've just come from having breakfast with the Princess of Polignac (as if you care !!) and we have discussed the publication of works by the prince. There are three that are ready to print. 1. Le Chant de Blanche Flor; 2. Lamento (orchestral score); 3. Robin m'aime. If you would be so kind as to pick them up from my house, any day but Tuesday or Wednesday, when I will be absent. I have not sent them over with this letter, as I did not know if you are home, or far away like Sévérac! I have the proofs of other pieces that I will review. I will send them to you as soon as they are ready. In any case, come and pick them up as soon as possible, the Princess is under the impression that this edition is taking particularly long.] Letter from

From this period are also Selva's own first compositions: *Paysage au soleil couchant* (1904), *Cloches dans la brume* and *Cloches au soleil* (1905)²⁵ for piano, the *mélodies* *Les Ancêtres du Lys* (1905), *Rosaire* (1906) and *Venez sous la tonnelle* (1908) and the organ work *Petite pièce* (1912). Furthermore, there is epistolary evidence of some unpublished pieces of which the manuscripts have been sadly lost. These are a piano *Suite* ('Prélude', 'Allemande', 'Courante', 'Burla', 'Chanson Farandole') (1904), the songs *Les Ancolies* (1905) and *L'Ange gardien* (1907), a piano *Trio* (1906) and the *Cantique de Noël* (1909) for piano.

Florence Launay also adds to Selva's catalogue of works a 1908 composition called *Pièces pour piano* of which the manuscript was to be found in the Museo de la Música de Barcelona.²⁶ The entire collection of documents relating to Blanche Selva is available to the public for inspection online ('Fons Blanca Selva' collection). Upon inspecting the manuscript pieces discussed by Launay, which are unsigned, and had been catalogued 02.1740 and 02.1741 within the collection, I was able to identify them with confidence as the second and third movements of Maurice Alquier's *Sonate* for

Blanche Selva to René de Castéra, dated 14 April 1903, transcription from AABS. '[...] Pour le nombre d'exemplaires à tirer, naturellement la P^{cesse} n'en sait rien. Pour les titres, le titre en couleur doit être celui de l'édition Mutuelle. Le 2^d titre, sur papier blanc, doit être fait d'après un dessin du prince. Si vous n'avez pas ce dessin, il faudra faire faire ces titres-là. Venez Jeudi dans la journée (après midi ou soirée) j'ai ce dessin chez moi, je vous le montrerai. Il est très très simple, ce ne sont que des lignes.' [As for the number of copies to print, naturally the Princess knows nothing about it. As for the titles, the title in colour must be that of the Mutuelle edition. The second title, on white paper, must be done after a drawing by the prince. If you do not have the drawing, you will have to have one made... Come on Thursday during the day (afternoon or evening) I have the drawing at home, I can show it to you. It is very, very simple, it is just some lines.] Letter from Blanche Selva to René de Castéra, dated 2 June 1903, transcription from AABS. 'Voici 4 pièces du P^{ce} de Polignac à faire paraître 1. Ave Maris Stella ; 2. Salve Regina ; 3. Aubade ; 4. Madrigal Romantique. Vous serez bien aimable de faire publier cela le plus vite possible afin que la P^{cesse} continue à voir qu'on s'occupe de l'édition.' [Here are four pieces by the Prince of Polignac to publish. 1. Ave Maris Stella; 2. Salve Regina; 3. Aubade; 4. Madrigal Romantique. Would you be so kind as to publish them as soon as possible so that the Princess can continue to see that the edition is being looked after.]

²⁵ These two pieces were performed by the author as part of the nine-hour long world-wide livestream dedicated to female piano composers of Spanish and Spanish American descent organised by FIMTE (Festival Internacional de Música de Tecla Española) on 1 October 2021. A link to a recording is given in Appendix 1.

²⁶ Florence Launay, *Blanche Selva compositrice* (Nice: Association Blanche Selva, 2019), p. 43.

piano, (which was incidentally dedicated to Selva) and not Selva's 1908 *Pièces pour piano*. The whereabouts of her 1908 piano compositions therefore remain unknown.

The Alquier manuscripts have clear and abundant editorial pencil marks, which are most likely Selva's own. Presumably, the composer handed over the pieces to her so that she could correct them before publication, and she kept the original. This is another piece of evidence of the close-knit relationship that she enjoyed with contemporary composers and their music, being involved in their development long before presenting them on the concert platform.

From around 1904, Selva's father became ill and was moved from the family home to a hospice in Souchez. This troubled Blanche, who wrote about it in a letter to René.

Il est bien installé dans une chambre confortable, mais rien de traverser la cour, cela m'a fait une impression terrible de voir là rien que des gens dans le même état que lui, pauvres épaves humaines n'ayant de la vie que la matière sans esprit. Si vous saviez quelle impression lamentable cela m'a fait ! Oh Dieu vous garde de subir jamais de semblables épreuves, mon cher Ami, elles impriment dans le cœur une trace ineffaçable. Comme je suis heureuse de l'avoir subie au lieu de ma mère ! Cela l'aurait rendu malade.²⁷

[He is installed in a comfortable room, but can do nothing more than cross the yard, it made a terrible impression on me to see there nothing but people in the same state as he is, poor human wrecks that have nothing left in this life than matter without spirit. If you knew what a horrible impression this made on me! Oh God protect you from enduring such hardships, my dear Friend, they leave an indelible mark in one's heart. How happy I am to have suffered it instead of my mother! This would have made her ill.]

Selva's father died in 1905 and Blanche, age 21, became head of the household, having to provide, not only for herself, but for her mother, grandmother and sister.²⁸ Her mother's later ill health also had material adverse effects on how Selva was able to manage her time and affairs. For instance, in the summer of 1907, she had to cancel her yearly visit to Faugs (Vincent d'Indy's residence) due to her mother's health. She

²⁷ Letter from Blanche Selva to René de Castéra, dated 8 October 1904, transcription from AABS.

²⁸ There is very little information about her sister Alice other than the fact that she herself was kept in different boarding houses and religious institutions throughout her life from June 1894 onwards. She may have been mentally or physically handicapped.

was therefore unable to give some courses in the region as she had planned²⁹ and Selva struggled to have the quiet time she craved to focus on her compositions.

Je travailotte à mon andante de Trio, mollement, car je suis ennuyée de Maman qui est toujours souffrante et qui de plus a trouvé moyen de vouloir marcher malgré sa jambe malade ce qui fait qu'elle est tombée et que maintenant elle ne peut guère bouger, ne sachant où se mettre pour moins souffrir.³⁰

[I work on my andante from the Trio, limply, as I am upset with Mama, who is always unwell and who, what's more, found some means of trying to walk despite her bad leg, as a result of which she fell and now she can hardly move, not knowing what to do with herself to ease her suffering.]

In fact, managing the family affairs by herself was a heavy burden for Selva, who felt alone both materially, as the only provider for her family, as well as emotionally, in the absence of a life partner, and having lost her father, to whom she was closest within her family.

She wrote candidly about this to Madame de Castéra, the mother of her friends René and Carlos.

L'hiver, vous savez que j'ai du travail plus que mes forces et maintenant, alors que je voudrais me reposer et me détendre un peu, autant par devoir que par plaisir, je suis très ennuyée de ma pauvre Maman. Et quand ce n'est pas Maman, ce sera Grand-mère, sans compter les autres soucis... et je suis seule, toute seule, sans soutien, sans cette affection forte d'un homme, hélas ! depuis que mon père n'y est plus.

Ah ! des femmes seules, vous ne savez pas ce que c'est, et avant d'y passer je ne pouvais m'en douter ! Et comment, comment pourrais-je sortir de là ?

Enfin je ne veux pas songer à moi, et comme c'est moi qui souffre le plus de cet état de choses, c'est fort bien et je ne m'en plains pas. Je me reproche toujours d'être égoïste quand je me prends à désirer quelque chose pour moi.

²⁹ Letter from Blanche Selva to René de Castéra, dated 21 July 1907, transcription from AABS. 'Je vous ai déjà dit, je crois, que je n'irai pas aux Faugs cet été à cause de Maman qui est souffrante et que je ne puis quitter. J'aurais beaucoup voulu faire quelques courses dans la région, mais pour la même raison je ne le puis.' [I have already told you, I think, that I will not go to Faugs this summer because of Mama who is unwell and whom I cannot leave. I would have very much liked to do several courses in the region, but for the same reason, I cannot.]

³⁰ Letter from Blanche Selva to René de Castéra, dated 28 July 1907, transcription from AABS.

Je dois vivre pour Maman et Grand-mère, leur procurer le plus de bien-être et de bonheur possible, et en dehors de cela je ne dois pas songer à moi, je suis une machine à gagner la vie, c'est tout.

Pardon, chère Madame, de ces réflexions peu gaies, mais, je vous l'ai dit, si je n'avais pas d'amis, je serais bien malheureuse, moi qui me sens si faible, ainsi, obligée d'être à la tête d'une famille, sans père et sans mari.³¹

[During the winter, you know that I worked beyond my strength and now that I would like to rest and stop a little, as much out of duty as for pleasure, I am really worried about poor Mama. And when it is not Mama, then it is Grandma, without mentioning other worries... and I am alone, all alone, without support, without that strong affection of a man, alas! since my father is not here any more.

Ah! Single women, you do not know what that is, and before it happened to me I couldn't imagine it myself! And how, how will I come out of it?

But I do not want to think of myself, and as it is me who suffers the most from this state of affairs, that's fine and I don't complain. I always reproach myself for being selfish when I want something for myself.

I have to live for Mama and Grandma, to procure for them as much comfort and happiness as possible, and besides I do not want to think of myself, I am a machine for making a living. That is all.

Sorry, dear Madam, about these unhappy reflections, but I have already told you, if I did not have friends, I would be very unhappy, I who feel so weak, like this, obliged to be the head of the family, without a father or a husband.]

This letter makes it clear that Selva saw remaining single as an emotional as well as financial burden. It has been suggested to me that pointing this out is 'an outdated assumption' and that there have been other female musicians that only married for convenience or not at all. However, the documentary evidence in Selva's case is incontestable, as is the fact that, absent a family legacy, a good marriage could bring a socio-economic advantage that was otherwise untenable for middle-class women. Whilst I do not deny that marrying an unsupportive husband could have been fatal to Selva's independence and development as an artist, I have often wondered the extent to which her own professional career may have been enhanced had she 'married well': the example that comes to my mind is that of her contemporary Marguerite Long.

³¹ Letter from Blanche Selva to Madame de Castéra, dated 2 August 1907, transcription from AABS.

Long has been hailed as ‘the most important French woman pianist in our century, [who] marked a whole epoch of musical life in Paris with the indelible stamp of her personality, artistry and achievement’.³² As noted by Dunoyer, ‘[t]he circumstances of [Long’s] life, notably her marriage with the eminent musicologist Joseph de Marliave, only strengthened her collaborations and friendships with the composers of her time.’³³ Marliave helped Long by adding a ‘personal dimension’ to her wife’s professional collaborations such as that with Fauré. Other composers with whom Long collaborated the most were Debussy and Ravel. Finally, a marriage could also elevate the wife’s status, as is also clear pursuing Long’s example further:

He [Joseph de Marliave] carried the title of Marquis, which in turn made his wife La Marquise de Marliave, a distinction to which she did not object and which only enhanced her ability to move about in certain circles.³⁴

There are several other letters addressed to Madame de Castéra, in which Selva is unusually open about her own feelings and private world, no doubt seeing her as a trusted confidante. In 1907 Selva had the financial means to re-purchase her family home, which she did to please her mother, despite her own preference to buy a property in the French Catalan region or in Fuenterrabia.³⁵ Selva’s purchasing power came entirely from her own relentless and eclectic work, mostly a mixture of concert work and teaching as well as editorial and writing commissions. Her concert work took a greater international turn during this period, travelling to London (1907), Germany (1908) and Russia (1909). Her frantic work schedule and domestic responsibilities can be seen yet again in a letter of 1909 addressed to both Madame de Castéra and Claire de Castéra:

³² Cecilia Dunoyer, ‘Marguerite Long, the image of an epoch’ unpublished doctoral thesis (University of Maryland, 1990), p. 1.

³³ Dunoyer, p. 1.

³⁴ Dunoyer, p. 23.

³⁵ Letter from Blanche Selva to Laura Albéniz, 4 August 1907, Biblioteca de Catalunya, Fonds Isaac Albéniz. ‘J’ai racheté ma maison natale parce que cela faisait bien plaisir à ma mère sans cela pour mon désir personnel je serai allée dans la Catalogne française ou à Fontarabie, mais je suis bien décidée à compter toujours pour zéro et à faire plaisir aux autres, même si...[...].’ [I have re-purchased the house where I was born because that pleased my mother, otherwise, if it were up to me, I would have gone to French Catalunya or to Fuenterrabia, but I am determined to count for nothing and to please others, even if...]

Impossible d'écrire de Paris, j'ai un travail fou. Grand-mère est un peu malade. Maman très fatiguée avec de la fièvre. [...] La maison est un taudis inextricable où rien ne se trouve. Maman ne veut rien placer sans que j'ai donné mon avis, comme j'ai 10 heures de leçons par jours et chaque soir j'ai eu des Roudanez à corriger jusqu'à minuit, ça peut durer longtemps.³⁶

[Impossible to write from Paris, I have a crazy amount of work. Grandma is a bit ill. Mama is very fatigued with fever. [...] The house is a tip where nothing can be found. Mama does not want to tidy anything without me giving my opinion, and as I give 10 hours of lessons every day and every evening I have had some Roudanez to correct until midnight, this could take a long time.]



Fig. 1.1 – Portrait of Blanche Selva³⁷

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³⁶ Letter from Blanche Selva to Madame and Claire de Castéra, dated 21 October 1909, AABS. Selva wrote this letter from London, on her second UK tour, when she also played in Leeds and Newcastle.

³⁷ Date and location unknown.

Around this time Selva began to reflect upon her own technique, her teaching and its current shortcomings. As she explained to her friend, the Catalan composer Lluís Millet much later in a letter in 1934,³⁸ in 1908 she was surprised to realise that what she was asking a student to do did not match what she instinctively was doing when playing herself. Upon realising this, she became ‘profondément troublée et je ne savais plus quoi enseigner’ [deeply troubled and I no longer knew what to teach]. This then ignited a period of reflection and deep research that lasted approximately two years.

By 1910 Selva had established the foundational aspects of her method, which she later crystalised in the six volumes and supplementary student exercise book that make up *L’Enseignement musical de la technique du piano*, her life’s work, published between 1916 and 1925.³⁹ In this voluminous treatise which comprises over 1000 pages, Selva cogently presents her reflections on piano technique as well as offering a systematic approach to its acquisition.⁴⁰ Other important works written by her are her monograph on the sonata (1913),⁴¹ and the biography of her friend Déodat de Séverac (1930).⁴²

During the war years Selva gave over fifty charity concerts and continued writing and teaching as best she could. She performed in France as well as in Spain, performing twice in Barcelona as part of a series of six concerts dedicated to French music.⁴³ In Switzerland she partnered amongst others with a bass by the name of Albert Valmond and performed several times with the Orchestre Symphonique des Internés Alliés.⁴⁴

³⁸ Letter from Blanche Selva to Lluís Millet dated 5 March 1934, Fonds Lluís Millet, R6.11 MC.

³⁹ Blanche Selva, *L’Enseignement musical de la technique du piano*, 7 vols (Paris: Rouart, Lerolle & Cie, 1916-1925).

⁴⁰ The contents of LEMTP are examined in Chapter 3.

⁴¹ Blanche Selva, *La Sonate: étude de son évolution technique, historique et expressive en vue de l’interprétation et de l’audition* (Paris: Rouart, Lerolle et Cie, 1913) and its abbreviated version: Blanche Selva, *Quelques mots sur la sonate (évolution du genre)* (Paris: Paul Delaplane, 1914).

⁴² Blanche Selva, *Déodat de Séverac*. Les Grands Musiciens par les Maîtres d’Aujourd’hui, 2 (Paris: Librairie Delagrave, 1930).

⁴³ MMB BS002/110, 15 May 1917 and MMB BS002/113, 17 May 1917.

⁴⁴ For example, the concert of 22 November 1917 in Montreux, MMB BS002/124.

According to her biographer Guy Selva, tensions began to arise between d'Indy and Selva in 1918⁴⁵ as disagreements about the implementation of her method in the Schola Cantorum and, most importantly, her ever-increasing international commitments distanced her from the institution and her *Maître*. In a letter dated 19 September 1918 d'Indy reproaches her for her absences:

[...] Sérieusement, voyez, ma chère enfant, le préjudice que vous causez à l'œuvre que vous avez aimé avec moi, et tâchez de trouver un *modus vivendi* qui puisse conserver à ces jeunes esprits qui viennent de tous les coins du monde avec le désir d'une formation d'art, la précieuse direction *effective* de votre parole, de vos préceptes, de votre enseignement, et non plus une sèche "inspection des services", comme on fait dans les ministères. [...] Où est le bon temps où vous jouiez le clavecin dans Orfeo et où vous chantiez le contralto dans la messe en si mineur! ... Sincèrement, ça valait mieux que d'aller pianoter de l'Albéniz en Suisse! ⁴⁶

[...] Seriously, my dear child, look at the harm you are causing to the work you have loved with me, and try to find a *modus vivendi* that can preserve for these young minds, who come from every corner of the world with the desire to be educated in the art, from the precious *effective* direction of your word, of your precepts, of your teaching, and no longer just a dry "inspection of services", as is done in the ministries. [...] Where are the good times when you played the harpsichord in Orfeo and sang contralto in the Mass in B minor! ... Honestly, that is more worthy than tinkling Albéniz in Switzerland!

On the surface one could perhaps sympathise with d'Indy and agree with him on the importance of employing a teacher who is present for the good of the school's students (and by extension the school's reputation). However, it is important to examine how in his request he is diminishing the value of her international concert work by reducing it to 'pianoter de l'Albéniz en Suisse' as well as putting her harpsichord playing or choral singing (activities where she was not a 'professional' in its strict sense) above it. It is almost unavoidable to see the parallels with Victorian values where the cultural norm for most middle-class piano-playing women was to abnegate their skill to the bounds of family discipline and service as well as community

⁴⁵ Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 91.

⁴⁶ Copy read at AABS, the original is to be found at the Archives Berthier de Lioncourt.

work rather than taking their art to the stage and forging a musical career for themselves.⁴⁷

Blanche was always measured in her letters, however in 1919 she confides to René de Castéra that she had begun to find her true self and d'Indy had not always been a good influence on her:

Réellement, je retrouve *ma* nature. Et il est bien vrai que si le maître m'a été excellent pour bien des choses, il m'a aussi annulé une bonne quantité d'autres pendant longtemps.

Really, I find *my* nature again. And it is true that if the master has been excellent for many things, for a long time he has also cancelled for me a good number of others.⁴⁸

She finally resigned definitively from the Schola Cantorum in 1922. The years immediately after the First World War were some of the most hectic in her international career. Partnered with the Quatuor Tchèque and acting as a promoter of French music in the newly founded Czechoslovakia, as well as bringing Czech music to France,⁴⁹ Selva took up a position as teacher in the Conservatoire in Prague in 1920, which she kept until 1924. Moreover, at the request of her friend Guy Ropartz, she also became a member of staff at the Strasbourg Conservatoire as well as leading some interpretation classes at the newly founded École Normale de Paris.

⁴⁷ Ruth A. Solie, "'Girling' at the Parlor Piano' in *Music in Other Words: Victorian Conversations*, by Ruth A. Solie (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 85-117.

⁴⁸ Letter from Blanche Selva to René de Castéra 18 July 1919. Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 92.

⁴⁹ Guy Selva, *Musique française, musique tchèque. Blanche Selva, double ambassadrice* (Nice: Association Blanche Selva, 2017). Selva received two decorations from the Czechoslovakian state for her role in the promotion of Czech music in the years 1924 and 1925, p. 35.

Selva became close to the Czech pianist, teacher and composer Václav Štěpán (1889-1944), who had lessons with her.⁵⁰ The always observant Marguerite de Saint-Marceaux⁵¹ noted in her diary:

Selva, Stepán, Bréville, Messenger, Alquier et Marthe dînent. Selva *chante* des mélodies populaires harmonisées par Stepán. Ce garçon tchécoslovaque est borgne, il s'est crevé l'œil pour ne pas servir contre les Alliés. Il a un grand talent. Sa musique est un peu trop touffue mais elle est pleine de qualité et de musicalité. Selva ne le quitte pas. Il loge chez elle. Ils sont en communion de pensées, leurs âmes sont sœurs, et rien n'est plus touchant que de voir la folle ardeur avec laquelle cette charmante créature dénuée de tout charme physique contemple et met en valeur cet artiste de son choix. [...]⁵²

[Selva, Stepán, Bréville, Messenger, Alquier et Marthe came for dinner. Selva *sang* some popular songs harmonised by Stepán. This Czechoslovakian boy is one-eyed, he stabbed himself in the eye so as to not serve against the Allies. He has a great talent. His music is a little dense, but it is full of quality and musicality. Selva won't leave him alone. He stays at her house. They are in a communion of thoughts, their souls are sisters, and there is nothing so touching as seeing the crazy ardour with which this charming creature devoid of any physical charm gazes at and dotes on her artist of choice].

It has not been possible to establish through letters or any other evidence apart from this comment whether Selva and Štěpán became intimate as I think Saint-Marceaux is suggesting. However, Selva's last stay in Czechoslovakia was the period from 11 May-7 June 1924,⁵³ shortly before Václav married concert pianist Ilona Kurzová (thereafter Ilona Štěpánová) on 21 June 1924. Meanwhile, Selva had met the violinist Joan Massià

⁵⁰ Letter from Blanche Selva to Auguste Sérieyx of 31 May 1919 (Guy Selva, *Musique française, musique tchèque*, p. 57). 'Il s'est enthousiasmé pour mon enseignement et veut venir passer plusieurs mois à Paris pour devenir mon « petit élève », comme il dit.' [He is enthusiastic about my method and wants to come and spend several months in Paris to become my "little pupil", as he says.]

⁵¹ Born Marguerite Jourdain (1850-1930), she was an amateur singer and pianist who had a popular salon at the beginning of twentieth-century Paris. Her soirées were attended by renowned personalities such as the composers Debussy, Ravel, Albéniz and Fauré. She wrote a diary during the years 1894-1927 which is an invaluable first-hand source of information to understand the musical backdrop of the time: *Marguerite de Saint-Marceaux, Journal 1894-1927*, ed. by Myriam Chimènes (Paris: Fayard, 2007).

⁵² Saint-Marceaux, p. 1075, entry for 14 May 1920.

⁵³ Guy Selva, *Musique française, musique tchèque*, p. 48.

(1890-1969) in February 1924.⁵⁴ He became her duo partner throughout the rest of her performing career.

In fact, Selva relocated to Barcelona, settling there permanently in 1925. It is likely that her friendship with Massià was the catalyst for this change, although there were other factors influencing this decision: her friendship with the Catalan teacher Joan Llongueras i Badia (1880-1953) with whom she worked in several music institutions in the city, and Séverac's regionalist influence on her. Selva remained in Barcelona until her forced exile at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936.⁵⁵ Her relationship with Barcelona, however, predates her permanent stay, as she had performed there several times before that, in 1905, 1911, 1917 and 1922.

Selva felt a strong bond with Catalunya and the Catalan people and felt inspired and rekindled by the move.

Quand j'arrive en Catalogne, je me sens maintenant chez moi par la correspondance à tous mes gens, et, plus profondément encore, par une voix mystérieuse qui ne me parle que là. Toujours mon art a reçu, de ce contact, une vivification nouvelle [...]⁵⁶

[When I come to Catalunya, I now feel at home because of the connection with all my people, and ever more so because of a mysterious voice which only speaks to me there. My art has always received a new lease of life from this contact...]

These feelings are in stark contrast to those that Paris appears to have evoked in her. In another letter to Millet two years later she refers to Paris as 'cette ville dans laquelle je me sens toujours si spécialement mal à l'aise !'⁵⁷ [this city in which I always feel so especially uncomfortable!]

⁵⁴ Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 166.

⁵⁵ For an extensive account of her years in Catalunya, see Montserrat Font Batallé, 'Blanche Selva y el noucentisme musical en Catalunya' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Universidad de Granada, 2011).

⁵⁶ Letter from Blanche Selva to Lluís Millet i Pagès, dated 25 January 1925. Fons Lluís Millet, Document R6.2 CDOC.

⁵⁷ Letter from Blanche Selva to Lluís Millet i Pagès, dated 4 December 1927. Fons Lluís Millet, Document R6.7 CDOC.

However, the relocation to Barcelona also meant a decrease in her appearances in Paris and the rest of Europe, although her activity in Catalunya was still prolific. She published a book on the Beethoven Sonatas in Catalan, a language that she learned to speak well and was very active in his centenary celebrations in 1927.⁵⁸ She wrote several articles in the *Revista musical catalana*, as well as collaborating with the cellist Pau Casals in the Associació Obrera de Concerts, giving her name to their music education programme.⁵⁹ During this period she used the Spanish and Catalan version of her name, Blanca, instead of Blanche.

Selva also taught in other academies with her name (Acadèmia Blanca Selva, Escola de Música Blanca Selva) and collaborated with Llongueras and her former pupil Guillem de Garganta (1886-1973) at the Acadèmia de Música de Barcelona.⁶⁰ Fukushima credits Selva with being the promoter of the Acadèmia de Música de Barcelona which was founded in 1929.⁶¹ Other pianists of the faculty included her own pupils Magda Soler and Maria Carbonell.

Selva was held in high regard in Barcelona, in particular by the Palau de la Música Catalana and its Orfeó Català⁶² as well as those musicians and collaborators of the institution. This is very apparent from the correspondence between her and Francesc Pujol i Pons (1878-1945) then an administrator and concert promoter at the Palau.⁶³

In an undated letter, (estimated date ca. 1927), Pujol extends an open invitation to Selva to attend whichever concerts she wishes at the Palau. She is told that she does not need a formal invitation and should treat the theatre as her own home.

⁵⁸ Blanche Selva, *Les Sonates de Beethoven per a piano i per a violí* (Barcelona: Atenés A.G., 1927).

⁵⁹ 'Estudis Musicals Blanca Selva'. See Font Batallé, p. 307.

⁶⁰ Font Batallé, pp. 301-307.

⁶¹ Mutsumi Fukushima, *El piano en Barcelona entre 1880 y 1936* (Barcelona: Boileau, 2008), p. 156.

⁶² The choral society affiliated to the Palau.

⁶³ Francesc Pujol had been a student of the Orfeó Català himself. He later became a teacher and deputy director there, before taking the leadership role upon the death of Lluís Millet in 1941. CEDOC <https://www.cedoc.cat/ca/francesc-pujol-i-pons-del-rigor-al-sentiment_7388> [accessed 7 November 2021].

Será sempre un honor per a nosaltres que vosté es digni assistir als nostres concerts. En el dubte de si vosté es troba o no a Barcelona ens abstením d'enviarli invitación. Però és que vostè no en necessita; no ha de fer més que venir ir dir. -Soc aquí.- i com que aquí es casa seva, ja no cal dir res més. 'Seu aff. servant i admirador'.⁶⁴

[It will always be an honour for us for you to come to our concerts. Not knowing whether you are right now in Barcelona or not, we have not sent you an invitation. But you do not need one; you simply need to come and say -I am here- and as here is your home, it is not necessary to say anything else. Your friendly servant and admirer.]

Selva did in fact make use of this positive relationship with Pujol and the Palau. Fig. 1.2 shows Selva's visiting card where she contacts Pujol to ask him to allow her Nîmes students to attend the concerts.

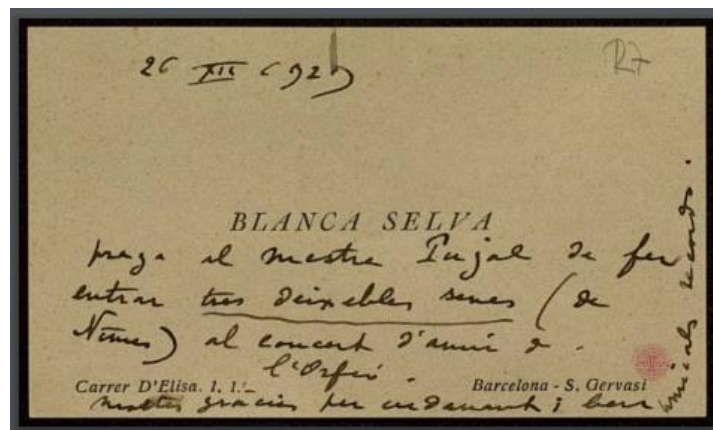


Fig. 1.2 – Blanche Selva's visiting card, dated 26 December 1929

Reproduced by permission of the Centre de Documentació de l'Orfeó Català (CEDOC)⁶⁵

Apart from her French students, Selva also had aspiring pianists from other parts of the world attend her home in Barcelona. For example, the Italian student Giacomina Donzelli

⁶⁴ Undated letter from Francesc Pujol to Blanche Selva. Estimated 1927. Fons Lluís Millet, Document R1691.3 CDOC.

⁶⁵ Dated 26 December 1929, 'Blanca Selva praga [sic] al Mestre Pujol de fer entrar tres deixebles seus (de Nîmes) al concert d'avui de l'Orfeó. Moltes gràcies [...]; ben amicals records.' [Blanca Selva prays Master Pujol to allow three of her students (from Nîmes) into today's concert at the Orfeó, Many thanks [...]; very friendly greetings.] Fons Francesc Pujol i Pons, R.7.

and the Canadian Henri Mercure referenced in a contemporary letter to Pujol in 1928⁶⁶ but little is known about them.

In 1929 Selva finally committed to recording some works playing solo and in partnership with Joan Massià. The resulting eleven tracks are the only ones the pianist left.⁶⁷ Whilst the twenties can perhaps be seen as the most fruitful years in Selva's professional and personal career, the following decade brought much pain and anguish to her life.

First, on 28 October 1930 she had a stroke that completely paralysed her left arm as well as causing her severe and long-lasting speech impediments.⁶⁸ Physical therapy ensued, but Selva never quite recovered from this episode, and she was not able to regain enough dexterity to return to the stage or record again.⁶⁹

She seems to have found some solace at this trying time by returning more fully towards composition, an activity she had already begun as early as 1904 with *Paysage au soleil couchant* but that she had not consistently kept up with over the years. However, she had already found some renewed drive to compose even before her paralysis. In 1929 she wrote, amongst other pieces, the enchanting violin duo *Cants de Llum* [Songs of Light] for her and Massià.⁷⁰ Other pieces from 1929 are *Muntanya blava* for voice and piano, *El Tronc* and *Quicumque Enim Spiritu Dei Aguntur* for choir, and *La Nit de la Purissima* for voice, violin and piano.

⁶⁶ Fons Francesc Pujol i Pons, document 3.9_R.218.

⁶⁷ Her recordings are examined in Chapter 4.

⁶⁸ Font Batallé, p. 106 and Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 182 and in two letters from Blanche Selva to Joan Llongueras: 'Et comme la maladie, si elle me prive de bavarder aisément encore avec la bouche commence à laisser assez de liberté à ma tête pour pouvoir un peu bavarder avec la plume' (1931) and '[...] les plus ennuyeux (indépendamment de l'impossibilité de jouer encore convenablement du piano) c'est la difficulté de [sic] j'ai à parler...' (1933) (Font Batallé, Appendix, pp. 121, 129-30). [The illness still prevents me from speaking easily with my mouth but I have become freer in my head to chat with my pen (1931) [...] the most annoying thing (apart from still not being able to play the piano properly) is the difficulty I have in speaking... (1933)]

⁶⁹ Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, pp. 180-81 and p. 254.

⁷⁰ They performed the suite at least three times in concert: 10 April 1929 in Bilbao, 23 March 1930 in Sallent, and 6 April 1930 in Barcelona.

In the autumn of 1931, a year after her stroke, she composed the set of nine short piano pieces *Records i entremeliadures o souvenirs et espiègleries* [Memories and mischiefs]. In the first one, *Ostra i Cargols* [Oyster and Snails] Selva displays some of her characteristic acidic sense of humour. It is written in the obscure 2/1 time signature and exclusively uses long values throughout: breves, semibreves and minims. The piece depicts the slow opening of an oyster and the likewise unhurried meandering of a snail as metaphors for her own bedridden condition.

[...] ceci souvenir pittoresque du moment de maladie aigrie, alors que, au début, je ne pouvais faire aucun mouvement dans le lit, et disait au Dr. Coll : Ara faig d'ostra, puis, ensuite, quand dans le même lit je commence à me mouvoir péniblement est que j'ai dit : Ara ja semblo més un cargol.⁷¹

[...] here this colourful memory of the bitter illness, when in the beginning I was not able to make a single movement in bed, and said to Dr Coll: Now I make the oyster, then, when in the same bed I began to move laboriously, I told him: Now I look more like a snail.]

Nevertheless, the span of four years between composing these pieces and the letter to her close friend Llongueras, suggests that she needed some time before being able to share them. The memories may indeed have been too recent and too painful to be readily accessible to others. The pieces were never performed in her lifetime, and the last three were never fully completed.

In 1936 she received a first prize for her ten songs *Deu Cançons Originals* in the Premio de Composició Concepció Rabell i Cibils.⁷² Entries were anonymous and Selva won by unanimity. She was the first woman to win the accolade.⁷³ This victory no doubt gave her a much-needed morale boost during this period.

Nevertheless, two further difficult events ensued. Although no conclusive written evidence has been found, it is possible that Massià and Selva had a romantic relationship. Ludovica Mosca is of this view and she recalled, unprompted, her teacher

⁷¹ Font Batallé, p. 413. Letter from Blanche Selva to Joan Llongueras, Barcelona 1 May 1935.

⁷² Another notable winner of this composition prize was the Catalan composer Xavier Montsalvatge. He won the competition in 1933 with his piano piece *Tres impromptus per a piano*.

⁷³ Font Batallé, p. 426.

Guillem Garganta telling her as much. According to her memory of what she was told by Garganta, it was Massià who ended the relationship with Selva, and very sad and hurt by this she took refuge with the Gargantas, staying with them for some days thereafter. Joan Massià married one of Selva's students, María Carbonell in 1938.⁷⁴

However, by then she had already been forced to leave her beloved Catalunya following the outbreak of the Spanish civil war in 1936.⁷⁵ The sudden rush of the relocation meant that most of her belongings had to remain in Barcelona, and her material possessions and library were lost after the war.⁷⁶ Back in France, alone and stricken by poverty, she needed to rely on her friends for help. Albert Sarrazin (1886-1970),⁷⁷ and her pupil Marguerite Gauthier-Villars remained in contact with her in her final years. Always wanting to remain active, Selva started writing a memoir to reflect her life and artistic philosophy, *Dialogues sur la musique avec Marie-Françoise*, an ambitious project of 22 books, of which she only completed the first, *Livre de Mamé*. She also carried on composing and maintaining correspondence with students and friends. However, most surprisingly some of her closest friends such as the Castéras never paid her a visit.⁷⁸ She finally passed away in the nursing home of the Sisters of Cambrai in Saint Amand-Tallende on 3 December 1942.

⁷⁴ In 1939 Massià asked Blanche to be the godmother of their daughter Francina, Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 198.

⁷⁵ Selva was required to leave Spain by the French consulate in 1937 (Font Batallé, p. 117).

⁷⁶ Font Batallé, p. 117, n. 396, states that Selva's Pleyel piano can be found in the Musée de la Musique in Paris and ventures that Joan Massià may have inherited her belongings now likely to be in the possession of his daughter María Massià. However, Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 194, n. 3, questions the whereabouts of Selva's piano: 'Après la guerre civile, ce piano réquisitionné sera, grâce à l'intervention de Théodore Garriga, réexpédié en France. Il aurait pu intégrer le musée de la Salle Pleyel ou le Musée de la Musique, mais on a perdu sa trace.' [After the Spanish Civil War, the piano that was left behind was sent back to France, thanks to the intervention of Théodore Garriga. It could have been accessioned into the museum of the Salle Pleyel or the Musée de la Musique, but we have lost all trace.] In my interview with Ludovica Mosca (Chapter 5) she stated that Guillem Garganta's piano was a Pleyel, and without my prompting her, she reflected on the surprising nature of this fact as it was not a common piano to own at the time. It is not inconceivable that Selva's Pleyel remained with Garganta after her departure.

⁷⁷ Former pupil of the Schola Cantorum, a notary of Moulins, and close friend of Selva.

⁷⁸ Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 196.

Chapter 2 Blanche Selva in the Concert Hall

Blanche Selva enjoyed a prolific concert career spanning a little over three decades. She made her formal debut in 1897 in Lausanne at the age of 13, although she had appeared in public beforehand. Her performance career was tragically cut short in October 1930 when she had a stroke. Much of the documentary underpinning and analysis in this chapter is drawn directly from the concert programmes kept by Selva herself.

Throughout her career, Selva methodically glued her concert and recital programmes into albums, of which four have been located. Two of them are part of the Fons Blanca Selva at the Museu de la Música in Barcelona (MMB) and are available online. They contain 489 items in total. The first album at the MMB (BS001) spans from 1899-1905, and the second (BS002) comprises the years 1912-1921. They are albums 1 and 4 chronologically speaking. The remainder of the concert programmes collected by Selva found to date are within two other albums (chronologically, albums 2 and 3, corresponding to the years 1905-1908 and 1910-1913 respectively) kept at the Archives de l'Association Blanche Selva (AABS). These albums are not available to the public, but I was able to study them during my stay in La Touche in 2019. This documentary evidence, together with additional concert programmes traced by the AABS shows that in the span of 33 years of her active career as a concert pianist Selva performed in approximately 1,500 concerts.

This chapter presents a comprehensive account of Selva's experience of the concert platform and her role as a pianist with the programmes in the four albums as the connecting thread together with concert reviews and letters. Further, the influence, musical and personal, exercised by Vincent d'Indy over Selva is also examined in this chapter in greater detail, as Selva's concert career is the medium through which his direction, and perhaps also his control of her in the early stages of her career, are most noticeable. The timeframes of Selva's own albums have been used to guide the reader through the chronology, together with other subheadings when discussing and highlighting elements of note in her performing career.

Although her first album begins in 1899, when she met d'Indy, Selva's formal debut was in 1897. A short article in the *Gazette de Lausanne* preceding the recital states that she had performed her first concert at age seven and a half, in 1891 in her hometown of Brive, and later in Paris in 1894 at the Salle Pleyel.¹ Most interestingly, however, this note introduces us to her recital programme, which amongst other works contains Beethoven's Sonata op. 53 (*Appassionata*), Chopin's *Fantaisie* op. 49 and Liszt's twelfth Hungarian rhapsody.² The programme itself implies that she had a considerable technical command over the instrument and musical maturity. Although we can see her performing an opera-based fantasy, the *Caprice sur les airs d'Alceste*, this is only one piece in a programme, where a variety of other styles and composers is present, including Beethoven. It is also an exception in her programming, as will be shown below. This moves beyond the pianistic practice seen decades earlier and exemplified, amongst others, by Clara Schumann, who played 'Glanzstücke' until her early twenties. As noted by Stefaniak:

Despite the desire she [Clara Schumann] articulated in her 1841 diary entry, she continued to play opera-based fantasies and Henselt études, and not only for her Danish and Russian tours of 1842 and 1844 respectively.³

The ensuing press review of Selva's debut puts her abilities at an early age beyond speculation, in spite of some criticism with regard to the later part of the programme.

¹ It is most plausible that this information was supplied by Selva's own parents to the newspaper.

² *Gazette de Lausanne et Journal Suisse*, 20, 25 January 1897. Chronique Musicale, 'Le concert Selva; (not paginated). '[...]Le programme de Mlle Selva est bien fait pour donner une idée du merveilleux développement de son organisation technique et musicale : outre Schubert, Bach, Saint-Saëns (caprice sur les airs d'Alceste), nous y trouvons représentés Beethoven (sonate, op. 53), Chopin (fantaisie en fa mineur), Liszt (12^e rhapsodie). Voilà qui n'est pas banal pour une petite fille de treize ans ! Car, ou nous le certifie, Mlle Selva aura justement treize ans le 29 janvier, à l'heure même où commencera son concert. [...] ' [Mlle Selva's programme is well crafted to give an idea of the wonderful development of her technical and musical understanding: besides Schubert, Bach, Saint-Saëns (Caprice sur les airs d'Alceste), we find represented Beethoven (Sonata, op. 53), Chopin (Fantasy in F minor), Liszt (12^e Rhapsody). This is no mean feat for a little girl of thirteen! As we can certify, Mlle Selva will be exactly thirteen years old on 19 January, at the exact time when the concert will begin.] In LT, online access <https://www.letempsarchives.ch/page/GDL_1897_01_25/2> [accessed 12 July 2023].

³ Alexander Stefaniak, 'Clara Schumann's Interiorities and the Cutting Edge of Popular Pianism', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 70:3 (2017), 697-765, p. 752.

[...] La toute jeune pianiste (elle a exactement 13 ans), possède un vrai tempérament d'artiste, fougueux, tendre et passionné, et l'étonnement de ses auditeurs a été profond en l'entendant interpréter Bach, puis Beethoven, Gluck, Chopin et Liszt, dans leurs œuvres les plus compliquées, avec un tact et un sens musical absolument extraordinaires. La *Chaconne*, en ré mineur, de Bach, présente de si grandes difficultés que *L'Impromptu*, en si bémol majeur, de Schubert, la *Fantaisie*, en fa mineur, de Chopin, n'étaient plus qu'un jeu pour la jeune prodige.

C'est surtout dans le *Caprice* sur les airs de ballet d'*Alceste* (Gluck-St-Saëns) que la jeune artiste a montré son jeu dans toute la fermeté de son rythme et la sûreté des passages les plus difficiles. L'interopération en a été parfaite et a transporté d'aise les amateurs d'une musique aussi gracieuse et distinguée que savante. Dans les derniers numéros du programme, très nourri, Mlle Selva, visiblement énermée, a fait appel à toutes ses forces et a exagéré les mouvements et les fortissimos. Mais ce début est bien remarquable et nous lui adressons, ainsi qu'à son professeur, M. G. Humbert, nos plus chaleureuses félicitations. [...]⁴

[The very young pianist (she is exactly 13 years old), has a true artistic temperament, fiery, delicate and passionate, and the astonishment of her audience was deep in listening to her interpretation of Bach, then Beethoven, Gluck, Chopin and Liszt, in their most difficult works, with a sensitivity and musical sense which were absolutely extraordinary. Bach's D minor *Chaconne* presents as many great difficulties as the *Impromptu* in B-flat major of Schubert, the *Fantasy* in F minor of Chopin, they were but child's play for the young prodigy. It was especially in the *Caprice sur les airs de ballet d'Alceste* (Gluck-St-Saëns) that the young artist showed her hand with all the mastery of its rhythm and assurance in the most difficult passages. The interrelationship was perfect and it transported with ease the listeners to a music that is as gracious and distinguished as it is wise. In the last numbers of her well-nourished programme, Mlle Selva, visibly on edge, summoned all her strength and exaggerated the movements and the fortissimos. But this debut is very remarkable and we extend to her, as well as to her teacher, M.G. Humbert, our warmest congratulations. [...]]

Selva never acknowledged Humbert as one of her piano teachers, and in her biographies in concert programmes Humbert is only credited as a harmony teacher instead.⁵

⁴ *Gazette de Lausanne et Journal Suisse*, n. 26, 1 February 1897. Chronique musicale, (unpaginated). In LT, online access < https://www.letempsarchives.ch/page/GDL_1897_02_01/3/article/1129673/Blanche%20Selva > [accessed 12 July 2023].

⁵ See for example BS002/13: 'Venue après cela habiter Genève, elle y prit quelques leçons d'harmonie avec Georges Humbert, puis commença la carrière publique et le professorat à

First Album: 1899-1905

The first documented concert in her album dates from 5 November 1899, when she was 15 years old and only three months after first meeting d'Indy. This programme is reproduced here in Fig. 2.1. Chopin and Liszt are featured again (*Nocturne* op. 48 no. 2 by the former, and *La Campanella* by the latter), as had been the case in her Lausanne concert. These composers are not however representative of her later 'core programme' and viewed with hindsight, this recital programme represents a clear transition period in Selva's early performing career. Two features in this programme are indicative of d'Indy's influence in the young Selva: her performance of Bach and her partnership with Vincent d'Indy himself, seen here as her duo partner in Chabrier's *Trois valse romantiques*.

l'âge de treize ans.' [Having subsequently moved to Geneva, she undertook some harmony lessons with Georges Humbert, and later began her public [performing] career and teaching at the age of thirteen.] This programme note was most likely written by Selva herself.

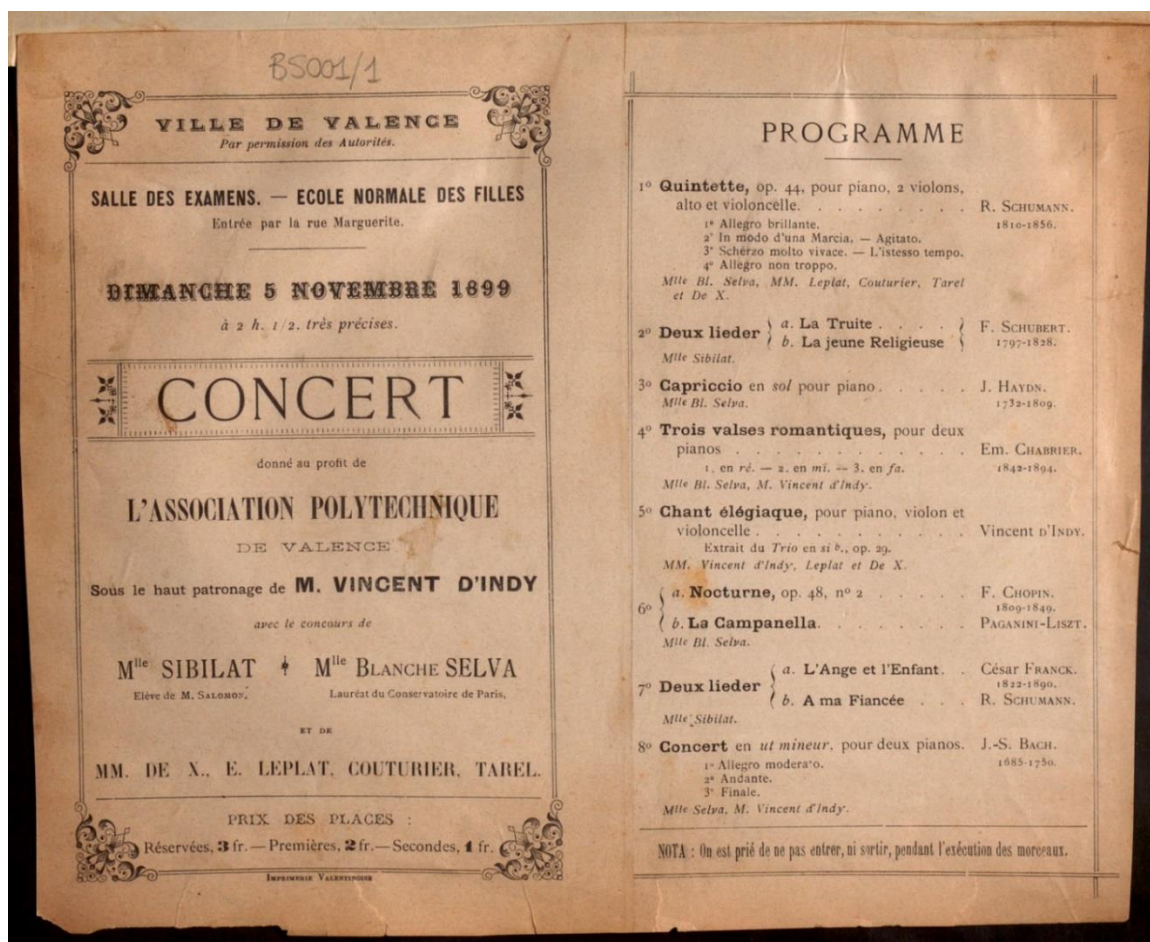


Fig. 2.1 – Concert in Valence, 5 November 1899

Courtesy of the Museu de la Música de Barcelona, Fons Blanca Selva, BS001/1

Over the years, their collaboration also entailed performing piano concertos together and jointly presenting lecture recitals, in which d'Indy would be the *conférencier*, and Selva his trusted performer.

However, d'Indy's influence and reach in Selva's concert work goes beyond the realms of simple musical partnership. To begin with, Selva considered d'Indy her main teacher. In 1937, many years after their first encounter, Selva began one of her greatest literary endeavours, the *Dialogue sur la musique avec Marie-Françoise*, which, sadly, she left unfinished. In it Selva reflected, amongst other things, on the nature of her early lessons with d'Indy. They were not piano lessons in the strict sense. Instead, she performed the pieces he had previously chosen in daily, informal musical gatherings with his own acquaintances, where he also played himself. He turned pages

for her, but stood behind her instead of beside her. Selva's later reasoning of this was that he did not want to reveal anything to her through his physical expression.⁶

In these same memoirs, she also wrote:

Bien des années plus tard seulement, j'ai pu comprendre ce qui s'était alors passé durant ses inoubliables exécutions-là : C'était mon maître qui, par son souffle, jouait de moi...

Je ne faisais que transmettre au piano un peu de ce qu'il sentait, de ce qu'il vivait. Et son souffle seul était mon inspireur me rythmant à son rythme, m'y nuancant à ses nuances.⁷

[Only many years later was I able to understand what happened during those unforgettable performances: it was my teacher who was playing me with his breath...

All I did was transmit to the piano a little of what he felt, what he lived. And his breath alone was my inspiration, his rhythm was my rhythm, his nuance my nuance.]

Although it is apparent that in her later years, and with the benefit of hindsight, she was able to ascribe to these early lessons some transcendental and metaphysical characteristics, it is evident that at the time, she was not aware of what was happening. The direct inference is that she was already a very accomplished pianist who needed very little, or no formal pianistic instruction in the mechanical sense at all. However, it is paradoxical how her later rationalisation of these 'lessons' removes all agency from her own musical merit. This view, that of seeing interpretation as a

⁶ Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 13, quoting from the largely unpublished *Dialogue sur la musique avec Marie-Françoise*, started in 1937. The surviving sketches are in the AABS. [...] 'Elles consistaient à ce que je joue devant lui des œuvres pianistiques qu'il m'avait indiquées au cours de réunions amicales chez ses propres amis où il faisait, lui, de la musique.' [...] 'Donc, en ces auditions où il me faisait jouer chaque jour, il tournait des pages de la musique que j'exécutais. Mais il ne voulait pas, pour ce faire, s'asseoir près de moi craignant (je l'ai compris bien plus tard !) que je ne puisse deviner ses impressions sur sa physionomie. Il se tenait debout derrière de moi.' [They consisted in me playing to him piano pieces that he had pointed me to during friendly gatherings at the homes of his acquaintances where he also made music himself.] [...] [So, in these rehearsals where he made me play every day, he turned the pages of the music I played. But he did not want to sit next to me fearing (I understood much later!) that I might guess his impressions from his physicality. He stood behind me.]

⁷ Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 13.

‘vessel’ to a (male) composer’s voice squarely conforms to the gendered expectations of musical performance. As noted by Katherine Ellis:

[...] female pianists in Paris made their reputations as interpreters of – or vessels for – the creative products of men. As such they reinforced a gender stereotype that called for women to renounce an individual authorial voice but allowed them, like St. Cecilia, to transmit the lofty inspirations of others.⁸

But this surprises in Selva’s case given her own earlier writings about interpretation. In 1913 Selva published her book *La Sonate. Étude de son évolution technique historique et expressive en vue de l’interprétation et de l’audition* which included a 35-page long chapter (Chapter 2) on interpretation.⁹ In it, Selva writes that in finding the musical meaning and expression (p. 18) the performer undergoes an active process that requires research and intelligence (p. 25), and although the interpreter is an intermediary (p. 17) she is also a creator:

Voilà, réellement, ce qu’est l’interprétation véritable, voilà comment l’interprète est *celui qui fait connaître les volontés, les intentions d’un autre*; voilà aussi comment, ainsi que le compositeur, il est un créateur. (p. 26)

[That is it, really, what real interpretation is, the interpreter is *he who makes known the will and the intentions of another*; this is also how, like the composer, he is also a creator.]

Metaphysical inspiration or not, as her main influence, d’Indy (and the Schola) did direct her repertoire choices throughout a significant portion of her career as well as having a direct impact on the type of concert engagement that she took on. As a result of her role as a *propagandiste* of the Schola Cantorum, much of her concert work was effected in the French provinces following the Schola’s almost evangelical music education mission.

La *Scola* qui s’est donnée pour mission de propager en province la vraie musique et relever ainsi le goût de masses, les diriger dans le sens de l’art vrai,

⁸ Katherine Ellis, ‘Female Pianists and Their Male Critics in Nineteenth-Century Paris’, *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 50.2/3 (1997), 353-385, p. 359.

⁹ Blanche Selva, *La Sonate: étude de son évolution technique, historique et expressive en vue de l’interprétation et de l’audition* (Paris: Rouart Lerolle, 1913).

substituant dans les Concerts, aux romances frelatées, aux platitudes de tous genres, la saine inspiration [...] ¹⁰

[The Schola which has given itself the mission to propagate true music around the provinces and so elevate the taste of the masses, to direct them towards true art, replacing adulterated romances with Concerts, and platitudes of all types with healthy inspiration [...]]

Not only did Selva perform in many such concerts throughout the French provinces, from Montpellier to Dijon, Lyon or Bayonne; she adopted the Schola's (and d'Indy's) values as her own. This is clearly reflected in her core repertoire, namely, Bach, Beethoven and Franck. An important addition to these is her work as a leading proponent of d'Indy's own music, as well as that of many other scholistes of the time, including Albéniz and Séverac.

The table presented by Guy Selva in his work *Une artiste incomparable* is very instructive and confirms this. From the total programmes surveyed at the time of writing, the number of performances of a piece by those composers is: Bach, 725; Beethoven, 425; d'Indy 312; Franck, 307; Albéniz, 303. ¹¹

It is important to stress however, that d'Indy's work as her teacher was more akin to that of a musical and sometimes almost spiritual guide than a piano teacher in the strict sense. Selva had a very solid technique by the time they met, as is clear from the repertoire she performed before beginning to study under him. He did not form a part of her technical discoveries and the formulation of her own technical conception either. In fact, d'Indy teased ¹² her about this work, jokingly referring to her method as the 'néo-piano'. ¹³ Of course, this alludes to musical Neo-Classicism, where a revival of

¹⁰ *Les Tablettes de la Scola, Bulletin bi-mensuel*, 10 May 1902, Document BS001/46 MMB.

¹¹ Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 212. Although not all programmes were available to Guy Selva at the point of writing, he surveyed over a thousand concerts and these numbers give a good indication of her programming preferences.

¹² Letter from Blanche Selva to Guy de Lioncourt, 30 September 1910, (Gilles Saint-Arroman, *Aux sources*, p. 19). After explaining the basics of her discoveries, she asks her friend, 'Comprenez-vous maintenant pourquoi ça m'est égal que le Maître me taquine sur cela, et pourquoi aussi je lui dis que ce n'est pas nouveau et que ça ne m'appartient pas ?' [Do you understand now why I don't mind that the Master teases me with this, and why I told him that this is not new and it does not belong to me.]

¹³ Letter from Blanche Selva to Guy de Lioncourt, 30 September 1910, Gilles Saint-Arroman, *Aux sources*, p. 18). 'Ce fameux "néo piano" puisqu'ainsi l'appelle le Maître, m'a appris bien de

earlier processes and styles are brought forward. Selva's treatise is studied in the next chapter, and as will be shown, together with advancing new techniques she also draws from known pianistic formulas. Her view is also that a lot of what is 'new' in her approach is so natural to our body that it is not novel per se, like weight playing. She might therefore have felt that the neo prefix was innocuous and maybe even accurate to an extent. However, it is less clear if that was also the case from the point of view of d'Indy, who may not have understood her discoveries, and whose remark may have been more pointed.

Vincent d'Indy himself had had a solid pianistic background, having studied piano with some of the most reputed French teachers, such as Louis Diémer (1843-1919) and Antoine François Marmontel (1816-1898), later studying composition and organ with César Franck, and even meeting Liszt in 1873, although it far less clear how influential, if at all, this encounter might have been.¹⁴ He reportedly also worked under Clara Schumann, although modern scholarship does not support this.¹⁵ However, as a clear example of his more limited technical means, he was not able to perform his own piano sonata, needing to enlist Selva, the dedicatee of the work instead, to promote it.¹⁶

Although not such a great pianistic influence, in the mechanical sense, Selva owed much of her musical understanding and conceptual framework to d'Indy and their work together, which she also further consolidated by attending his composition

choses !' [This famous "néo piano", since that is what the Master calls it, has taught me many things!]

¹⁴ According to his biography in the concert programme 22 March 1902, BS001/41 MMB.

¹⁵ In a letter from Blanche Selva to Carlos and René Castéra dated 2 August 1906, she tells them that she has been working a lot on some Schumann pieces, *Papillons*, *Davidsbündler* and *Fantaisiestücke* and the *Carnaval* [...] which she then stated d'Indy had worked on under Clara Schumann and Liszt. 'Vous ai-je dit que j'avais beaucoup travaillé les Schumann avec le Maître, notamment les *Papillons*, les *Davidsbündler*, les *Fantaisiestücke* et le *Carnaval* qu'il a lui-même travaillé avec M^{me} Clara Schumann et avec Liszt.' (Rémy Campos, *Blanche Selva interprète*, p. 49). This is however not supported by the available evidence, and no mention of their acquaintance appears in Claudia de Vries's important study of Clara Schumann, Claudia de Vries, *Die Pianistin Clara Wieck-Schumann. Interpretation im Spannungsfeld von Tradition und Individualität* (Meinz: Schott Musik International, 1996).

¹⁶ Letter from Vincent d'Indy to B. Selva, 7 August 1907, as quoted by Campos and Donin, p. 179. See below for a detailed account of their collaboration on this work.

classes at the Schola. Her emphasis on analysis as well as much of the nomenclature used in her treatise also reflects this influence which will be explored in the next chapter.

Throughout this first period some of the general traits in Selva's later career are already on display. Together with her appearances at concerts organised by the Schola Cantorum, she performed in such prestigious Parisian associations as the Société Nationale, La Trompette, or the Aeolian with the Parent quartet. She also appeared in several salons and as the performing partner in lecture recitals. Some of these concerts will now be examined in greater detail.

Société Nationale

As stated by Jann Pasler, this is one of the 'best well-known private music societies',¹⁷ founded in 1871, and d'Indy became its president from 1890. Unsurprisingly, Selva was a frequent performer in these concerts.

Between 1899 and 1905 she performed for the association on thirteen occasions.¹⁸ In fact, her return to the Parisian stage happened at the Salle Érard in a Société Nationale concert on 27 January 1900, where she played d'Indy's *Tableaux de voyage* op. 33. In a letter dated 6 January 1900 d'Indy refers to the appropriate concert attire for the occasion, evidencing the level of detail and influence he had over his then nearly 16-year-old protégée:

La toilette est à votre choix, soit soirée, soit ville, cette dernière hyphothèse serait peut-être mieux à mon avis, car la Société nationale est une Société d'artistes où l'art est surtout en famille et sans façon.¹⁹

¹⁷ Jann Pasler, 'Concert Programmes and their Narratives as Emblems of Ideology', *International Journal of Musicology*, 2 (1993), 249-308, p. 259.

¹⁸ The concert dates and programmes within BS001 at the MMB are: 27 January 1900, BS001/6; 19 January 1901, BS001/18; 25 January 1902, BS001/29; 8 February 1902, BS001/32; 5 April 1902, BS001/42; 24 January 1903, BS001/68; 21 February 1903, BS001/72; 23 January 1904, BS001/109; 5 March 1904, BS001/118; 7 January 1904 BS001/144; 4 February 1905, BS001/151; 18 March 1905 BS001/168; 15 April 1905, BS001/175.

¹⁹ Letter dated 6 January 1900 from Vincent d'Indy to Blanche Selva. Transcription from the AABS.

[Dress is up to you, whether evening dress, or city [daytime], the latter perhaps better in my opinion, as the Société nationale is a society of artists where the art is above all an unpretentious family affair.]

These concerts were never solo performances. As such, she was always partnering or appearing with other artists, often only playing one or two pieces. She performed pieces such as Franck's *Prélude, Aria et Final* op. 23 (25 January 1902), or Balakirev's *Islamey* op. 18 (19 January 1901). However, revealingly and relevant for her later scholarly reception, whenever she performed contemporary music, this was almost always by the Schola affiliates, composers of whom we know, or hear, comparatively little these days: Felix vom Rath (1866-1905), Albert Roussel (1869-1937), Pierre Coindreau (1867-1924), Pierre de Bréville (1861-1949) or, of course, d'Indy himself. By contrast, we find other pianists, who have become more prominent in musicological literature, such as Ricardo Viñes (1875-1943) or Marguerite Long (1874-1966) associated with composers who have made it into the canon, like Ravel and Fauré respectively. Fig. 2.2, exemplifies this. In this programme Selva gave the première of Albert Roussel's sonata for violin and piano op. 11, whilst in the same concert, Viñes played the *Thème et Variations* op. 73 by Fauré and premièred Ravel's *Pavane* and *Jeux d'eau*. This, and many other similar concert programmes, illustrate that although less well known at present, Selva was also part of the Parisian musical scene, that is, she appeared in the same venues as other artists who have become household names in modern scholarship. However, it is plausible that her almost exclusive association with composers who have interested later audiences and scholars less, could go a long way to explain her absence from a significant part of the literature devoted to the period and the comparatively lower profile she has enjoyed since.

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Samedi 5 Avril 1902, à 9 heures précises
Ouverture des portes à 8 heures 1/2

PROGRAMME

Fondée en 1871
par ~~Romain~~ BUSSINE

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Animé - Modéré, très expressif - Très animé. (1re aud.)
M. Henri SAILLER et M^{lle} Blanche SELVA
2. **ÉPIGRAMME FUNÉRAIRE** (DE HÉRÉDIA)..... A. SAUVREZIS
M^{me} Jane ARGER. (1re aud.)
Chœur : Le cours d'ensemble vocal de M^{me} CHEVILLARD et GÉLOSO.
3. a) **PAVANE POUR UNE INFANTE DÉFUNTE** (1) MAURICE RAVEL
b) **JEUX D'EAU.** (1re aud.)
M. Ricardo VINES.
4. **POÈMES DE FRANCIS JAMMES** (2) CH. BORDES
a) *La poussière des tamis chante au soleil.* (1re aud.)
M^{me} DE LA ROUVIÈRE.
b) *La paix est dans les bois silencieux.*
M^{me} J. DE LA MARE.
c) *Oh ! ce parfum d'enfance dans la prairie.*
M. Jean DAVID.
d) *Du courage ! mon âme ; éclate de douleur !*
M. Alb. GEBELIN.
5. **ADAGIO** pour violon et piano LUZZATO
MM. Henri SAILLER et LUZZATO. (1re aud.)
6. **THÈME et VARIATIONS** G. FAURÉ
M. Ricardo VINES.

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BS001/42

Fig. 2.2 – Concert at the Société Nationale, 5 April 1902
Courtesy of the Museu de la Música de Barcelona, Fons Blanca Selva, BS001/42

Concerts at the Schola Cantorum

As eloquently stated by Rémy Campos, Selva was an integral part and ‘voice’ of the Schola Cantorum:

Blanche Selva fut la figure emblématique de cet univers laborieux : première auditrice de la parole magistrale, elle était aussi la voix de la Schola – créatrice de partitions indigènes et propagandiste infatigable des doctrines locales – l’exemple même de l’abnégation artistique.²⁰

[Blanche Selva was the iconic figure of this industrious universe: the first to hear the masterful word, she was also the voice of the Schola – first performer of home-grown scores and infatigable promoter of local doctrines – the epitome of artistic self-sacrifice.]

As already mentioned, Blanche Selva toured France often as part as the Schola’s music education mission, so as to bring ‘de bonne musique’ [good music] to a wider audience.²¹ As was advanced earlier, this was not always a benign impulse. Fulcher compellingly argues that a racist and anti-semitic discourse permeated French cultural institutions behind a veil of French nationalism, including the Schola and d’Indy himself.²² In his opera *La légende de Saint Christophe* op. 67 (begun in 1903 but first performed in 1920) d’Indy overtly denounced ‘the assault on French tradition’ and ‘the modernist and cosmopolitan danger’ present in French cultural values (Fulcher, pp. 458-459). More broadly, d’Indy in his courses spoke against the Italianate melodic style of Meyerbeer as ‘the quintessence of the meretricious, derivative and venal “Jewish Style”’ (Fulcher, p. 461).²³ Selva seems to have remained outside this discourse, although one antisemitic reference can be found in her 1913 book *La Sonate*. When discussing the composer Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (1809-1847), Selva first praises

²⁰ Rémy Campos, *Blanche Selva interprète*, p. 46.

²¹ *Tablettes de la Schola*, 25 January 1901, BS001/19.

²² Fulcher, *passim*.

²³ This is in stark contrast to his earlier admiration for the composer as expressed in several letters: ‘In his letter of 28 February 1870, d’Indy called Meyerbeer’s *Le Prophète* “sublime” and “the great masterpiece of all masterpieces”; in that of 5 April 1870, he praised the composer as “the greatest musical genius in modern times”; and in that of 25 March 1871, he explained that he knew “nothing as beautiful in dramatic music” as the end of his act IV.’ Jann Pasler, ‘Deconstructing d’Indy, or the Problem of a Composer’s Reputation’, p. 233 fn. 10.

him as a 'véritable exception' [true exception] in the romantic period (p. 161) and then asks:

Dut-il à son origine israélite de n'appartenir, en propre, à aucune époque, comme à aucune nation ?²⁴

[Is it because of his Jewish origin that he does not really belong to any period in the same way as not belonging to any nation?]

A pernicious discourse around nationality and race was indeed commonplace in French musical circles before the first World War:

[a]lready race was being treated not as a synonym for nationality, as was characteristic in the past, but as a synthesis of both culture and blood; Debussy, implying that Paul Dukas was not "fully French", agreed with some critics that *Ariane et Barbe-bleu* was a masterpiece, but, he added, not "un chef-d'œuvre de la musique française". Similarly, he considered César Franck, who had spent his entire career in France, not to be a "French" composer because he was of "Flemish blood".²⁵

However, as Fulcher also notes,

[n]ot everyone, [...] shared such xenophobia; this was certainly the case with Maurice Ravel, who now became and tenaciously remained its strident outspoken opponent. Ravel refused to join the Ligue pour la Défense de la Musique Française, opposing its proposal to ban those works that he believed French composers should hear.²⁶

Ravel also went on to orchestrate and later perform his *Mélodies hébraïques* in 1920, the same year as, and in direct response to, the first performance of d'Indy's *La légende* (Fulcher, p. 464). Selva became an ardent Catholic although she did not embrace Catholicism until her father's passing in 1905, out of respect for him, who had had religion banned in the household.²⁷ Her biographer, Guy Selva, does not think that her faith is connected to d'Indy or the Schola, which was known as a predominant Catholic circle, as Selva appears to have been drawn to the Church since childhood.²⁸ I am however of the view, given the extent of d'Indy's (a devout Catholic) influence on

²⁴ Selva, *La Sonate*, p. 161.

²⁵ Fulcher, p. 464.

²⁶ Fulcher, p. 464.

²⁷ Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 107.

²⁸ Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 107.

her during this early period that it is not possible to draw such a clear line in the sand, and that it is more likely than not that he, and the Schola, may have contributed in great, or at the very least some, part to Selva's religious beliefs.

As advanced earlier, perplexingly, the foundational pillars upon which the Schola purported to reinvigorate and promulgate 'good' French contemporary music were on the one hand the Germans (Bach, Beethoven and Wagner) and on the other, Franck. The Schola was also invested in the promotion of *musique ancienne* more broadly. As well as touring the provinces, Selva undertook many significant concerts for the institution in its Parisian hall, at Rue St Jacques with permutations of concert programmes aligned to these ideals. Two concert series in this first period merit special attention.

The first is her huge undertaking of bringing the entirety of Bach's keyboard music to the French audience, a first in France and most likely, given that it took place between 1903-1904, in the world.²⁹ Entitled 'L'œuvre de Piano de J. S. Bach', she organised his works into 17 programmes which she performed between December 1903 and May 1904.³⁰ A reviewer at *Le Courrier Musical* wrote after the first concert:

Mlle Selva a commencé la série des récitals consacrés à la musique pour piano de Bach. Il faut admirer pleinement cette tentative peut-être sans précédent. Oser cette tâche, il fallait la foi que Mlle Selva tient de son maître Vincent d'Indy, pour l'exécuter, il faut un talent hors ligne et cette facilité de compréhension qui font de Mlle Selva une artiste unique.³¹

²⁹ She had previously performed Bach's *Goldberg Variations* on 6 March 1903 also at the Schola Cantorum. BS001/77. André Tubeuf in his work on the Chilean pianist Claudio Arrau (1903-1991) credits him with being the first pianist to present the entirety of Bach's keyboard output in Berlin (p. 134), but this was in 1935, over 30 years later than Blanche Selva. Arrau did however play it from memory, whilst, as noted below, Selva most likely played it with the score. André Tubeuf, *Appassionata, Claudio Arrau, prodige, dandy, visionnaire* (Paris: Nil Editions, 2003).

³⁰ The programmes of sixteen out of the seventeen recitals are found in the MMB collection: 8 December 1903, 9pm. BS001/96; 15 December 1903, 9pm. BS001/98; 22 December 1903, 9pm. BS001/99; 5 January 1904, 9pm. BS001/100; 12 January 1904, 9pm. BS001/102; 19 January 1904, 9pm. BS001/108; 26 January 1904, 9pm. BS001/110; 2 February 1904, 9pm. BS001/111; 9 February 1904, 9pm. BS001/112; 23 February 1904, 9pm. BS001/114; 15 March 1904, 9pm. BS001/121; 22 March 1904, 9pm. BS001/124; 19 April 1904, 9pm. BS001/127; 3 May 1904, 9pm. BS001/133; 10 May 1904, 9pm. BS001/136, 21 May 1904, 9pm. BS001/137.

³¹ Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 40.

[Miss Selva started the series of recitals dedicated to Bach's piano music. This perhaps unprecedented attempt should be fully admired. To dare this task, it is necessary to have the faith that Mlle Selva holds from her master Vincent d'Indy, to execute it, you need an extraordinary talent and the ease of understanding that make Mlle Selva a unique artist.]

As was habitual at the time, instead of presenting the works by genres or sets, she mixed and matched them. For instance, a concert could have some *Inventions*, a *French Suite*, a *Partita*, some movements from the *Well-Tempered Clavier* or an *English Suite*. Nevertheless, each subsequent programme was structured according to Bach's order of composition of these genres. That is, she did not arrange the pieces by tonality or musical affinity, but in order of publication. The first concert contained the first *Partita*, and so the following concert had the second. As can be seen from the non-consecutive numbering of the programmes in footnote 30, during the period of the seventeen Bach recitals she also continued performing in other concerts alongside this endeavour, most often with programmes other than Bach, as well as partnering d'Indy in some lectures. This strongly evidences her infatigable nature and high capabilities.

The other important concert series at the Schola is the six-part recital series, 'Six Séances de Piano consacrées à J.S. Bach, Rameau, D. Scarlatti et leurs devanciers' (Fig. 2.3), which ran from 17 January 1905 to 4 April 1905.³² A summary is provided by Maite Aguirre Quiñonero and Barry Ife in a forthcoming article 'Blanche Selva: advocate of Scarlatti'³³ where they comment:

Across these marathon six recitals Selva played the complete Biblical Sonatas of Kuhnau; four complete or near complete Couperin *ordres* (nos 6, 14, 15, 18) and selections from nine others (nos 2, 4, 5, 8, 9, 11, 13, 16, 20); the complete solo keyboard works of Rameau; 39 Scarlatti sonatas; and twelve preludes and fugues from the 48, two complete partitas, four toccatas and fugues, a capriccio, a fantasia, a suite and the Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue of Bach. This is an outstanding achievement for a young artist at the age of 21, showing early

³² BS001/146; BS001/148; BS001/161; BS001/163; [BS001/164 is a repeat of the preceding programme], BS001/170, BS001/173.

³³ Aguirre Quiñonero, Maite, and Barry Ife, 'Blanche Selva, advocate of Scarlatti' in *Proceedings of the 2019 FIMTE symposium on Domenico Scarlatti*, ed. by Luisa Morales (Almería: LEAL, forthcoming).

evidence of the energy, drive and capacity for hard work that characterised the rest of her career.

We can also glimpse an extremely pragmatic mind at work in the way she presented the Rameau pieces, for example. She was perfectly willing to split the 1706 *Premier livre* into two shorter suites within the same programme, just as she split the 1724 suite in D across two concerts. But her most radical decision was to defer the brilliant last movement of the 1729 suite in A — the famous Gavotte and 6 *doubles* — from the fifth to the final concert, even though it meant separating it from the rest of the suite and pairing it with another suite in a different key.

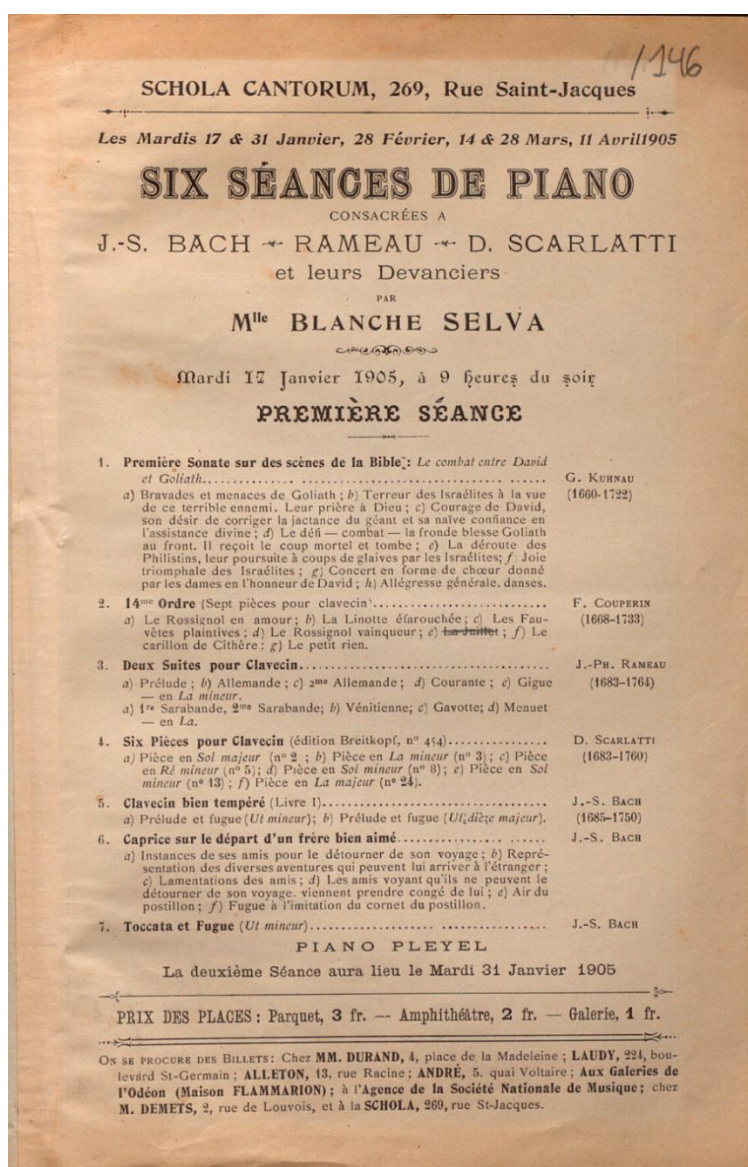


Fig. 2.3 – Programme for the first of six solo recitals at the Schola Cantorum, January-April 1905

Courtesy of the Museu de la Música de Barcelona, Fons Blanca Selva, BS001/146

Other Paris Concerts

Selva was also a frequent performer at the *Soirées La Trompette*. Founded in 1861 by Emile Lemoine, they became later a private and highly select concert series, where the audience was only allowed in by invitation.³⁴ Pasler gives an account of other performers such as Risler, Landowska, Viñes, Bathori and Féart performing there.

Selva's first appearance dates from 8 January 1904,³⁵ when she played Bach, Scarlatti and d'Indy, as well as joining the string players in Schumann's Quartet op. 47. Later, in March 1904,³⁶ also true to her specialism, she delivered Franck's *Prélude, Choral et Fugue*.

Other notable concerts include her performance of d'Indy's *Symphonie sur un air montagnard français* in collaboration with the famous Lamoureux orchestra conducted by Camille Chevillard (1859-1923) on 13 March 1903,³⁷ as part of the *Société des Grandes Auditions Musicales de France*. Furthermore, during these years, Selva also appeared in several salons, including those of Labey,³⁸ Saint-Marceaux and the Princesse de Cystria.³⁹

Although much of her repertoire in this first period revolved around the aesthetics and projects of the Schola, she also ventured occasionally into other musical areas, and we can see her playing Debussy from quite early on despite the ostensible animosity between him and d'Indy. She performed *Estampes* (1903) from 1904 onwards. In fact, the first public performance she gave of these pieces on 16 January 1904 in a concert

³⁴ Pasler, 'Concert Programmes and their Narratives as Emblems of Ideology', p. 262.

³⁵ BS001/101 MMB.

³⁶ BS001/125 MMB.

³⁷ BS001/83 MMB.

³⁸ The Labey couple, conductor and composer Marcel (1875-1968) and his wife, the composer Charlotte Sohy (1887-1955) hosted their own musical gatherings as well as frequenting those of others. Both were students of Vincent d'Indy.

³⁹ Born Léonie de Trévise (1866-1939) she became the Princess of Cystria through her marriage in 1888 to Rodolphe de Faucigny-Lucinge. Chimènes credits her with an eclectic taste which expressed itself in the variety of artists and composers engaged in her salon, in Myriam Chimènes, *Mécènes et musiciens. Du salon au concert à Paris sous la III^e République* (Paris: Fayard, 2004), p. 183.

organised by *La Revue Musicale*⁴⁰ was only seven days after its official première by Ricardo Viñes at the Société Nationale on 9 January 1904.

Selva also performed the suite at a matinée at the Princesse de Cystria, earlier on the same day, as recorded in Saint-Marceaux's diary, where she notes that the pieces had been 'très bien joués par Blanche Selva' [very well played by Blanche Selva].⁴¹ Debussy had also been in attendance. However, we know from a previous letter from Debussy to André Caplet in 1903 that he dismissed her as a performer of his works.⁴² It is not clear what exactly displeased him about her playing, or whether he may have treated her as d'Indy's creature. Further, as noted by Robert Orledge, amongst Debussy's letters bowdlerised by Durant in 1927, there are some 'cutting remarks about contemporary pianists like the corpulent Blanche Selva, who, Debussy wrote, 'evokes visions of prairies' (March 1911).⁴³ It is most likely that it was this physical dislike which may have played a part, or the only part, in Debussy's rejection. As noted by Lemy Lim in her examination of the interaction between the female body and reviews of female pianists, there is a 'disapproval of women who diverge from the traditional image of their sex'.⁴⁴ The fact that Lim's study is centered on 1950s London only confirms the prevalence across borders and time of this criticism, as the same conclusions are observed in the analysis of reviews of female pianists in nineteenth century Paris.⁴⁵

In any event, Blanche Selva performed this work and other Debussy pieces during this time, as is also evident in programme BS001/135. In a concert organised by Louis Laloy, chief editor of *La Revue Musicale*, Selva was chosen as the pianist to perform the solo pieces, piano accompaniment to Camille Fourrier's singing, and, with Marcel Labey as duet partner, some works by Debussy and Schumann (Fig. 2.4).

⁴⁰ BS001/106 MMB.

⁴¹ Saint-Marceaux, 16 January 1904, p. 329.

⁴² Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 56. Debussy wrote to Caplet 'ne pensez pas aux mains de Blanche Selva'. [Don't think of Blanche Selva's hands.]

⁴³ Robert Orledge, 'Debussy's Piano Music: Some Second Thoughts and Sources of Inspiration', *The Musical Times*, 122, no. 1655 (1981), p. 25.

⁴⁴ Lemy Lim, 'Female Body and Reviews of Women Pianists in 1950s London', in *Women: A Cultural Review*, 23:2 (2012), 163-181, p. 174.

⁴⁵ Katherine Ellis, 'Female Pianists and Their Male Critics in Nineteenth-Century Paris', *passim*.

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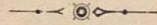
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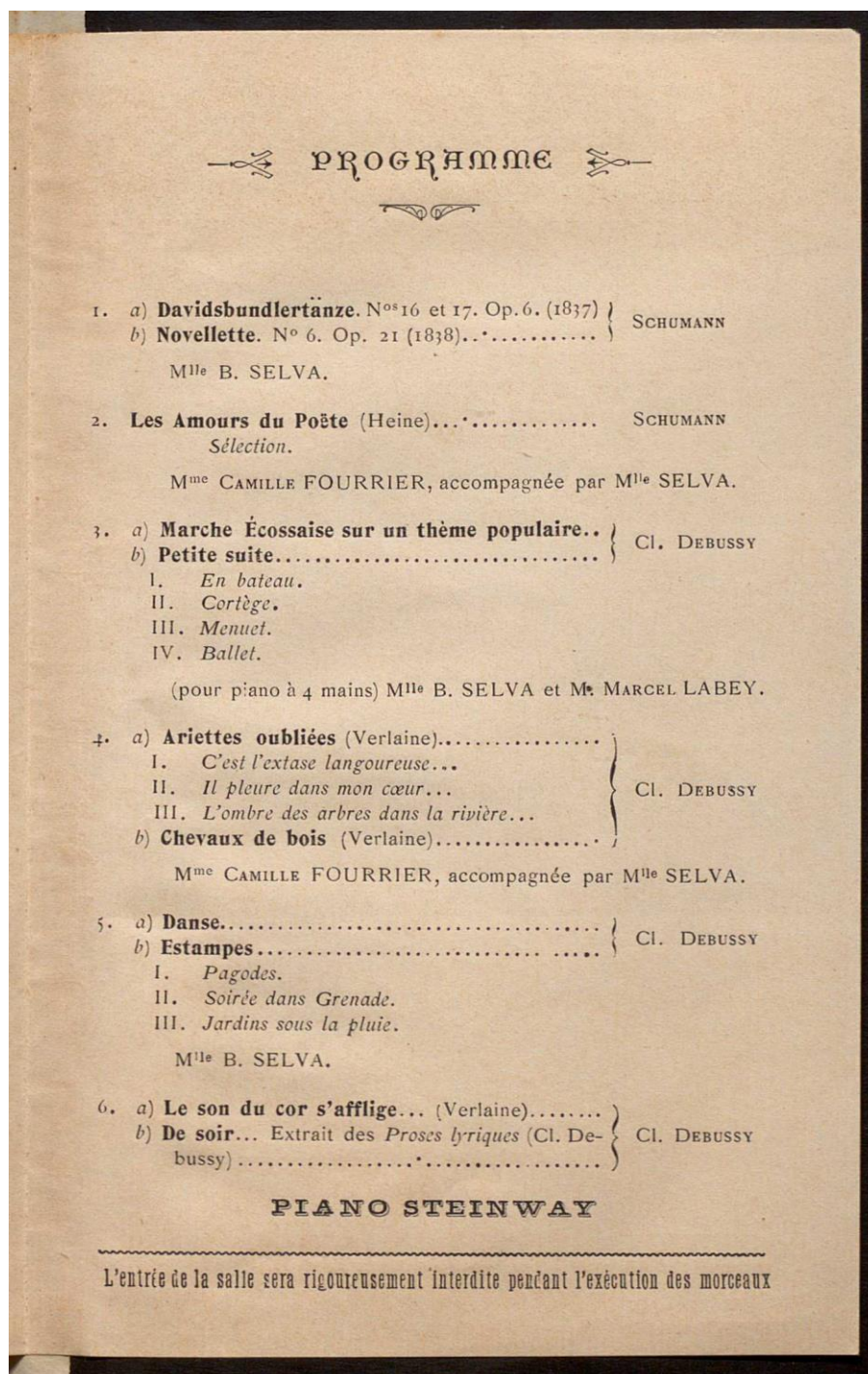


Fig. 2.4 – Schumann and Debussy programme, 10 May 1904

Courtesy of the Museu de la Música de Barcelona, Fons Blanca Selva, BS001/135

As has been shown already through the available programmes from this first period (when she was aged 15-21), Selva was active in all the main arenas in Paris covering a vast and very demanding repertoire. However, it is important not to lose sight of d'Indy's strong influence on Selva, particularly during this early period. This is best

reflected in the fact that he did not allow her to play Beethoven before he thought she was ready, and she acquiesced. From a letter dated 8 September 1905:

Je veux que votre interprétation beethovenienne marque un réel progrès intellectuel sur l'interprétation courante et quelconque que donnent les rares pianistes qui s'attaquent à cette œuvre. Telle quelle, vous la *jouez* très bien, aussi bien qu'eux, mais vous ne l'*interprétez* pas de la façon tout à fait personnelle dont vous pourrez le faire dans quelques années. C'est pourquoi je vous dis : Vous n'êtes pas encore mûre pour Beethoven, attendez. Mais attendre et renoncer font deux.⁴⁶

[I want your Beethoven interpretation to mark real intellectual progress with respect to current interpretations and those rare pianists who tackle this work. As it is, you *play* it very well, as well as them, but you do not yet *interpret* it in the personal way that you could do in some years' time. This is why I say: You are not yet mature enough for Beethoven, wait. But to wait and to renounce are two different things.]

We know from the available correspondence that d'Indy required her to wait five years before embarking on Beethoven. However, her interpretation of this composer was welcomed by the critics already at this stage. For example, a reviewer in Montpellier wrote in December 1905:

[...] cette jeune fille de génie dont la merveilleuse interprétation est faite de lumière, de cœur et d'intelligence. [...] La Sonate opus 111 de Beethoven, [est] apparue sous ses doigts dans sa splendeur demi-divine.⁴⁷

[...] this young girl of genius whose wonderful interpretation is made of light, heart and intelligence. [...] Beethoven's Sonata opus 111, [has] appeared under her fingers in its semi-divine splendour.]

Moreover, as early as 1 December 1899, only four months after having first heard her play, d'Indy had written to composer Pierre de Bréville stating that he had met

une jeune pianiste extrêmement remarquable (et vous savez que je n'emballe pas sur les pianistes!), qui est douée d'un sentiment musical inné tout à fait extraordinaire ; c'est la seule femme par qui j'ai entendu bien interpréter Beethoven ; elle s'appelle Blanche Selva et n'a que seize ans... Vraiment, c'est à

⁴⁶ Letter from Vincent d'Indy to Blanche Selva, dated 8 September 1905, AABS.

⁴⁷ Guy Selva, *Beethoven, el nostre cantor i germà*, p. 17.

faire connaître et je serais bien étonné si elle ne conquérirait pas une très haute place d'ici peu ; il faut en profiter pour la Société Nationale.⁴⁸

[a young extremely remarkable pianist (and you know that pianists don't really appeal to me!), who is gifted with an innate musical feeling which is absolutely extraordinary; the only woman I have heard interpret Beethoven well; she is called Blanche Selva and is just sixteen years old... Truthfully, she needs to be known and I will be very surprised if she doesn't achieve great things before very long; we must take advantage of her for the Société Nationale.]

Blanche had also partnered with her mentor on 17 December of the same year performing Beethoven's *Emperor* (Concerto no. 5, op. 73).⁴⁹ In light of this, it is unclear whether his resistance to her playing Beethoven stemmed from a genuine concern and desire for her to grow musically ahead of tackling the repertoire, as he states, or whether this was a conscious or unconscious mechanism to exert control over her.

Further, there is also the possibility that there was some bias in the gendering of repertoire at play. Katherine Ellis writes that the gendering of repertoire was 'institutionalized by the Paris Conservatory' throughout the nineteenth century through to the beginning of the twentieth century, with stark repertoire divisions between the sexes⁵⁰ which is most apparent precisely through the figure of Beethoven. Whilst the men's piano classes were assigned Beethoven from 1863, Ellis explains that the women were never given this composer and were required to play Chopin, or Haydn (1899) and Bach (1898 and 1900) instead; 'for the men, the constant was Beethoven; for the women, it was either Haydn or Bach.' However, it is important to recall that Selva had already performed Beethoven's *Waldstein* in her debut recital in Switzerland aged 13.

⁴⁸ Letter from Vincent d'Indy to Pierre de Bréville, dated 1 December 1899, transcription from AABS.

⁴⁹ BS001/4 MMB.

⁵⁰ Katherine Ellis, 'Female Pianists and Their Male Critics in Nineteenth-Century Paris', p. 363. 'The idea that women pianists should play different repertory from their male counterparts was institutionalized by the Paris Conservatory throughout the nineteenth century in the works selected for the end-of-year competitions in the men's and women's piano classes. The differences are starkest in the second half of the century. Beethoven was assigned to the men's class in 1863 (his first appearance in the repertory lists), 1876, 1880, 1886 and 1897 through 1900. The women's class was never given Beethoven.'

D'Indy finally gave his blessing in 1908, which Selva shared with her friend René in a letter dated 21 September 1908:

« Je lève l'exeat, vous pouvez jouer Beethoven ! » Puis, malicieux, il a ajouté :
« mais sapristi, c'est embêtant, je suis obligé de me déjuger, j'avais dit qu'il faudrait que vous ayez 27 ans et... vous en avez 24 ½. Alors vous gagnez 2 ans ½. Vous mûrissez vite à ce train là. »

"I raise the exeat, you can play Beethoven!" Then, mischievously, he added:
"but you know, it's annoying, I'm forced to change my mind, I said you would have to be 27 years old and... You are 24 ½. Then you gain 2 ½ years. At this rate you will mature quickly".⁵¹

Before moving on to the examination of the concert programmes in Selva's next album, which starts in 1905, it is important to note that there is secondary evidence that suggests that from as early as 1903 Selva was not performing from memory, an aspect that also permeated her teaching practice from the early stages of her career. This is evidenced by Marguerite-Marie de Fraguier's (1890-1963) account of her time with Blanche Selva at the Schola Cantorum in 1903.⁵² In this text, Fraguier quotes Selva as having said: 'Je ne trouve pas l'exécution par cœur nécessaire ; je ne la pratique pas moi-même, et cela ne sert à rien.' [I do not find playing by heart to be necessary; I do not do it myself, it serves no purpose.] I have not been able to establish whether this practice began before meeting d'Indy or not, nor whether this was something she decided for herself or was suggested to her by someone else.

Second and Third Albums: 1905-1913

Between 1905 and 1909 Selva worked on and premièreed most of Albéniz's *Iberia*. She also forged strong ties with Déodat de Séverac, assisting in the editing of his works as well as performing them. Her role as a collaborator of these two composers is analysed in detail in Chapters 6 and 7 and is therefore not dealt with here.

⁵¹ Letter from Blanche Selva to René de Castéra dated 21 September 1908. Copy at AABS. Guy Selva, *Beethoven el nostre cantor i germà*, p. 3.

⁵² Marguerite-Marie de Fraguier, *Vincent d'Indy. Souvenirs d'une élève* (Paris: Jean Naert, 1934), p. 14.

During this period, she began playing at the Polignac salon more frequently. The perceptive and avid diary writer Marguerite de Saint-Marceaux has several entries in her diary recording her impressions of Selva's playing and there is one record, from 10 December 1905, describing one such occasion when Selva performed with the Princesse Bach's concerto in D minor for three pianos together with Marcel Labey. Saint-Marceaux is quite mixed in her review. Indeed, she was not always persuaded by Selva's playing: 'soirée chez la princesse de Polignac. Selva joue très bien et fort ennuyeusement. C'est impeccable et assommant.'⁵³ [Evening at the princess of Polignac. Selva plays very well and very boringly. It is impeccable and deadly dull.]

In another illustrative example:

L'engouement de la Schola pour Selva est exagéré. Elle a d'excellents doigts mais aucune variété dans l'attaque du son et une manière uniforme d'interpréter tous les maîtres. Au demeurant excellente musicienne et complaisant autant qu'elle est grosse.⁵⁴

[The infatuation for Selva in the Schola is overdone. She has excellent fingers but no variety of touch and a uniform way of interpreting all composers. But, when all is said and done, she's an excellent musician and as kind as she is fat.]

However, despite the scathing criticisms, her record clearly shows the importance and esteem in which Selva was held by the Schola and its followers and the concessions that even someone as sharp-tongued as Saint-Marceaux had to make. For, although she disliked her playing as 'boring', she nevertheless had to accept that it was 'very good' and 'impeccable'. Her remark in relation to the absence of variety of attack is not shared by other reviewers noted below, although they are commenting on different performances.

Apart from her close collaboration with Albéniz and Séverac during these years, another fruitful partnership was of course that of Selva with her *Maître*. As was noted above, they appeared on stage frequently, and Saint-Marceaux has two other revealing entries in which she describes Selva playing his compositions.

⁵³ Saint-Marceaux, 10 December 1905, p. 416.

⁵⁴ Saint-Marceaux, 14 December 1907, p. 499.

On 12 January 1908, 'Selva joue la *Symphonie montagnard*.⁵⁵ Sa figure illuminée suit le bâton du maître avec des yeux d'extase. Elle a manqué mourir d'inquiétude ces derniers jours.'⁵⁶ [Selva played the *Symphonie montagnard*. She glowed under the baton of the master with eyes of ecstasy. She nearly died of worry the last few days.] The passage hardly needs any commentary and evidences the abnegation and adoration of Selva for d'Indy. This is even made more explicit by her entry dated 8 January 1910: 'Selva joue merveilleusement du d'Indy. Sa grosse personne sue la poésie en interprétant l'œuvre de l'homme qu'elle aime.'⁵⁷ [Selva played d'Indy marvelously. Her great bulk oozes poetry when interpreting the work of the man she loves.]

However, Selva's involvement with d'Indy's work went further than being the self-effacing and recurrent performer of his pieces. This can be seen in some of their letters in relation to d'Indy's *Sonate pour piano en mi* op. 63. Composed in 1907, it was première by Selva, to whom the work is dedicated, at the Société Nationale de Musique on 25 January 1908.⁵⁸ The work is pianistically demanding, and as is evident in the correspondence between composer and its first interpreter,⁵⁹ d'Indy was not able to perform the piece himself, needing Selva's virtuosity to present it in public.

⁵⁵ She refers to the *Symphonie sur un chant montagnard français* for piano and orchestra, op. 25 by Vincent d'Indy, composed in 1886.

⁵⁶ Saint-Marceaux, p. 505.

⁵⁷ Saint-Marceaux, pp. 571-572.

⁵⁸ Rémy Campos provides an excellent contextualisation of the work: 'La *Sonate pour piano* était l'apothéose de la technique d'écriture cyclique que d'Indy présentait comme l'actualisation ultime de la pensée de Beethoven. Alors que le « debussysme » s'imposait comme alternative à la doctrine prêchée à la Schola, les quarante minutes de combinaisons harmonico-motiviques, de déductions rythmiques et de subtiles élaborations formelles de la *Sonate en mi* offraient au public — et aux élèves de l'école dirigée par d'Indy — l'assurance que le métier patiemment acquis, que le travail d'artisan consciencieux conduisaient à coup sûr au chef-d'œuvre.' [The *Sonata for piano* was the apotheosis of the cyclical writing technique that d'Indy presented as the latest updating of Beethoven's thinking. As "Debussyism" gained ground as an alternative to the doctrine preached at the Schola, the forty minutes of combinations of harmonic motifs, rhythmic reductions and subtle formal elaborations of the *Sonate en mi* offered the audience — and the students of the school directed by d'Indy — the assurance that craft patiently acquired, the work of the conscientious craftsman, led unerringly to a masterpiece.] Campos and Donin, p. 157.

⁵⁹ Letter from d'Indy to Selva, 7 August 1907 (Campos and Donin, p. 179): '[...] il y en a 2 (variations) que je ne peux pas jouer... néanmoins, je crois que ça ne sera pas extrêmement difficile *pour vous*, bien qu'évidemment ça ne soit pas précisément pour le cours du 1^{er}

However, Selva's role was not confined to that of a first performer and d'Indy also relied on her to give him her pianistic input ahead of publication. In a letter dated 24 September 1907, d'Indy asks her to meet him and some friends so that he can play the piece to her twice. The first time, without attempting to play all the notes, but so as to get the general feel of it, and the second time, with all the notes but considerably under tempo. This was so that she could advise him on the pianistic changes that needed to be made.⁶⁰

Blanche Selva wrote a very long letter to the Castéra family recounting her discovery of the *Sonate* as played to her by d'Indy.

Le Maître me l'a jouée, tout en disant des blagues ici c'était du Debussy, et ailleurs du Charpentier etc. Poujaud le faisait taire.

Le Maître semblait très inquiet de mon impression. Il m'avait dit, en m'amenant de la Schola : « Je ne sais ce que vous en penserez, mais j'avais cru faire quelque chose de bien, je le crois encore, et pourtant personne n'a l'air d'y rien comprendre ; pourvu que vous l'aimiez ! »

dégréée...' [there are two (variations) that I cannot play... even so, I think it will not be extremely difficult *for you*, even if evidently this is not exactly for beginners...]

⁶⁰ Letter from d'Indy to Selva, 24 September 1907 (Campos and Donin, p. 179): 'Donc, le Lundi 14, je viens vous cueillir à la Schola à la sortie de votre cours et nous pourrons, soit rester à la Schola, soit aller chez vous pour l'audition en question qui doit être *sérieuse*. Je m'explique : Je tiens à vous jouer *2 fois* l'œuvre en question, une 1ère fois *sans faire les notes* et dans le mouvement pour avoir une idée d'ensemble, une seconde fois *lentement* en faisant tout, afin que vous puissiez me dire les modifications *pianistiques* que vous y verriez, car comme on la gravera pendant mon absence, je voudrai pouvoir donner un manuscrit *au net*. Entendu, n'est-ce-pas — Et puis, pour cette affaire, des *amis*, bien entendu, s'il y en a à Paris, mais pas autre chose que de *très-intimes*, à cause du travail à faire à nous deux. En suite de quoi, j'irai vers 6 heures la porter chez Durand et on pourrait dîner tous ensemble n'importe où.' [So, on Monday 14, I will pick you up at the Schola at the end of your class and we can, either stay at the Schola or go to your place so that the play-through in question is *serious*. I explain myself: I will play the work in question for you *twice*, the first time *without playing all the notes* and at speed to have an idea of the whole thing, then a second time *slowly* playing everything, so that you can tell me the *pianistic* modifications that you see in it, as it will be published in my absence, I would like to hand in a *clean* manuscript. You understand – and then, for this matter, between *friends*, of course, if there are any in Paris, but not anyone that is not *very close*, due to the work to be done between us both. After which, I will leave around 6 to take it to Durand and we can all have dinner together wherever.]

Aussi dès que ce fut finit, il se retourne vers moi et me dit : « Eh bien ! Blanche, aimez-vous ? »

Alors, moi, complètement emballée de la magnifique œuvre qu'il venait de me faire, et qu'il croyait que je n'aime pas (comment a-t-il pu jamais imaginer chose pareille) je me suis précipitée à son cou et je l'ai embrassé.

Alors il a eu l'air très ému et m'a dit : « merci, vous l'aimez, je suis content ».

Seulement, mes amis, je dois vous dire qu'il la joue fort mal ; ce n'est pas tant les notes qu'il ne fait pas, cela m'est égal, mais surtout, il a peur de se donner là-dedans, encore plus que dans ses autres œuvres je crois, et alors il joue froidement, sans qu'on puisse se douter de l'expansion expressive, de la généreuse tendresse, de l'émotion extraordinaire qui débordent de ces pages. J'enrageais, tandis qu'il me la jouait, et par endroits, c'était plus fort que moi, je chantais de tout mon cœur.

Aussi, au lieu que ce soit lui qui me la rejoue lentement, comme il avait été convenu, ce fût moi, qui dans mon enthousiasme, me mis au piano et la lui déchiffrais immédiatement. Vous pensez quelle émotion j'avais, à déchiffrer ainsi devant lui !

Mais je m'en tirais si bien qu'il en était abasourdi, non que j'ai fait toutes les notes, mais l'esprit y était, et tout semblait d'aplomb. Il dit alors à Poujaud : « J'avais crû faire quelque chose de difficile et voilà que s'il y avait un concert demain, elle la saurait déjà admirablement. »

Il n'en revenait pas, et répétait sans cesse : « comme c'est bien lu, c'est ça, c'est ça que je voulais ! »⁶¹

[The Master played it for me, at the same time as joking here it's Debussy, and there Charpentier etc. Poujaud made him shut up.

The Master seemed very nervous about my reaction. He had told me, when meeting me at the Schola: "I don't know what you will think, but I had thought I've written something good, I still think so, and so even if no-one understands it, I won't mind as long as you like it!"

As soon as it finished, he turned towards me and said: "So, Blanche, do you like it?"

So, me, totally absorbed by the wonderful work he'd just written for me, and that he thought I wouldn't like (how could he ever have thought such a thing) I threw my arms around his neck and hugged him.

⁶¹ Letter from Blanche Selva to the Castéra family, 15 and 16 October 1907 (Campos and Donin, pp. 180-181).

So then he was very moved and told me: “thank you, you like it, I am happy”.

Only, dear friends, I have to tell you that he played it really badly; it is not so much the notes that he did not play, I don’t mind that, but especially that he was afraid of giving himself, even more so than in his other works, and so he played coldly, in such a way that one could not appreciate the expressive expansion, the generous tenderness of the extraordinary emotion that overflows from those pages. I was enraged, as he was playing it for me, and in places, I couldn’t hold back, I sang with all my heart.

And so, instead of him playing it again slowly, as had been agreed, it was me, in my enthusiasm, who sat at the piano and sight-read it immediately. You must imagine what emotion I was feeling when reading like that in front of him!

But I did so well he was taken aback, not that I played all the notes, but that the sentiment was there, and all seemed to fit. He then said to Poujaud: “I had thought that I had written something difficult and look at this, if there was a concert tomorrow, she could already play it admirably”.

He could not stop repeating: “how well it was read, that’s it, that’s what I wanted!”]

There are several aspects that come to the fore through this text. The opening remarks are an illustrative example of their amicable relationship and humorous exchanges. Other letters have also attested to the fact that the music of Debussy and Ravel was often an object of jest and in-jokes.⁶²

Through Selva’s own words we can also sense that, although d’Indy exercised great influence over her, he also had great respect for her and sought her approval. Nevertheless, it is clear from the previous letter that he was seeking ‘pianistic’ advice only. I suggest that, as Selva could be quite outspoken about the works she was being asked to work on, he was pre-empting her from stepping into territory that he did not want her to enter, namely any compositional advice whatsoever.

Selva’s letter also gives us an insight into Vincent d’Indy’s own shortcomings as a pianist; or at the very least an insecurity that results in an inability to give himself to the performance. Selva’s own priorities as a pianist also become clear: music comes first. Conveying the musical expression, the feelings, that is of the utmost importance

⁶² Letter from 31 August 1908 from d’Indy to Selva where the ironic name “Debussel-Ravy” is used, amalgamating both composers in one (Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 53).

even when the notes are not there yet, which she emphasises with her emphatic 'ça m'est égal'.

Finally, Selva's capabilities as a sight-reader are also on display in the letter. However, as before, Selva stresses the importance of conveying the musical meaning rather than being note-perfect. Testimony of the deep impression she made on those who heard her can be found in copious reviews. As an example, Léon Vallas, who although in 1909 still found the colouristic playing of Selva excessive, anyway stated as a matter of fact that:

[...] M^{lle} Selva exerce sur le public, sur les pianistes, sur certains compositeurs même, une profonde influence. Son jeu si personnel, d'une incroyable variété de touche, nous a même valu un nouveau style pianistique fort intéressant, dont la récente sonate de Vincent d'Indy est le plus admirable spécimen. C'est un style pour ainsi dire orchestral, qui, aujourd'hui, séduit presque tout le monde [...]⁶³

[Mlle Selva exercises a strong influence over the audience, pianists, and even some composers. Her personal touch, of an incredible variety of attack, has even given us a new pianistic style which is quite interesting, its latest admirable manifestation displayed within Vincent d'Indy's Sonata. It is a style which is orchestral, so to say, that, today seduces almost everybody.]

It is from this second period, around 1910, that she began elaborating her own technical framework, which crystallised years later into *L'Enseignement musical de la technique du piano*. Nonetheless, it is clear from a review in 1908 that she was already playing differently from her French counterparts before that. A highly perceptive reviewer (signed 'A.M') compares her to the school of Leschetitzky, compared with whom she still has to gain greater variety of colour. Nevertheless, the critic praises her results overall, as well as the means by which she attains them: through a variety of attack.

⁶³ Léon Vallas, 'M^{lle} Selva, pianiste', *Revue Musicale de Lyon*, 6:15, 24 January 1909, 443- 445, BnF <<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5753271r/f1.item.r=Blanche%20Selva>> [accessed 22 March 2022].

This review is also very useful for its insight into Selva's contemporaries' style of playing and how that was perceived at the time. The critic explains that Selva's touch is distinguished from that of most of her peers because it is not rigid and articulated.

Mlle Selva n'a pas ce jeu rigide et articulé qui est celui de presque tous les pianistes français – de tous ceux qui sont passés par le Conservatoire sans exception, et dont M. Diémer et M. Risler sont à l'heure actuelle les représentants les plus notoires et les plus applaudis.⁶⁴

[Mlle Selva does not have the rigid and articulated touch that is present in most French pianists- without exception all those who passed through the Conservatoire, and of which M. Diémer and M. Risler are at present the most noteworthy and most lauded representatives.]

In contrast to them, Selva's movements are described as follows: 'elle ose frapper la note, tantôt de haut, tantôt de bas, la caresser à l'attaque ou au lâcher, la faire vibrer par des oscillations du poignet. Elle ose même jouer des bras, chose qui était réputée haïssable entre toutes : elle n'a pas tort.' [She dares to play the note downwards as well as upwards, to caress it or let it go, make it vibrate with wrist movements. She even dares to play from the arm, something which was reputedly hateful amongst all things: she is not wrong.]

The anonymous reviewer explains the folly of trying to generate a manifold palette of musical colours with only one touch, 'vouloir obtenir des sonorités variées avec une attaque toujours identique est une entreprise au moins hasardeuse' [to want to obtain a variety of sounds whilst always playing with the same attack is at the very least a chancy endeavour] and praises Selva's approach. Nevertheless, the critic notes that she still does not have the prodigious range of colours seen in other foreign piano schools but observes the beginning of those traits in her playing.

However, it is also clear that Selva had a light touch that was greatly appreciated in her Baroque playing in general and in Scarlatti in particular. The reviewer from the *Ancien Mercure Musical* identifies this as 'le jeu gai', which he holds to be a rare quality in a

⁶⁴ 'Bulletin de la Société Française de Musique', *Ancien Mercure Musical*, 1908, 15 February 1908, pp. 223-224. BnF Gallica, <<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5568363w/f245.image.r=Ancien%20Mercure%20MusicalBlanche%20Selva?rk=128756;0>> [accessed 15 February 2022].

player. She employed this touch in Scarlatti, giving those pieces ‘une drôlerie charmante’. This lightness of touch is also in evidence in her recordings, analysed in Chapter 4, and shows that Selva could ‘switch off’ the heavier weight playing when the music so required.

A later review from December 1910 penned by Jacques Hernann for the *L’Art Moderne* confirms a variety of means deployed by Selva which result in a greater variety of tone:

Parlerai-je de sa technique impeccable, si variée dans ses moyens, si intéressante par la diversité des timbres et l’ingéniosité des trouvailles ? Mais cette technique compréhensive, raisonnée, consciente demanderait à elle seule une chronique. Voir un bon virtuose très bien jouer du piano ou du violon, c’est « amusant » pour les professionnels. Voir jouer Blanche Selva, c’est assister à un cours de maîtrise.⁶⁵

[Should I speak of her impeccable technique, so varied in her means, so interesting by the diversity of tone and the ingenuity of her findings? But this comprehensive, reasoned, conscious technique alone would require a chronicle. Seeing a good virtuoso play the piano or violin very well is “amusing” for professionals. Watching Blanche Selva play is like attending a masterclass.]

These reviews are valuable evidence that Selva developed a sophisticated technique that looked and sounded different from that of her French counterparts. It was a gradual process which was already in motion before 1910 when she began consolidating her approach in writing, and although she employed a greater variety of resources, she nevertheless had an impeccable light finger action which is so characteristic of what we commonly understand these days as the French School. However, in light of the quote above and the comparison the reviewer makes with other players such as Diémer and Risler, one has also to wonder what exactly is meant by expressions such as ‘articulated touch’, or ‘finger playing’, ‘jeu gai’ or the quasi mythical ‘jeu perlé’.

I suggest, and this will be further discussed in Chapter 3 when analysing her treatise, that for Selva, the ‘jeu perlé’ or ‘jeu gai’ was something beyond an isolated and measurable range of finger action. Instead, it is a finger touch combined with musical awareness and phrasing that is also aided physically by small wrist and arm

⁶⁵ Guy Selva, *Blanche Selva, Un répertoire exceptionnel*, pp. 21-22.

movements. I think this is at the heart of the perceptible differences which are exposed in the review: Diémer and Risler are credited with having a touch that is articulated (finger action) but rigid (little phrasing, most likely very little or no use of forearm or wrist motions). The result is a drier touch. In contrast, Selva produces a light touch whose effect is a 'drôlerie charmante' and deploys a greater variety of resources altogether which create 'diversity of tone'.

Stage fright

Despite the glowing reviews, or the self-assurance that emanates from the letter to Castéra seen earlier, behind her apparent strong character and musical convictions, there was also sometimes a scared and anxious performer.⁶⁶ The exchanges with her close friend, the *scholiste* Guy de Lioncourt (1885-1961), provide us with an invaluable testimony into her psychology as a performer. Further, understanding her coping mechanism is also crucial to a holistic understanding of Selva, and evidence how transcendental God and religion were for her.

In the first place, from her letter of 30 September 1910,⁶⁷ it is clear that her fear was not only about playing in public but extended to public speaking, which she had recently begun doing more often.⁶⁸ She also states that this paralysing fear could sometimes manifest itself up to eight days before any given concert.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Something that had not escaped the perceptive Saint-Marceaux, who, as was noted above, remarked in 1908 that Selva 'nearly died of worry the last few days' before a concert under the baton of d'Indy.

⁶⁷ Letter from Blanche Selva to Guy de Lioncourt, dated 30 September 1910 (Gilles Saint-Arroman, *Aux sources*, pp. 17-18).

⁶⁸ This letter refers to a forthcoming lecture on 13 October 1910.

⁶⁹ pp. 17-18 [...] ce trac abominable qui jusqu'ici m'a paralysée jusqu'à me rendre malade, quelquefois, 8 jours avant un concert. Mais le trac, ce n'est pas autre chose qu'une variété d'orgueil, variété extraordinairement subtile qui se cache sous un mensonge. Si l'on faisait entièrement abstraction de soi, on irait droit à son but, sans penser si l'on va être digne de ce que l'on fait ou non, et on deviendrait par cela même capable de choses infaisables autrement. Aussi, cet animal de trac, je lui ai voué une haine mortelle et je suis bien décidée à combattre contre lui jusqu'à ce que la victoire m'appartienne. [... this stage fright that until now has paralysed me to the point of getting sick, sometimes 8 days before a concert. But stage fright, this is nothing other than a type of pride, an extraordinarily subtle variety that hides under a lie. If one could abstract oneself, it would be possible to go straight to the goal, without thinking if one is worthy or not, and as a result, one would become capable of things otherwise

In a following letter she describes her fears as ‘la peur du ridicule, la peur du bafouillage, la peur de la trahison de mes faibles moyens devant un si grand sujet’ [fear of ridicule, fear of stuttering, fear of being betrayed by my feeble means in the face of such a great endeavour]. She then explains how she overcame her anxiety: by offering her performance to God, and most importantly, by accepting what could happen.

Avant d’entrer sur cette estrade terrible, j’ai simplement offert à Dieu ce que j’allais faire [...] et j’ai accepté de le mal faire et d’être ridicule.

Alors, à l’instant même, toute peur s’est évanouie. Une joie profonde m’a enveloppée tout entière et je suis entrée, sans le moindre émoi, et j’ai parlé comme je pensais.⁷⁰

[Before entering this terrible stage, I simply offered to God what I was about to do [...] and I accepted doing it poorly and being ridiculed.

Then, in that same instant, all fear disappeared. A great joy enveloped me, and I went on, without the smallest commotion, and I spoke as I thought.]

She also articulates the type of concert that had triggered such anxiety in the past, and for which she now feels more prepared to deal. These were the Colonne-Pierné concerts. Edouard Colonne had established this concert series in 1873. These performances took place at the Théâtre du Châtelet which had a capacity of 3000 seats. Initially there was only a Sunday series which presented ‘as many genres as possible’ whilst the Thursday run focused on chamber music.⁷¹ No doubt the greater fame of the concerts, the large audience and high expectations of such events, played

impossible. As well, I have vowed to this stage fright beast a deadly hate and I am determined to fight against it until I become victorious.]

⁷⁰ Letter from Blanche Selva to Guy de Lioncourt, dated 17 October 1910 (Gilles Saint-Arroman, *Aux sources*, pp. 21-26).

⁷¹ Pasler, ‘Concert Programmes and their Narratives as Emblems of Ideology’, p. 253.

a part in causing those fears.⁷² Selva then recounts her recent success in one such concert,⁷³ describing it as an occasion of joy.⁷⁴

In this very letter, she also explains the feeling of abandoning herself to the performance that she just experienced, what we would call nowadays in English 'letting go', also linking it to her new technical discoveries.

Moi, je ne brille que par mon absence.

J'ai tellement l'impression, en jouant, de n'être qu'un passif instrument dans lequel passe un souffle que je ne puis ni retenir ni faire revenir !

Quand c'est bien, soyez sûr que je n'y suis pour rien. C'est le jour où je me suis le plus abandonnée. Quand c'est mal, c'est moi qui ai voulu agir et naturellement, comme je ne suis capable, par moi-même, de rien de bien, cela a été mauvais et j'ai trahi. [...] Tout cela se vérifie entièrement dans le « néo-piano » et c'est là que j'ai appris à le mieux comprendre.⁷⁵

[I only shine by my absence.

When I play, I have the impression of being a passive instrument through which a breath passes that I cannot retain, or make come back.

When it is good, rest assured that I am not there. It is the day when I have abandoned myself more fully. When it is bad, it is me that has wanted to act and naturally, as I am not capable on my own of anything good, the performance was poor and I betrayed myself. [...] This all has been verified by the "néo-piano" and it is here that I have learned to understand it better].

⁷² Gilles Saint-Arroman, p. 24. 'Dimanche je vais jouer chez Colonne-Pierné, le Concerto en ré maj. p. fl. et v^{on} [Bach, 5th Brandenburg Concerto BWV 1050] ; voilà encore un endroit où j'ai eu de ces tracs ! l'estrade du Chatalet ! Mais maintenant ça m'est égal.' [On Sunday I will play at Colonne-Pierné, the Concerto in D major for piano, flute and violin; this is somewhere where I used to have those fears! the stage of the Chatelet! But now I do not care.]

⁷³ Letter from Blanche Selva to Guy de Lioncourt, 4 November 1910 (Saint-Arroman, pp. 27-34).

⁷⁴ Saint-Arroman gives a brief note of the ensuing review in *Le Ménestrel*, 29 October 1910, p. 247, 'On a réservé un accueil triomphal au Concerto' [A triumphant reception was given to the Concerto], p. 31, fn. 2. A notice from *Le Temps*, 2 November 1910, on an upcoming concert by Selva at Colonne states 'Aux Concerts-Colonne, [...] quatrième concert avec le concours de Mlle Blanche Selva, dont le succès a été si grand au précédent concert [...] [At the Colonne concerts [...] fourth concert with the participation of Mlle Blanche Selva, who had a great success in the last concert.] BnF <

<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k2402902/f4.item.r=%22Blanche%20Selva%221904.zoo> m> [accessed on 21 March 2022.]'

⁷⁵ Saint-Arroman, pp. 24-25.

As Saint-Arroman notes, these ideas are of a Christian inspiration. However, these mental processes are also explained by ‘flow theory’. A term first used by the research psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi,⁷⁶ it has been later described as a ‘highly coveted yet elusive state of mind that is characterized by complete absorption in the task at hand as well as by enhanced skilled performance’.⁷⁷ From the work of Csikszentmihalyi (1990)⁷⁸ and (1999) in his collaboration with Susan Jackson,⁷⁹ nine dimensions of flow models have been postulated: 1. Challenge-skill balance; 2. Action-awareness merging; 3. Clear goals; 4. Unambiguous feedback; 5. Concentration on the task at hand; 6. Sense of control; 7. Loss of self-consciousness; 8. Transformation of time; and 9. Autotelic experience. Although *merging of action and awareness* was described by Jackson and Csikszentmihalyi as ‘the most telling aspect of flow experience’ (p. 20) in the more recent research of Sinnamon et al, *loss of self-consciousness*, which I suggest is what Selva is describing, ‘does not occur as frequently as flow is reported to occur’, which the authors imply means that flow is less prevalent than the self-reported data suggests and puts this dimension in the foreground of flow.⁸⁰

It is also crucial to acknowledge the validity and importance of this particular state of mind from a performer’s perspective, and particularly when discussing the career of a female interpreter. The gendered expectations of nineteenth-century performers derived from female pianists being understood as mere ‘vessels’ of a composer’s voice, as discussed in Chapter 1. However, this cannot automatically be extrapolated to an interpreter’s experience of herself on the stage. I do not think that there is anything self-effacing in Selva’s words when she writes that she ‘only shines by [her] absence’. Instead, I think she is describing a state of deep flow, where she is losing herself in the performance. I also find most interesting that Selva seems to have found a mechanism

⁷⁶ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety: Experiencing Flow in Work and Play* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1975).

⁷⁷ Sinnamon, Sarah, Aidan Moran, Michael O’Connell, ‘Flow Among Musicians: Measuring Peak Experiences of Student Performers’, *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 60:1 (April 2012), 6-25.

⁷⁸ Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly, *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990).

⁷⁹ Susan Jackson, and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow in sports: The keys to optimal experiences and performances* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1999).

⁸⁰ Sinnamon et al, p. 18.

to facilitate her access into this elusive state of mind. Her description of it also matches my own experience on the stage.

Another trigger of Selva's anxiety was Vincent d'Indy himself. In her letter, she states how she will be returning to Colonne the following week, and that she is calm despite the *Maître* being in the hall.

Ceci m'aurait fait perdre autrefois toute espèce de moyens ; il fallait qu'il fût près de moi et que je sente si c'était ça qu'il voulait, mais l'idée qu'il était public, qu'il était juge, me faisait perdre la tête.⁸¹

[That would have made me crazy before; I needed him to be close so that I would feel if I was playing as he wanted, but the idea that it would be public, that he would be a judge, made me lose my mind.]

It would appear that a strong fear of being judged and not attaining what is expected, or what she thinks is expected of her, are at the root of her anxiety. She felt more at ease when she could sense d'Indy's approval, as he often sat next to her as her page-turner.⁸²

A previous reference to moments of stage fright has been found in a letter to Madame de Castéra.⁸³ Written from London, she describes how she felt during her Schumann concert, which she believes went quite poorly: [...] 'j'avais une sorte de vertige, le piano semblait s'enfuir et j'avais l'impression que si je quittais le clavier des doigts j'allais tomber.' [I had a kind of vertigo, the piano seemed to escape and I had the feeling that if I were to remove my fingers from the keyboard I would fall.] However, the reviewer of the *Daily Telegraph* had a very favourable impression of her performance and compared it to that of Clara Schumann.⁸⁴ Although the reviewer was less impressed with Selva's *Kreisleriana*, where 'she did not seem quite at her ease', the critic from *The Times* also equally noted the similarity with the School of Clara Schumann, writing that her interpretation of Schumann was 'so sympathetic she

⁸¹ Saint-Arroman, p. 31.

⁸² Saint-Arroman, p. 35.

⁸³ Letter from Blanche Selva to Madame de Castéra dated 22 November 1907, AABS.

⁸⁴ Review from the *Daily Telegraph*, 22 November 1907, AABS.

seemed to be a pupil of the composer or of his wife'.⁸⁵ It is important to contextualise these statements in the light of the historical evidence. As pointed out by Natasha Loges, 'attitudes of veneration and discipleship were imposed both internally and externally' in respect of Clara Schumann and those around her.⁸⁶ It is therefore impossible to determine whether the reviewers did in fact appreciate a musical and/or technical affinity between both, or whether drawing favourable comparisons and links with Schumann was a way of paying Selva a compliment. However, it is clear that Selva's Schumann concert was overall positively received despite her anxiety on stage.

As an experienced performer, I suggest that it is likely that she was able to disguise her fears on stage most of the time, if not always. In any event, there are also letters in which she describes positive and exhilarating experiences on stage.

Aujourd'hui, mon 1er concert moderne aux Agriculteurs a été digne de ceux de Suisse. Exécution qui m'a émerveillée moi-même (je suis toujours plus auditrice ou mieux spectatrice, quand je joue, qu'exécutante, je me prête au Souffle qui passe quand Il veut et comme Il veut.) Le Public subjugué, je ne puis pas dire autre chose.⁸⁷

[Today, my first modern concert at the Agriculteurs has been worthy of those of Switzerland. A performance that has amazed even me (I am always more a listener or rather spectator, when I play, than performer, I give myself to the Breath that passes when It wants and how It wants.) The Audience was subdued, I cannot say it any other way.]

Fourth Album: 1912-1921

As was discussed earlier in Chapter 1, this 9-year period is crucial in Selva's life. It is the time when, having begun developing her own technical framework from around 1910, she started to teach it formally and formulate it in writing. Her maturity and increasing independence from the Schola led to her final resignation in 1922. Her repertoire choices after the war increasingly show her pulling away from the Schola and asserting

⁸⁵ Review from *The Times*, 23 November 1907, AABS.

⁸⁶ Natasha Loges, 'Clara Schumann's Legacy as a Teacher' in *Clara Schumann Studies*, ed. by Joe Davies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 271-291, p. 277.

⁸⁷ Letter from Blanche Selva to Auguste Sérieyx, 10 December 1917 (Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 94).

her musical independence. Chopin as well as other composers such as Fauré, Debussy and Ravel now appear in her concerts with increasing frequency.

Selva was very active during the First World War years, giving over fifty charity concerts throughout France. Later, she also performed in Spain and Switzerland, as well as touring in Czechoslovakia extensively after 1919. In Paris, she continued to appear in some of the most important halls, featuring in concerts together with other artists or alone in venues such as Salle Pleyel, Érard, Société La Trompette, Les Agriculteurs, as well as for the Colonne or Lamoureux concerts. There is also an instance of her participating with Vincent d'Indy at the Concerts Rouge.⁸⁸ These concerts were very different in nature from those of Colonne or Lamoureux, attracting a less sophisticated audience with their cheaper tickets, which also entitled the audience to a drink. Nevertheless, by 1907 these concerts 'were highly praised for their excellent performances'.⁸⁹

Some concert programmes have been selected to examine her different programme choices. The first one is a very beautiful programme with works by Chopin and Fauré with the collaboration of the singer Mademoiselle Delcour in Lyon, 18 March 1919, BS001/169 and presented here in Fig. 2.5.

⁸⁸ Programme BS002/52 MMB, 5 February 1915, Concert entitled '1^{re} Soirée Française'; Selva performed Paul Dukas' *Variations, Interlude et Final*, and some extracts from Vincent d'Indy's *Tableaux de voyage*, as well as their joint performance of his *Symphonie sur un chant montagnard français*.

⁸⁹ Pasler, 'Concert Programmes and their Narratives as Emblems of Ideology', p. 256.



Fig. 2.5 – Chopin and Debussy programme, 18 March 1919

Courtesy of the Museu de la Música de Barcelona, Fons Blanca Selva, BS002/169

This is a beautifully crafted and unusual programme in Selva's diary.⁹⁰ She alternates Chopin and Fauré, two composers who developed a highly personal musical and pianistic language, and where the predominant solo piano recital structure is briefly interrupted by a *mélodie* section. Although all the keys of the works are presented in the programme there is no evidence to suggest that Selva improvised connecting

⁹⁰ From some letters exchanged with Albert Blondel, director of the piano maker firm Érard from 1879-1935, it appears that Selva also played a Chopin-Fauré programme at the Salle des Agriculteurs on 1 March 1919. These letters are examined below. The programme regrettably does not form part of the MMB online collection.

passages between the works and there is no evidence that Selva ever improvised thus in her concerts. Of this Chopin-Fauré programme, she wrote the following to her friend, the artist Maurice Denis (1870-1943) on 27 February 1919⁹¹

[...] un programme qui m'enchante : Chopin-Fauré. J'ai mis là des Chopin populaires, héroïques, des tableaux inouïs de puissance rythmique et de synthèse de vastes espaces. Ce que Chopin apparaît dans son vrai jour à notre époque, quand on a avec lui un contact direct, oubliant tous les maquillages et les déséquilibres qu'on lui a fait subir.⁹²

[A programme that I love: Chopin-Fauré. I have put in popular Chopin pieces as well as heroics, creating undreamed-of images of rhythmic power and syntheses of vast spaces. So that Chopin can be seen in his true light in our time, when we are in direct contact with him, forgetting all the cosmetics and distortions he has been subjected to.]

The absence of Chopin in her programming until now, apart from in her very early concert years, is explained by the education received at the Schola and its long-lasting influence. This can also be seen in her own words, as written in a letter to her friend René de Castéra, dated 18 July 1919.⁹³ In it, she explains that her love for the romantic composers 'a été bridé, muré par l'enseignement', [kept in check, hemmed in by her training], a teaching philosophy that placed too much, even exclusive emphasis on the musical form as an arbiter of musical value.

Another programme that exemplifies greater breadth in her programme choices in her maturity is that of an earlier piano recital on 3 March 1918 in Angers, Fig. 2.6.

⁹¹ Cf the previous footnote about the existence of another Chopin-Fauré programme on 1 March 1919. It is most likely that the programme was the same or very similar. Most likely without the collaboration of a singer, as Selva was playing a series of four recitals in this venue and the other three for which we have the programmes were solo piano recitals.

⁹² Letter from Blanche Selva to Maurice Denis, dated 27 February 1919, AABS.

⁹³ Letter from Blanche Selva to René de Castéra, dated 18 July 1919, AABS.



Fig. 2.6 – Recital in Angers, 3 March 1919

Courtesy of the Museu de la Música de Barcelona, Fons Blanca Selva, BS002/143

This programme follows an approximate chronological structure of musical periods with the notable exception of her final piece. Indeed, finishing her recitals with either the *Prélude, Choral et Fugue* or as here the *Prélude, Aria et Final* is something very characteristic of Selva's solo recitals after the first period. Instead of finishing with a short and popular showpiece, the preceding 'Rondeña' for instance would have served that purpose, and indeed Selva sometimes did use it as a closer, Selva often finished her concerts with a substantial piece — in this case, over twenty minutes long — that requires concentration, both on the part of the performer as well as the audience. The endings of her concerts are not moments to 'show off' or ease the audience with a more light-hearted work, but still moments of reflection and greater concentration.

This 1918 programme is presented in 'historical form', which Jann Pasler attributes to pianist Édouard Risler, who offered six such concerts as early as 1900 and 1901.⁹⁴ However, there are examples of Selva's own historical sequencing already from that time. The 'Matinée Musicale' offered at the Château de la Buisse on 23 September 1900,⁹⁵ featured the following programme organised into 5 sections.

1. a. *Gigue* in D major; Domenico Scarlatti
b. *Chromatic Fantasia and Fugue*; Johann Sebastian Bach
2. *Appassionata*, Sonata op. 57; Ludwig van Beethoven
3. a. *Davidsbündlertänze* op. 6 no.16; Robert Schumann
b. *Papillons* op. 2; Robert Schumann
c. *Prélude, Choral et Fugue*; César Franck
----- Second part-----
4. a. 'Lac Vert'
b. 'La Poste'
c. 'La Pluie' des *Tableaux de Voyage* op. 33; Vincent d'Indy
d. *España*; Chabrier-Chevillard
5. *Islamey (Fantaisie orientale)* op. 18; Mili Balakirev⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Pasler, 'Concert Programmes and their Narratives as Emblems of Ideology', p. 293.

⁹⁵ Programme BS001/11 MMB. Layout as in the original manuscript. 23 September 1900.

⁹⁶ Selva offered a very similar programme to this a month later in a concert in Geneva. Some changes are minor, for example the addition of a Scarlatti piece. But there is a significant

It is unfair to compare these two programmes (the 1900 Buisse and 1919 Angers recitals) like for like as their length is different. The programme in Angers comprises over two hours of music, and the 1900 programme a little over one hour and a half. Nevertheless, a comparison is helpful to show Selva's programming evolution. In the 1900 programme, there is a very narrow conception of the Romantic period, with Schumann as the only 'permitted' composer, Franck always bridging the gap between the Romantic and modern traditions, and then the contemporaries, here exclusively represented by d'Indy. *Islamey* op. 18 (1869) at the end of the programme is a final display of virtuosity. This is a piece that Selva performed quite often in this early period but which is completely absent from her later, more mature recitals.

In the Angers 1919 concert, each section is expanded, not only through a greater number of compositions, but a broader showcase of composers and styles. Her sensibility and affinity for the Baroque period is here exemplified by the addition of Pasquini. As well as the known Baroque masters such as Bach, Scarlatti, Rameau or Couperin, Selva also performed music of other less often performed composers such as Tartini, Pergolesi, Veracini and Nardini.⁹⁷

The inclusion of Schubert and Chopin signifies an expansion in the Romantic sphere and this programme also shows a more diverse outlook on the modern French composers, where, together with the *Scholistes* d'Indy, Séverac and Albéniz, she also included Debussy, Fauré and Ravel. Although Selva began performing these composers more frequently and systematically after the war, it is important to reiterate that she had already done so in the past, albeit to a far lesser extent. Earlier reviews not only attest to her sporadic performances of this repertoire but her success with it. As an example, the reviewer of the Belgian *L'Art Moderne* had already noted in 1907:

Mlle Selva, malgré la préférence évidente qu'elle parait avoir pour les œuvres à forme disciplinée, expressives des sentiments intérieurs plutôt que des sensations, n'en joue pas moins bien pour cela les Estampes, les Miroirs et les

change in that she replaced the *Prélude, Choral et Fugue* with the *Prélude, Aria et Final* by the same composer, showing true intellectual and technical prowess for a 16 year-old, as well as demonstrating from early on an unwillingness to perform reiterations of the same programme.

⁹⁷ Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 219.

Rustiques. Elle y met tout son esprit, tout son sens du pittoresque, du coloris, de la lumière, et c'est avec un égal souci de la perfection qu'elle rend le rythme vague et la lumière atténuée de la Danse au bord de l'eau de M. Roussel, l'étincelant impressionnisme de la Soirée dans Grenade de M. Debussy, et l'exquise puérilité sautillante de l'Alborada del gracioso de M. Ravel.⁹⁸

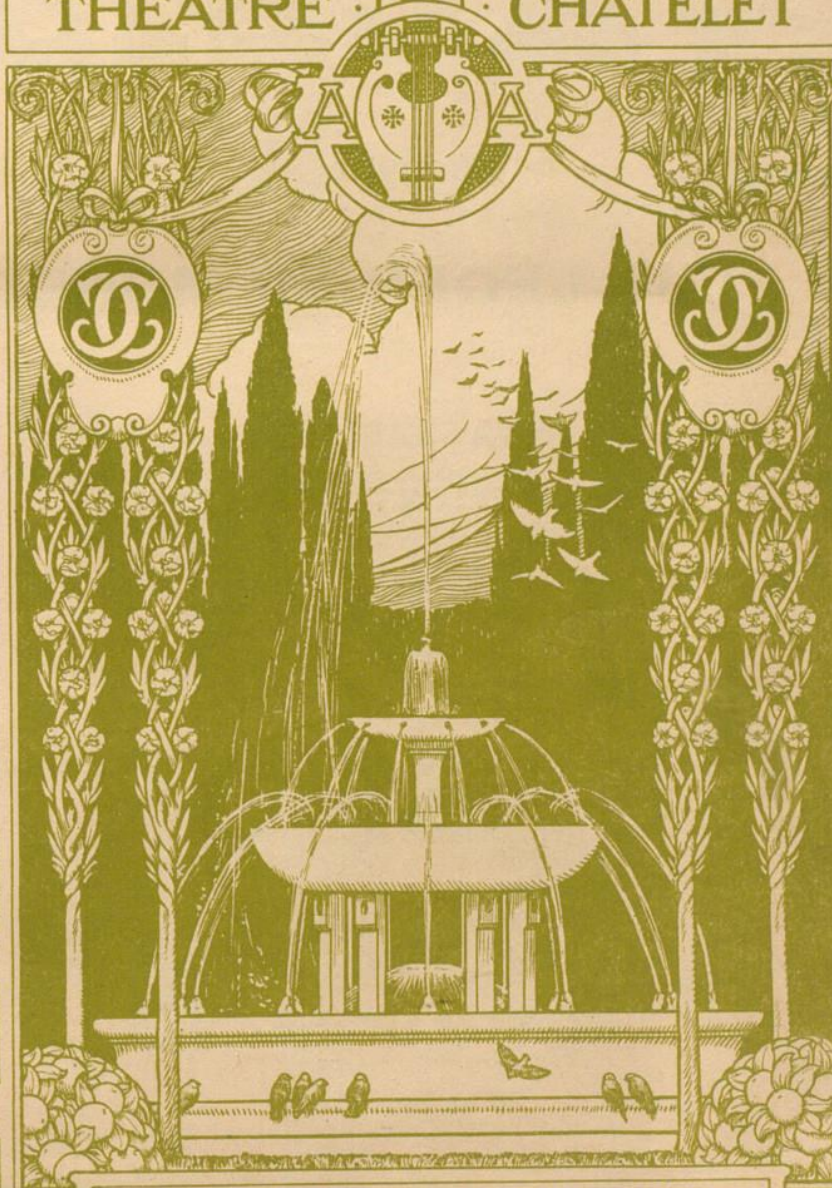
[Mlle Selva, despite her clear preference for works that have a disciplined structure, expressive in inner feelings more than sensations, plays pieces such as Estampes, Miroirs and Rustiques no less well for all that. She always puts her heart into the works, all her pictorial sense, the colours, light, and she renders the vague rhythm and the dim light in the Danse ou bord de l'eau by M. Roussel, the sparkling impressionism of Soirée dans Grenade by M. Debussy and the exquisite youthful ebullience of the Alborada del Gracioso by M. Ravel with an equal concern for perfection.]

However, despite her incursions into these other repertoires, it is most likely that she remained in the collective mind as a pianist, or *the* pianist most connected with the Schola Cantorum, its composers and the core repertoire which promoted its values. This is most apparent when surveying the Colonne and Lamoureux concerts where she was invariably engaged exclusively to perform Bach, Beethoven or d'Indy.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Review from 12 April 1907 (Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 53).

⁹⁹ BS002/17 18 January 1914, Bach, Concerto in D minor with Gabriel Pierné; BS002/34 22 March 1914, Beethoven, Concerto in E-flat major, (*Emperor*), and d'Indy, *Symphonie sur un air montagnard français* with Vincent d'Indy; BS002/50 31 January 1915, d'Indy, *Symphonie sur un air montagnard français* with Gabriel Pierné ; BS002/77 6 February 1916, d'Indy, *Symphonie sur un air montagnard français* with Gabriel Pierné (in the first half of the concert, she performed Chopin's Polonaise-Fantaisie op. 61); BS002/82 16 April 1916, d'Indy, *Symphonie sur un air montagnard français* with Vincent d'Indy ; BS002/232 21 March 1920, d'Indy *Symphonie sur un air montagnard français* with Guy Ropartz ; BS002/247 23-24 October 1920, d'Indy, *Symphonie sur un air montagnard français* with Gabriel Pierné (programme reproduced here in Fig. 2.7).

ASSOCIATION ARTISTIQUE
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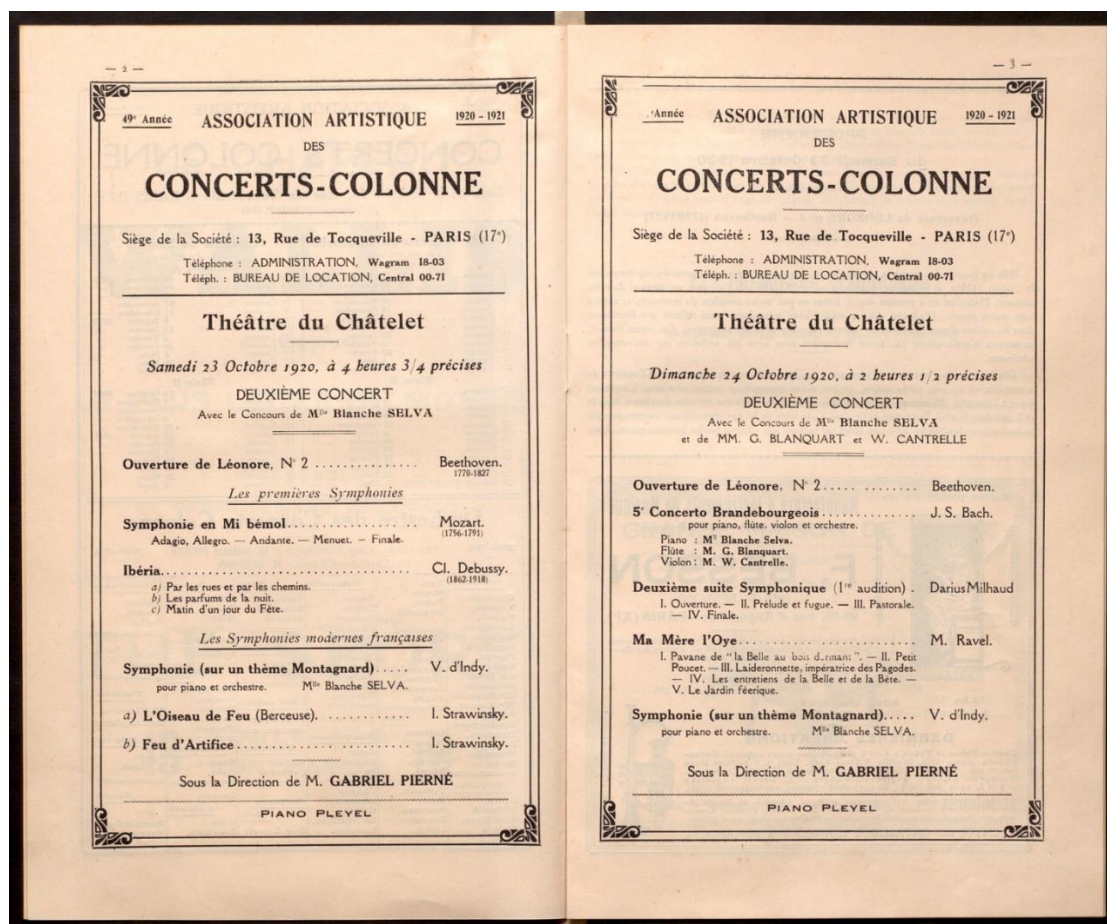


Fig. 2.7 – Concerts Colonne, 23 and 24 October 1920

Courtesy of the Museu de la Música de Barcelona, Fons Blanca Selva, BS002/247

Of course, it is possible that it may have been her own choice to continue with this concert repertoire in these settings. However, in any case, her relative disengagement from composers who have enjoyed the favour of later and modern audiences and scholars appears to be one of the main reasons for her relative obscurity amongst mainstream musicological scholarship, particularly in the English-speaking world.

The programmes of the 23-24 October 1920 (Fig. 2.7) have been selected as poignant examples. Both programmes retain a Baroque and/or Classical segment, with Beethoven, Mozart and Bach juxtaposed with modern music (mostly French). In this latter section, modern composers such as Debussy, Milhaud, Ravel or Stravinsky appear. But Selva performs, yet again, d'Indy's *Symphonie* for piano and orchestra. In the programme notes this piece is unsurprisingly referred to as 'déjà ancienne' [already old], which by proxy could have represented a heavy weight on Selva, always

linked to a different era. Nevertheless it appears to still have enjoyed the favour of the audience, as the programme notes also state that it is 'encore aujourd'hui l'une des plus appréciées parmi toutes celles de M. d'Indy' [still one of the most beloved compositions amongst all of those of M d'Indy].

A pianist and her audience

Selva had at times expressed ambivalent feelings regarding her career on the stage and seemed particularly hostile to the Parisian and large city audiences:

Le concert, ça m'intéresse de moins en moins, et il ne m'en coûterait absolument rien d'y renoncer tout à fait. Paris, Etranger ou grands centres, ce que tout cela est vide ! Ce qu'il y a peu de gens qui aiment vraiment les belles choses, qui cherchent à les aimer davantage, ou à en connaître d'autres !

[The concert, that interests me less and less, and it would cost me absolutely nothing to give up playing them at all. Paris, abroad or large centres, that all is empty! There are very few people who really love the beautiful things, who seek to love them more, or to find others].¹⁰⁰

This is perhaps the reason behind her characteristic reluctance to play encores, leaving the stage 'sans se soucier des appels forcenés de ses admirateurs'¹⁰¹ [without worrying about the frantic calls of her admirers] and a general evasive behaviour after a concert.

Est-il au monde une virtuose qui recherche moins les applaudissements et le succès monétaire que Mlle Selva ? ... Ajoutez à cela, qu'à peine plaqué le dernier accord de la Sonate de Dukas et pendant qu'on l'applaudissait frénétiquement pour ses admirables exécutions, si musicales, si expressives, par les mille sonorités qu'elle tire du Pleyel, si claires, si noblement, si parfaitement belles, Mlle Selva s'esquiva, son manteau sous le bras, son chapeau sous l'autre, sautant dans une voiture, qui la mit rapidement à distance de tous ceux qui auraient voulu lui exprimer de vive voix leur émerveillement. Mlle Selva n'est vraiment pas une artiste ordinaire.¹⁰²

[Is there a virtuoso in the world who seeks applause and monetary success any less than Mlle Selva? ... Add to this, that as soon the last chord of the Sonata of Dukas was played and while she was frantically applauded for her admirable performance, so musical, so expressive, by the thousand sonorities she drew from the Pleyel, so clear, so nobly, so perfectly beautiful, Mlle Selva slipped away, her coat under one arm, her hat under the other, jumping into a car,

¹⁰⁰ Letter from Blanche Selva to Carlos de Castéra, dated 6 August 1911, AABS.

¹⁰¹ *Le Monde Musical*, 15 February 1919, p. 45. Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 115.

¹⁰² *Le Monde Musical*, 30 January 1912, p. 30. Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 115.

which quickly put her at a distance from all those who would have wished to express their wonder to her. Mlle Selva is really no ordinary artist.]

However, her experience playing for a devoted Czechoslovakian audience clearly reconciled her to performing in this period of maturity. Indeed, a long letter to René Castéra in 1919 exudes excitement and happiness both for her heightened experience on stage as well as a clear enjoyment of the attention she received. This letter refers to the concert given in Tábor on 19 November 1919, reproduced here in Fig. 2.8.

[...] J'y ai reçu un accueil qui dépasse tout ce qui était possible d'imaginer. Si j'avais été officiellement envoyé par le gouvernement français on n'eût pu me recevoir avec plus de magnificence.

Je vous raconterai qu'un exemple : le concert de Tabor [...] Quand je montai sur l'estrade, un chœur d'enfants, massé dans une galerie, entonna la Marseillaise, tandis que l'assemblée entière se levait comme un seul homme. [...] Quand ce fut fini, on vint, sur l'estrade, me souhaiter la bienvenue en termes d'une délicatesse touchante et on me remit une gerbe de chrysanthèmes blancs noués aux couleurs tchèques. Comme avant de prendre les fleurs, je baisais les couleurs du pays aimé, une ovation frénétique se déclencha dans le public. Et je commençai Prélude Choral et Fugue, avec quelle émotion que je l'ai joué, dans la ville à l'histoire si émouvante, après cet accueil, je n'ais pas besoin de le dire. Le succès fut, comme partout, extraordinaire. À chaque fin de concert, j'ai dû ajouter 1, 2 ou même 3 œuvre, en congédiant le public, car on ne partait pas encore.

Et lorsque je quittai la salle de Tabor, ce fut un cri de « vive la France » qui m'accompagna jusqu'à ce que la voiture se fût éloignée.

Après les concerts, des soupers privés me mettaient en contact avec tout ce que les villes comptaient de notabilités officielles, artistiques et intellectuelles. Et quelle délicieuse atmosphère il y avait là ! ¹⁰³

[...] I received a welcome there that exceeded anything that was possible to imagine. If I had been officially sent by the French government, they could not have received me with more magnificence.

I will tell you just one example: the Tabor concert [...] When I went up on the stage, a choir of children, standing in a gallery, struck up the Marseillaise, while the entire audience rose as one. [...] When it was over, they came to the stage to welcome me so delicately it was really touching and presented me with a bouquet of white chrysanthemums tied in Czech colours. As before taking the flowers, I kissed the colours of the beloved country, a frenzied ovation was

¹⁰³ Letter from Blanche Selva to René de Castéra, 29 November 1919 (Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, pp. 130-131).

unleashed in the public. And I began Choral Prelude and Fugue, I cannot tell you with what emotion I played it after this welcome, in the city with such a moving history. The success was, as everywhere, extraordinary. At the end of each concert, I had to add 1, 2 or even 3 works because they weren't leaving yet.

And when I left the room in Tabor, it was a cry of "Vive la France" that accompanied me until the car had moved away.

After the concerts, private suppers brought me into contact with all that the cities had of official, artistic and intellectual personalities. And what a delightful atmosphere there was!]

She is also lavish in her accounts of the events after the concerts 'pour me faire honneur' [in my honour]. Indeed, in this letter, she also makes clear how different the audience in Czechoslovakia was from that of Paris, providing us with insight into her own perspective on the musical milieu of the time:

Quand je pense à ces salles de 1100 à 1600 places, comblés, même dans les villes de province, pour entendre les œuvres qui font peur même à nos publics de la « Nationale » et autres lieux ! Quand je pense que c'est un pays où les musiciens de profession, même les plus renommés, vont habituellement au concert, alors que chez-nous, ils ne savent parfois mettre les pieds dans les salles que lorsqu'on joue de leurs œuvres, ou celles de leur parti !

Quand je pense que j'ai été bissée après la Sonate en mi de d'Indy et après celle de Dukas !¹⁰⁴

[When I think about those halls with 1100 to 1600 seats, all full, even in the provincial towns, to listen to works that even our audiences at the "Nationale" and other places fear! When I think that this is a country where professional musicians, even the most renowned ones, go frequently to concerts, whilst at ours, they do not enter the hall unless their works, or those of their party are played!

When I think that I was asked for an encore after the Sonate in E by d'Indy and that of Dukas.]

Her own disaffection might have had to do with her not feeling understood or valued sufficiently in her own country. Her criticism of the composers' party frictions and lack of interest for other types of music than their own is also noted.

¹⁰⁴ Letter from Blanche Selva to René de Castéra, 29 November 1919 (Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, pp. 130-131).

Hudební spolek tábořský.

19. listopadu 1919.

O 8. hodině večer.

Dvorana Sokolovny.

Mile BLANCHE SELVA,
nadšená propagátorka české hudby ve Francii,
prof. na konservatořích v Štrasburku a Paříži.

Program:

1. César Franck: Preludium, chorál a fuga.
(1822-1890)
2. Ernest Chausson: Pavana } Ze sbírky
(1855-1899) Forlana } »Quelques danses.«
Em. Chabrier: Idylla } Z »Pièces pittores-
(1841-1894) Scherzo-valse } ques.«
3. Jos. Suk: Jak zpívala matinka chorému děcku.
(Z cyklu »O matince.«)
Čís. III. Tajemně a vzdušně.
Čís. X. Zapomenutým rovům v koutku hřbitůvka
Křečovického. (Z cyklu »Životem a snem.«)
Vítězslav Novák: Troják (Valašský tanec).
4. Vincent d'Indy: Zelené jezero } Z »Tableaux de
(1851) Déšť } voyage.«
Déodat de Séverac: Poháněcí mezků před křížem
(1874) v Lívii.
V tartaně*) z cyklu »Cardaňa.«
Js. Albaniz: Triana (z »Iberie«).
(1860-1909)
5. Cl. Debussy: Masky.
(1862-1918) Zatopená kathedrála. (Z »Préludes«).
Tanec.
Em. Chabrier: Fantastické bourrée.

*) Vesnický povoz v Jižní Francii.

CENY MÍST: Balkon (střed) 6 K 60 h, poboční 5 K 50 h,
křeslo 5 K 50 h, I. pořadí 4 K 40 h, II. pořadí
3 K 30 h, k stání 2 K 20 h, stud. lístek 1 K 10 h.

Členům hudebního spolku sleva na 2 sedadla balkonová
nebo křesla.

P. Frank, Tábor — Nákl. vl.

6611

Fig. 2.8 – Recital in Tábor, 19 November 1919

Courtesy of the Museu de la Música de Barcelona, Fons Blanca Selva, BS002/199

Final period: 1921-1930

Selva continued her prolific career during these later years, which saw a greater emphasis on teaching work and a willingness for greater independence from other teaching institutions. In the summer of 1921, she began her courses, 'Cours d'été' in her family home in Brive that she renamed *Mas del Sol* ['home of light' in Catalan]. Some years later, Selva herself explained her mission statement for these summer courses in the *Revue Pleyel*:

Ces cours, qui fonctionnent depuis déjà 6 ans, et que fréquentent régulièrement un grand nombre d'élèves-professeurs, venus de tous les coins de France et du monde, ont lieu chaque jour pendant 6 semaines d'été. C'est là surtout que viennent s'alimenter les professionnels qui, l'année scolaire venue, s'en retournent chacun chez soi, distribuant autour d'eux les connaissances reçues, les développant pour leur propre compte et créant ainsi, dans chaque ville, dans chaque région où ils sont, des foyers de véritable art, où les enfants et les adultes peuvent puiser un développement aussi rapide que solide et beau.¹⁰⁵

[These courses, which have been running for 6 years now, and are regularly attended by a large number of student-teachers from all over France and the world, take place every day for 6 weeks in summer. It is there above all that the professionals come to nourish themselves and who, when the school year begins, return to their home, imparting the knowledge received, developing it for their own account and thus establishing, in each city, in each region where they are, centres of true art, where children and adults can draw a development as rapid as it is solid and beautiful.]

The first year there were 28 participants in the summer class, doubling the amount in the following year and with 65 pupils in 1923. The course was suspended in 1929.¹⁰⁶ However, aside from teaching, this period in Selva's career is a period of maturity and definition in her own sound production. Returning to Lyon in 1922 she finally convinced the critic Léon Vallas who had been critical of her excessive colouristic display in the past. He now gave her credit for her playing:

Tout le monde a toujours apprécié sa profonde intelligence et l'intensité expressive de son interprétation, mais il faut l'avoir entendue jouer dimanche les Baigneuses au soleil de Déodat de Séverac pour se rendre un compte exact

¹⁰⁵ Guy Selva, *Blanche Selva, un professeur, des élèves*, p. 26.

¹⁰⁶ Guy Selva, *Blanche Selva, un professeur, des élèves*, p. 27.

de ses étonnantes qualités de peintre ou de coloriste ainsi que de la beauté sonore de son jeu velouté.¹⁰⁷

[Everyone has always appreciated her deep intelligence and the expressive intensity of her interpretation, but you have to have heard her play *Les Baigneuses au soleil* by Déodat de Séverac last Sunday to realise exactly the extent of her amazing qualities as a painter or colourist as well as the tonal beauty of her velvety touch.]

Her partnership with Joan Massià took increasing precedence over the course of these years, although in their concerts together she often inserted solo piano pieces and after her relocation to Barcelona, her Paris concerts decreased substantially after 1924. Nevertheless, Selva, both as a soloist or partnering Massià appeared in the French capital with some regularity and were well received by the audience. In Selva's own words on one such occasion in 1927:

Déjà le 1er concert avait attiré un audition très nombreux et fervent, mais le 2^e a dépassé toutes les prévisions. On a du refuser plusieurs centaines de personnes, après avoir cependant augmenté de plus d'un centaine de places d'estrade le nombre normal de places de la salle. On a tellement utilisé tout l'espace disponible pour y mettre des auditeurs supplémentaires que nous avons bien de la peine à gagner le centre de l'estrade pour y jouer !¹⁰⁸

[Already the first concert attracted a large and devout audience, but the second surpassed all forecasts. It was necessary to refuse entry to several hundred people, after having already increased the capacity of the hall with over a hundred stage seats. The space was completely utilised to put the additional members of the audience that we had to work hard to get to the centre of the stage to play.]

Before moving to Barcelona, in 1923 she offered four recitals at the Salle Pleyel, on 1, 8, 15 and 22 December. These four recitals represent and showcase her versatility in full in a period of musical maturity and independence: member of the faculty at the École Normale de Paris, in the Conservatoires of Strasbourg and Prague, with most of the treatise already published and an ever-greater following of students.

In these four recitals she gave performances of works by Bach, Scarlatti, Couperin, Dandrieu, Rameau, Pasquini, Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Chopin,

¹⁰⁷ Léon Vallas at the *Salut Public*, 4 March 1922. Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 119.

¹⁰⁸ Letter from Blanche Selva to Lluís Millet i Pagès, 4 December 1927. Fons Lluís Millet, Document R6.7 CEDOC.

d'Indy, Albéniz, de Séverac, Chabrier, Bréville, Fauré, Turina, Ravel, Honneger, Migot and Cras.

Each recital followed an approximate chronological outline, each of them finishing with one of Albéniz's cahiers from *Iberia*. *Le Monde musical's* review shows the great esteem in which she was held.

Lorsque Mlle Blanche Selva est assise devant le piano, lorsqu'elle le met en vibration, lorsqu'elle en fait sortir de la musique, il semble qu'elle fasse corps avec l'instrument, qu'elle soit sortie de ses flancs et qu'elle se soit proportionnée à sa taille. Toute autre objet ne paraît pas avoir été fait à sa mesure. Aucun autre instrument ne lui eut convenu. On ne la voit pas jouant du violon ou pinçant la guitare. Elle est la créature née du piano.[...] ¹⁰⁹

[From the time Mlle Blanche Selva sat at the piano, from the moment she set it in motion, and made the music come out, it seemed that she became one with the instrument, that she emerged from its flanks and grew to its size. No other object seemed to have been made to her measure. No other instrument was for her. It is not possible to visualise her playing the violin or plucking the guitar. She is a creature born of the piano.]

Selva's pianos

Reading Selva's correspondence it has also been possible to establish which qualities she valued in an instrument. In fact, she looked for specific qualities in an instrument that went beyond preferring one piano maker over another.¹¹⁰ An important source are the letters exchanged between Blanche Selva and Albert Blondel, then director of the Érard piano factory contained in *The History of the Érard Piano and Harp in Letters and Documents*.

Before a concert at the Salle des Agriculteurs on 21 February 1919¹¹¹ Selva was dissatisfied with the Pleyel piano that she was due to use for her performance and

¹⁰⁹ *Le Monde Musical*, 23-24, December 1923. Signed A.M.

¹¹⁰ Letter from Blanche Selva to M.G. Lyon 24 February 1919, *The History of the Érard Piano and Harp in Letters and Documents, 1785-1959* ed. by Robert Adelson, Alain Roudier, Jenny Nex, Laure Barthel and Michel Foussard, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 516, 'J'irai toujours du côté où les instruments concordent le mieux avec mes besoins pianistiques du moment.' [I will always choose instruments that match my current pianistic needs best.]

¹¹¹ BS002/163.

swapped it for an Érard that was available in the hall, even if the latter was not completely in tune. Following this, she contacted Blondel to make a permanent change so that Érard became her piano of choice in the ensuing concerts, and to be sent an instrument for her own personal practice.¹¹²

The first concert for which she is requesting this change is that of 1 March 1919 at the Agriculteurs again. Sadly, this programme is not available amongst the digital copies of her album. However, she refers to a Chopin-Fauré programme and it is possible that it was the same or very similar programme to the one performed days later in Lyon, discussed above. Selva requests that the piano is the best possible, with a vigorous sonority and a brilliant sound in the middle and high registers due to the heroic nature of some of the Chopin pieces.¹¹³ The first concert programme in which the change is reflected is that of BS002/165 at the Odéon Theatre.

However, she was soon dissatisfied with the Érard pianos. In a letter approximately a year later, 14 February 1920, she complains to Blondel that the piano that had been sent to Strasbourg for her concerts there did not make a good impression.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, from the same letter it can be ascertained that Selva favoured a piano that would allow her a greater means of expression over any mechanical ease.

J'ai été obligé de constater moi-même que si je me sentais infiniment plus à l'aise sur votre instrument, quant à son clavier et son mécanisme, le résultat purement artistique, en intensité, poésie, variété, velouté sonore, aboutissent à une interprétation beaucoup plus vivante, intérieure et émotive, avait été très supérieure sur le Pleyel.

[I was obliged to note myself that even if I felt far more at ease on your instrument as regards its keyboard and action, the pure artistic result, in

¹¹² Letter from Blanche Selva to Albert Blondel, dated 24 February 1919, *The History of the Érard Piano*, pp. 515-516.

¹¹³ 'Il me faut là ce que vous avez de mieux. J'ai besoin d'un clavier aisé, d'une sonorité vigoureuse et éclatante dans le médium aigu et l'aigu particulièrement parce qu'il y a des Chopin héroïques et rutilants.' [There I need your best. I need an easy keyboard, with a strong sound and a bright middle and high register particularly because there are some heroic and gleaming Chopins.] (p. 516).

¹¹⁴ '...n'y fait pas bonne impression.' Letter from Blanche Selva to Albert Blondel, 14 February 1920, *The History of the Érard Piano*, p. 519.

intensity, poetry, variety, velvety sound, culminating in a much more lively, inner and emotive interpretation, was far superior on the Pleyel.]

Selva also complains that the sound of other Érard pianos in previous concerts had been too dry and short, resulting in a 'sécheresse destructive d'émotion artistique' [destructive dryness of artistic emotion.] Later in the same letter, she requests that the instruments that she is sent are over-strung instead of having parallel strings as they have a better sonority. What is important for her therefore is that the sounds are long and velvety ['velouté sonore'] and not dry and short, particularly in the middle and high registers, where a singing tone is most needed.

However, from later correspondence regarding some concerts in Catalunya, it can be ascertained that at times her choice of piano responded to more prosaic matters. In a letter to Francesc Pujol, then manager at the Palau de la Música Catalana, she explains that the reason for preferring one Pleyel piano over another is the keyboard. The Pleyel from the Palau allowed her to play the tenths in her own violin and piano composition *Cants de Llum*, which another Pleyel from the Casa Izabal did not. Presumably, the former model was older and had narrower keys.¹¹⁵ However, weeks later, she complained that the piano at the Palau had insufficient quality and she preferred the Pleyel from Casa Izabal, even if that meant paying the transportation costs of this other piano from her own pocket, rather than having to play without the required nuances.¹¹⁶ (Letter of 17 June 1930, same source).

Selva ended up owning a Pleyel piano, which was left in Barcelona upon her departure. As its serial number is not known it will never be possible to identify the instrument with complete certainty. However, through my conversation with Ludovica Mosca¹¹⁷ it

¹¹⁵ Letter from Blanche Selva to Francesc Pujol, 2 April 1930. Fons Francesc Pujol i Pons. Document 3.9_R.218. CEDOC. Reunits a l'Exposició. 'Havia pensat primerament tocar amb el Pleyel de la Casa Izabal, però el teclat d'aquest piano m'impediria de poder tocar els intervals de 10ena qui hi ha en els meus Cants de Llum... i així prefereixo escollir el Pleyel del Palau que em permeti almenys aquests acords!' [First I had thought of playing on the Pleyel from the Casa Izabal, but the keyboard of that piano would prevent me from reaching the intervals of 10th in my Cants de Llum... so that I prefer to choose the Pleyel from the Palau that allows me to reach these chords.]

¹¹⁶ Letter from Blanche Selva to Francesc Pujol, 17 June 1930. Fons Francesc Pujol i Pons. Document 3.9_R.218. CEDOC.

¹¹⁷ Chapter 5.

became apparent that Guillem Garganta had a Pleyel piano that was sold on after his death. It is my hypothesis that this is the piano that Selva left behind.

However, Érard and Pleyel were not the only pianos on which she performed, although they appear in the majority of programmes leaving Gaveau or Bechstein significantly behind. A different piano which she greatly enjoyed playing was the Castéras' Steinway, then known as 'le piano des riches'.¹¹⁸ Selva was very fond of this particular instrument. She thoroughly enjoyed her stays with the Castéras in Angoulême, where she felt welcome as a family member and practised on the instrument.

C'est bien de votre faute si je suis devenue si indiscreète et si j'abuse ainsi à chaque automne du Steinway et surtout de la patience et de l'amabilité des habitants de cette maison aimée.¹¹⁹

[It is truly your fault if I have become so indiscreet and I take advantage of the Steinway every autumn as I do and most of all the patience and the amiability of the inhabitants of this beloved home].

Conclusions

Blanche Selva enjoyed a prolific concert career which allowed her to enter some of the most prestigious musical circles of her time. However, many of her recital and concert appearances were also dominated by the needs of the Schola Cantorum, and the direct influence of her mentor, Vincent d'Indy, cannot be overstated. This impacted upon the engagements she took on as well as the repertoire she decided to perform.

Furthermore, d'Indy also impressed upon her his own personal and musical life ethos. His famous dictum 'L'art n'est pas un métier'¹²⁰ [art is not a job] together with their common strong Catholic beliefs, materialises in Selva's understanding of her role as a performer as that of a humble servant of a greater purpose:

Mais qu'est-ce, pour moi, que cet Art ? Le moyen de servir et de louer.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Giraud, *Paul Loyonnet*, p. 230 as quoted by Howat, p. 374.

¹¹⁹ Letter from Blanche Selva to Madame de Castéra dated 2 August 1907. Transcription from AABS.

¹²⁰ From Vincent d'Indy's lecture at the start of the academic year, 2 November 1900 (Rémy Campos, *Blanche Selva interprète*, p. 48).

¹²¹ Letter from Blanche Selva to Guy de Lioncourt, 17 October 1910 (Saint-Arroman, p. 23).

[But what is this Art for me? The way to serve and to praise].

This self-sacrificial view and reluctance to view performing through a more practical and material lens had profound and long-lasting consequences for her career. This may also lie at the root of her over-extensive commitments as a teacher, which constantly encroached on her concert career, as well as her multiple appearances in charity events and performances arranged by the Schola in the French provinces, to the detriment of a more sophisticated and lucrative concert career.

D'Indy's position as an aristocrat with family wealth allowed him to live by his dictum, 'art is not a job', in a way that was substantially and materially different for a single woman with dependants in her care who had no other financial support nor family wealth, and thus had to make a living solely as a professional musician. It was an unattainable standard for Selva, which no doubt must have created some internal conflict in her. Furthermore, this outlook appears to have also crystallised in her performances through a general rejection of programming showpieces, a stage demeanour that often appeared severe and a lack of contact with the audience, whether in the form of playing encores or remaining in the hall to meet her public.

However, reading her long letter to Castéra after her rousing success in Czechoslovakia it is very apparent that she was also capable of enjoying the effusive reception of the audience. Perhaps away from d'Indy's scrutiny she felt freer to open herself to this kind of "material" success. It is possible that she may have had a more conventional and successful career had she not been influenced for such a long time and so strongly by Vincent d'Indy. This relationship, and in particular his influence over her repertoire choices, outside what we nowadays understand as the canon, may also explain in part the relatively small scholarly output about Selva, particularly in the English-speaking world.

Nevertheless, in spite of this, this chapter evidences the high esteem in which she was held during her life. She always performed with the score and although she displayed a huge variety of attack and a highly individualised technique that was comparatively unusual at the time, she was not an ostentatious performer 'tant sa personnalité

s'efface de ses interpretations. Et certes, ce n'est pas impassibilité !'¹²² [so much does her personality fade from her interpretations. And yet, it is not impassivity!]. Her conflicting attitudes towards the stage as well as the recounted episodes of stage-fright allow us to appreciate the nuances, the ups and downs that are natural in a long performing career, and to understand Selva holistically and comprehensively, both the artistic greatness and the human frailty.

Of course, we do not have films of Selva playing and she only left eleven tracks of recorded music which are examined in Chapter 4. However, thanks to the detailed description by her friend Gustave Samazeuilh, we can almost see her approaching the stage:

Les musiciens de ma génération, habitués des grands concerts, des séances de la *Société nationale* ou de la *Schola*, n'ont pas oublié les entrées de Blanche Selva sur les estrades, l'œil froncé, son petit ruban noir dans ses cheveux simplement relevés, sa large croix sur poitrine, s'installant à son piano aussi simplement que si elle était seule dans la salle, mettant ses grosses lunettes d'écaille, ouvrant sa musique, dont son fidèle ami René de Castéra lui tournait souvent les pages, ainsi que nous le rappelle la composition de Maurice Denis qui est au plafond de la salle du théâtre des Champs-Élysées.¹²³

[The musicians of my generation, used to great concerts, the sessions at the *Société nationale* or the *Schola*, have not forgotten the entrances of Blanche Selva to the stage, wrinkled eye, her little black bow in her hair simply put up, her large cross on her chest, seated at the piano as simply as if she were alone in the hall, putting on her big tortoiseshell glasses, opening her score, her loyal friend René de Castéra frequently turning pages for her, as the painting by Maurice Denis on the ceiling of the theatre of the Champs-Élysées reminds us.]

¹²² *La Liberté*, 11 February 1908, p. 84. Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 115.

¹²³ Rémy Campos, *Blanche Selva interprète*, p. 51.



Fig. 2.9 – Reproduction of La Sonate by Maurice Denis¹²⁴

¹²⁴ The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Picture Collection, The New York Public Library. (1913-04). *La sonate*. Retrieved from <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e3-3d18-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>. Maurice Denis (1870-1943) painter, writer and close friend of Selva as well as of Vincent d'Indy and other mutual friends such as the Castéra brothers and Déodat de Séverac. He was commissioned to decorate the theatre of the Champs-Élysées (1912-1913) of which the pane representing Selva within the musical concept of the Sonata forms a part. Selva also appeared in two other projects by Denis: the cover of the piano score *Album pour enfants petits et grands* (Paris: Édition Mutuelle, 1906), of which Selva's *Cloches* compositions also form a part; and a picture from 1912 entitled *La Soirée musicale*. Delphine Grivel, 'À la croisée des arts: Blanche Selva et Maurice Denis' in *Blanche Selva, naissance d'un piano moderne*, ed. by Jean-Marc Warszawski (Lyon: Symétrie, 2010), pp. 219-233.

Chapter 3 L'Enseignement musical de la technique du piano

Context: The French piano school at the turn of the twentieth century

During the nineteenth century, French keyboard technique was largely based on the advice of the eighteenth-century *clavecinistes*, who emphasized independence of fingers and a supple but motionless wrist and forearm. Keyboard methods and exercises from the early eighteenth century up until even the middle of the twentieth century demonstrate this French preoccupation with 'pure' finger technique.

[During the Second Empire (1852-1870)] Paris remained the place to come to study music, but the many foreign pianists who performed there only passed through and so had little influence on French pedagogy. A distinctively French style of piano playing thus developed independently of what was happening in the rest of Europe. This style was defined by clarity and speed, playing shallowly into the keys, *jeu perlé*, and technique based on finger and wrist action combined with "the ideals of the *clavecinistes*: clarity, elegance, and sobriety of expression". Technique and interpretation were taught independently of each other.¹

This is consistent with Selva's own view, and criticism of the technical and pedagogical practices around her, which prompted her research and the development of her own technical framework. Selva crystallised her findings in her treatise, *L'Enseignement musical de la technique du piano* (LEMTP) written between 1916 and 1925. It consists of six volumes and a student workbook which relates to the first volume of the treatise. The numbering of the seven volumes is not consistent and the full details are as follows, in order of publication, together with the scheme of references used in this thesis:

¹ Susanne Skyrm, 'An early Granados Mentor: Charles-Wilfred de Bériot', in *Enrique Granados in Context. La escuela española de piano y los movimientos artísticos entorno a la Gran Guerra*, ed. by Luisa Morales, Michael Christoforidis, Walter A. Clark (Almería: FIMTE Festival Internacional de Música de Tecla Española, 2020), p. 29.

Table A – Selva, LEMTP, contents and scheme of references

	Title as published	Aguirre references
1	Tome premier <i>Principes de la sonorité au piano. Travail élémentaire du toucher</i> (Paris: Rouart, Lerolle & Cie, 1916)	Vol. 1
2	<i>Principes de la sonorité au piano. Travail élémentaire du toucher. Livre de l'Élève</i> (Paris: Rouart, Lerolle & Cie, 1916)	<i>Principes</i>
3	Tome second <i>La Simultanéité des sons au piano. Travail élémentaire des doubles notes. Fondements harmoniques de la polyphonie et du trait</i> (Paris: Rouart, Lerolle & Cie, 1919)	Vol. 2
4	<i>Livre préparatoire. Première partie: principes primordiaux du travail pianistique</i> (Paris: Rouart, Lerolle & Cie, 1922)	LP1
5	Tome troisième <i>Première partie: doubles notes, tremolo, traits brisés et arpeggio</i> (Paris: Rouart, Lerolle & Cie, 1923)	Vol. 3/1
6	Tome troisième <i>Deuxième partie: gamme, arpèges, traits composés</i> (Paris: Rouart, Lerolle & Cie, 1924)	Vol. 3/2
7	<i>Livre préparatoire. Seconde partie: préparation du toucher</i> (Paris: Rouart, Lerolle & Cie, 1925)	LP2

Consistent with Skyrms's summary, in Selva's opinion, the teaching methods of the time had not adapted to the requirements of the modern piano and were still, and only, based on the procedures applicable to older keyboard instruments, harpsichords and clavichords.

Tel est, en somme, l'état général de l'enseignement du piano. Ruine de l'ancien jeu des clavecins et clavicordes, il n'offre plus à nos besoins actuels que des procédés inactifs, dépourvus de vie féconde par leur manque d'appropriation au nouvel organe traducteur de la pensée musicale : le Piano. Chaos obscur, créé et entretenu par l'aveuglement de l'orgueil, la férocité de l'arrivisme et la méconnaissance de l'Art, mortels esprits de division qui font s'entre-choquer et s'entre-déchirer les éléments vitaux nécessaires, il n'atteindra à son épanouissement fécond que par la coordination pacifique dans l'unité du but. A ce prix seulement existera l'enseignement logique du vrai jeu de piano, par

lequel toutes les ressources instrumentales actuelles seront mises au *seul service de la Musique*.²

[This is, in summary, the general state of piano pedagogy. A ruin of the old touch used at harpsichords and clavichords, it only provides us with lifeless procedures, deprived of fertile life through their lack of application to the new instrument that translates musical thought: the Piano. Dark chaos, created and maintained by the blindness of pride, the ferocity of careerism and the lack of knowledge of Art, deadly spirits of division that make the necessary vital elements clash and tear each other apart, it will not reach its fertile fulfilment unless through peaceful coordination towards a single goal. This is the only price at which the logic and truthful teaching of the piano will exist, through which all the current instrumental resources will be employed *only* towards the *service of Music*.]

As will be shown below, in her treatise, Selva postulates that her teaching surpasses these limitations and brings a logical method to acquire the true way of playing the piano: 'l'enseignement logique du vrai jeu de piano' [the logical teaching of real piano playing.] As such, her treatise is not only a guide to learn, but a reference point to what is, in Selva's opinion, real piano playing. As noted by Chiantore,

[l]os textos de orientación pedagógica constituyen una fuente de incalculable valor para conocer la evolución de la técnica de un instrumento.³

[[p]edagogical texts are a source of incalculable value to learn about the technique of an instrument.]

My study of Selva's treatise is concerned, in the first instance, with exploring the extent to which it can show us Selva's own personal technique and how this fits within the chronology of the evolution of piano technique as a whole. Secondly, by applying a practice-based methodology, that is, applying its precepts in my own practice as a concert pianist and in the teaching room, I also set myself to answer other secondary questions, such as what does her method feel like? Has my pianism changed through her work and, if so, how? And whether it can be taught and the extent to which I may feel that I need to make any modifications or concessions. However, it is important to stress that the weight of the analysis is not on piano pedagogy, but on piano technique itself, although it is accepted that sometimes the two overlap.

² Vol. 1, p. vii.

³ Chiantore, *Historia de la técnica*, p. 576.

I echo the words of Alan Davison in relation to Liszt:

While Franz Liszt's remarkable pianistic skills have been the subject of much published scholarship, the precise nature of both his own technical development and his contribution to the evolution of piano playing warrants scrutiny within the context of a flourishing interest in 19th- century performance practice. Such scrutiny is especially justified in relation to piano playing for, as Robert Winter observed adroitly in the recent *New Grove* entry on piano playing, '[m]uch of the lore surrounding the history of piano playing belongs more properly to the realm of anecdote or even myth than scholarship; much work in this area remains to be done.'⁴

Similarly in the case of Selva, as already discussed in the Introduction, several authors before me have written about her, but a comprehensive study of her technical development and the viability of her ideas in modern pianism is still lacking.

To fully understand Selva's work, it is important to first contextualise her treatise and pianism historically. Charles Timbrell offers valuable insights into the French Piano School, its evolution and main exponents, as the author combines a narrative and descriptive historical account with interviews with many different pianists of the early and mid-twentieth century.⁵ Timbrell also gives a valuable explanation of what a national school of playing is or can be:

A national school of playing can develop when a country's leading composers, performers, teachers, and instrument makers hold common aesthetics and are able to influence one another.⁶

Following this, he identifies a 'distinctive pianistic style during the 150-year period from the time of Louis Adam and his students, c.1810, to that of Marguerite Long and her students, c.1960'. Some elements of this style are 'clarity, precision, moderation, and technical finish', which Timbrell also argues are characteristics that have been reflected in the type of pianos produced in France.⁷ Selva was active as a concert pianist from the end of the nineteenth century to the year 1930, although she taught

⁴ Alan Davison, 'Franz Liszt and the Development of 19th-Century Pianism: A Re-Reading of the Evidence', *The Musical Times*, 147:1896 (2006), 33-43, p. 33.

⁵ Charles Timbrell, *French Pianism. A Historical Perspective* 2nd ed. (London: Kahn & Averill and Pro/Am Music Resources, 1999).

⁶ Timbrell, p. 251.

⁷ Timbrell, p. 26.

until the 1940s and thus carried on exerting a pianistic influence on her students until then. This situates her in the latter half of the 150-year period described by Timbrell.

By way of historical background, Timbrell considers Louis Adam (1758-1848) to be 'the first important professor of piano at the Conservatoire'. He also points to another influential pianist and pedagogue in France during the nineteenth century, Friedrich Kalkbrenner (1785-1849). He advocated the use of a device called *Guide-Mains*, designed to aid the acquisition of a good finger dexterity at the piano as well as the style of playing *jeu perlé*. Timbrell writes:

This style, which requires the utmost equality of touch and an unenforced tone that is controlled entirely by the fingers, has been a prime concern of the French school from Adam to such later pianists as Saint-Saëns, Marguerite Long, Isidor Philipp, and their students.⁸

References to Marguerite Long and Isidor Philipp abound throughout the text. Their type of playing is described as 'pearly finger technique' (p. 94). In a conversation with the author, Jeanne-Marie Darré (1905-1999) explains how Long's and Philipp's technique stemmed 'from the knuckle and wrist', emphasising that this made Long's sound 'not too powerful' (p. 94). In a different interview, Darré also noted that 'for technique, you have to play from the end of the hand, with just the fingers and the wrist'.⁹

Luca Chiantore also highlights Philipp as an exponent of a French Piano School which was centred around finger dexterity ('digitalidad francesa').¹⁰ Chiantore argues that Philipp's technique seems to be limited to a 'refined and elegant *jeu perlé*'. He considers this to be outdated but something that was close to the sensibility of French pedagogues.¹¹ Further, Chiantore maintains that this pedagogy was not aligned with the requirements of music other than the French repertoire. This propelled other

⁸ Timbrell, p. 38.

⁹ Dean Elder, *Pianists at Play* (London: Kahn & Averill, 1986), p. 78.

¹⁰ Chiantore, *Historia de la técnica*, p. 599.

¹¹ 'Con Philipp toda la técnica parece reducirse a un refinado y elegante *jeu perlé*: un criterio de enseñanza que parece provenir de otra época y que los pedagogos franceses sintieron siempre muy próximo a su sensibilidad.' [With Philipp all technique appears to be reduced to a refined and elegant *jeu perlé*: a teaching criterion that seems to come from a different time and one that French pedagogues always felt very close to their sensibility.]

theorists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to find alternative solutions to adapt to the wider canon. This is aligned with Timbrell's view of Selva, who 'like Cortot and Risler, adopted a style of playing that went beyond the limits of the old French school. This is evident from her repertoire, with its emphasis on big 'muscular' pieces'.¹²

However, Timbrell's interview with Gaby Casadesus¹³ evidences a disparity of opinion about what the French School of piano actually is or was. This is significant as Casadesus was also active as a concert pianist at the time. In response to the interviewer's question about the 'old French School' she replied:

Most people associate it with Madame Long and Isidor Philipp. But there were other ways of playing here — think Cortot, Risler, Lazare-Lévy. And Blanche Selva. She used much more arm and had more suppleness than Long. Selva specialized in Franck, d'Indy, Séverac, and, especially, Bach. Her technique was a bit like Lazare-Lévy's, which was good and complete — though some of his students seemed to use so much wrist that they lost finger control. Another great French pianist who was different from Long and Philipp was Francis Planté, a really wonderful Chopin player.¹⁴

This passage is revealing as Casadesus deliberately rejects the notion of an 'old French School' that is strictly associated with the finger technique, or *clavecin* school mentioned by Timbrell. She adopts the expression 'old School' only as a chronological frame, presenting a view that is inclusive of the different technical approaches alive at the time. This is at odds with Timbrell's position, as in his text he continuously juxtaposes the 'old School' against the more innovative pianists mentioned here also by Casadesus. He presents these pianists (Selva included) as being outside the school, whilst Casadesus' understanding of the period is underpinned by an acceptance of a wider and more heterogeneous pianistic reality.

In my opinion, both Timbrell's and Gaby Casadesus' views can coexist within Selva's own perception of the pianism of the time. As will be discussed in further detail below,

¹² Timbrell, p. 68.

¹³ Gaby Casadesus (1901-1999), born Gabrielle L'Hôte, studied at the Paris Conservatoire first in the preparatory class of Marguerite Long and later in the class of Louis Diémer, winning a first prize in both classes. Interview at Timbrell, pp. 192-96.

¹⁴ Timbrell, p. 195.

Selva criticises the pedagogical tradition that is exclusively centred around finger technique and presents her treatise as an alternative to this method. This supports Timbrell's idea that there is a distinctive 'finger school' in France, a tradition that has a following and is widely accepted and practised. However, Selva argues that this pedagogical school is obsolete and that modern pianists around her already evidence a different style of playing. This supports Casadesus' view that different types of playing and players coexisted within the pianistic fabric of early twentieth-century France.

Selva's own approach

In her treatise, Selva argues that technique, as it was understood in her time, represents a systematic negation of real music. She criticises pianists who work at the 'mechanism' without regard for musical meaning. Pianists become mechanical themselves and unable to translate music expressively. She calls this type of playing and technique *anti-artistique* as music and technique are viewed as opposed. Instead, Selva argues that they are inseparable. Therefore, she calls her treatise *L'Enseignement musical de la technique du piano*, the 'musical' study of piano technique: a treatise that deals with musical expression and technical means together as a whole.

[...] *L'Enseignement musical de la technique du piano*. Ce titre exprime admirablement ce qu'est cet enseignement et cette manière de travailler. La *Technique*, telle qu'on la pratique couramment, est la négation systématique de la musique véritable. Aussi est-il malheureusement général que plus un pianiste a travaillé le « mécanisme », et moins il lui reste de souffle artistique (en admettant qu'il n'en eût jamais possédé !). Il devient, à force d'exercice et d'idéal de « mécanisme », une mécanique remontée qui débite des notes à tant à l'heure, sans aucune possibilité de traduction *expressive* des œuvres qu'il piétine, pourrait-on dire, de tout le trottement impitoyable de ses doigts. Cette technique-là, anti-artistique, a créé l'horreur de la Technique chez bon nombre de natures véritablement artistes. Et la paresse et la vanité, d'autre part, viennent donner la main à cette incompréhension malheureuse des véritables *lois de l'art*, comme de toute vie. On oppose étourdiment la *Musique* et la *Technique*, sans comprendre qu'elles sont inséparables, pétries l'une de l'autre. *La Technique*, disons-nous dans le tome I " de cet ouvrage, *provient de l'Expression et y retourne*.¹⁵

¹⁵ Vol. 3/2, p. 171.

[...] *l'Enseignement musical de la technique du piano*. This title expresses admirably this teaching method and this form of work. *Technique*, as it is practised currently, is a systematic negation of real music. Unfortunately, it is also common that the more a pianist has worked on the “mechanics”, the less artistic breath there remains (assuming that he ever had any!). He becomes, through exercise and this idea of “mechanism”, a glorified machine that delivers notes without any possibility of *expressive* translation of the works that he tramples on, one can say, a ruthless pitter-patter of his fingers. This technique here, anti-artistic, has given good technique a bad name, technique that belongs to the real artistic nature. And laziness and vanity, on the other hand, have enabled this unfortunate misunderstanding of the real *laws* of art. Music and Technique are wantonly opposed without understanding that they cannot be separated, kneaded with one another as they are. *Technique*, we said in the first volume of this work, comes from Expression and returns to it.]

This is a significant methodological and philosophical departure from mainstream pianistic pedagogical practice established since the mid-nineteenth century. As noted by Lora Deahl in her article ‘Robert Schumann’s “Album for the Young” and the Coming of Age of Nineteenth-Century Piano Pedagogy’:

Mechanical technical development continued to be the focus of widely used methods published after 1850 by Ferdinand Beyer, Sigismund Lebert and Ludwig Stark, Karl Urbach, Louis Plaidy, Josef Pishna, and Charles-Louis Hanon. While Beyer’s widely distributed method distinguished itself by a more realistic pacing of material, it was nevertheless dominated by exercises of etudes. Echoing pedagogues from the first half of the century, Hanon recommended that a full hour of daily practice be devoted to playing the exercises from his *Le pianiste-virtuose* from beginning to end. Additional piano methods were linked to the use of demonic finger exercisers and practice aids such as the *Chiroplast* of Johann Logier, *Hands-guide* of Friedrich Kalkbrenner, *Dactylion* of Henri Herz, *Digitorium* of Myer Marks, *Technicon* of James Brotherhood, and *Tekniklavier* of Almon Virgil as well as assorted practice clavier, hand gymnasium, and legato monitors. For many thousands of amateur piano players, the majority of them young women, hours of daily practice on scales and exercises became a way of life.¹⁶

Naturally, not all pedagogues used these methods to the letter nor advocated the use of torturous devices. Deahl emphasises Friedrich Wieck’s (1785-1873) criticism of those teachers who would prescribe ‘daily two hours of scales in all major and minor keys, in unison, thirds and sixths, and then daily three to four hours of etudes by

¹⁶ Lora Deahl, ‘Robert Schumann’s “Album for the Young” and the Coming of Age of Nineteenth Century Piano Pedagogy’, *College Music Symposium*, 41 (2001), 25-42, pp. 29-30.

Clementi, Cramer and Mosheles'. His own recommendation being limited to 'a daily quarter of an hour of scales that I shall have you play, as I see fit, staccato, legato, fast, slow, forte and piano' 'with an emphasis on beauty and tone'.¹⁷ However, as a pedagogical genre, mechanical exercises without musical nuance or meaning were a well-known mainstream teaching tool from the mid-nineteenth century.

Further, in her writing, Selva expands on the observation that the principles of piano technique generally taught in France are misunderstood. She considers that these *systems* (her emphasis) for its acquisition are contradictory or wrong and most importantly, that the students are not taught the way professional pianists are currently playing. She argues that this is because pedagogical practice has not caught up with or adapted to the modern piano. In fact, Selva establishes a direct link between the evolution of the instrument and the different physiological changes needed from the pianist in order to maximise the potential of the piano. In her opinion, the teaching around her is obsolete as it has not adapted to these changes, offering impractical solutions with regard to the demands of the modern piano. As was already discussed in the first chapter, Selva herself was troubled in 1908 when she realised that what she was teaching did not match how she was instinctively playing the piano, prompting her research and updating her approach. Descriptively, she calls this type of obsolete teaching practice 'pedagogical routine'. In this very same passage she highlights the dichotomy, 'conflict', between what is taught and what is used when one can play the piano and is an artist.

C'est en effet, dans l'évolution historique de l'instrument, *non suivie* par la *routine* pédagogique, qu'est la source du conflit actuel entre *ce que l'on enseigne* et *ce que l'on emploie*, quand on *sait jouer du piano* et qu'on est *artiste*.¹⁸

[It is in fact in the historic evolution of the instrument, *not followed* by pedagogical *routine*, that the source of the current conflict lies between *that which one teaches* and *that which one uses*, when one *can play the piano* and one is an *artist*.]

¹⁷ Deahl, p. 30 quoting from Friedrich Wieck, *Piano and Song (Didactic and Polemical)*, trans. Henry Pleasants (New York: Pendragon Press, 1988), pp. 124-125.

¹⁸ Vol. 1, p. 121.

Selva argues that the origin of these outdated practices lies within the old harpsichord school of playing.¹⁹ This is aligned with Susanne Skyrme's and Charles Timbrell's view that links the old *clavecin* school with the French School of piano. It is important to note however, that Selva never uses the expression 'French School' in the LEMTP. Selva describes the expansion and transformation of pianistic touch as a direct consequence of the instrumental evolution. As the pianos have increased in size and acoustic power, the variety of touch has increased and is richer.

Le Toucher s'est modifié proportionnellement à l'instrument. Plus l'instrument s'est agrandi, enrichi, en étendue et en puissance sonores, plus le Toucher a dû s'élargir et s'enrichir de moyens variés.²⁰

[The touch has been modified in proportion to the instrument. The more the instrument has become larger and richer, in range and acoustic powers, the more the Touch has had to increase and become richer in various ways.]

As such, Selva distinguishes between two main approaches at the piano, the older form of playing, which she calls 'jouer des doigts' [finger playing] and the modern approach of arm-weight playing, ('jouer du bras'). However, she cautions against their opposition stressing that both are still relevant in modern piano playing depending on the musical requirements of a given passage. Crucially, for her, the modern touch does not break with the old touch ('toucher ancien'). Rather, the modern touch incorporates all elements of the old touch, although perfecting and surpassing them. She draws a parallel with the evolution of the instruments themselves, arguing that this is akin to the newer instruments surpassing the older ones.

Le Toucher moderne ne *détruit* pas le Toucher ancien, il l'*emploie* entièrement, le *perfectionne* et le *dépasse*, comme s'est *employé*, *perfectionné* et *dépassé* l'instrument lui-même.²¹

[The modern touch does not *destroy* the old Touch, it *utilises* it entirely, it *perfects* it and *surpasses* it, in the same way one has used, perfected and surpassed the instrument.]

¹⁹ Vol. 1, p. vii.

²⁰ Vol. 1, p. 123.

²¹ Vol. 1, p. 125.

Importantly, therefore, Selva integrates ‘finger playing’ as a type of touch, a musical device, but considers it insufficient in and of itself as the foundation of modern piano technique. This is in alignment with the current general understanding of what ‘modern technique’ broadly means, as Davison says:

While crude, ‘modern technique’ is a useful term in referring to a physically eclectic approach to technique that makes use of the fingers, wrists, upper and lower arms.²²

Going further than merely expanding on the pianist’s physical range at the keyboard, a tenet of Selva’s technical approach is the categorisation of these different modes of attack, which incorporate the older and modern types of playing, in relation to their particular acoustic effects. What Selva does, therefore, is group different biomechanical processes (old and new) into musically meaningful signifiers in relation to their intrinsic acoustic effects and their musical and expressive possibilities in relation to the notated score. This approach is a complete departure from the methods discussed by Deahl mentioned earlier, which were entirely based on mechanical finger exercises at the piano, contained no musical instruction and little to no advice as to the biomechanical processes for their correct execution.

In Selva’s work, she distinguishes between a *jeu indifférent*, *jeu appuyé* and *jeu éclatant*. Selva condenses the old practices of piano playing under the umbrella category of *jeu indifférent*, whilst expanding on two other main different touches, *jeu appuyé* and *jeu éclatant* which are necessary to exploit fully the greater dynamic resources of the modern piano. The pianist then needs to learn to grade these modes of attack.

Enfin la variété comprise entre l’extrême force et l’extrême légèreté étant plus considérable actuellement qu’autrefois, la gradation reliant ces pôles opposés comporte une richesse infiniment plus grande qu’anciennement, et requiert, en conséquence, des moyens de *contrôle* plus précis et plus continus.²³

[Finally, the variety between the *extreme force* and *extreme lightness* being much more considerable currently than before, the gradation between these two opposed poles comprises an infinitely larger richness than in the old times,

²² Davison, p. 33, fn. 2.

²³ Vol. 1, p. 125.

and it requires, consequently, far more precise and continuous means of *control*.]

Further, the vast difference between both extremes offers a wide and rich sound palette from which to draw. For this reason, the modern pianist requires precise tools to adapt to and maximise the potential of the instrument.

This wider dynamic range and power available to the keyboard player are only accessible by utilising more means than the fingers themselves. Selva explains that, where previously the action of the finger was enough, the pianist must now also use the wrist, and where in the older pianos action with the wrist would have been enough, in modern pianos one needs to engage the forearm, etc. Selva defines modern piano technique as the refinement of muscular touch, obtained by the detachment and liberation of all the necessary body muscles at play, in order to develop and maximise their strength in isolation.

Tout le charme de la technique moderne consiste dans le raffinement du tact musculaire obtenu par le détachement et l'affranchissement de tous les muscles du corps en exercice, afin de développer et d'épuiser leur force isolément.²⁴

[All the allure of modern technique lies in the refinement of the muscular touch obtained through the isolation and freedom of all the muscles of the body in exercise, so as to develop and use their strength in isolation.]

This advances the important part that muscular relaxation has in Selva's technique. Nevertheless, it is important to understand that for Selva, musical expression is the most important element, what she considers to be the pianists' law.²⁵ As such, all these new resources must be employed only to aid the musical meaning ('au seul service de la Musique').²⁶ For the pianist, all musical education must lead to the ability to realize the musical thought ('pensée'), and at the same time to convey the personal feelings ('sentiment personnel') that these works provoke in the interpreter: 'Là est la vérité unique devant guider tout professeur dans l'enseignement technique du piano.'

²⁴ Vol. 1, p. 5.

²⁵ Vol. 1, p. 5.

²⁶ Vol. 1, p. vii.

[This is the only truth that ought to guide every teacher in the teaching of piano technique.]²⁷

The idea of truth is a very important notion for Selva. Her writing exudes this willingness to provide aspiring pianists with a 'truthful' pathway towards mastery of piano technique. Moreover, as discussed in earlier chapters, this notion also permeates her own mission statement as a performer. Selva views interpreters as more than just providing the message of the composer to the audience. In distilling the composer's music through their own personal feelings, providing a musical result that is inherent and unique to them, a performer becomes a creator, like a composer. But this process is reliant in a profound respect and understanding of the musical text, that is only accessible through a thorough and truthful enquiry. This is reminiscent of the thinking of some of her contemporaries, for instance the Russian pianist Heinrich Neuhaus (1881-1964).²⁸ Maria Razumovskaya quotes Neuhaus thus,

[...] aesthetic questions, questions of dignity, human values, of the beauty of man's souls, of spiritual greatness concerned me not less, if not more, than the most beautiful sonata of Beethoven.²⁹

Further, Razumovskaya notes that 'Neuhaus's need to identify with the idea of truth was driven by his decision to define himself as a pianist-interpreter who had renounced composition'.³⁰ I suggest that in Selva's case the idea of 'truth' (seeking and transmitting it) is first anchored in her deep Catholic beliefs. The Christian values she feels deeply committed to as a Christian permeate into her role as a performer and as a teacher, where she feels duty bound to share the 'truth'. I also agree with Razumovskaya's assessment of Neuhaus' identification of this idea with his role as

²⁷ Vol. 1, p. vi.

²⁸ Maria Razumovskaya, 'Heinrich Neuhaus: A Performer's Views on the Realisation of Music', *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, 46:2 (2015), 355-369, [Neuhaus'] 'preoccupation with the search for truth in interpretation can be traced back to his formative years', p. 359.

²⁹ Razumovskaya, p. 359 quoting from H. G. Neuhaus, 'Autobiographical Notes. Chapter II (autopsycographical)', in Y.I. Milstein (ed.), *H. G. Neuhaus. Thoughts, Reminiscences, Diaries. Selected Articles. Letters to his Parents*, 2nd ed. (Moscow, 1983), p. 44.

³⁰ Razumovskaya, p. 360.

pianist-interpreter and consider that it also befits Selva's own internal sense of self as an artist.

In summary, Selva's conceptual understanding of piano technique is one that is at the service of musical expression and utilises the whole body fully in order to maximise the resources of the modern piano. This exploitation of pianistic resources has a direct impact on the sound and musical possibilities and Selva arrives there by introducing and placing a strong emphasis on different forms of attack that are related from the outset to different categories of sound. Selva's treatise amalgamates the new possibilities of the modern piano regarding timbre, with an awareness and exploitation of greater and more varied biomechanical processes to create those effects, underpinned by a strong musical understanding that ignites the individual's musical expression.

Her treatise is largely based on her personal and practical observations and teaching practice supported by contemporary and relatively modern literature. Her work rests upon many different authors, particularly Rudolf Maria Breithaupt (1873-1945),³¹ Joseph Schiffmacher (1827-1888),³² and Hugo Riemann (1849-1919)³³ whom she also acknowledges for their observations. Nevertheless, another key influence is Vincent d'Indy. Although it does not seem that he influenced her in the outward expression of her technique, that is, the gestures themselves, or their connection to the music, Selva's framework firmly rests upon the musical pillars from d'Indy's *Cours de composition musicale*.³⁴ The importance of rhythm, accentuation, musical form and deep understanding of musical analysis are characteristic of his teaching. It is upon this solid musical foundation that Selva builds her method.

³¹ Rudolf Maria Breithaupt (1873-1945), pianist, musicologist and writer. His works on piano technique are *Die natürliche Klaviertechnik*, 2 vols (1905, 1909) and *Praktische Studien zur natürlichen Klaviertechnik* (1916-21).

³² Joseph Schiffmacher (1827-1888), Alsatian pianist, student of Thalberg and possibly Chopin. His student, Aline Tasset, reflected his pedagogy in her book *La main et l'âme du piano d'après Schiffmacher*. (Chiantore, pp. 315, 602-03).

³³ Hugo Riemann (1849-1919), German composer, theoretician and writer.

³⁴ Vincent D'Indy, *Cours de composition musicale* (Paris: Durand et Fils, 1912).

In the book, *Style et technique des grands maîtres du piano* published in 1948, only six years after Selva's death, the author, Pierrette Hissarlian-Lagoutte, credits Selva's treatise for its uniqueness and originality.³⁵ She also suggests that Selva was the first pianist successfully to introduce a study of various pianistic touches or attacks in France.

Certes, d'autres avant Blanche Selva semblent avoir pressenti l'importance que prendrait l'étude de l'attaque dans la technique moderne du piano, mais c'est à Blanche Selva, en France que revient sans conteste le mérite d'en avoir indiqué les meilleurs procédés.³⁶

[Admittedly, others before Blanche Selva seem to have foreseen the importance that the study of attack would have in modern piano technique, but the credit for indicating the best methods in France belongs incontestably to Blanche Selva.]

This book is interesting as it discusses the piano technique and teaching of Selva as well as that of Isidor Phillip (1863-1958), Alfred Cortot (1877-1962) and Marie Panthès (1871-1955). Selva is the only one of them who was no longer alive at the point of writing. All of them had by all accounts read the book and approved Hissarlian-Lagoutte's writing. Even, in the case of Isidor Phillip, to the extent of writing a preface:

J'ai lu avec un vif intérêt "Style et Technique" de Mme Hissarlian-Lagoutte. Toute la technique pianistique est détaillée dans ce livre avec une rare intelligence. L'auteur a beaucoup lu, beaucoup retenu, beaucoup pensé. Je souhaite à son ouvrage le succès qu'il mérite.³⁷

[I have read "Style et Technique" by Mme Hissarlian-Lagoutte with great interest. The entire piano technique is detailed in this book with a rare intelligence. The author has read, retained and thought extensively. I wish her book the success it deserves.]

³⁵ Pierrette Hissarlian-Lagoutte, *Style et technique des grands maîtres du piano* (Genève: Éditions Henn, 1948).

³⁶ Hissarlian-Lagoutte, p. 50.

³⁷ Hissarlian-Lagoutte, Preface.

L'Enseignement musical de la technique du piano

Structure and overview

Selva wrote her piano treatise *L'Enseignement musical de la technique du piano* (LEMTP) over a period of nine years. Despite the number of years that separate the several volumes, it is clear that Selva contemplated later volumes early on, as some concepts that appear later are anticipated in preceding books. This is most noticeable in the second volume, which refers often to the third volume (in two parts) published four and five years later respectively.³⁸

However, throughout the different volumes, one can also observe changes in her style and method of delivery. For instance, later books have a stronger biomechanical focus and address a vast amount of preparatory exercises to condition the body away from the piano. Moreover, Selva taught and showcased her method publicly in lecture-recital concerts together with chosen students, for example, the *Exposé et Démonstration de L'Enseignement Logique & Musical du Piano* given at the Salle Pleyel on 9 June 1923.³⁹ In this concert Selva was accompanied by some of her youngest as well as her most senior students.⁴⁰

³⁸ Vol. 2, p. x: 'Le travail rythmique du geste pianistique proprement dit est plus spécialement étudié dans le 3^e Livre, où nous donnons la manière de procéder au travail rythmique de toutes les formes pianistiques, étude qui, seule, fait parvenir à leur plus grande puissance, délicatesse et perfection de réalisation.' [The core of the rhythmic work of the pianistic gesture will be studied in detail in the third book, where we give the procedures for this work in all its pianistic forms, the only type of study that can achieve the greatest type of power, delicacy and perfect execution.]

³⁹ The word 'logique' does not appear in the titles of her books, but she refers to her teaching as such. For instance: 'l'enseignement logique du vrai jeu de piano', (Vol. 1, p. vii) [the logical teaching of true piano playing.]

⁴⁰ The participants were: F. Enders, S. Long-Depaquit, G. Viellard, P. Nathan, J. Aucuey, N. Denizot, C. Montplanet, A. Planchenault, A. Montsabret, E. Eisenschitz, M. A. Mouchonnet, O. Viellard, X. Gardelle, M. Pottecher, F. Londonchutz, M. Solé, A. Foulquier, Y. Collet, G. Compagnon, E. Desclaux, Y. Bertrand, M. Chupin, R. Dupond, and L. Verjychova. The concert was structured in four sections, showcasing different pedagogical aspects:

Résumen du travail élémentaire

Exemples des recherches complémentaires conduisant à l'exécution

Étude musicale du texte et réalisation expressive

Développement de la personnalité artistique de l'exécution

[Summary of elementary work]

As these events and the treatise were reviewed by the press, later volumes also reflect and react to contemporary criticism. For example, in the introduction to the *Livre préparatoire* (1922), Selva writes that she has to refute some ‘nonsense’.

[...] il est pourtant bon de réfuter une des nombreuses sottises qui se débitent sur ces choses (comme sur toute chose nouvelle), sans réflexion, et surtout avec la secrète aversion de tout principe, de tout *ordre* mis à la base de ce que l’on fait.⁴¹

[It is for this reason important to refute one of the many absurdities that are extracted from these things (as with everything that is new), without reflection and particularly with the secret aversion against any principle, any *order* that constitutes the basis of what one does.]

In this instance, she is defending her treatise against the argument that it is not possible to devise a method that suits everyone.

Il est impossible, disent quelques-uns de ces écervelés, qu’il y ait *une* méthode bienfaisante pour *tous*. Chacun a sa personnalité et c’est d’abord elle qu’il faut prendre en considération pour que l’enseignement puisse être fécond.⁴²

[It is impossible, it is argued by some scatterbrains, that there would be *a* good method for *everyone*. Everyone has their personality and it is this that needs to be considered so as to make the teaching productive.]

Selva rejects this with a straightforward, slightly acidic and humorous answer that is characteristic of her prose, by saying that although all different, we are all human, not dogs or insects. As such, one must learn to utilise one’s own body in accordance with the ‘general human constitution’ first. Later, when one has acquired an ability to

Examples of additional elements leading to execution

Musical study of the text and expressive realisation

Development of the artistic personality in the execution.]

In some cases, the same piece was played by several students. The programme consisted of: *Gigue in F major* and *Little Prelude in C minor* by Bach, *La Volta* by Byrd, *Eighth invention* by Bach, *Sonata in D major* by Galuppi, First Movement of the *Sonata in F major* by Mozart, *Prelude and Fugue* by Bach (first book), *Novelette op. 99* by Schumann, *Sonata op. 10 n. 1* by Beethoven, *First Barcarolle* by Fauré, ‘La Fontaine de Chopin’ by D. de Séverac, ‘El Puerto’ by Albéniz and the *Second Barcarolle* by Ducasse. Selva finished the concert performing Debussy’s *Isle Joyeuse*.

⁴¹ LP1, p. vii.

⁴² LP1, p. vii.

employ the muscles effectively and execute all necessary movements, then there will be more scope to consider the aspects of each individual personality.

Puis, quand chacun sait manier tous ses muscles, trouver toutes ses attitudes, réaliser tous ses mouvements – toutes choses qui sont la *richesse commune de la conformation humaine* – l'enseignement s'en vient prendre encore davantage en considération la personnalité individuelle.⁴³

[Later, when everyone knows how to use all their muscles, find the different dispositions, performing all the movements – all the things that are the *common richness of the human configuration* – the teaching comes to take into further consideration the individual personality.]

Selva is not denying the importance of developing artistic personality or attending to the individual needs of each student but proposes a system that is applicable to every individual, as it begins by considering basic principles of human anatomy.

Interestingly, her work is also a dialogue within her own practice and Selva refined her ideas over time. This is demonstrated in the preface of the first preparatory book published in 1922, 6 years after the first volume. In it she acknowledges that her method has been improved and clarified throughout her courses in Paris, the French provinces and abroad. Revealingly, she calls these 'laboratories', where she has 'experimented' in order to acquire the truly expressive way of playing the piano. However, at the time of writing, she considered her method to have been established ('fixé').

Sans nous attarder davantage sur cette mise au point de la valeur du travail qui va être exposé, nous tenons cependant à dire qu'il est le fruit spécial de douze années de perpétuel enseignement, elles-mêmes précédées de recherches préliminaires qui ont mis sur la voie des découvertes essentielles. Cet enseignement a été sans cesse amélioré, clarifié, simplifié et fixé dans nos divers cours de Paris, de province française et de l'Étranger, cours qui ont été les laboratoires et les pépinières où nous avons poursuivi sans relâche nos expérimentations pour parvenir à notre but : le véritable jeu expressif du piano, dans toute la pureté du style et la splendeur de sa manifestation, et la manière d'y atteindre le plus vite et le plus parfaitement, ou, au moins, le moins imparfaitement, le plus musicalement. Cet enseignement est à présent, depuis

⁴³ LP1, p. viii.

plusieurs années, nettement fixé et commence à pouvoir donner les fruits qui sont en lui.⁴⁴

[Without dwelling any longer on the focus of the value of the work that will be presented here, we have to say that it is the product of twelve years of continuous teaching, they themselves preceded by preliminary research that has brought forward essential discoveries. This teaching has been relentlessly improved, clarified, simplified and fixed during our various courses in Paris, the French provinces and abroad, courses that have been laboratories and nurseries where we have followed-up without break our experiments so as to reach our goal: the truthful expressive playing at the piano, with all the purity of style and the splendour of its manifestation, and the procedures to obtain the quickest and the most perfect, or at least, the least imperfect, the most musical. This teaching is at present, after several years, clearly established and it begins to bear the fruits within it.]

Through the different books, Selva supports her detailed explanations and statements by way of her own exercises as well recommending the study of etudes and other musical works by different composers. One such example is *Die Schule des Octavenspiels* op. 48 by Theodor Kullak (1818-1882), of which Selva published her own edition in 1915.⁴⁵ Further, her work is supported by a vast number of graphic examples through which the students and teachers can assess the correct gestures. These were drawn by one of her students, Maguy Chupin (1898-1976).⁴⁶ Moreover, in her text, Selva references a book, *Table de travail*, to be co-authored with Cécile Piriou-Kunc (1884-1976), her student and collaborator for many years.⁴⁷ It was intended to reflect the necessary and fundamental explanations and practical advice about the sequencing of the work at the piano following Selva's treatise. According to Selva, this book was indispensable, but regrettably, it was never published.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ LP1, pp. viii-ix.

⁴⁵ Blanche Selva, *L'Etude des Octaves d'après la Méthode du Jeu d'Octaves de Théodore Kullak. Revue, classée et précédée d'exercices préliminaires avec la manière de travailler par Blanche Selva* (Paris: Roudanez, 1915).

⁴⁶ Maguy Chupin (1898-1976): pianist, composer and painter. She participated as an approved teacher in Selva's courses in Brive and taught following her method in Montauban. Guy Selva, *Blanche Selva : un professeur, des élèves*, p. 45.

⁴⁷ Chapter 5 expands on the role undertaken by Piriou-Kunc as Selva's assistant.

⁴⁸ LP1, p. ix: 'Les explications fondamentales nécessaires et les exercices pratiques indispensables qui sont publiés ici sont suivis, en dernier lieu, d'une *Table de Travail* sans laquelle l'ordre d'étude de ces matières ne saurait être établi comme il est convenable.' [The fundamental and necessary explanations and the indispensable and practical exercises that are

In the first volume of LEMTP, Selva addresses the basic elements concerning the touch or attack at the piano. As will be explained in more detail below, she introduces three main categories to rank these, the *jeu appuyé*, *jeu éclatant* and *jeu indifférent*⁴⁹ as well as another fundamental concept in her treatise, the *neume*, from the Greek *pneuma*, breath. The student workbook presents a summary of all the concepts discussed in this first book as well as a selection of the most important exercises in it.

The second volume deals with double notes and polyphony generally and is centred around the concept of *empreinte* [imprint]. This book also introduces the idea of rotation, but this is not properly elaborated until volume three.

The third volume is divided into two parts. The first picks up on the notion of *empreinte* discussed in the second volume and extends it in order to work on tremolos, exploring the concept of rotation and extending these notions to other types of passage work. The second part deals mainly with scales and arpeggios. Selva's placing of scales at the end of the treatise is a deliberate choice. She considers that these elements are of such complexity, that in order to execute them well they ought to be taught later, as it is necessary to learn and master the different components separately first. Selva complains that scales are given to students in order to acquire technique. She argues that students ought to gain a certain technical competency first, before they can start studying them.

La Gamme, en effet, est le trait le plus complexe d'exécution qui se puisse imaginer. La routine a toujours envisagé comme synonyme : faire des gammes ou apprendre le piano ! [...] Les gammes sont, en effet, considérées par l'enseignement courant, comme une sorte de panacée guérissant ou prévenant toute maladie technique. Que ne leur demande-t-on pas ! Indépendance, force, égalité, agilité, adresse des doigts, connaissance du clavier, legato du jeu, variété et beauté de la sonorité... et bien d'autres choses encore ! Et qu'arrive-t-il ? — Il advient que la gamme, pour être artistiquement réalisée, *demande*, en effet, toutes ces qualités, *mais qu'elle ne les fait point acquérir*. Ce n'est pas en jouant, en répétant, en rabâchant des gammes pendant des heures, des mois et des années que l'on acquiert les qualités qu'elles exigent. On peut ainsi

published here, are followed, finally, by a *Table of Work* without which, the order of study of these topics will not be established as it needs to be.]

⁴⁹ The *jeu appuyé*, *jeu indifférent* and *jeu éclatant* are three distinct modes of attack devised by Selva. Importantly, the author ascribes to them not only a distinct physical realisation but a specific musical application and particular sound characteristics, see below.

constater les déficiences, les déplorer, se décourager de rester à peu près toujours au même degré d'imperfection... car on ne peut qu'y rester. Et la cause de cette impuissance à progresser vient de la multiplicité des éléments techniques mis en œuvre pour la *composition* de la gamme. Sans isoler le travail de ces divers éléments, il est impossible de s'en saisir avec puissance.⁵⁰

[The Scale, in effect, is the most complex feature of execution that one can imagine. They are routinely considered synonymous: do scales or learn to play the piano! [...] Scales are, in effect, considered by the current teaching practice as a kind of curing panacea or a means to prevent every technical illness. Let us not demand it of them! Independence, strength, evenness, agility, finger position, knowledge of the keyboard, legato touch, varied and beautiful tone... and many other things! And what comes out of it? It happens that the scale, to be artistically realised, *demand*s, all those things, *but that is not what enables their acquisition*. It is not by playing, repeating, scales relentlessly for hours, months and years that one acquires the qualities that they demand. This will highlight the defects, disparage them, one will be discouraged to remain more or less at the same level of imperfection... one cannot do anything other than stay put. And the cause of this inability to progress comes from the multiplicity of technical elements that are at play for the *constitution* of the scale. Without isolating the work into these individual components, it is impossible to command them.]

However, it is also important to note that the order in which most elements are to be taught and learned is not linear and that Selva asks the reader to study/teach the concepts of the various books simultaneously throughout the student's piano studies. So, whilst she recommends that the study of the scales appears at a later stage, the mastery of all other concepts in the previous books is not expected from the student before that point. Her only stipulation is that the student begins the learning process with the elements from the first book.⁵¹ This is because Selva considers the second and third books to refer to concepts that relate to acquiring 'virtuosity' at the piano, whilst the first book tackles the understanding of the musical elements and the fundamental relationship between the pianist and the instrument.

⁵⁰ Vol. 3/2, pp. 7-8.

⁵¹ Vol. 2, p. 201: '...l'étude du 1^{er} livre doit, en tous *cas*, *précéder* tout autre travail. [...the study of the first book, must, in every *case*, precede all other work.]

Key precepts of LEMTP

The three touches: *jeu appuyé, jeu éclatant, jeu indifférent*

As was highlighted at the beginning of the chapter, Selva first works through the ideas concerning what she considers the three main touches. These are presented from the outset as entities with an inherent sound world and biomechanical processes and are taught after some preliminary exercises.

To this effect, her initial consideration is body relaxation, 'détente du corps'. This is explained as a requirement to produce a beautiful sound. As such, muscular relaxation is not justified for pianistic ease, for the pianist's comfort, but to gain maximum effect for a good tone production and, consequently, the best possible musical result.

The initial stages of this process concern weight release exercises ('dégager la pesanteur') and learning how to transfer this to the keyboard ('l'apporter au clavier'). In this regard, Selva explains that one has to learn to release the weight of the entire arm and hand, and later learn how to bring that to the keyboard (Vol. 1, p. 6). Selva also argues that this must be learned, as it is not a natural movement since the hand is a grasping organ. In fact, her treatise explores the weight-transfer approach, reliant on inertia and its control, to a greater degree than the prehensile possibilities of the hand, although there is evidence that both formed part of her pianistic tools (see Chapter 7).

An initial exercise on inertia and contact with the piano is presented in Vol. 1, pp. 12-20. It begins with a free-fall exercise of the arm away from the instrument (first stage), progressing into free-fall to the knees, finally releasing or dropping the entire hand on the piano (second and third stages), represented here in Fig. 3.1 and Fig. 3.2. As can be seen through the presented illustrations, the teacher has a leading and tactile role as she actively lifts the arm before letting it drop. If the student tenses at any point, the exercises need to continue or be retraced back a phase. This stage is followed by releasing or dropping individual fingers at the piano through a free fall.

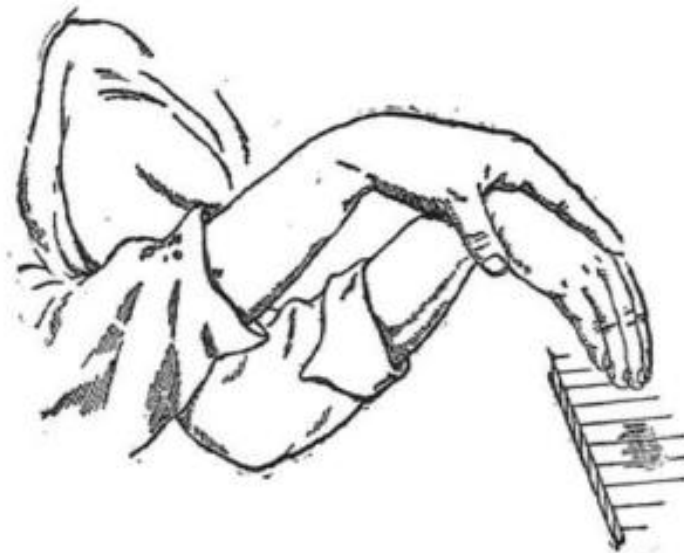


Fig. 1.

Fig. 3.1 – Selva, LEMTP, Vol. 1, p. 12. Fig. 1

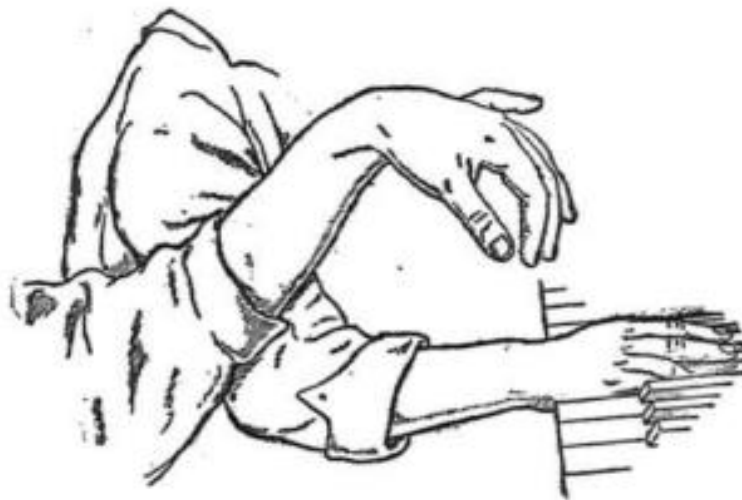


Fig. 2.

Fig. 3.2 – Selva, LEMTP, Vol. 1, p. 12. Fig. 2

After this preparatory stage, Selva introduces the three principal ways of attacking a key (p. 21). They are:

'jeu appuyé : propre au caractère intérieur', supported touch for an inward character;

'jeu éclatant : propre au caractère extérieur', explosive touch for an outward character;
and

'jeu léger ou indifférent : propre au caractère indifférent', light or indifferent touch for a neutral character.

Selva is ascribing a distinct timbre, musical quality and applicability to each individual attack. This provides the pupil with clear pianistic tools. These are precise pianistic gestures that synthesise sound and musical meaning with a physical movement, a holistic embodied practice.

Jeu appuyé

Selva explains this touch first as it comes directly from the free fall, 'chute libre' movement learned previously. In order to play with this touch, the hand must rest, or lean on the piano, transferring the weight of the arm to a different degree according to the musical need.⁵² The only difference as regards the previous freefall exercises is the isolation of each playing finger. As can be seen in Fig. 3.3 below, and is explained by her in Vol. 1, p. 22, the position of the playing finger is vertical, with the fingers at rest, in an extended position, continuing the natural alignment of the hand. As shown by the accompanying exercise, this has to be practised slowly and with the middle finger first, before progressing into the subsequent fingers. The quaver rests in the exercise are not fortuitous. They ease the understanding that each sound has a beginning and end and encourage the student to return to the starting position during the rest in readiness to action the next sound. This is linked with the idea of *neume* that Selva advances later in her book, and will also be explained subsequently in this chapter.

⁵² The *jeu appuyé* 'se fait en laissant la main se reposer, s'appuyer sur le clavier, y laissant, par conséquent, porter son poids, et plus ou moins de la pesanteur du bras, selon les cas' (Vol. 1, p. 21).

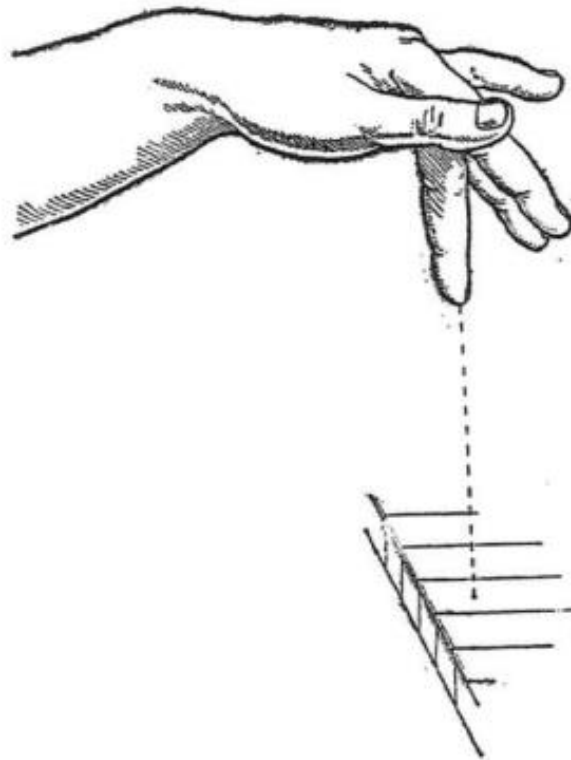


Fig. 10.

Phase a :
Par un seul doigt.



Fig. 3.3 – Selva, LEMTP, Vol. 1 p. 22. Fig. 10

This touch, particularly when using considerable weight, creates the richest and fullest type of sound. According to Selva the attack is deep but never violent.⁵³ This relates to the speed at which the weight is transferred, which cannot be too fast.

She explains that this attack falls always with the musical accent itself, which she also calls tonic accent ('accent Tonique'). As such, this is always the main part of a *neume*.

⁵³ 'la corde étant ainsi ébranlée profondément et sans violence.' [The string being thus vibrated deeply and without violence.]

Jeu éclatant

The second touch she introduces is the *jeu éclatant* (p. 27). This produces a different sonority, which is explosive, incisive and metallic.⁵⁴ Selva employs this touch to highlight certain notes. Descriptively, Selva draws on orchestral timbre to describe this attack as the sound of a trumpet which cuts across the entire ensemble.⁵⁵

To produce it, the hand and wrist maintain outwardly the appearance of the *jeu appuyé*. However, importantly, the musculature of the fingers, hand and wrist must be strongly contracted in the preparatory position. In direct opposition with the previous touch, this is not a free fall, but a voluntary and fast release that touches the key abruptly (p. 28).

Nevertheless, Selva writes that a huge variety of sounds can be produced with this touch attending to the distance between hand and piano, speed, relative contraction of the muscles, and finally, the angle at which the fingers intersect with the keys. This touch is not only for the strongest **ff** metallic attacks, but very soft **pp** bell-like effects can be produced if, as exemplified in Fig. 3.4, the key is struck at a very close distance, and touched by the finger pad and not the tip, that is, varying the angle of contact.

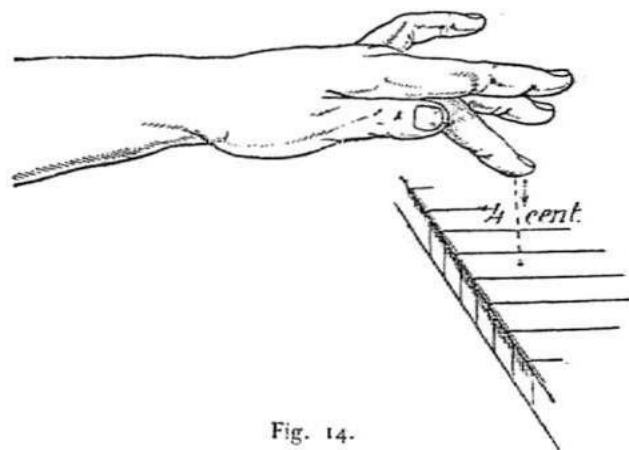


Fig. 3.4 – Selva, LEMTP, Vol. 1, p. 29. Fig. 14

⁵⁴ 'une sonorité éclatante, incisive, quasi cuivrée'. [A brilliant sound, incisive, almost metallic.]

⁵⁵ Vol. 1, p. 26: 'C'est lui qui fait *saillir* certaines notes, les mettant comme en relief sur les autres, à l'instar d'une trompette sur le reste de l'orchestre, par exemple'. [It is this that makes some notes *stand out*, highlighting them above others, like a trumpet cutting across the orchestra, for example.]

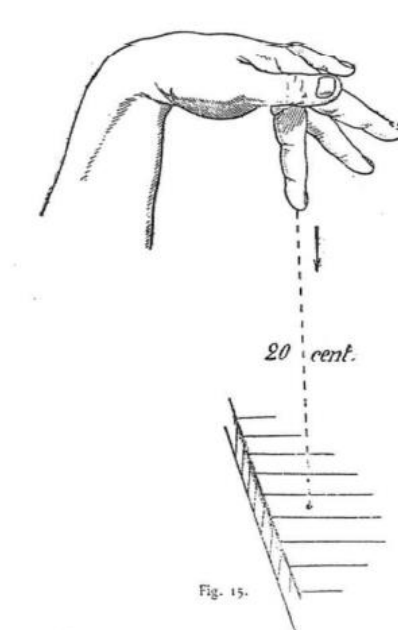


Fig. 3.5 – Selva, LEMTP, Vol. 1, p. 29. Fig. 15

By contrast, as shown in Fig 3.6, high distance, vertical finger, contracted hand and fast speed would produce a strong and metallic sound. This clearly evidences that each of these touches are broad categories where basic modes of play are grouped. However, vast differences coexist, not only between them, but within each type. Selva's technique and pedagogy are not therefore about presenting 'three types of attack' but a system of categorisation to better understand, assimilate and access the myriad possibilities of timbre production at the piano.

Jeu indifférent

Finally, on page 31 Selva introduces the *jeu léger ou indifférent*. This touch is what Selva considers to be most commonly used to play the piano.⁵⁶

The type of sound that it produces is of medium intensity, without particular richness or bright timbre. For this reason, she argues that this touch is ideal for accompaniment patterns, secondary melodies, or instances where the music requires a separation of the voices. In order to execute it, this attack requires the 'classical position of the

⁵⁶ Vol. 1, p. 31: 'ainsi nommé parce que la main, pour l'exécuter, retient la plus grande partie de son poids, est ce que l'on appelle, communément le jeu normal du piano'. [So called because the hand, in order to execute it, retains most of its weight, and this is what we commonly call the normal touch at the piano.]

hand'. For Selva this consists in creating a horizontal line between the hand, wrist and forearm, with more or less curved fingers, depending on the case.⁵⁷

The distance can be medium to close up, but never at great height, as the sonority will be poor (p. 31). However, this type of touch can be very versatile, and within it, various modes of play are available, from the finger, wrist or elbow.⁵⁸ Fig. 3.6 represents the elbow touch, Fig. 3.7 shows the attack from the wrist, and finally, the pure finger attack is shown in Fig. 3.8. The given distance of attack is only intended as a teaching aid when learning these principles in isolation first. Once they are applied to the music, any given distance will have to be adapted to match the musical intention and the sound of each piano in a given space. As can be seen by the visual representations and her explanations above, the finger disposition is rounded and not vertical as with the preceding touches.

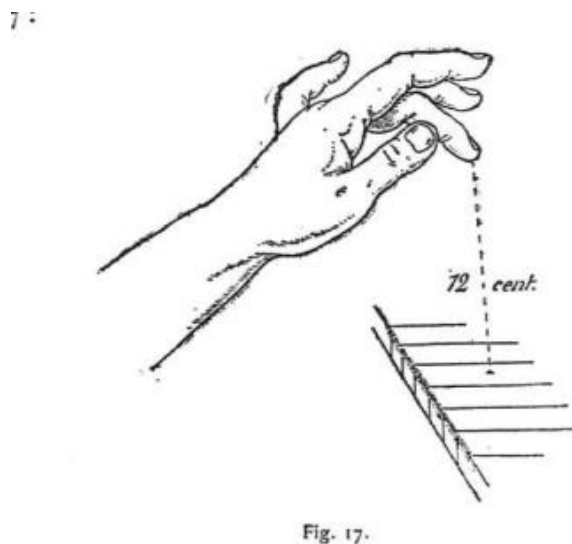


Fig. 3.6 – Selva, LEMTP, Vol. 1, p. 32. Fig. 17

⁵⁷ Vol. 1, p. 31: 'position classique, de la main : la main, le poignet et l'avant-bras faisant corps en une ligne horizontale, les doigts plus au moins arrondis, suivant les cas'. [Classic position of the hand: the wrist and the forearm in a horizontal line with regard to the body, the fingers more or less rounded, depending on the case.]

⁵⁸ Vol. 1, p. 31: 'ce jeu peut être attaqué, soit par l'articulation du doigt, soit par celle du poignet, soit par celle du coude, suivant la force de sonorité à produire' [This touch can be produced by the articulation of the finger, the wrist, and the elbow according to the strength of sonority desired.]

puis par celle du poignet, fig. 18 :

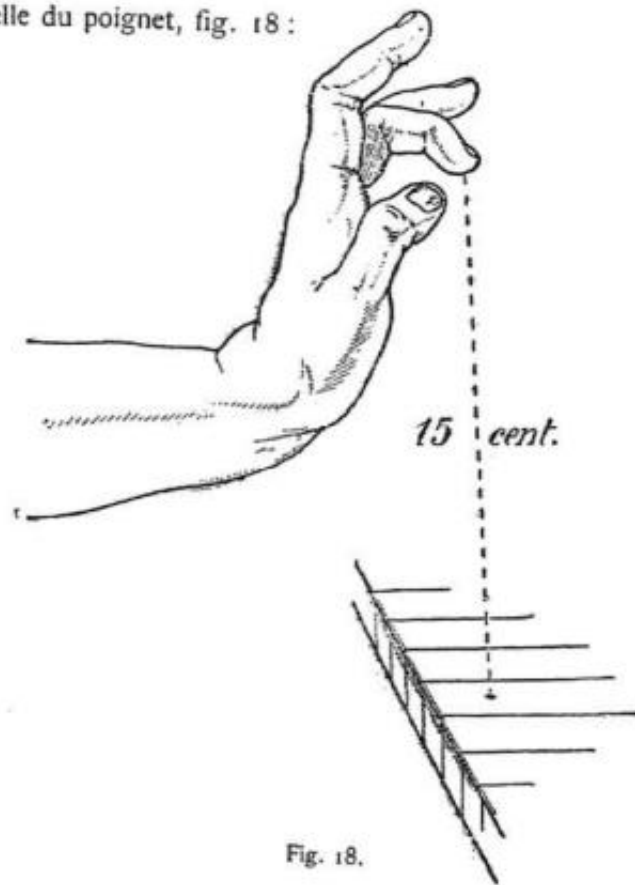


Fig. 3.7 – Selva, LEMTP, Vol. 1, p. 33. Fig. 18

enfin par celle du doigt seul, fig. 19 :

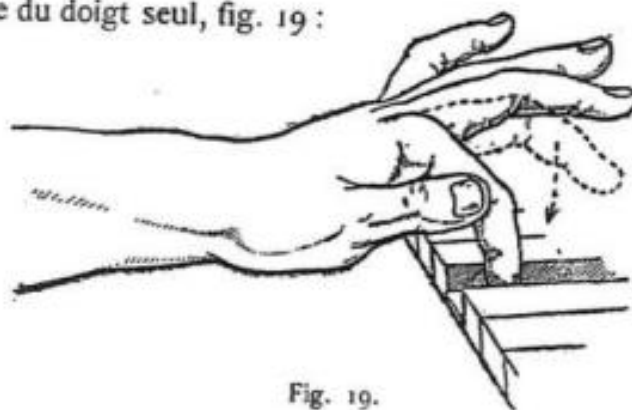


Fig. 3.8 – Selva, LEMTP, Vol. 1, p. 33. Fig. 19

According to Selva, it is the *jeu indifférent* of the fingers alone (Fig. 3.8) which will produce the *staccatissimo leggierissimo*, which she argues also needs to be executed

with a stiff arm. As the *jeu indifférent* can be produced by fingers, wrist or forearm, she stresses the need to practice the exercises in all of these variants as well as in combination with the other touches. Fig. 3.9 shows one such example. This example illustrates the simplicity of her exercise in terms of ‘notes on the page’, yet the complexity in terms of dexterity of execution when considering the demands made on the pianist as to the frequency of changes of attacks is considerable. In further exercises, Selva also asks for different changes to occur simultaneously across both hands.

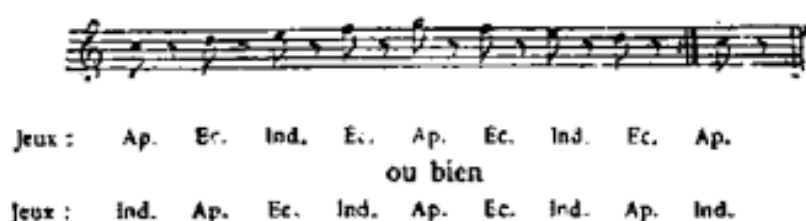


Fig. 3.9 – Selva, LEMTP, Vol. 1, p. 34. Ex. 5

The approach could not be more different from that of her contemporaries. As an illustrative example, Malwine Brée’s *Die Grundlage der Methode Leschetizky* from 1902, and so written only 14 years earlier.⁵⁹ This book is a compilation of the ideas and system of the acclaimed Polish pianist and teacher Theodor Leschetizky (1830-1915), a former student of Czerny, and teacher of twentieth century piano legends such as Artur Schnabel (1882-1951) and Ignacy Paderewski (1860-1941). Although written by his student, Malwine Brée, the book had the approval of her teacher, as demonstrated by allowing the book to have illustrations of his own hand and a written preface.

Quoting from the English translation, Leschetizky stated that:

[...] I am in principle no friend of theoretical Piano-Methods; but your excellent work, which I have carefully examined, is such a brilliant exposition of my personal views, that I subscribe, word for word, to everything you advance therein. Your “Groundwork of the Leschetizky Method” leads with a practised hand along the same path on which, for many years, you have won such striking success as my assistant by teaching in accord with my intention. [...] Approving the illustrations of my hand as genuine and lifelike, I declare your

⁵⁹ Malwine Brée, *Die Grundlage der Methode Leschetizky* (Vienna: G. Schirmer, 1902) translated into English by Dr. Th. Baker as *The Groundwork of the Leschetizky Method* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1905).

book to be the sole authorized publication explanatory of my method, and wish it all success and popularity.⁶⁰

This example is also apt, because it was available to Selva in its French edition, *Base de la méthode Leschetizky* (Paris: E. Fromont, 1902), and, she quotes from it in relation to rotation, as will be shown below. Further, her playing had been compared to that of the Leschetizky school by some reviewers, as noted in the previous chapter.

It is important to highlight that the scope of the Brée/Leschetizky's succinct 100-page long method is different from Selva's at the outset. As noted in the conclusion (p. 100), the intended readers of Brée/Leschetizky's book are 'piano-players who may be assumed to possess more than a rudimentary pianistic training'. The extent of that knowledge, however, is not explained, although the author notes that this does not 'preclude the instruction of beginners or even children, according to the Method' either. In contrast, Selva's instructions are intended to guide a teacher to impart its precepts without any assumed knowledge. Further, Brée/Leschetizky's method does not depart from the five-finger 'neutral' position at the piano, relying entirely on it as its basis. Fig. 3.10 and 3.11 below show some of the first illustrations of the method, evidencing the traditional approach of a curved hand in close contact to the piano. Fig. 3.12 shows the first exercise in the book, which likewise relies on the nineteenth-century tradition of five-finger exercises with held notes, to be executed with a completely still arm. The negative consequences of these exercises are well documented in the piano technique literature of the last fifty years of the twentieth century. For example, the Hungarian pianist and writer György Sándor (1902-2005) writes in his book *On Piano Playing. Motion, Sound and Expression* from 1981:

There is a great deal wrong with this approach. The role of the forearm muscles is to act as an antagonistic set – the flexors pull the fingers down, and the extensors raise them. When the four inactive fingers in the exercises continually press down the keys instead of resting, their flexors are under continuous tension: this state is not only unnecessary but harmful...We need the horizontal, vertical, and depth adjusting motions to place the finger properly.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Brée, non-paginated preface.

⁶¹ György Sándor, *On Piano Playing. Motion, Sound and Expression* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1981), p. 159.

Other nineteenth-century conceptually ingrained traditions present in the Brée/Leschetizky Method are observed in the demand to raise the weaker fingers as high as possible,⁶² and little to no movement from the wrist and arm (p. 14, '[t]ake care in all these exercises to keep the hand quiet, and the wrist loose but unmoved; neither must the elbow rise when the elbow passes under'). All of these processes are reminiscent of the 'old' piano tradition.



FIG. 1. HOW TO HOLD THE RIGHT HAND

Fig. 3.10 – Brée, p. 2. Fig. 1

⁶² 'These two [4th and 5th fingers] must, however, be raised as high as possible, so that the hampered 4th finger may acquire more independence and the 5th more strength', Brée, p. 6.



FIG. 3

Fig. 3.11 – Brée, p. 4. Fig. 3



Fig. 3.12 – Brée, p. 6. Ex. 1

Reverting to the (French) finger-school, or finger independence⁶³ this is something that is also touched upon by Selva but her specific and detailed approach is different. Selva explains the necessary movement as folding the fingers from the metacarpal joint towards the inside of the hand. For Selva it is important that the other fingers remain extended, prolonging the line of the hand, rather than curved all the time, which she calls *articulation maxima* and which is discussed in greater detail below (Fig. 3.13).

C'est à dire *pliant* l'articulation qui l'attache à la main, pour rapprocher le doigt de l'intérieur de la main, [...] tandis que les autres doigts restent allongés,

⁶³ Vol. 1, p. 67: 'ce que l'on appelle *l'indépendance des doigts*, "l'articulation", suivant le jargon courant'. [what one calls *finger independence*, "articulation" in the current jargon.]

naturellement : c'est-à-dire continuent à prolonger la ligne de la main, comme si elle n'avait pas la possibilité de se replier sur elle-même. [...] C'est là tout ce qui est nécessaire au jeu de piano.⁶⁴

[That is, *folding* the finger from the articulation by which it is joined to the hand, in order to approach the finger towards the inside of the hand, [...] whilst the other fingers remain extended naturally: that is in prolongation of the line of the hand, as if the finger had no possibility of folding with itself. [...] This is everything that is necessary to play the piano.]

Selva argues that this finger extension, the 'travail à doigts étendus' confers the greatest possible independence immediately. Moreover, she considers this work to be exploiting the natural movements of the body, instead of advocating a type of articulation that is against the nature of the body. Specifically, raising the fingers higher than the level of the hand (as predicated by Brée/Leschetizky) belongs to this 'anti-natural' category, and according to Selva constitutes a very serious mistake.⁶⁵ However, it is this type of articulation that has permeated the most and is usually synonymous with 'finger technique'. In Dean Elder's interview with Jeanne-Marie Darré already discussed above, he notes how 'She [Darré] illustrated 'articulation', lifting the muscular finger high, striking hard'.⁶⁶ It is this high finger technique which was also discussed by Timbrell as a characteristic of the French School of piano. In her treatise, Selva offers a clear physical description as to how her technique differs from this entirely.

Articulation maxima and minima

Extending from the finger articulation described above, in her treatise Selva discusses a juxtaposition between the *articulation maxima* and *minima*. The *articulation minima*, as the name suggests consists of a small stroke from the finger towards the inside of the hand whilst already in contact with the key (Vol. 1, p. 71).

⁶⁴ Vol. 1, p. 67.

⁶⁵ Vol. 1, p. 67: 'C'est, là, la grave erreur que l'on commet lorsque l'on veut obliger le doigt à se relever au-dessus du niveau du dos de la main.' [It is here that the serious mistake is made when one tries to force the fingers to lift above the level of the palm of the hand.]

⁶⁶ Elder, p. 78.

The *articulation maxima* however, is presented as a stronger element to develop the technique further as well as a study aid. In this regard, *articulation maxima* ought to be used at the initial stages of passage-work study, the finger movements being reduced over time when the section is better assimilated and there is an increased speed. This is a diametrically opposed approach to that evidenced in Brée/Leschetizky where the close contact of the fingers at the piano through held-notes in five-finger position variants is the starting point of the method.

It is interesting to note that epistolary evidence has been found in which Selva not only advocates this type of articulation to her students for their own practice but admits to practising herself this way.⁶⁷ Furthermore, Aldo Ciccolini (1925-2015) discusses its applicability in his book *Je suis un lirico spinto...*⁶⁸ Ciccolini describes the *articulation maxima* as a toning exercise as follows:

Je me souviens d'un exercice que j'ai beaucoup pratiqué à une époque, préconisé par Blanche Selva pour renforcer le métacarpe. Il consiste à jouer des sons avec la main complètement contractée, comme si l'on voulait pousser les doigts qui ne jouent pas en avant et vers le haut. On passe ainsi d'un doigt à l'autre en gardant les doigts perpendiculaires. Elle parle de cet exercice dans sa méthode et si l'on travaille pendant dix minutes, on a l'impression d'avoir des phalanges en acier et des doigts faciles. C'est un merveilleux exercice pour tonifier la main.⁶⁹

[I remember an exercise recommended by Blanche Selva to reinforce the metacarpal joint that I used to practice a lot for a time. It consists of playing with the hand completely contracted, as if you aimed to place the fingers that aren't playing high. One has to go through the different fingers observing the perpendicular angle of the others. She discusses this exercise in her method and if one works at it for ten minutes, one has the impression of having iron phalanxes and light fingers. It is a wonderful exercise to tone the hand.]

Ciccolini's recommendation of this exercise provides an example of the endurance and permeability of Blanche's ideas through the pianism of the twentieth century, although

⁶⁷ Letter to Andrée Vidal, 23 May 1938. [Unpublished letter, AABS.]

⁶⁸ Aldo Ciccolini, *Je suis un lirico spinto..., Entretien avec Pascal Le Corre*, (Paris: Van de Velde, 2006), p. 52. I am very grateful to Guy Selva for drawing my attention to this text.

⁶⁹ Ciccolini, p. 52.

it is admittedly only a small fraction of Selva's overall technique. Nevertheless, it is an example of its effectiveness as recommended by another important French pianist.

For instance, as explained in Ex. 11, and Ex. 12 of Vol. 1 (pp. 8 and 9) shown here as figures 3.13 and 3.14, it is the notion of release and upwards movement of the finger that has just played that I have found very helpful to myself and to my students.

EX. 11 Exercice pour apprendre à tenir un doigt abaissé pendant qu'un autre se lève. Articulation maxima

Fig. 3.13 – Selva, LEMTP, Vol. 1, p. 8

EX. 12**Exercice des cinq doigts sans tenue
Articulation maxima**

Fig. 3.14 – Selva, LEMTP, Vol. 1, p. 9

After reading Selva's text, I began to observe my pupils. I noticed that those students who struggled with speed were striking the keys fast downwards, but they were not properly releasing the fingers after the attack. They experienced tension, the sound was uneven and sloppy, and they could not play up to speed or sustain the speed for the entire passage or scale. After I started practising with them, both with *articulation maxima* and highlighting the importance of releasing the finger after it has played, the positive results were very noticeable and, in some cases, even immediate. Further, emphasising work on the metacarpal joint, and realising its importance for the optimal alignment of the hand have been crucial for my pianistic understanding.

Neume: Synthesis of musical idea and gesture

After completing the study of these main forms of attack, Selva introduces her pivotal and central idea that ties together the physical, acoustic and written elements of music: the *neume*. She explains that she has chosen this old Gregorian term for the accuracy of its meaning: air or breath.⁷⁰ The use of this term is attributable to the strong influence of the Schola Cantorum in her work. As already discussed, Selva taught and performed regularly in this institution, which emphasised the study of the *ancienne-musique*. Further, Selva attended Gregorian chant lessons at the Schola Cantorum, a discipline that she advocated to her own students, even offering lessons on the subject in the piano summer courses she organised in her own home in Brive.

⁷⁰ Vol. 1, p. 36: '*Neume*, du grec, pneuma, souffle, air.'

In fact, throughout all of her books, although most notably in the first one, the idea of singing and melodic line is mentioned constantly, such as in her analogy between speech and music and the reiteration of the importance of accentuation within the different *neumes*. As such, understanding what and where the musical accent falls is another fundamental tenet of the *neume*. Selva defines the accent as both a point of rest and of action.

L'accent est le point vers lequel tendent ou convergent des forces en action et où elles se reposent; le point où l'action atteint son maximum et où elle entre dans le repos. Il est donc à la fois mouvement et repos.⁷¹

[The accent is the point at which the forces in action converge and where they rest; it is the point where the action reaches its maximum and where it rests. It is therefore both movement and rest.]

Joining the concepts of *neume* and accent together, Selva explains that the meaning of a *neume* is an accent in movement, and an accent is a support [*appui*].⁷² The *appui* translates pianistically to the point of rest [*repos*] at the piano. Each *neume* is a unit of musical meaning with a point of support, or greater inflection than the rest, with pulling forces towards it, and departing from it thereafter, which are produced by vertical wrist and arm movements. Circling back to the already studied forms of attack, Selva explains therefore that a single sound already constitutes a *neume*.

The general application that she proposes consists of employing a downward motion to coincide with a strong musical part and an upwards wrist motion to lighten the sound. The translating of graphical musical representation at the piano is then largely regarded as having to group different melodic *neumes* together (p. 36), a practice that Selva considers to be of an artistic nature (p. 73). Fig. 3.15 gives an outline of the basic forms of *neume*.

⁷¹ Vol. 1, p. 36.

⁷² Vol. 1, p. 37: 'Le *neume* est donc un *accent en mouvement*, en activité'.

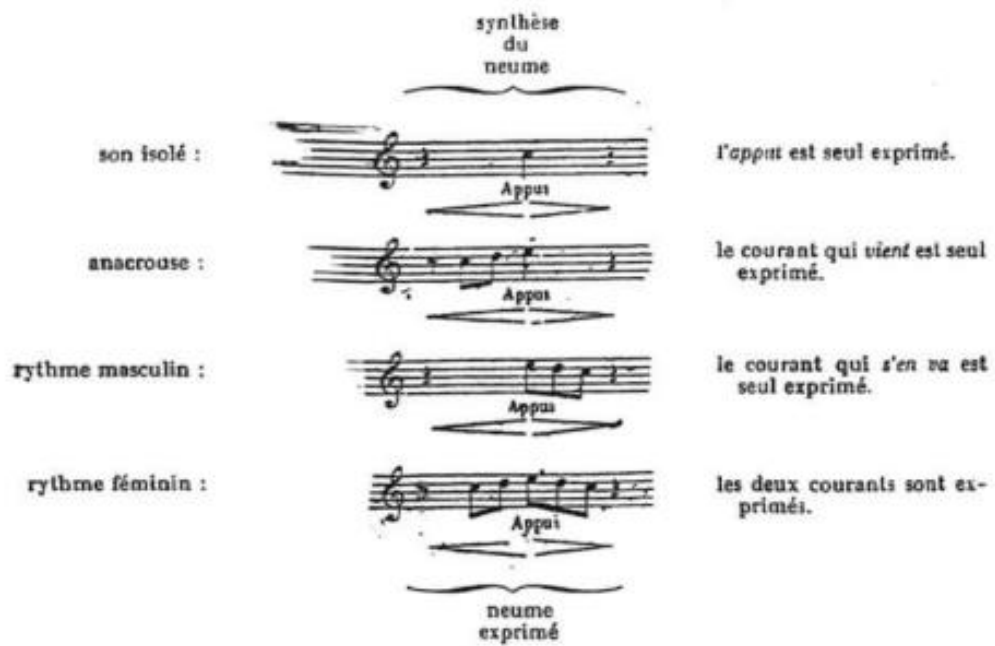


Fig. 3.15 – Selva, LEMTP, Vol. 1, p. 47

A *neume* is therefore an embodied idea with its own ontological meaning. It is the cognitive assimilation of the musical notation translated into a physical gesture that is linked to a concrete sound effect.

As with many of her ideas, the concepts that she discusses can be easily transferred and adapted to different musical landscapes. For instance, taking as an example a simple *neume* consisting of two notes, what Selva calls 'Travail du *neume* de deux notes. Rythme masculine' shown here in Fig. 3.16.

EX. 15

**Travail du neume de deux notes.
Rythme masculin**



La main gauche deux octaves plus bas. Mains séparées.

Geste de l'exécution du neume de rythme masculin¹

Pose attente,
de préparation

Accent



Appui

Allègement progressif de la main obtenu par un geste continu de relèvement du poignet, jusqu'au moment où, la main étant dressée verticalement, le poignet, continuant à s'élever, détache le doigt de la touche pour le silence.

Comptez : I

II

III

IV

Fig. A)
Position
d'attente.

(Fig. B)

Position
d'appui.

Geste
d'allègement
par le
relèvement
du poignet.

(Fig. C)

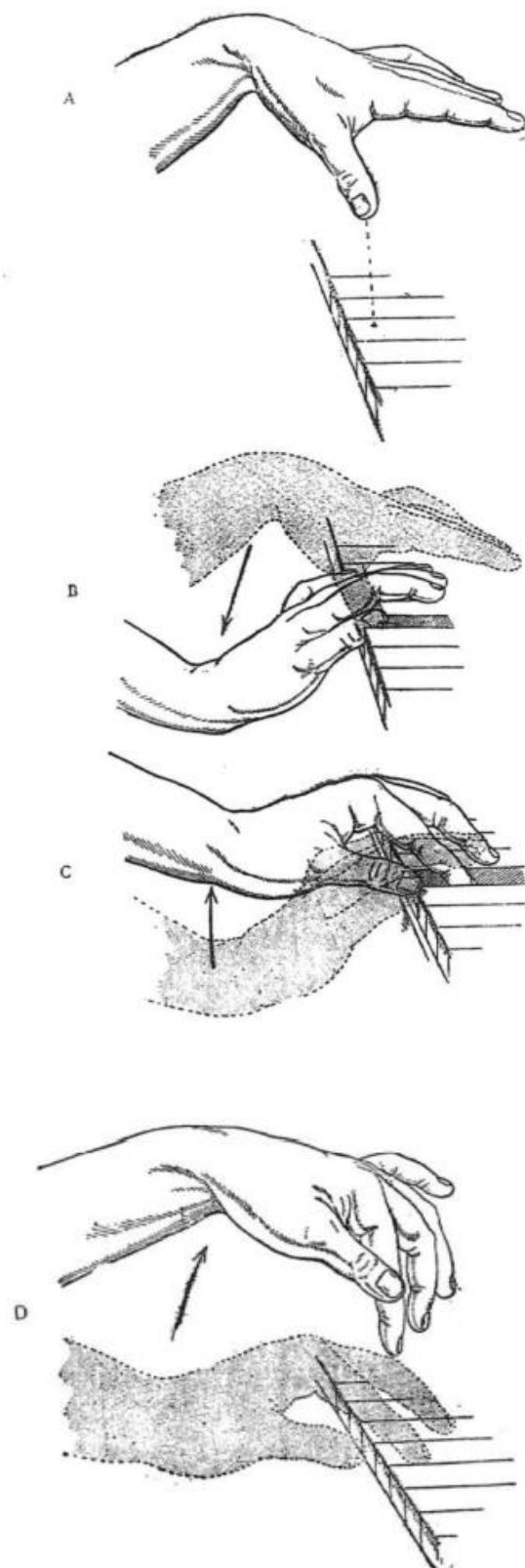
Position
à peu près
horizontale
qu'à la main
au moment
de jouer la
2^e note.

Continuation
du geste
d'allègement
par le
relèvement
du poignet.

(Fig. D)

Geste du silence se trou-
vant être la pose
d'attente pour un neume
suivant, s'il y a lieu.

Fig. 3.16 – Selva, LEMTP, Vol. 1, p. 74, Ex. 15



Dessin 29.

Fig. 3.17 – Selva, LEMTP, Vol. 1, pp. 76-77

The little notated exercise shows a sequence of pairs of notes a second apart (Fig. 3.16). Each pair is slurred, and Selva has added a diminuendo sign under each. She has also notated the second note shorter than the first. In addition to her explanations in the body of the text of the treatise, Selva has additional notes under the exercise (p. 74) represented here in Fig. 3.16, where she has broken down the *neume* into 4 different stages or positions, with two additional intermediate transition stages, each accompanied with further drawings (Fig. A to D, represented here in Fig. 3.17).

In summary, each pair is to be played using the *jeu appuyé* to mark the tonic of the pair (the first note) first through a downward movement with a flexible wrist, and to graduate the movement in the upward release of the following note so as to produce a legato and diminuendo effect, with a second note that is both shorter and quieter.

Selva's meticulous style of delivery and her ability to break down concepts into smaller constituent parts for pedagogical purposes is also strongly in evidence here.

This *neume* can be extrapolated to repertoire as diverse in terms of difficulty and style such as Beethoven's pairs of quavers of his famous *Tempest* sonata (Sonata op. 31 no. 2), represented here in Fig. 3.18, to the little pairs of seconds in bars 2, 4 and 7 from Friedrich Burgmüller's (1806-1874) etude op. 100 no. 5, *Innocence* (Fig. 3.19) for beginners or Béla Bartók's (1881-1945) slurred seconds in his *Mikrokosmos* vol. 2 no. 49 (Fig. 3.20), not to mention countless passages in piano sonatas of the Classical era.



Fig 3.18 – Beethoven, Sonata op. 31 no. 2, bb. 1-6

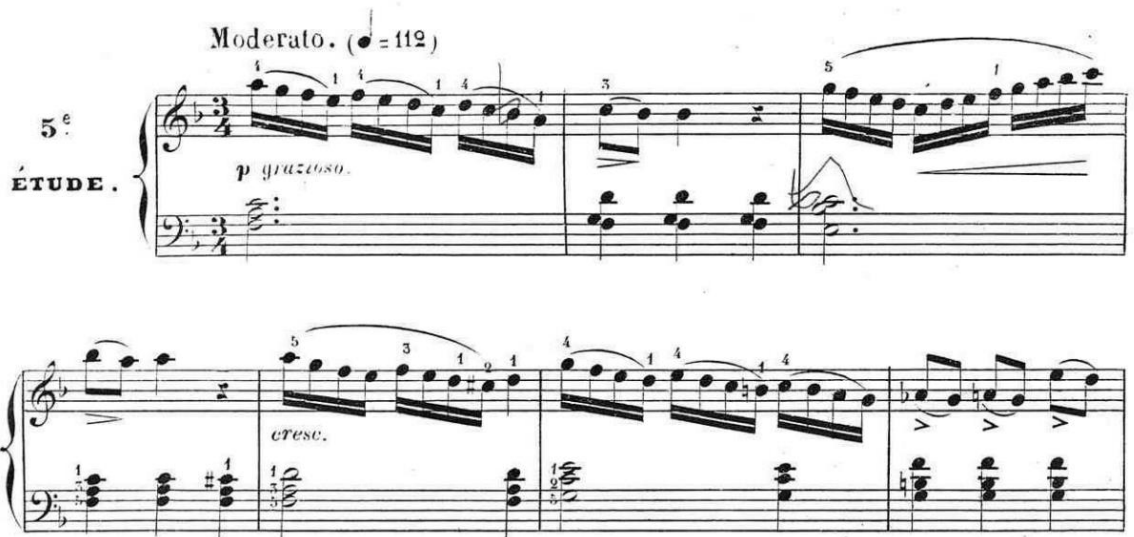


Fig. 3.19 – Burgmüller, Etude op. 100 n. 5, *Innocence*, bb 1-7



Fig. 3.20 – Bartók, *Mikrokosmos*, vol. 2 no. 49, 'Crescendo – Diminuendo', bb. 1-4

The inflection of the gradation of sound will inevitably have to adapt to each composer and will be contingent in its realisation to the level of each individual student or pianist. However, what Selva teaches is to understand notation, with its corresponding sound and gesture at once. The decoding of written music into sound and physical gesture is therefore simplified by teaching (and learning) to understand units of musical meaning that are interlinked with biomechanical processes (*neumes*).

Further, she links the idea of *neumes* with speech (p. 38). Selva writes that when these elements function in their correct proportion, 'letters become words', rendering meaning and expression. This is of paramount importance and something that underpins all her ideas, as her ambition is to fulfil her musical 'duty', which she understands as best to express the composer's ideas through her own personal expression. Selva places huge importance on the cogent understanding of the musical text, as this is what shapes the correct physical assimilation of those ideas. The musical

thought becomes gesture, and only the right gesture conveys the correct musical meaning. To further exercise the student's understanding of phrasing and accentuation at the piano, Selva advocates the practice of Josèphe Géry's *100 Exercices pour l'indépendance de l'accentuation entre les mains*, which has an introduction and annotations by Selva, including fingerings.⁷³ Written in canonic form and sequenced in increasing level of difficulty, most are just 4 to 8 bars long compositions that work on different musical patterns, keys and musical expression. They all contain markings which are similar to hairpins, although as explained by Selva on p. 1 these are to be understood as signalling the musical contour. Fig. 3.21 and Fig. 3.22 show exercises 1 and 51 for illustrative purposes.

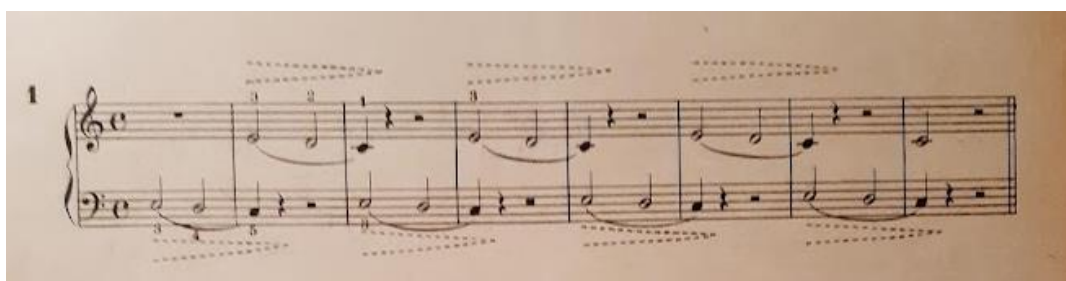


Fig. 3.21 – Géry, *100 Exercises*, no. 1, p. 1

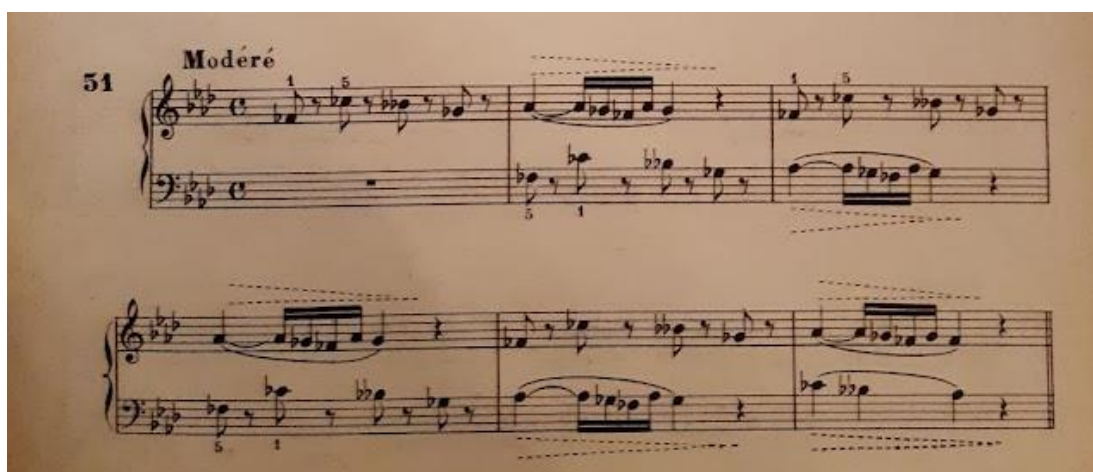


Fig. 3.22 – Géry, *100 Exercises*, no. 51, p. 13

⁷³ Josèphe Géry, *100 Exercices pour l'indépendance de l'accentuation entre les mains* (Paris: Dulieux, 1915).

Empreinte

The notion of *empreinte* or imprint, is another key concept in Selva's technical approach and one, as will be shown later, that is also inherently bound to her holistic understanding of music and piano technique. However, the concept is not of her own coinage and as stated on page 12 of the second volume, she credits Schiffmacher and Rieman as two examples of other teachers who have already advocated its use.

To define it, Selva simply states that the hand adopts the shape of the chord it is going to play, that it knows and preserves this *empreinte*, in order to have a beautiful execution of double notes.

Pour obtenir ces divers points nécessaires à la belle exécution des « doubles notes », il s'ensuit que la main doit prendre, pour ainsi dire, la forme de l'accord, c'est-à-dire connaître et garder l'empreinte quelle reçoit au clavier, du fait de cette agrégation de sons qui oblige les doigts à se disposer de diverses manières selon la constitution de l'intervalle ou de l'accord.⁷⁴

[In order to acquire these different necessary aspects for a beautiful execution of double notes, it follows that the hand must adopt, so to speak, the shape of the chord, that is, to know and keep the shape that it receives from the keyboard, from the addition of sounds that compels the fingers to be disposed in different forms according to the constitution of the interval or the chord.]

In my view, her definition understates the significance and dimension of the concept, although the vast number of exercises she provides, and the length of time dedicated to it in the second volume are testament to the relevance of *empreinte* in her technique and pedagogy.

In Selva's definition the mental element in the preparation of 'the hand' appears to be under-explained. However, in my opinion it is precisely the duality of mental and biomechanical readiness which makes the concept of *empreinte* so useful for the pianist.

⁷⁴ Vol. 2, p. 11.

In alignment with Ben Spatz, who postulates that embodied practice is epistemic,⁷⁵ I consider this to be a clear example of embodied practice at the piano. According to Spatz,

“embodiment” absolutely does not refer to a distinction between mind and body. [...] My assumption here is that mind and body are holistically intertwined — or rather, following current trends in cognitive studies, that mind is an emergent property of body, just as body is the material basis for mind. Therefore, when I refer to “embodiment” and “embodied practice” throughout this book, I mean to include all of the following: thought, mind, brain, intellect, rationality, speech and language.⁷⁶

In the case of Selva’s use of *empreinte*, the hand adopts a particular shape because it knows this shape to belong to a certain group of notes, which in turn will be actioned with that *empreinte*. The sound comes out once the notes have been played, but the sound was already embodied in the prepared hand, in the *empreinte* before it was actioned. The hand shape, the *empreinte* itself is an embodied musical feature, a physical representation of sound.

Selva expands through the entire book on this concept, offering myriad ways to train the hands and the mind, by working on hands separately, alternating, together, over small distances, large distances, etc., but in my opinion the beauty and effectiveness of the *empreinte* lies in the understanding of the fundamental principle upon which it rests, namely that *empreinte* is a powerful synergic concept encapsulating mind, body and sound together.

This mental activity and anticipation of the musical material is also expressed as ‘porter son attention en avant de la realisation’ [bring your attention before realisation] (Vol. 2, p. 6), where she is discussing sight-reading and note learning.

⁷⁵ Ben Spatz, *What a Body Can Do* (Oxford: Routledge, 2015), p. 26: ‘*Embodied practice is epistemic*. It is structured by and productive of knowledge.’

⁷⁶ Spatz, p. 11.

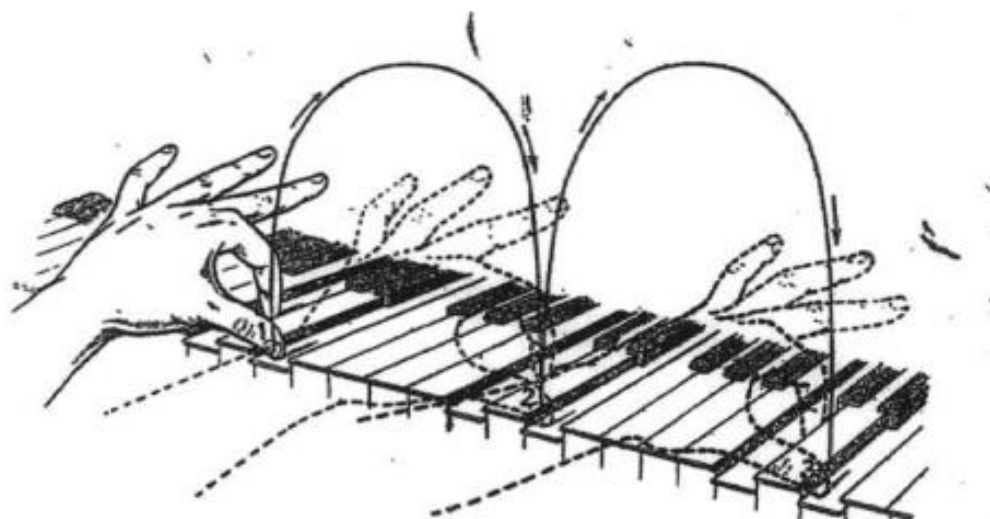


Fig. 3.23 – Selva, LEMTP, Vol. 2, p. 36

Selva also discusses how to navigate the piano when confronted with leaps. Her exercises consist of working on different note patterns across the keyboard, be it in seconds or octaves. The movement is, as shown in Fig. 3.23 that of a semicircle with a quicker or slower rebound at each point depending on the speed of the music.

Rotation

Rotation is another key concept in Selva's pedagogy and one that highlights the transformation of her understanding of piano technique as well as pedagogical practice through time. Rotation only appears twice in passing in the first book,⁷⁷ whilst there is no mention of it in the student's book at all, wrist movements are only described as vertical upwards and downwards movement. However, rotation becomes

⁷⁷ Vol. 1, p. 50: 'Les mouvements latéraux, rotation, etc., gouvernent le déplacement de la main sur le clavier'. [Lateral movements, rotation etc, govern the displacement of the hand across the keyboard.] and p. 119: 'Ces exercices étant bien possédés, on travaille progressivement les exercices 17, 18, 21 à 25 inclus, en suivant, tandis que l'on commence l'étude des principes des Empreintes, de l'alternance ou de la simultanéité de l'action des deux mains, des divers degrés dynamiques et de leurs superpositions, ainsi que les principes concernant le déplacement de la main par les mouvements de rotation du poignet et de l'épaule, la pronation, supination, etc.' [Once these exercises have been acquired, one works progressively through the exercises 17, 18, 21 to 25 inclusive, continuing, whilst beginning the study of the principles of the imprints, with the alternation or the simultaneity of actions across both hands, the various dynamic degrees and their superposition, as well as the principles relating the displacing of the hand through the rotatory movements of the wrist and the shoulder, pronation, supination, etc.]

a prominent feature in Selva's third and preparatory volumes, which were written later.

In the introduction to the first part of her third volume, Selva explains rotation as the movement by which the arm leads the hand.⁷⁸ Moreover, in this introduction she also opens a window to the general pedagogical practices of her time as she states that:

Ces mouvements, longtemps prohibés par la routine pédagogique, sont, pourtant, des mouvements *instinctifs* de déplacement, des gestes *naturels*, déterminés par la conformation humaine elle-même. Aussi, quelles que soient les barrières factices qu'on leur oppose, la rigidité erronée à laquelle on condamne les membres des *élèves*, ces mouvements sont-ils *obligés* de se produire dans l'exécution artistique. Les *artistes* les emploient, qu'ils s'en rendent compte ou non.⁷⁹

[These movements, forbidden for a long time by pedagogical routine, are instinctive movements of transfer, natural gestures that are determined by the human body. Moreover, regardless of the fictitious barriers used to oppose them, the mistaken rigidity with which students' limbs are condemned, these movements must be produced in an artistic execution. Artists employ them, even if they are not always aware of them.]

This statement evidences the dichotomy observed by Selva between pedagogical and artistic performance practice. It also highlights Selva's acute understanding of the needs and demands of piano technique, as well as strong observation and self-reflectivity regarding artistic practice.

Selva goes to some length to explain the entire range of rotatory movements, from small, lateral wrist movements, to larger, circular movements from the shoulder. These are explained and exercised in detail. Regarding the former, she introduces this type of movement with a clear analogy:

Ce geste, à la description scientifique quelque peu rébarbative, est en réalité, fort simple. C'est celui que l'on fait pour tourner une clef dans une serrure.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Vol. 3/1, p. vii: 'le déplacement de la main par le bras, connu sous le nom de *mouvements de rotation*'.

⁷⁹ Vol. 3/1, p. x.

⁸⁰ Vol. 3/1, p. 59.

[This gesture has a very daunting scientific description, but it really is very simple. It is the same movement that one uses to turn the key in a lock.]

However, as stated later on (p. 100), this analogy was taken from Malwina Brée's book on Leschetizky's technique that Selva quotes from in its French edition.⁸¹

Another interesting element of her treatment of rotation, is that it highlights Selva's change of writing style and overall approach. Rather than explaining the fundamental concepts underpinning this important process, as she had done during the first two books, Selva discusses rotation at length in all its different forms and provides a vast amount of physical exercises to prepare for its acquisition. These are exemplified mainly by illustrations, particularly in the preparatory books. This demonstrates the strong influence on Selva of Jacques Dalcroze⁸² and his innovative 'Gymnastique Rhythmique'. This pedagogy postulates that, by stimulating the global psychomotor skills, the students feel their own bodies as the first musical instrument. This is then also the conduit through which musicality is felt and transmitted.⁸³

In the later part of her treatise, Selva also advocated the study of Dalcroze's method, not only by practicing his *solfège* method, but by realising those same vocal exercises at the piano and incorporating all necessary elements such as rotation, different touches and her idea of *neume* in them.⁸⁴ The Dalcrozian pedagogy relies on a strong

⁸¹ Malwina Brée, *Base de la méthode Leschetizky* (Paris: E. Fromont, 1902).

⁸² Émile-Jacques Dalcroze (1865-1950), Swiss musician and teacher. He devised his own musical pedagogy, the *Gymnastique Rythmique*, centred around body movement.

⁸³ The Institut Jacques-Dalcroze <<https://www.dalcroze.ch/lijd-et-la-rythmique/rythmique-geneve-quoi/>>, [accessed 23 December 2019].

⁸⁴ Vol. 3/2, p. 91: 'Tous les exercices pratiqués vocalement dans l'enseignement du solfège Jaques-Dalcroze, sont à réaliser pianistiquement, au même moment des études, à l'aide de l'adaptation de la rotation, des jeux différents et des *neumes*. *Penser* en même temps musicalement, et *réaliser* techniquement au piano constitue la définitive adaptation de ces éléments entre eux.' [All the exercises practised vocally within the solfège teaching of Jaques-Dalcroze, have to be undertaken pianistically at the same time, with the help of rotation, the different touches and the *neumes*. To *think* musically at the same time as technically *executing* at the piano constitutes the definitive adaptation of these elements between themselves.]

culture centred on the body and movement and Selva fully incorporated this line of work into her own playing and teaching.⁸⁵

Finally, as a general aid to the acquisition of different concepts and gestures, Selva employs 'immobilité consciente' [conscious immobility] and advocates extremely slow practice. Most of her physical exercises have to be undertaken with a pulse of 40 per beat. As an example, her way of introducing octaves, Vol. 3/1, p. 1 is to fix the *empreinte* of the octave with three different finger combinations in turn, 1-5, 1-4 and 1-3. They have to be played as semibreves to a pulse of 40, each crotchet followed by an empty bar. She notes that one has to '*Obliger la main à la plus stricte immobilité, tant au clavier qu'en l'air, c'est là tout le travail et le point capital pour le jeu*'. (Italics in the original) [To force the hand to the strictest immobility, as much at the keyboard as in the air, this is all the work to be done and the capital point to play the piano]. This study, she continues, has to be done practising all the different touches.

Selva's approach in context

Selva's text presents a cogent approach to piano technique viewed and understood as a holistic process encompassing musical thought and physical gesture. Her technique impresses for its modern perspective as her pianism transcends the mere digital approach to piano playing and advocates the use of the entire body apparatus at the piano, that is finger, wrist, forearm and shoulder actions to be used in isolation as well as in combination with one another to offer the pianist wide-ranging tools to adapt to the requirements of an ever-increasing body of piano literature. In disaggregating her approach into its constituent parts, Selva emerges as a meticulous pedagogue with a vast array of pedagogical tools to share her technique.

It is also important to draw the distinction between her technical treatise and other works that purport to be such but, in reality, are mostly compendia of mechanical exercises with little to no instruction as to how to play them or their musical

⁸⁵ Photos seen in the Archives de l'Association Blanche Selva in La Touche, France, show Selva and her students practising these *gymnastique rythmique* exercises. The students (male and female) are dressed in comfortable sporting attire to that effect. See also Fig. 5.3 in Chapter 5.

application. A clear and contemporaneous example is that of Alfred Cortot's *Principes rationnels de la technique pianistique*.⁸⁶ Written later than any of Selva's books the burden of the 100-page volume does not depart from the five-finger model of the nineteenth century exposed earlier, and like Brée/Leschetizky's method, begins by introducing held-note exercises, whose unreliability as a technical and pedagogical tool has already been discussed.

In fact, Cortot summarises 'tous les problèmes de l'exécution pianistique à cinq catégories essentielles' [all the problems of pianistic execution in five categories]. These are: 1. Equality, independence and finger mobility; 2. Passage under the thumb (scales and arpeggios); 3. Double notes and polyphony; 4. Extensions and 5. Wrist technique, execution of chords.⁸⁷ It is indisputable that these are still relevant elements for the modern pianist and within modern piano technique. However, his methodology is very much anchored in nineteenth-century pianoforte tradition that saw the pianist's apparatus finish at the wrist with little to no attention to the forearm, upper arm and shoulders. The weight of Cortot's method is in building the hand and wrist apparatus in isolation from the rest of the body and without linking it to musical meaning and does not propose any new formulas to the modern pianist.

This is also the case with another of Selva's contemporary French counterparts, Marguerite Long's *La petite méthode de piano*, that appeared over thirty years later than Selva's.⁸⁸ Long's method, unlike Cortot's or Brée/Leschetizky's, is intended to be used as a pedagogical tool to teach from the first piano lesson. It begins with some general notions as to hand position, and how to introduce notation to students, and includes a bespoke selection of contemporary piano music for children, with works created for the method by composers such as André Jolivet or Henri Dutilleux amongst others.

However, the pianistic technical framework is yet again predicated on the same five-finger position formulas, and held notes exercises (p. 21 onwards) and scales and

⁸⁶ Alfred Cortot, *Principes rationnels de la technique pianistique* (Paris: Senart, 1928).

⁸⁷ Cortot, p. 8.

⁸⁸ Marguerite Long, *La petite méthode de piano* (Paris: Salabert, 1959).

arpeggios with little to no attention to sound production in precise terms nor the use of arms and shoulders. John Ellis concludes that '[i]t provides a clear pathway for children to develop a stable and nuanced technique [...]'⁸⁹ a conclusion that surprises given the inconsistencies that he himself brings forward by contrasting the physical processes advanced by Long and shown in pictures (high and curled fingers), versus the physiologically informed texts that he quotes, amongst others, Sándor, already mentioned above.

It is indisputable, however, that, despite their limitations, or perhaps, rather because of them, both of these texts have been more marketable than Selva's and are still in print. I echo the pianist and musicologist Luca Chiantore's words when he reflects upon the lack of permanence of the rational approaches of technicians, amongst whom Selva, as opposed to those by pianists, amongst whom Cortot, and in my view also Long:

Pero el estudio racional de los mecanismos pianísticos no ha llegado a sustituir el eficaz sincretismo que ya caracterizó a los grandes protagonistas de la pedagogía decimonónica y no es una casualidad que al comenzar el siglo XXI, no encontramos ni uno solo de los pesados volúmenes de Matthay, Breithaupt, Selva u Ortmann, descatalogados ya hace mucho tiempo, sino los "imperfectos" trabajos de Hofmann, Lhevinne o Cortot. La clase de piano sigue estando marcada por la corrección del detalle y por un análisis de los problemas concretos de cada alumno, en el cual la experiencia personal del pedagogo prima sobre el conocimiento teórico de la técnica. Los tratados del siglo XX no han conseguido crear una especie de "gramática" de la técnica universalmente aceptada; la música se ha mostrado una vez más, rebelde a cualquier racionalización de sus fenómenos.⁹⁰

[But the rational study of the pianistic mechanisms has not been able to replace the effective syncretism that already characterised the great protagonists of nineteenth-century pedagogy, and it is not by chance that at the beginning of the XXI century, we do not find a single one of the heavy volumes of Matthay, Breithaupt, Selva or Ortmann, discontinued long ago, but the 'imperfect' works of Hofmann, Lhevinne or Cortot. The piano lesson carries on being marked by correction of detail and an analysis of the concrete problems of each student, in which the personal experience of the teacher takes precedence over the theoretical knowledge of technique. The XX century treatises have not

⁸⁹ John Ellis, 'La petite méthode de piano. A forgotten Connection to the French School', *American Music Teacher* (June/July 2013), 19-26, p. 26.

⁹⁰ Chiantore, *Historia de la técnica*, pp. 722-723.

managed to create a kind of universally accepted ‘grammar’ of [piano] technique; music has proved yet again to be resistant to any rationalization of its phenomena.]

Viewed in its historical context, Selva’s treatise is very different from the writings of her counterparts and departs from the ‘old French School’. Ellis summarises the preoccupation of pedagogues of the French school as follows:

The French School has historically emphasized finger independence and instructed students to achieve this through isolation exercises and relatively high finger positions.⁹¹

This is consistent with the approach observed in Cortot’s and Long’s texts, which, although both written later than Selva’s are still anchored in old pianistic formulas. This is, however, markedly different from Selva’s approach. It bears stressing that it is not just the methodology that is different in approach, but the ensuing tone at the piano. When Selva puts the *jeu indifférent* into practice as a touch to produce light sound, she does it through the prism of the *neume* in any given piece. As discussed above this encompasses the understanding of phrasing and using wrist and arm movements to navigate the musical intonation of a piece through units of musical meaning.

In my view, it is precisely this synergy between finger action and light wrist and arm movements underpinned by a strong sense of musical phrasing that constitute the essence of a beautifully crafted ‘*jeu perlé*’, rather than considering it and framing it as a particular finger articulation. I suggest that this is what set her touch apart from some of her peers, as was discussed in Chapter 2, for instance when the reviewer of the *Ancien Mercure Musical* praised her ‘*jeu gai*’ opposing it to the dry finger touch of Diémer and Risler.

Further, as stated above, Hissarlian-Lagoutte credits Selva with being the first pianist to have introduced weight-playing in her teaching practice in France. From Selva’s own writings we know that she had observed that some professional contemporary pianists played in a very different way from that which was taught. This evidences a dichotomy

⁹¹ John Ellis, *La Petite Méthode*, p. 21.

between artistic and pedagogic practice at the turn of the century but supports the idea that arm-weight playing was already deployed by professionals on the stage. I agree with Davison when, in his work on Liszt, he disputes the popular assertion that the Hungarian was the first pianist ever to understand the importance of weight playing at the piano and sustains that there is no evidence of that. Rather, he states that ‘the advent of arm-weight in piano playing appears to have occurred more or less simultaneously throughout several countries late in the 19th century’.⁹²

Selva’s modern approach is also evidenced by the exposition of concepts that have gained more recent traction, such as Ben Spatz’s idea of embodiment, which in its application to music, is already anticipated in Selva’s own terminology, *corps musicalisé*, the musicalized body. This phrase only appears once in her text and yet her whole treatise is strongly permeated by this understanding.

C’est ainsi que l’interprétation trouve, au moment voulu, un corps tellement discipliné, si parfaitement *musicalisé*, qu’il ne fait plus qu’un avec l’instrument, et disparaît avec lui pour laisser resplendir la pensée et le sentiment artistiques, pour le plus grand rayonnement de l’œuvre interprétée.⁹³

[It is in this way that the interpretation finds, at the required moment, a body so disciplined, so perfectly *musicalised*, that it cannot but be at one with the instrument, and disappears with it in order to allow the thought and artistic sentiment to shine, for the strongest radiance of the interpreted work.]

This phrase is highly revealing also as a mission statement for her artistic practice. The pianist, through the thorough understanding of this embodied process, becomes one with the instrument and disappears, letting the music and artistic sentiment shine through the interpreted work. This can be traced back to Selva’s own recollection of flow experience, and how she linked accessing this mental state to her recent discovery of the ‘néo-piano’, as was discussed in Chapter 2.

Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that in her work there is an excess of detail, in particular in her later books, which, together with an abundance of physical exercises away from the piano, at times obscure this central meaning. If read in isolation, these

⁹² Davison, p. 43.

⁹³ Vol. 3/1, p. 89.

appear disconnected from Selva's original pursuit: to acquire a technical mastery at the service of the musical goal.

For instance, this can be observed in the expansion of a concept such as the *neume*, found in the second preparatory book, LP2. Written nine years after she first explained it, its meaning becomes obfuscated through excess information and added nomenclature. This, no doubt, responds to Selva's intention to increase accuracy to avoid her treatise being misunderstood and misused. It is also testament to her attention to detail and pedagogical expertise and exemplifies Selva's ample resourcefulness in devising myriad different exercises and rules. However, the beauty and immediacy of her ideas get stifled by a system that becomes at times overly and unnecessarily complex.

Although there are abundant exercises, her treatise is not meant to be worked on in any particular sequence. Nor is it a compendium of exercises and etudes. Her treatise is a thorough exposition of her theoretical knowledge of piano technique in its interrelationship with music and a written record of her personal pianism. Her treatise provides a framework, a scaffolding of the most important, if not all, musical and technical parameters that the student/pianist needs to comprehend to master their craft. This provides the reader with tools to anticipate and overcome some obstacles even before they are encountered. Evidence of how Selva herself worked with students anticipating certain musical and technical elements can be found from the set of 12 piano pieces for children with the Catalan title *Primers Jocs* [First games] written in 1931 which she dedicated to her young students in Barcelona.⁹⁴ Fig. 3.24 below shows the first bars of a little piece entitled 'Fanfare in Dialogue'. Through this piece, as can be seen from Selva's annotation, the student works on alternating a sequence of *jeu éclatant-jeu appuyé* which she has devised in anticipation of an unidentified *Gigue* in F by Bach — which clearly had an upbeat motive.

This little composition shows how different touches can be introduced to children: more gradually than to older learners, with little hands together coordination patterns,

⁹⁴ Blanche Selva, *Primers Jocs (Premiers Jeux) 12 Petites Pièces très faciles pour Piano* (Paris: H. Hérelle & Cie, 1931).

and an abundance of repetition of a particular formula. It also shows Selva's departure from the traditional five-finger position, with the student working throughout the extension of an octave and practicing jumps from early on.

a Josep Jordi LLONGUERES
i Caius PERELLADA

V
Fanfara
dialogada

Fanfare
dialoguée

Pour l'enchaînement des jeux éclatant
et appuyé, et pour servir de préparation
à une Gigue en FA de Bach.

Per a l'encadenament dels jocs esclatant
i apoiat; i com a preparació a una Giga
en FA de Bach.

(anacr.) (accent) (anacr.) (accent) (anacr.)
1 1 2 2 1
ff (éclat) (ap.) (écl.) (ap.) (écl.)

accent)
2 1 5
(ap.) (écl.) (ap.) (écl.) (ap.) (écl.)

H.4 C^{le} 2173

Fig. 3.24 – Selva, 'Fanfara dialogada', *Primers Jocs*

Returning to the treatise itself, it is important to realise that Selva's writing was primarily devised as an *aide-memoire* and intended to be a guide or a reference book to be combined with a direct contact with her or teachers who had trained under her instruction. Nevertheless, the clear exposition of her ideas has enabled me to

understand her technique and put into practice her ideas to a great extent which has transformed my understanding of piano technique.

Selva herself was reluctant to rely on written works as a source of embodied knowledge. This reservation can also be observed in Selva's own view about the limits of her own treatise, as she stresses that teaching must be oral and direct although she acknowledged the 'auxiliary tool' she was providing with her work.

C'est pourquoi il est nécessaire d'avoir recours à ces deux formes d'ouvrages, se complétant l'un par l'autre: le *traité*, où sont contenus tous les éléments à posséder, et la *Table de travail*, sorte de *cours permanent*, où le professeur trouve indiquée en détail, avec toute l'expérience que lui lègue cet ouvrage, la route exacte qu'il doit faire suivre à l'élève. C'est tout ce que peut, vraiment, apporter la contribution livresque dans l'enseignement de la musique. Le reste ne peut être qu'oral, direct. Un point capital, en effet, ne peut être communiqué sans contact immédiat: la sûreté du coup d'œil, du diagnostic, *la formation du jugement du professeur*. Pour savoir s'il *sait apprécier* la réalisation de l'élève et comprendre le sens réel de ce que le livre lui dit, il faut le voir à l'œuvre dans son enseignement. C'est pourquoi, comme il est dit dans la préface du 1^{er} tome de cet ouvrage, l'enseignement ne peut être qu'oral. Les livres sont faits pour être les auxiliaires de l'enseignement vivant.⁹⁵

[This is why it is necessary to have help from these two types of work, they complement each other: the *treatise*, where all the necessary elements are found, and the *Table of work*, a kind of *permanent course*, where the teacher finds detailed indications, with all the experience that this work bequeaths, to establish the exact route through which they have to guide the student. This is all that can, really, be contributed by a book-based approach to musical education. The rest cannot but be through oral transmission, directly. A very important point that cannot be transmitted without the immediate contact: the reliability of the trained eye, the diagnostic element, *the development of the teacher's judgement*. To discover if one *can appreciate* the execution of the student and understand the real meaning that this book is telling them, one has to observe their teaching. This is why, as was said in the preface to the first volume of this work, the teaching cannot but be oral. Books are written as auxiliary tools to a teaching practice that is alive.]

However, doing and teaching her exercises has shown me how valuable the written medium can be as a source of knowledge transmission of embodied practice, in this case piano technique. Drawing from my personal experience, I cannot but regret that, although her work had been published all those years ago, most of the piano teaching I

⁹⁵ LP1, p. 33.

received during my formative years was similar to the elements described by her as 'pedagogical routine'. Discussion with many colleagues has shown that my case is not an isolated one.

The pianistic community appears ineffective, or at the very least, slow, at sharing its cumulative knowledge as it tends to rely exclusively on direct contact between a master and a pupil. Technical books, such as Selva's, are not generally used even as the 'auxiliary' device that she intended. It may be perhaps due to the notion that piano playing is a 'living' and embodied experience and practice and, therefore, that it does not lend itself well to being translated into the written form in standardized systems. However, Selva's work demonstrates that effective pianistic knowledge can be transmitted through the written word and that, provided the system is open enough to adapt to individual needs, students and teachers, will be able to find suitable solutions in them.

Conclusion

Selva's text departs strongly from the finger-technique type of play found in France at the time, offering a different pathway to the acquisition of piano technique. Her approach is original and modern for its holistic approach, best summarised by her expression 'the musicalized body'. However, Selva's work is also powerful as a vehicle to understand, not only her craft, but also her as a person and as an artist. Her writing exudes a vibrant personality and an honest drive to find and share what she considers to be the 'truth'. In contrast to any of the aforementioned piano methods, her treatise references many other pianists and treatise writers. Selva embarked on a personal and professional quest to explore and expand the extent of piano technique, propelled by her realisation that she was uncritically teaching how she had been taught without realising that her own playing was different. She did not do it in an isolated way, but by studying it from as many authors as she had access to. Her treatise is a product of a thorough and thought-out enquiry, which is all the more commendable in a woman who had had no access to a solid academic education in her youth.

As noted by her biographer, Guy Selva, the three values that constituted Selva's life ideal or ethos were *Bonté-Beauté-Vérité* [goodness-beauty-truth].⁹⁶ These don't appear quoted as a triad in the treatise, but references to beauty and truthfulness do abound. In fact, throughout her writing there is continuous sense of her own moral and divine duties which evidence and respond to her deeply held Catholic beliefs and are also a reflection of the period when it was written and the influences she was subject to within the Catholic circle of the Schola Cantorum. As such, Selva is as much a pioneer as a product of her time and place. Nevertheless, there is still evidence of deep spiritual attachment with her work from later in her career, once she no longer formed part of the Schola circle. For instance, in 1931, in the preface to the set of children's pieces *Primers Jocs* mentioned earlier Selva writes:

Qu'il soit donc un *Jeu*, au vrai sens du mot, c'est-à-dire quelque chose de *vivant*, dans lequel l'artiste en formation sente naître et croître en lui, avec des visions spirituelles chaque jour plus nettes, plus claires, plus intenses, plus belles et plus variées, un grandissant amour de la Musique, en tant qu'elle est l'expression sonore de la Beauté, elle-même « Splendeur du Vrai », c'est-à-dire irradiation et don de Bonté !

[May it therefore be a Game, in the true sense of the word, that is to say something *living*, in which the artist in training feels born and grow within him, with spiritual visions each day clearer, more clear, more intense, more beautiful and more varied, a growing love of Music, as it is the sound expression of Beauty, itself "Splendour of the True", that is to say irradiation and gift of Goodness!]

The language in her treatise and writing may therefore be jarring at times to the modern reader. However, I suggest that, understood within Selva's own belief system and personality, these could be translated as being something akin to 'integrity'. In my view, this should not deter the modern pianist from finding valuable lessons in her work, which is still of relevance today, or from bringing some of her ideas forward in their own playing and teaching.

⁹⁶ Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 124.

Chapter 4 Blanche Selva in the Recording Studio

The central research question at the heart of this chapter is whether, and, if so, to what extent, it is possible to learn more about Blanche Selva's own playing and interpretative style through her recorded output. What do her recordings tell us about her playing? Can we ascertain whether these are representative of her pianism generally? Taruskin writes that recordings are 'the hardest evidence of performance practice imaginable'⁹⁷ and Leech-Wilkinson that 'one performs one's own identity [...]'.⁹⁸ However, a recording captures a performer's playing at a specific point in time, which may not in fact be representative of that performer. I agree with Stanović when she writes that recordings have 'their limitations' and that 'despite many things that one may learn from early recordings, they are a highly specific form of evidence that cannot be relied upon without additional supplementary evidence'.⁹⁹ In the present case, the analysis undertaken is supported by a range of contextual information, including Selva's own editions and writings, that provides a solid foundation to the analysis and allows us to understand Selva's pianism holistically.

A fundamental contextual source in this exercise has been the study of her treatise documented in Chapter 3. In the first instance, this study has allowed me better to hear and understand the nuances in her playing. Further, the knowledge acquired through the study of the treatise has been instrumental in unlocking a key documentary piece of evidence: an unfinished letter written by Selva to her pupil Andrée Vidal in 1938, which was previewed in the Introduction. Selva wrote this letter in response to Vidal's live radio performance, and in essence it is a performance class in epistolary form. Selva gives detailed commentary on the technical and musical

⁹⁷ Richard Taruskin, *Text and Act. Essays on Music and Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 168.

⁹⁸ Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, *Challenging Performance: Classical Music Performance Norms and how to Escape them*. Version 2.04 (30.iv.21) at <https://challengingperformance.com/the-book/>, p. 26.

⁹⁹ Inja Stanović, '(Re)constructing Early Recordings: a guide for historically-informed performance' in *Proceedings for research hands on piano, International Conference on Music Performance*, ed. by Alfonso Benetti, Francisco Monteiro and Jorge Salgado Correia (Aveiro: UA Editora, 2019), pp. 62-69 (p. 63).

aspects of Vidal's performance (using LEMTP framework and vocabulary), which includes two pieces from Selva's own recorded catalogue (J.S. Bach's *Partita I* and Séverac's *Baigneuses au soleil*). Further, whenever possible, Selva's editions of the works recorded by her have been used as a textual point of reference. Other contextual historical references used have been letters and published texts by Selva, such as *La Sonate*. Following an introduction to her catalogue of works below, each of the pieces analysed is discussed in turn and the available sources in relation to each of them is explained in each relevant section.

Another line of enquiry that emerges in this study is an assessment of the applicability of her interpretative ideas to the contemporary performer. This has not usually been the primary concern of those analysing recordings, as stated by Jonathan Freeman-Attwood:

[...] the recent surge of musicological interest in recordings and the resulting scholarly output has barely registered on the radar of performers (as distinct from those who study performance), as a catalyst either to pursue models of enquiry into past interpretative values or to measure what these achievements count for in their own creative lives. The study of recordings by academics is rarely motivated by how it can inspire performance.¹⁰⁰

However, close listening with a view to better understanding past interpretative practice as a springboard for further creative output has been a parallel research objective in this thesis. Moreover, I suggest that this objective is itself central to shaping the methodological approach chosen by a researcher at the outset.

Nicholas Cook emphasises that there are a variety of methodological tools, as well as motivations, to examine recordings: Sonic Visualiser, Performance Work, spectrograms, mathematical functions, scattergrams, and multi-correlational plots are some of the tools available. But he also recognises that 'important musicological work has been carried out using equipment no more specialized than a record or CD player,

¹⁰⁰ Jonathan Freeman-Attwood, 'Still small voices', in *The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music*, ed. by Nicholas Cook, Eric Clarke, Daniel Leech-Wilkinson and John Rink (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), pp. 54-59.

a pencil, and perhaps a stopwatch, coupled with the capacity for close listening that comes with experience'.¹⁰¹

In fact, several other authors who have made valuable contributions to this field of research have not relied on technologically-assisted methods of listening: Neal Peres da Costa¹⁰² and Robert Philip¹⁰³ are well-known examples. I also agree with pianist and researcher Dr Marisa Gupta that '[w]hile the graphical/computational approaches [...] can produce exact and 'scientific' results, information of this nature does not necessarily address the needs of performers'.¹⁰⁴ In fact, I suggest, quite plainly, that what a machine can hear that the human ear cannot is unlikely to generate valuable new artistic instrumental output by a performer.

In this chapter, I have therefore favoured a qualitative approach that relies on 'experience' (see Cook above) and is grounded in a practice-based research methodology. I do not dispute that technology may be useful in some contexts, but in this research, I have placed greater reliance on informed and critical listening, especially as it is supported by the available contextual information, as my approach demonstrates. By using the full range of contextual information, we can be reasonably confident that, for the most part, Blanche Selva's recordings are a reliable guide to her performance practice and interpretative style, and a source of valuable artistic insight into the same and other repertoire.

A further benefit of this study is a better understanding of early twenty-century performance practice as a whole. As noted by Leech-Wilkinson, the detailed, granular study of a particular pianist, as is proposed here, is a necessary component to building a comprehensive picture of a cultural epoch:

¹⁰¹ Nicholas Cook, 'Methods for analysing recordings' in *The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music*, ed. by Nicholas Cook, Eric Clarke, Daniel Leech-Wilkinson and John Rink (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), pp. 221-245 (p. 222).

¹⁰² Neal Peres da Costa, *Off the Record, Performing Practices in Romantic Piano Playing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹⁰³ Robert Philip, *Performing Music in the Age of Recording* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) and *Early Recordings and Musical Style* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992).

¹⁰⁴ Marisa Gupta, *The Piano Works of Frederic Mompou, 1910-1921: Repertoire and Performance* (unpublished doctoral thesis, Guildhall School of Music & Drama, 2015), p. 98.

[...] we really need now to undertake many detailed studies of local and especially of personal styles, and only then, using that detail as a secure base, will we be able to build up a new and better picture of a general period or national style. I suggest that it's on these much more detailed studies that attention could best be focused in the immediate future.¹⁰⁵

I also echo the words of Dr Inja Stanović when she discusses the intrinsic value of the study of early recordings:

Early recordings provide clear evidence of past performing practices. Such recordings, particularly those produced during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, enable us to hear some of the most significant performers of an age now passed; through such recordings, one may discover surprising ways in which performers approached the musical text, whilst encountering styles, traditions and aesthetic tendencies that differ, sometimes wildly, from our contemporary approaches to the same. For researchers of such practices, early recordings are invaluable; early recordings do not always correspond with their written counterparts and they often provide information about performance styles and techniques that is rarely discussed in written evidence. Early recordings are therefore a valuable form of primary evidence that allow performances of the past to be repeated and systematically studied using a wide range of different research methods.¹⁰⁶

Peres da Costa also notes the value that early recordings have in discovering past performance traditions:

Early acoustic recordings and player-piano roll recordings shed light on the performance traditions of approximately the last 150 years. To our modern ears these recordings often sound shockingly foreign: their style bears little resemblance to anything heard today. The performances are sometimes haunting, sometimes declamatory. They exhibit expressive qualities that are heartfelt and leave an indelible impression. Above all, they preserve a tradition that is, as Taruskin states, "instantly recognizable as premodern."¹⁰⁷

When contrasting the past against the present, Peres da Costa uses the expression 'modern ears'. Other authors than Peres da Costa have also used similar turns of

¹⁰⁵ Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, 'Recordings and histories of performance style' in *The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music*, ed. by Eric Clarke, Daniel Leech-Wilkinson and John Rink (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), pp. 246-262 (p. 254).

¹⁰⁶ Stanović, '(Re)constructing Early Recordings: a guide for historically-informed performance', p. 63.

¹⁰⁷ Peres da Costa, *Off the record*, p. xxviii.

phrase to represent the temporal binary: Leech-Wilkinson refers to a 'modern performance style' and 'modern performance'¹⁰⁸ in contrast to one that is in the past, whilst Stanović uses the expression 'nowadays' in her comparative analysis between past and present.¹⁰⁹ While perhaps vague and non-specific, I suggest that such expressions are valid and easy to grasp reference points that take the reader to the writer's own temporal and cultural present broadly understood. Leech-Wilkinson provides a helpful summary of the characteristics of modern performance style, with which I completely agree:

Characteristics of modern performance style therefore include reliability, blend, and synchronisation that nevertheless allows considerable expressivity because change (rubato, loudness) is agreed and precisely timed and graded.¹¹⁰

By extension, I suggest that 'modern ears' or 'modern listeners' are those who are, broadly speaking, accustomed to this performing style as their main reference point. For ease of reference, I will also use similar expressions in this chapter when necessary.

It is also important to lay down the performance style backdrop against which to situate this granular and detailed study of Blanche Selva's playing. Although Selva recorded in the years 1929 and 1930 (in her forties) it is important to bear in mind Leech-Wilkinson's conclusion that 'most players don't radically change the way they play to follow their younger contemporaries'.¹¹¹ This means that despite recording in the late 1920s already as a mature pianist, Selva's recordings potentially capture her style from an earlier period in time, taking us back stylistically perhaps by one or two decades, towards the early twentieth century. Peres da Costa summarises the predominant features observed in many early twentieth-century piano recordings: 'dislocation, arpeggiation, metrical rubato and various forms of rhythmic alteration as

¹⁰⁸ Leech-Wilkinson, *Challenging performance*, p. 16 and p. 20 respectively.

¹⁰⁹ Inja Stanović, *Chopin in Great Britain, 1830 to 1930: reception, performance, recordings* (unpublished doctoral thesis, The University of Sheffield, 2016), p. 172.

¹¹⁰ Leech-Wilkinson, *Challenging Performance*, p. 26.

¹¹¹ Leech-Wilkinson, *Recordings and Histories*, pp. 246-262.

well as tempo modification.’¹¹² This is consistent with the findings of other authors. So Stanović:

At the turn of the century, arpeggiation unmarked in the musical score was as widespread as dislocation and used for similar reasons, namely emphasis of a melodic line, or enhancement of harmonic content through strengthening or softening. As with dislocations, written evidence about unnotated arpeggiation is rare. Again though, abundant evidence exists in the form of sound recordings.

This is also supported by Leech-Wilkinson, who uses the recording of Mary Garden (1874-1967) singing Debussy’s *L’ombre des arbres* accompanied by the composer himself not only to describe past practice but to demonstrate the change in taste between then and now:

The voices aren’t synchronised, which is one of the most crass faults in any modern performance, chords are spread, there’s wide rubato and portamento, none of it notated, which to us would seem to rule it out as intended. [...] These features that we now consider unmusical were essential to ideal musicianship a century ago. [...] The performers were often, as in this Debussy case, the best and most authoritative; the recordings are quite good and numerous and consistent enough to show that the rules of musical performance 100 years ago were simply different from today.¹¹³

Stanović is also unequivocal in her assertion that performance fashions and styles have changed from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries until now:

[the analysed recordings] illuminated certain stylistic conventions and pianistic techniques common to the late nineteenth- and early twentieth- centuries, paying particular attention to rhythmic alterations, tempo modifications, tempo rubato, dislocation and un-notated arpeggiation. Such recordings demonstrate, beyond any doubt, that performance fashions and styles have since changed.¹¹⁴

Peres da Costa suggests that the change in performing style observed throughout the twentieth century is in large part attributable to the advent and development of recording techniques:

¹¹² Peres da Costa, *Off the record*, p. 309.

¹¹³ Leech-Wilkinson, *Challenging Performance*, p. 20.

¹¹⁴ Stanović, *Chopin in Great Britain*, p. 215.

Undoubtedly, such changes in attitude and playing style went hand in hand with developments in sound recording techniques during the second half of the twentieth century. The invention of sound recording itself provided a strong catalyst for change. As Taruskin posits, it led to the eroding of personality and emotion from the performer “since it offers the possibility of performance to a medium that had formerly existed only in the moment”. This also allowed the performer objectively to compare and model their own playing on that of other artists. Nevertheless, recordings from around the turn of the twentieth century remain a veritable treasure trove. They provide a window into the era before the change. These recordings reveal an ad hoc or seemingly careless approach to the literal, notated notes and rhythm, tuning, and basic pulse. To “modern” sensibilities, the effects seem primitive, old-fashioned, and curious-sounding. In fact, these are intrinsic performing practice elements. In this respect John Butt concludes that those features that might sound “casual, senselessly erratic and only accidentally expressive” now, were once the keystone of artful interpretation. Early recordings are characterized by originality and freedom of expression that produces a feeling of improvisation.¹¹⁵

Selva was initially extremely reluctant to leave a recorded legacy. She stated in 1914 that recordings disfigured music,¹¹⁶ an impression derived from the erratic results of early recordings. However, the advent of electrical recordings from the mid-twenties onwards brought a more clear and realistic system of reproduction¹¹⁷ which correlates with her own change in disposition towards the recording process, with her first recordings dating from 1929. This is also in line with the general trend observed in the francophone area at large.¹¹⁸

However, the onset of paralysis in October 1930 cut her recording projects extremely short.¹¹⁹ She left only eleven tracks, of which seven are solo performances and four in

¹¹⁵ Peres da Costa, *Off the record*, p. xxix.

¹¹⁶ Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 179.

¹¹⁷ ‘Electrical recording could capture an enlarged frequency range, at the beginning from 100 to about 5,000 cycles [...]. Bass frequencies not before heard from records gave weight and body to the sound, and treble frequencies introduced a definition and detail previously missing [...].’ Timothy Day, *A Century of Recorded Music* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 16.

¹¹⁸ ‘[...] the resources for French piano music are not especially extensive in the early years of recordings, but become much more plentiful in the electric era; that is, after microphones began to be used in 1925’, Christopher Dingle, ‘Players and Pianos: An Overview of Early Recorded Resources for the French Piano Repertoire’ in *Perspectives on the Performance of French Piano Music*, ed. by Scott McCarrey and Lesley A. Wright (Oxford and New York: Taylor & Francis, 2016), p. 127.

¹¹⁹ Font Batallé states that Selva had signed a contract with Columbia to record the works of Albéniz and the complete Beethoven Sonatas, an engagement that remained unfulfilled, p.

partnership with Joan Massià. Two pieces (by Mozart and Séverac) were never released commercially.

Table B summarises information compiled by Guy Selva in his Appendix,¹²⁰ and that which is available on *Blanche Selva. Les enregistrements Columbia 1929-1930*,¹²¹ the CD that has been chosen as the basis for analysis of her recorded output, Fig. 4.1. Where minor inconsistencies have arisen, the information provided by Solstice has taken precedence.



Fig. 4.1 – Les enregistrements Columbia 1929-1930, Blanche Selva (Solstice SOCD 351/2, 2018)

104. Guy Selva also notes that the Columbia contract included other sonatas before Beethoven and after him, p. 181.

¹²⁰ Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 248.

¹²¹ *Blanche Selva. Les enregistrements Columbia 1929-1930* (Solstice SOCD 351/2, 2018).

Table B – Blanche Selva's recorded works

Date	Composer	Work	Timing	Reference
Paris 3 June 1929	J.S. Bach	Adagio from Sonata in E minor, BWV 1023 [Massià/Selva]	3'28	Columbia LFX 108/WLX750
Paris 7 January 1929	D. de Séverac	Baigneuses au soleil	6'36	Columbia D15142/WLX771, 772
Paris 9 January 1929	L.v. Beethoven	Sonata in F major, op. 24 [Massià/Selva]		Not completed. Session I.
Paris 11 January 1929	D. de Séverac	Les muletiers devant le Christ de Llivia (Cerdàña)	7'12	Columbia D15141/WLX791, 792
		Vers le mas en fête (En Languedoc)	7'02	Columbia D15140/WLX793, 794
Paris 4 May 1929	J.S. Bach	Partita n1, BWV 825	Praeludium 1'42 Allemande 1'25 Courante 2'30 Sarabande 3'05 Minuets I and II 2'25 Gigue 1'24 Total: 12'31	Columbia D15234- 5/WLX1020, 1021, 1022, 1023
Paris 13 May 1929 ¹²²	L.v. Beethoven	Sonata in F major, op. 24 [Massià/Selva]		Not completed. Session II.
Madrid 2 June 1930		Sonata in F major, op. 24 [Massià/Selva]	Allegro 9'54 Adagio molto expressivo 5'16 Scherzo 1'10 Rondo 6'48	Session III Columbia LFX105- 108/WLX777-3, 1370, 1371, 1372, 1373, 1374

¹²² Date provided by Solstice; not included in Guy Selva's appendix.

			Total: 22'58	
Madrid 3 June 1930	J. Garreta	Sardana	5'04	Columbia 2594/WL2302-1, 2303-1
Madrid 3 June 1930	C. Franck	Sonata in A major [Massià/Selva]		Not completed. Session I Columbia LFX/100- 3/WLX1378, 1479, 1780, 1781
Madrid 5 June 1930		Prélude, Choral et Fugue	Prélude 5'10 Choral 6'14 Fugue 7'24 Total: 18'48	Columbia LFX 168- 70/WLX1382, 1383, 1384, 1385, 1386, 1387
Madrid 6 June 1930		[Massià/Selva]	Sonata for violin and piano Allegretto ben moderato 6'40 Allegro 7'40 Recitativo- Fantasia 6'57 Allegretto poco mosso 6'11 Total: 27'28	Columbia LFX/100- 3/WLX1388, 1390, 1391
Madrid 6 June 1930	W.A. Mozart	Rondo in B-flat major [Massià/Selva]		Columbia LX 1392 (not commercialised)
NA	D.de Séverac	Ménétriers et glaneuses		Columbia LF 57-58/WL 2300, 2301, 20302, 2303 (not commercialised)

Some authors have already lamented the absence of any of the *Iberia* pieces by Albéniz that she premièred.¹²³ The inclusion of Juli Garreta, a minor Catalan composer may also appear surprising. However, there is an almost biographical coherence within

¹²³ Chiantore, *Historia de la técnica*, p. 524 and Alfonso Pérez Sánchez, *El legado sonoro de Iberia de Isaac Albéniz: la grabación integral: un estudio de caso* (unpublished doctoral tesis, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2013), p. 38.

her recorded output when viewed holistically with regard to the arch of her career, as has also been observed by Guy Selva.¹²⁴

Johann Sebastian Bach, Partita in B-flat major, BWV 825

As stated in the outline biography¹²⁵ Selva might have been the first performer ever to have played Bach's complete works for keyboard (1903-1904) and this composer constantly featured in her concert and pedagogical work. The first partita, *Partita I*, is also the work by Bach that she performed most often in concert,¹²⁶ and it is therefore unsurprising that she chose to record it.

Bach was also the sole composer selected for the first concert of her London debut recital series at Steinway Hall in 1907; the first partita also featured in the programme. Specifically of her recording of the *Partita I*, Darius Milhaud wrote:

L'enregistrement en est remarquable surtout dans le *Prélude*, l'*Allemande*, la *Courante*. Les nuances les plus tendres, les pianissimi son parfaitement rendus dans le *Menuet* et la *Gigue*.¹²⁷

[The recording is remarkable particularly in the *Prelude*, *Allemanda* and the *Courante*. The most tender nuances, pianissimi are perfectly executed in the *Menuet* and in the *Gigue*.]

There are two valuable documentary sources that will be used in combination with her recording of the first Partita to examine her output. One is her own revised and annotated edition of Bach's *Partitas*¹²⁸ and the other is the unfinished letter to her pupil Andrée Vidal referenced in the introduction.

¹²⁴ Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 180. 'Bach, Beethoven et Franck restaient sa trilogie de référence, Séverac choisi comme paradigme des compositeurs contemporains et Garreta clin d'œil à ses amis catalans.' [Bach, Beethoven and Franck remained her trilogy of reference, Séverac chosen as paradigm of contemporary composers and Garreta a nod to her Catalan friends.]

¹²⁵ Chapter 1.

¹²⁶ Guy Selva, *Blanche Selva, un répertoire exceptionnel*, p. 4.

¹²⁷ As quoted by Guy Selva in *Blanche Selva, actrice du renouveau de Jean-Sébastien Bach*, p. 14.

¹²⁸ J.S. Bach, *6 Partitas. Nouvelles Révision et Annotations par Blanche Selva*, (Paris: Éditions Salabert, Collection Maurice Senart, 1921). The score itself does not contain the year of publication. The date 1921 has been taken from the information provided of the same text at the BNF <<https://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb428266208>> [accessed 16 June 2021]. There appears to be an earlier edition of the Partitas in individual volumes from Senart, Roudanez et

Wrong notes?

As expressed to me via Guy Selva, some musicologists such as Gilles Cantagrel, and regular listeners, as exemplified in several comments on YouTube¹²⁹ state that Selva's recording contains 'wrong notes'. However, upon working with her own score it is clear that the notes that may irritate the listener are not an accident of the moment but are played thus by Selva deliberately.

These are the db'' on the third beat of the Courante b. 54 (Fig. 4.2); the eb'' in the high register of the Sarabande b. 5 (Fig. 4.3); and the insertion of an ab'' in b. 18 of the first Menuet (Fig. 4.4).

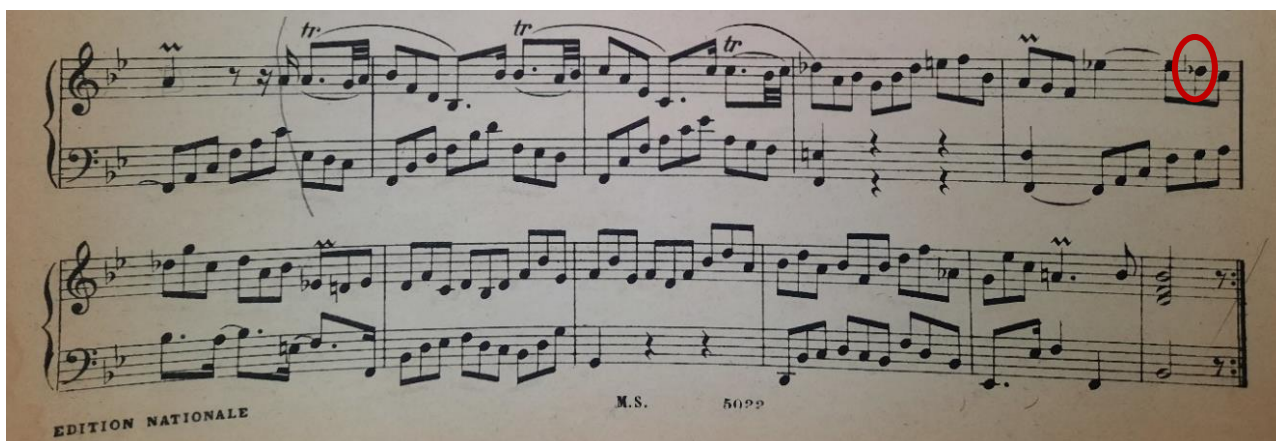


Fig. 4.2 – Bach, Partita I, 'Courante', bb. 50-60

Cie from 1908. This is the edition stated in the *Catalogue des œuvres* in *Blanche Selva, naissance d'un piano moderne*. As the 1921 score is classed as 'Collection Maurice Senart', it is most likely that this is a reprint of all the individual volumes of 1908 under one title.

¹²⁹ I am referring to the comments under the video of the *Partita* recording of Blanche Selva posted on 'gullivior's' channel <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nh9uhWV_gBc> [accessed 18 June 2021]. With over 28k subscribers this is a very popular YouTube channel that focuses on sharing old piano recordings.

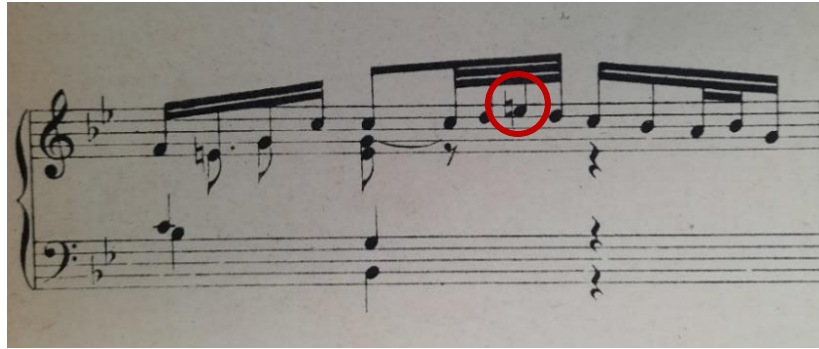


Fig. 4.3 – Bach, Partita I, 'Sarabande', b. 5



Fig. 4.4 – Bach, Partita I, first Menuet, bb. 14-19

Selva is therefore faithfully playing as written out in her edited work, and indeed her recording is devoid of any 'wrong notes' in the traditional sense of an accidental lapse. Whether one agrees with her edition or not, all three examples can be easily explained if looked at from a harmonic perspective.

In the 'Courante', adding the db'' in the preceding bar creates a written-out lower mordent with the following db'' in b. 55 resolving in the tonic minor, before we hear the dominant chord on the third beat of b. 55, finally resolving in the major tonic.

The eb'' in the Sarabande purports to encompass the entire bar within the sonority of the C7 chord, and in the 'Menuet', the ab'' becomes the minor 7th of the B-flat major chord which has a dominant function in b. 18, leading to E-flat major in b. 19.

None of these accidentals can be found in Bach's first edition. It is not known whether Selva herself decided to insert them, or whether she took guidance from another

edition that she may have used in the development of her own. Her approach favours harmonic function over counterpoint. This appears initially at odds with the Schola's general reputation of focusing on 'counterpoint while the Conservatoire taught harmony'.¹³⁰ However, a closer look at how the Schola, and d'Indy, taught counterpoint evidences that a harmonic awareness was a central pillar of the core teachings of the institution at Rue St Jacques. This also corresponds with the modernist preference of highlighting structure as a performance device. As noted by Leech Wilkinson, who supports his position on Cook 2013:

structure became a concern as an aspect of the take-over of musical thought by the values of twentieth-century modernism in which making structure visible was virtuous. It's easy to relate to this the notion that the composer is a genius in construction, supporting the narrative in which the composer-god can be presented as supremely organised and far-sighted, while at the same time offering a way of imagining oneself as sounding the composer-god's plan.

Cross-referencing her own score with her edition leads to the unequivocal conclusion that she was very consistent with her written version, or rather, that her edited work encapsulates her interpretative style, which is consistent over time. There are no major discrepancies and only on occasion can we hear a difference that adds to the score, rather than detracting from it. However, we can also hear elements in the recording that elude being captured in black and white in annotated form.

1. 'Prélude'

The 'Prélude' is executed with a beautiful clarity of tone throughout, and the phrases are clearly enunciated with an underlying subtle dynamic palette which always conforms to the general parameters as set out by her in the score. Selva is unafraid to lead the line forward when the music requires and although always discreet, the pulse is somewhat flexible in places.

Her rich tonal control is on display particularly when the left hand is playing the main theme (*chanté*) starting in b. 4. By bb. 8-9 the right hand is playing an exquisite bell-like *p*, returning to a more balanced colour between both hands in the subsequent bars.

¹³⁰ Pasler, 'Deconstructing d'Indy', p. 248.

Less idiomatic to modern ears are her two ritardandi in bb. 13-14 (resolution to the dominant) and bb. 18-19 (cadential point to the tonic), as well as a more subtle leaning into the dominant cadence in b. 17. As clearly marked in the score, Selva finishes the movement *en élargissant beaucoup* and *ff*, although these are within a smaller dynamic range in accordance with the Baroque sound world and in proportion to the overall effect of the piece. However, the emphasis in the octave bass line and final chord are clearly audible.

In her written advice to Vidal, Selva states that:

Il faut strictement garder les proportions de tous les arrêtes et élans des lignes mélodico-rythmiques si frappantes de cette pièce. Il faut que sa réalisation soit partout exacte avec les battements d'un métronome à la D. Il y a seulement un tout petit élargissement durant le dernier temps de la cadence en FA maj. (13è mes.) mais à peine sensible, simplement ne pas bousculer, c'est tout, il ne faut d'aucune manière qu'on puisse attendre la fin de la pièce.

[It is necessary to preserve the proportions of all stops and impulses of the melodic-rhythmic lines that are so striking in this piece. It is necessary that their realisation is exact with regard to the metronome to semi-quaver beats. There is only a very small broadening during the last beat of the F major cadence (b. 13) but almost imperceptible, simply not jostling, that is all, one must not hear that the piece has finished.]

When cross-referencing this indication with her recording, it is noticeable that she does not always adhere to the pulse so strictly, as was stated above. The notion of working with the metronome to the semi-quaver was surprising to me, but shows Selva's utmost attention to detail, wanting to control the timing of each interval carefully.

Proof that her ritardando in b. 13 is deliberate can be found in her recommendation to Vidal to do so albeit in a discreet manner. Her ritardando is not as subtle to modern ears as her letter may suggest, which shows how subjective notions of timing and style have changed over time. Similarly, Selva indicates that the 'élargissement conclusif ne doit pas être de vastes proportions' [the conclusive ritardando should not be of vast proportions]. However, to modern ears her ritardando is substantial, and yet, her unapologetic resolution into a forte chord results in an exuberant rather than indulgent effect.

Selva's ornaments are, apart from the first in bb. 9 and 11 (which are less even) extremely crystalline and she remains faithful to her score, not adding any other embellishments. She criticises their execution in her student's performance and tells her that this is because 'les doigts qui ne jouent pas n'ont pas encore assez de tension par leur relèvement des phalanges...' [the non-playing fingers do not yet have in their elevation enough tension in the phalanxes.] This is an important element in her technique that is described in Chapter 3 and this letter is further confirmation that she performed according to what she taught.

2. 'Allemande'

As befitting her own indication in the score of Allegro moderato, Selva plays this piece at $\text{♩} = 120$ (approx.), although it appears that she is phrasing it in minims.

Selva's interpretation mirrors her edition and we can hear in this instance how her *chanté* section in b. 21 with the small polyphony is executed not just through pure sound but with agogic nuances, and there is a small inflexion of time there.

Characteristic of this piece are also the fuller sonorities in the forte passages that were highlighted above and are clearly represented in her scores with the indication *très articulé* and accents. Similarly, as in the 'Prélude', the final rallentando culminates in a bright execution of the tonic chord. This is in stark contrast to modern interpretations that consistently soften the cadential point to conclude in an always quieter tonic chord.

'Courante'

As advanced earlier, one of the most salient features of her playing of this piece is her tempo, which, in line with her annotation 'modéré' she plays at 108 to the dotted crotchet (approx).

In contrast to the 'Allemande', Selva plays the first repeat of the 'Courante', although not the second. They are however largely the same and the ornaments are only those as contained in the score, trills and mordents.

The second section is not repeated, and Selva inserts a mordent on the right-hand f#” in b. 33. This section is entirely clean of annotations in Selva’s edition, but her playing evidences a well thought-out dynamic plan. There are clear cresc. in line with the harmonic tension of the piece, e.g., bb. 29-33 which then diminishes until arriving at the tonic in b. 31. The next section builds up to b. 44, arriving at the dominant of the relative minor, that resolves in b. 46; b. 50 marks the journey of the final V-I of the piece, and Selva uses the ascending progression of the trills to propel her momentum, although to a lesser degree than in the first part. The movement closes with a substantial ritardando.

Selva’s version is slow, and yet her first indication to Vidal is that she played it ‘trop lente’ [too slowly]. Importantly, Selva explains to her student the rule to judge the tempos of Bach’s courantes. For Selva, the key is in the character of the following ‘Sarabande’. When the sarabande is not very expressive, then the courante almost takes over and has a calm tempo. However, in a partita such as this, when the ‘Sarabande’ ‘est bien “sarabande”’, the courante has a forward momentum. Indeed, even if her general pulse is slower than expected, her playing is always flowing.

Particularly revealing is also the metaphor she uses when discussing the importance of the internal sense of direction even in the diminuendo passages. Selva compares it to a hike in the mountains, where sometimes a given route may have a slightly downhill path, although one is overall climbing to the top.

This passage illustrates well Selva’s broader vision of music, and musical direction in particular. Even if in her treatise she painstakingly analyses individual physical movements and musical features (such as the *neumes* with all the relevant Greek nomenclature in LP2), these elements never obscure the musical narrative. They are the means, and never the end, and Selva also foregoes their discussion when the student is already an advanced pianist such as Vidal. As such their implementation in the classroom is very much context dependent.

3. 'Sarabande'

Selva's edition closely mirrors her interpretation in the recording,¹³¹ but her recording reveals subtleties in her dynamic and agogic playing that elude annotation. For instance, how she elongates some of the notes, giving them a little more weight against others (highlighted in orange in figure 4.5), and her exquisite tonal control.

Particularly beautiful and exemplary of her playing are bb. 9-10. In Fig. 4.5, I have tried to convey with rudimentary markings and colours her way of leaning into the first note of each slurred motive (in orange), elongating the note slightly and therefore achieving expressivity not just through dynamic but also agogic expression as well as the change of colour into the diminuendo (blue) after the highlighted tonic point of the phrase (red). She uses this interpretative device throughout the Sarabande to great effect.

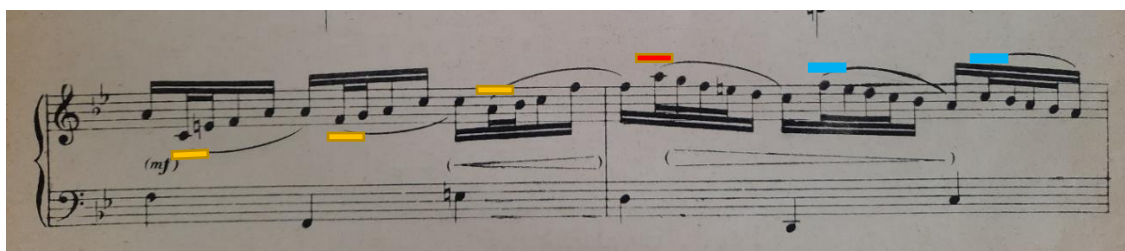


Fig. 4.5 – Bach, Partita I, 'Sarabande', bb. 9-10 with annotations

It is clear from the letter she writes to Vidal in 1938, that the harmonic principles that underpinned her chapter on interpretation in *La Sonate* twenty-five years earlier were still at the forefront of her style and conceptual framework of musical interpretation.

As an example, Selva writes:

Par contre, il ne fallait pas céder au 3^{ème} temps de la mes. 7 à cause qu'au contraire nous revenons vers le V du Fa maj. Donc D. [dominant/V] de D. [dominant/V] du ton général, point culminant, d'éclaircissement, d'affirmation de clarté de toute la pièce.

¹³¹ This is with the exception of b. 20 where in Selva's edition there is bb' which Selva herself plays as natural as is also customary nowadays. She also plays it natural the second time the note appears within the bar.

[However, it is not necessary to delay the third beat of b. 7 because on the contrary, we return to the V of F major. So, dominant of the dominant of the principal tonality, climax, lighting, and affirmation of lightness of the entire piece].

How she describes the small ritardando onto the F major cadence in b. 9 is also interesting: 'il ne faut lui donner caractère de cadence définitive, mais tout de même une certaine largeur tout en restant dans la rigueur métronomique' [it must not be given the character of a final cadence, but even so, a certain elongation whilst remaining within the metronomic rigour is necessary]. It is true that generally, when observing a quaver pulse, Selva remains within the general pulse even when she is slightly stretching particular notes. However, she is not always completely strict in time either; b. 2 second beat the tied quaver is too short, her minim in b. 12 also a quaver too short (even when she criticises Vidal for the same thing, 'trop court la B[lanche] de la fin de la 1^{ère} partie... [...] Tout se fait avec la rigoureuse exactitude de durée (ni trop, ni pas assez...juste !)'¹³² and finally, the second beat of b. 16 is also a bit too short.

4. First and second Menuets

These pieces are the ones that Selva liked least from her student's performance, and her letter provides us with particularly valuable insight.

In the first place, she did not like at all the touch that Vidal had for the second Menuet, as she had played it too heavily.¹³³ This had grave consequences for Selva as 'la transparence idéale qui permet la perception harmonieuse des notes tenues a été complètement détruite de ce fait. Et le chatoiement spécial de ce joyau rare n'a pu exister' [the ideal clarity that allows the harmonic appreciation of the held notes was completely destroyed due to that fact. And the special shimmer of this precious jewel could not be realised]. She recommends to her student to 'écoute bien mon enregistrement' [listen carefully to my recording].

¹³² [Too short the minim at the end of the first part... [...] It is done with the exact rigour of its length (neither too much, nor too little... just right!)] As underlined in the original text.

¹³³ 'Trop lourd de toucher'.

This brief passage allows us to state unequivocally that Selva appreciated her own playing of, at the very least, the second Menuet. It also reinforces the importance of active harmonic listening in her playing and teaching and gives an example of evocative metaphoric language being used to ignite the student's imagination, 'shimmering of a precious jewel'.

Further, another passage of her writing regarding this Menuet contains a vivid description of Selva's own embodied feeling when playing this piece and allows us, as far as possible given the lack of footage of her playing, to visualise her:

Quand je jouais ce menuet, le soulèvement général de dessous les bras, que je gardais durant l'exécution du 1^{er} menuet et de la gigue était à son complet. Je jouais sur l'extrême pointe des doigts et tenais tout mon corps relevé comme pour tenir relevés les paniers d'une jupe d'autrefois, avec le pouce et l'index... Et mes doigts qui ne jouaient pas avaient autant de tension surélevant que je pouvais leur donner, et la pointe des doigts qui jouaient aussi peu de pression qu'il était possible d'en donner pour que le piano parle tout de même... la sonorité de la voix supérieure, la plus acide de toutes. Tout le menuet sans l'ombre d'un ralenti, il faut avaler le métronome pour jouer ça et que ce soient nos doigts qui fassent son tic-tac... [...] Il faut toujours faire la reprise de chaque période encore plus *ppp* que la 1^{ère} émission et encore plus acide, surtout la reprise de la 2^{ème} période, pas l'ombre d'amollissement, ni de tempo, ni de timbre (V. mon disque).

[When I played this menuet, the general uplift from under the arms, that I maintained in the first menuet and the gigue was complete. I played on the outmost tip of the fingers having all my body lifted as for keeping the hoop petticoat from another era held up, with the thumb and index fingers... And my fingers that did not play had as much uplift tension as I could give them, and the tip of the fingers that play had as little pressure as it was possible to give them to make the piano speak... the sonority of the high voice, the most acid of them all. All the menuet without a shadow of rallentando, it is necessary to have swallowed the metronome to play this and that it is our fingers that do the tic-tac [...] It is necessary to make the repeat of each section even more *ppp* than the first time and even more acidic, especially the repeat of the second section, without a shadow of softening, of tempo or timbre. (See my disc).]

This passage graphically reveals Selva's position at the piano, a pronounced elevation of the arms, that she used also for the first Menuet as well as the following Gigue. The physical experience she is describing results in a lightness of touch, as described by her and easily ascertainable by anyone who sits at the piano and tries what she proposes,

which is produced by removing as much of the natural weight of the arm as possible. It gives the player a feeling of having her fingers almost suspended from the air.

This is particularly striking as one of the central pillars in her treatise is precisely the effective use of the natural weight of the arm in piano playing. However, as already indicated in previous chapters, Selva is not a dogmatic performer or teacher, and uses all her technical arsenal to the advancement of music. Far from painting all the music with the same colours or brushes, Selva develops a broad kinaesthetic vocabulary that she applies in accordance with the individual needs of each piece of music.

Although admonishing her student for taking too fast a tempo in the first Menuet (and too slow a one in the second), Selva's tempo of 69 to the dotted minim is at the very edge of a 'modéré' menuet. However, Selva tells Vidal, 'jamais un menuet ne peut être aussi rapide que tu as pris ce 1^{er} menuet, cela lui enlève tout caractère de menuet' [a menuet cannot ever be as fast as you played the 1st menuet, that removes from it all the character of a menuet] and one is therefore left to wonder what vertiginous speed Vidal may have taken on that day.

As she indicates to her student, her recording of the second Menuet is very strictly in time, although she does soften the timing of the final dotted minim of the first phrase, and does two rallentandos, the second one larger, at the end of the second section: the second time, even beginning it 3 bars before the end. This repetition is exquisite in her dynamic approach with a beautifully executed *pp*.

Her recording also shows a detail that she points out to her student, which is highlighting the f# in b. 23 in the left hand, leaning on that bass line to enunciate the cadence to G minor, the relative minor of the original tonic. This is noticeable the three times that Selva plays this part of the first Menuet¹³⁴ and stresses again the relevance of harmonic awareness in her playing.

¹³⁴ '6^{ème} mes. De la 2^{nde} partie : faire davantage valoir le fa# du 1^{er} temps de la m.g.. Il faut qu'il soit plus en dehors, plus appuyé, afin qu'il rayonne sur toute la mesure, l'englobant dans ses vibrations de manière que la cadence V-I du sol min. soit comme l'élargissement concentrique d'une flaque d'eau qui se répand et s'étale.' [6th bar of the second part: emphasise the f# of the first beat in the left hand. It must be more pronounced, more supported, so that it radiates

Finally, the *mf* indication in b. 34, 6 bars before the cadence of the first Menuet is never executed as such. Selva rather takes a significantly softer dynamic overall, with a noticeable diminuendo effect which is not apparent from her graphic indication in the score. However, she takes this approach the three times that she plays this section, and it is therefore a very deliberate effect.

5. 'Gigue'

Selva tells Vidal that it is imperative to always do the first repeat of the dance, due to the 'équilibre architectural' [architectural balance]. However, this is not so in her recording and neither section is repeated. This strongly suggests that the decision not to make this repeat, is due to the physical space on the disc, which also explains the absence of repeats in the 'Courante'.¹³⁵

Selva's tempo is approximately ♩ = 132, although she pushes the metronome in places, particularly in the second section. Nevertheless, we can be quite certain that she was at least reasonably satisfied with her interpretation in this regard, for she criticises Vidal for a slightly faster tempo, and recommends her to listen to her recording. On the other hand, the piece is entirely devoid of final ritardandos and with reference to Vidal's letter this is also unequivocally a deliberate choice: 'terminaison sans l'ombre de pédale ni de ralenti' [ending without a shadow of pedal nor rallentando]. Interestingly, this is the only dance where she has inserted pedal markings, which are always short and mostly reinforce the first and third beats of the bar. A notable exception can be found in passages such as bb. 5-6, when the melody moves in seconds, there is no pedal between the notes. The other is in the section starting in b.

over the whole bar, encompassing it in its vibrations so that the V-I cadence into G minor becomes like the concentric widening of a pool of water that spreads and spreads.]

¹³⁵ As explained by Robert Philip, 'Until the development of the Long-Playing Record in the late 1940s, a long movement usually had to be recorded, and always had to be played back in short sections. A 12-inch 78 rpm record had a time-limit of under five minutes per side (though occasionally longer), nearer four minutes in the early days. If the music did not fit conveniently on a side, it could be split between two or more sides, or shortened by cutting, or played faster than usual.' Robert Philip, *Performing in the Age of Recording* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 35.

32, where Selva asks for a sonority with *una corda* and no sustaining pedal lasting 9 bars.

Most interesting in Selva's letter is her description of her own feeling when playing this particular passage:

Durant toute cette période, je retenais mon souffle autant que possible, ne respirant à peine et même quelquefois pas du tout... je ne reprenais la normalité de souffle, qu'une fois la descente finie et cela contribuait au « bien-être » qui faisait éprouver la remontée.

[During the whole of this section, I held my breath as much as possible, only breathing slightly, and sometimes not at all... I did not recommence breathing normally until the end of the descent, which contributed to the 'well-being' experienced in the ascent.]

The most striking element of her recording is, however, her moderate tempo, which befits her own characterisation in her edition of '*Allegretto con moto espressivo*', where any kind of virtuosity is rejected. Her gigue exudes restraint, elegance and a certain air of dignity which befits the final piece of a *Partita* that is likewise characterised above all for a sense of moderation and control.

César Franck, *Prélude, Choral et Fugue*

This is a work that Selva performed very often in her career. From the first time that she performed it on 25 May 1900, Selva played this piece in at least 127 concerts spanning the entirety of her career.¹³⁶ It is therefore safe to infer that she knew the piece intimately, and that by the time she recorded the piece, had a very clear conceptual idea of it, and that it is more likely than not that the recording reflects this.

It is also important to contextualise Selva within the Franckist tradition, as a student of Vincent d'Indy, who had himself studied with Franck. Indeed, Selva was often hailed for being the heiress of this tradition, and her interpretations of Franck were praised, being labelled '*la grande prêtresse de Franckisme*' [the great priestess of Franckism.]¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Guy Selva, *Blanche Selva, héritière spirituelle de César Franck*, p. 7.

¹³⁷ Fauquet, *César Franck*, p. 346 as quoted by Langham Smith, p. 107.

Selva also knew the composer's work more broadly from her piano arrangements of three of his chorales for organ,¹³⁸ and her edition of *Danse lente*.¹³⁹ As noted above, Chiantore and Langham Smith have provided valuable insight into Selva's interpretation of this work.

In his article,¹⁴⁰ Langham Smith notes that Selva does not employ the usual Romantic expressive techniques, such as arpeggiation and dislocation,¹⁴¹ but that she displays interpretative freedom through different means.

His analysis is based on a comparison with her contemporary, but much more famous as a legendary historical pianist, Alfred Cortot, a comparison also drawn by Chiantore in his analysis. For the avoidance of doubt, Cortot's recording is that of 6 and 19 March 1929 in the Small Queen's Hall, London.¹⁴²

Chiantore focuses on the *a capriccio* section of the 'Prélude' and highlights Selva's emphasis on the tonic accent of each bar, whilst for him, Cortot's interpretation that is 'hautement sensuelle et passionnée, chargée de contrastes dynamiques à la recherche d'une direction de grande échelle, d'une incontestable efficacité' [highly sensual and passionate, charged with dynamic contrasts in the search for large scale directionality of undeniable effectiveness.] He also states that it is not strange that the public, 'ait suivi en masse le charismatique pianiste français, dans les interprétations duquel des gestes d'un immense impact émotionnel ne font aucune ombre aux petites sophistications les plus sublimes'¹⁴³ [followed the charismatic French pianist, whose interpretations with gestures of immense emotional impact did not overshadow the most sublime small details.]

¹³⁸ César Franck, *Trois Chorals pour orgue. Transcription pour Piano à 2 mains par Blanche Selva* (Paris: Durand & Cie, 1910). Plate D.&F. 7925.

¹³⁹ César Franck, *Danse lente. Avec doigtés et indications d'interprétation par Blanche Selva* (Paris: Roudanez, 1919).

¹⁴⁰ Langham Smith, 'Style, Performance Practice and Reception', pp. 105-123.

¹⁴¹ For a detailed study of these devices, Neal Peres da Costa, *Off the record* (Oxford: OUP, 2012), Chapters 2-3: Playing One Hand after the Other: Dislocation and Unnotated Arpeggiation.

¹⁴² *Alfred Cortot: 1929-1937*, Alfred Cortot (Naxos 8.111381, 2010).

¹⁴³ Chiantore, 'La théorie du *neume*', p. 120.

However, going back to the sources of the period it is not definitely the case that Cortot's Franck interpretations were always as well received. Chiantore's view of Cortot's 'immense impact émotionnel' can be contrasted with the review of Cortot's performance of the *Prélude, Choral et Fugue* in 1904.¹⁴⁴

Il faut que rien n'y sente le caprice et l'improvisation. Le charme d'une interprétation n'en exclut pas la sévérité et quand on veut faire valoir des lignes aussi pures et aussi nobles, le mieux est de les présenter simplement en pleine lumière sans commentaires. C'est ce que M. Cortot nous paraît un peu avoir oublié dans le *Prélude*. Quant au *Choral*, il est comme on sait composé de 3 versets, ... Le choral descend pour ainsi dire du ciel comme un chœur céleste en réponse à une ardente prière ?... M. Cortot nous par un inexplicable caprice a donné de ce choral un caractère saccadé et brutal. Il l'a pris dans un mouvement accéléré, sait-on pourquoi ? Et quand aux accords brisés, il les a brisés avec une telle décision que sa main gauche, conformément au précepte évangélique, a constamment ignoré ce que faisait la main droite.

[Nothing should be left to caprice and improvisation. The charm of an interpretation is not mutually exclusive with discipline and when one wants to show the pure and noble lines in the music, the best is to present them simply in full light without commentary. This is what Mr Cortot appears to have somewhat forgotten in the *Prélude*. With regard to the *Choral*, it is composed, as we know, in three verses, ... The choral descends, so to say, from the sky like a celestial choir in response to an ardent prayer?... Mr Cortot, by an inexplicable caprice, gave to this choral a jerky and brutal character. He took an accelerated tempo, do we know why? And regarding the broken chords, he played them so decisively that his left hand, in conformity with the evangelist's precept, never knew what the right hand was doing.]

Cortot himself greatly appreciated Selva's Franck playing, so his words in 1930:

Une grande artiste contemporaine, qui a consacré à l'interprétation des œuvres de Franck le meilleur de son talent et son cœur, M^{lle} Blanche Selva, a fait remarquer avec infiniment de justesse que l'ondulation rythmique franckiste n'est en rien assimilable au rubato et qu'elle naît de l'émotion, non du caprice.¹⁴⁵

[A great contemporary artist who dedicated the best of her talent and heart to the interpretations of Franck, Mlle Blanche Selva, remarked with infinite judgement that franckist rhythmic undulation is not assimilable to rubato, and that it is born out of emotion, not caprice.]

¹⁴⁴ Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 47.

¹⁴⁵ Alfred Cortot, *La musique française de piano Vol. 1* (Paris: Éditions Rieder, 1930), p. 97.

Although brief, Selva left some commentary regarding the interpretation of this piece in her book on the sonata which has provided greater interpretative insight. She emphasises the importance of harmonic development and colours. As the piece is in B minor, every time that the harmony leaves this tonal anchor, such as E-flat major or minor when the key of B appears again, this ought to reflect the ‘paix et gloires finales’.¹⁴⁶ A clear example of the application of this principle in her interpretation can be found in her recording of bb. 35-37, shown in Fig. 4.6.

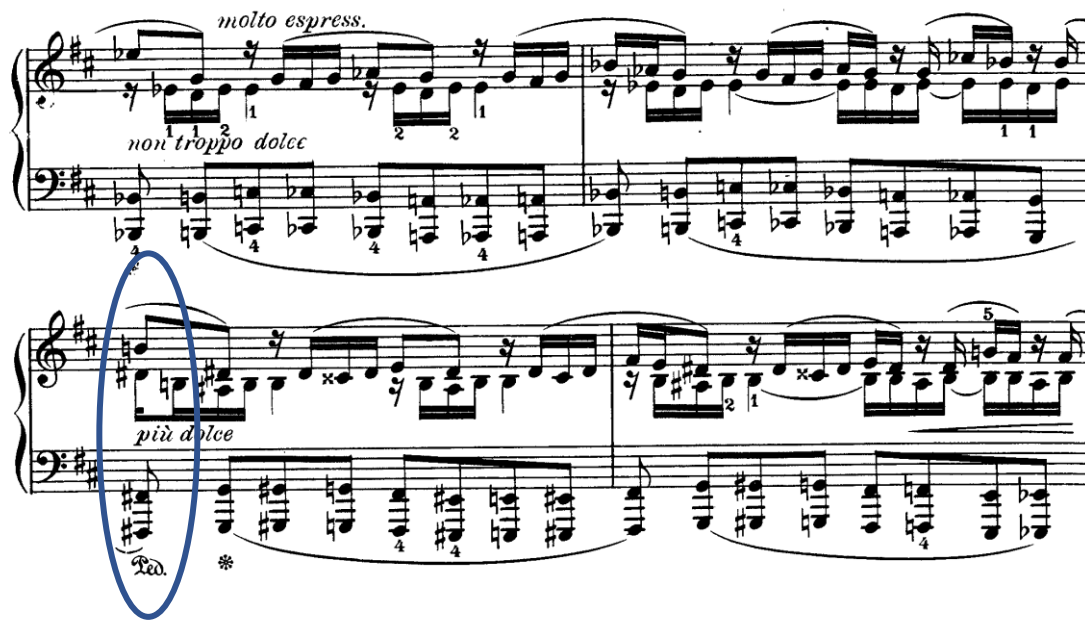


Fig. 4.6 – Franck, *Prélude, Choral et Fugue*, bb. 35-38

Selva prepares the B major chord in second inversion in b. 37 by placing the chord, that is, by ever so slightly delaying it and playing it with an exquisite pianissimo. This is a very effective device in her recording, because Selva delays the downbeats extremely infrequently in her playing.

¹⁴⁶ Selva, *La Sonate*, p. 188. ‘Le ton principal est si. C’est le lieu de l’action propre au thème humain. Toutes les fois que seront touchés, dans l’œuvre, les tons de Mib ou de mib, tons obscurs et lointains, apparaîtra le ton de Si, ton de paix et de gloires finales. C’est cette admirable marche tonale qui révèle toutes les intentions expressives de cet émouvant chef-d’œuvre’. [The main key is B. This is the place where the action of the human theme appears. Whenever the keys of E-flat major or E-flat minor are touched in the pieces, keys that are dark and distant, the key of B will appear as the key of peace and final glory. It is this admirable tonal march that reveals all the expressive intentions of this moving masterpiece.]

In fact, as she further explains,

Les ondulations de la mélodie de Franck ou de ses dessins accompagnants doivent être traduits surtout par la différence d'*intensité* (allègement après l'accent, en particulier) bien plus que par la différence de *rapidité* des sons. Cela ne doit pas se rendre par des saccades, des précipitations de mauvais goût, de ces « rubato à la tzigane » qui cherchent à faire croire à plus d'expression qu'il y en a vraiment.¹⁴⁷

[The undulations in Franck's melodies or of his accompaniment figures have to be realised especially through a difference in *intensity* (release after the accent, in particular) more than a difference in *velocity* of the sounds. The effect cannot be achieved through jerks, anticipations of bad taste, those 'gypsy style rubato' that pretend to create more expression than there really is.]

Most relevant in this passage and a prominent feature of her interpretation of this piece is what she describes as 'allègement après l'accent'. That is, Selva does not delay the downbeat itself, but its release into the following beat. This is something that is very noticeable in the *a capriccio* section that was studied by Chiantore and Langham Smith but was not dealt with by them, and is also noticeable in other parts of the work.

In the *Come una cadenza* section of the 'Fugue', Fig. 4.7, Selva consistently delays the resolution of the next beat into the next melodic point. This stresses the declamatory effect by underscoring its length and resolving more softly and later than playing strictly in time would produce. Cortot plays metrically but, interestingly, I came across a live recording by Lugansky from 2014, who uses a similar rhetorical device to Selva's in this passage.¹⁴⁸

This lengthening of downbeat notes is consistent with the praxis advocated by Charles Bériot and recorded in his *Mécanisme et Style*, a work known to Selva as she also quotes from it in her treatise. As noted by Susanne Skyrm¹⁴⁹ Bériot's musical understanding is rooted in the spoken language:

¹⁴⁷ Selva, *La Sonate*, p. 193.

¹⁴⁸ Live recording of the 2014 Festival de la Grange de Meslay performance, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ct516-YDc4k>> [accessed 1 July 2021].

¹⁴⁹ Susanne Skyrm, 'An early Granados Mentor: Charles-Wilfred de Bériot', in *Enrique Granados in Context. La escuela española de piano y los movimientos artísticos entorno a la Gran Guerra*, ed. by Luisa Morales, Michael Christoforidis, Walter A. Clark (Almería: FIMTE Festival Internacional de Música de Tecla Española, 2020), p. 37.

Like an orator, a true artist must understand the importance of breathing in the correct place, the emphasis of certain words or notes and how that emphasis changes meaning, and the prolongation of certain notes representing the climax of a phrase. Rather than accenting the note, it may be prolonged beyond its written value.



Fig. 4.7 – Franck, *Prélude, Choral et Fugue*, ‘Come una cadenza’, bb. 129-134

In the *a capriccio* section (Fig. 4.8), Selva likewise elongates the first quavers in every pair consistently to great declamatory effect. Although Chiantore focuses on the downbeat accents themselves, it is the lengthening of the note and the careful release ensuing quieter dynamic that make the passage truly distinct from Cortot, who plays in strict time without such dynamic differences.



Fig. 4.8 – Franck, *Prélude, Choral et Fugue, 'A capriccio'*, bb. 7-14

Langham Smith notes of this passage, that in b. 12 (Fig. 4.8) Selva plays a pianissimo in the *poco rit.* section that is not written in the score, although Franck indicates it in the following *a capriccio* section and that 'her approach seems to assert a connection often warned against by piano teachers these days: that accelerando and crescendo are associated, and ritardando and decrescendo'.¹⁵⁰ This approach however was very much in style at the time and advocated by other interpreters, notably Bériot.¹⁵¹

Langham Smith's conclusion may also be an oversimplification of Selva's interpretative resources viewed holistically. As already discussed, Selva inherited from d'Indy a

¹⁵⁰ Langham Smith, p. 119.

¹⁵¹ Skyrn, pp. 35-36. 'With the caveat that there is no fixed rule for suppleness in tempo, he advises that generally animation coincides with *crescendo* and *ritenuto* with *diminuendo*. These nuances are too fleeting to be notated by the composer: the player must feel them and render them in the correct proportion.'

strong interpretative framework based on the musical forms and structure. This is also in evidence throughout her *La Sonate* text. I believe that it is more plausible that her pianissimo in b. 12 corresponds to a deliberate interpretative decision to provide symmetry between both *a capriccio* sections.

Further, there are examples in her playing that dispel the notion that Selva associated crescendo with *accelerando* or *ritardando/rallentando* with decrescendo axiomatically, for example the way she plays bb. 22-23, Fig. 4.9.

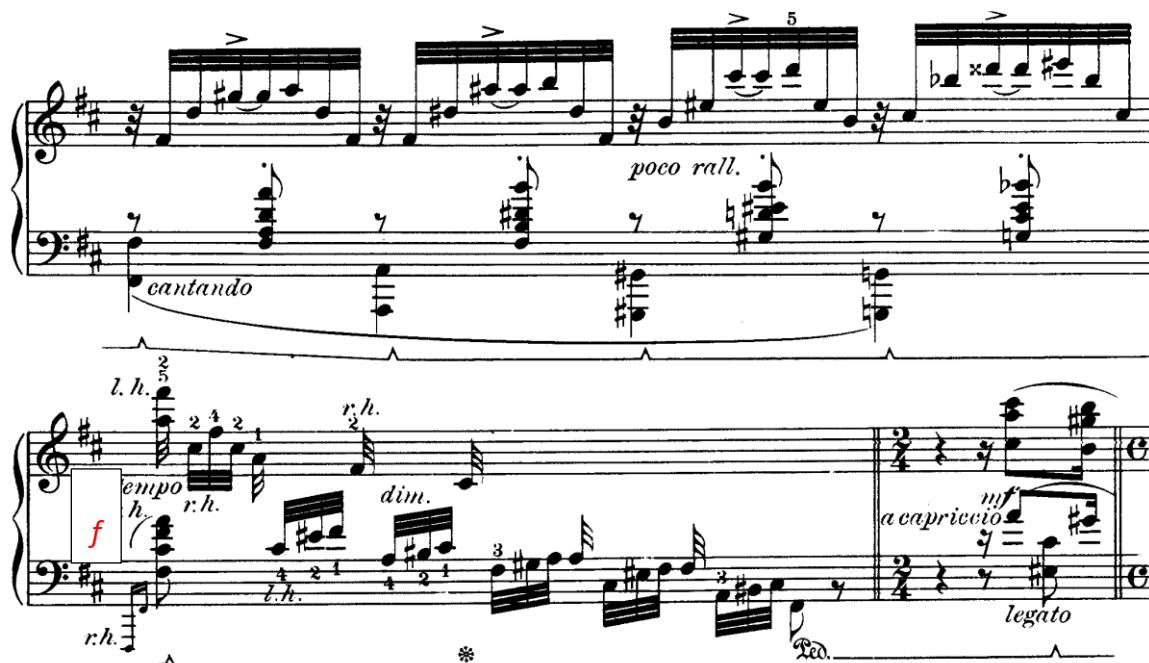


Fig. 4.9 – Franck, *Prélude, Choral et Fugue*, bb. 22-23

In b. 22 Selva highlights the bass line marked *cantando* and develops a majestic crescendo that is not written in the score through the *poco rallentando* culminating in a *forte* dynamic (not written in the score) in b. 23 to play the F-sharp minor chord. By contrast, Cortot plays *rallentando* with a pronounced diminuendo into pianissimo.

A highlight of Selva's recording, and something that sets her apart from the other versions consulted is the way she emphasises the theme in the fugue when it appears hidden by the right-hand octaves, bb. 94-98, Fig. 4.10.



Fig. 4.10 – Franck, *Prélude, Choral et Fugue*, bb. 94-98

Selva creates a wonderful *ff* sonority yet keeps the appearance of the theme as a centrepiece, displaying her clear architectural understanding of the work.

Finally, her 1913 *La Sonate* has some acidic comments concerning how, in her view, this piece was played or understood by other pianists of the time and some words of advice to the interpreter of Franck, which ought to inspire modern readers as they may have done previous generations.

Et comme ils ne savent pas *qui est Franck*, qu'ils ont seulement appris, au hasard des salles de concerts, que lorsqu'on jouait « du Franck » on était un virtuose « sérieux », ils viennent demander à son nom de consacrer leur personnelle réputation. Mais l'habitude de la mascarade publique les fait craindre que le succès ne réponde suffisamment à leur ambition. Alors, pour présenter ce « père Franck » dans le monde, ils lui font la toilette et le revêtent d'oripeaux décrochés au « *magasin des accessoires* » du théâtre des passions humaines !

Interprète qui voulez toucher à Franck, rentrez-en vous-mêmes, faites d'abord votre âme semblable à la sienne ; que votre cœur, ainsi que le sien, vibre d'une ardeur très pure... alors seulement vous pourrez espérer faire resplendir l'incomparable trésor de son génie.¹⁵²

¹⁵² Selva, *La Sonate*, p. 194.

[And as they do not know *who is Franck*, as they have only learned, randomly in the concert halls, that if one plays “Franck” one is a “serious” virtuoso, they expect of his name a personal consecration of their own reputation. But the habit of the theatrical public masquerade makes them fear that this success would not adequately match their own ambition. So, to present this “father Franck” in the world, they put some make up on him and dress him in rags found in that “costume store” of the theatre of human passions! Performers who wish to play Franck, enter into yourselves, first make your soul like his; let your heart, like his, vibrate with pure ardour... only then will you be able to make the incomparable treasure of his genius shine.]

Déodat de Séverac

Selva recorded three pieces from Séverac’s corpus: *Baigneuses au soleil*, ‘Les muletiers devant le Christ de Llivia’ (from the suite *Cerdaña*) and ‘Vers le Mas en fête’ (from the suite *En Languedoc*).

Apart from Juli Garreta, Séverac is the only composer recorded by Selva with whom she worked closely, and her recordings are possibly the first of his works. They are therefore a valuable source of insight into how the composer may have heard the pieces performed and whether or not he approved (cf Chapter 7). Nevertheless, this should not be the only purpose of our enquiry into Selva’s recordings. As is well observed by Dingle:

Much performance practice scholarship focuses on an attempt to discern the composer’s expectations. As a consequence, early recordings are often consulted for similar reasons, in order to obtain insight and context for the practices the composer knew or desired. [...] This is a coherent aspiration, for the authority of interpretative practice is often judged by proximity to the composer’s wishes (perceived or actual).¹⁵³

However, as the author states a little later in the same passage, ‘a performer may find insights and solutions unimagined by the composer’, and sometimes ‘certain approaches running counter to the composer’s conception may carry musical weight and be widely accepted’. Indeed, as is shown later in Chapter 7, Séverac stated that Selva had revealed to him his own *Cerdaña* with her interpretation, and it is proposed

¹⁵³ Dingle, p. 132.

that her playing of Séverac's music, a composer with whom she had a very close rapport and affinity, offers us a unique insight, not just into his sound world, but hers.

In fact, the reissues of *En Languedoc* and *Cerdaña* give credit to Selva for being the one who added the *indications d'interprétation* and *nuances* to these pieces. This indication is absent from *Baigneuses* but a hypothesis discussed in Chapter 7 is that Selva's hand is also behind the annotations in it as well as in the first publications of the other pieces.

Another interesting avenue of enquiry stems from the recordings of the French pianist Jean-Joël Barbier (1920-1994). Charles Timbrell in his interview with Barbier noted that he could hear a similarity of approach between Barbier's playing of Séverac's *Cerdaña* suite and Selva's.¹⁵⁴ Indeed Barbier was exposed to Selva's pedagogy from the outset as he studied with two students of hers; first with Louise Terrier for eleven years and later with one of Selva's main assistants, the Czech pianist Libussé Novak.¹⁵⁵ In fact, Jean-Joël Barbier also recorded the other two pieces examined here, and contrasting his playing with Selva's offers us an opportunity to assess whether there are any elements of Selva's school that could have been passed on via the interpretation of these pieces. For Barbier, one of the hallmarks of Selva's playing was that 'she phrased in such a natural way, with long, long lines, never stopping halfway through a phrase to emphasize a particular note or harmony'.¹⁵⁶ Selva's recording of 'Les muletiers' clearly validates Barbier's assessment. Her rendition is predominantly characterised by a strong forward momentum that is closer to the interpretative style of a symphonic orchestra than a solo pianist. The way she approaches the arpeggiations, always ahead of the beat and never played slowly so as to clearly enunciate the melody also supports this approach. More recent versions such as Michel Bourdoncle's in 1994¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ Charles Timbrell, *French Pianism: A Historical Perspective* 2nd edn (London: Kahn & Averill and Pro/Am Music Resources, 1999), p. 204.

¹⁵⁵ Timbrell, p. 204. Barbier also states that he was never directly taught by Selva, but that he 'heard her perform often, went to her courses' [...], also p. 204.

¹⁵⁶ Timbrell, p. 206.

¹⁵⁷ *Musique Romantique Française pour Piano*, Michel Bourdoncle (Doron Music DRC 3018, 1994).

or Laurent Martin's in 2018¹⁵⁸ have more pianistic mannerisms than Selva's. As an example, Fig. 4.11 shows bb. 25-30.



Fig. 4.11 – Séverac, *Cerdaña*, 'Les muletiers devant le Christ de Llivia', bb. 25-30

When Selva plays the repetitions of the motif in b. 27 she does it exactly as it is written in the score, with each bar at a clearly different dynamic level but playing strictly in time. The two aforementioned contemporary pianists however, place every repeat, that is, they include a slight agogic pull ahead of enunciating the motive. This is not a criticism of their playing and both pianists play beautifully. But it is obvious in the recording of this piece that this type of expressive device is not in Selva's vocabulary. Similarly, both Martin and Bourdoncle introduce other agogic subtleties, small rubatos in places such as the melodic line that starts in b. 12, whilst Selva inflects the dynamic expression and contour through the hairpins but presents the melody rhythmically pure. The effect in Selva's rendition, far from sounding mechanical, is of greater emotive effect as the piece unfolds in a very sincere and heartfelt way.

In general, Selva follows the indications of the score very closely, but the *cédez à peine* in bar 19 (Fig. 4.12) is not executed. Instead, Selva does a *cédez* in the previous bar, arriving onto b. 19, but the demisemiquavers are played in time.

¹⁵⁸ Déodat de Séverac: *La vasque aux colombes*, Laurent Martin (Ligia 192135, 2018).



Fig. 4.12 – Séverac, *Cerdaña*, 'Les muletiers devant le Christ de Livia', bb. 19-21

In fact, whenever this anacrusic motif appears, Selva plays it strictly in time, which gives the piece an earthy feel that is more akin to the popular spirit of the *Cerdaña* suite, and which is spoiled if there are too many romantic rubatos distorting the pulse.

In Barbier's recording this sense of big line and momentum is also present. However, Selva does something unique in her treatment of the opening unison (Fig. 4.13) that is not present in Barbier's version either. Selva clearly projects the left-hand bass melody instead of the right hand, giving this opening phrase a much darker and richer tone. This colour is then matched at the very end, when each hand plays $b\flat$ unisons, and Selva highlights the deep bass notes. Pianists such as Barbier, Martin, Bourdoncle or even Ciccolini all conclude the piece with the same dark tone, but they all choose to emphasise the upper voice in the beginning — which is standard pianistic practice. Selva's rendition offers another possibility to the performer and evidences her continuous and imaginative search for different means of expression through sound.



Fig. 4.13 – Séverac, *Cerdaña*, 'Les muletiers devant le Christ de Llivia', bb. 1-7

'Vers le Mas en fête' (from *En Languedoc*)

Selva's treatment of 'Vers le Mas en fête' also evidences a solid foundation in the score with Selva only occasionally departing from it. Further, contrasting the earlier 1905 edition with the 1919 reissue, where the annotations are incontestably hers, gives us some interesting points to note.

Selva clearly emphasises the right-hand melodic line that results from accenting the marked semiquavers within the sextuplets (Fig. 4.14 shows bb. 30-33, the passage in question is the one that begins in b. 31). These accents do not appear in the 1905 edition. Irrespective of whether the 1905 indications were also Selva's or Séverac's, the version that has come down to us bears a clear indication that can transform the interpretation of the music. Contrasting Ciccolini's and Barbier's interpretations with one another, in Ciccolini one can hear the phrasing as Selva performed it and is indicated in the later 1919 text. Barbier, however, chooses instead to highlight and lead through the bass line in this passage, which is what appears logical when the semiquaver sextuplets are unaccented. Barbier does the same in bb. 80-85 when the motif appears in a different key. It is possible that Barbier may have been using the older first edition for his recording, whilst Selva and Ciccolini most likely played

following the 1919 indications. Another passage lends further support to this hypothesis.



Fig. 4.14 – Séverac, *En Languedoc*, ‘Vers le Mas en fête’, bb. 30-33

1919 R.L. 11046 edition

Fig. 4.15 and 4.16 below show bb. 124-129 in both editions.

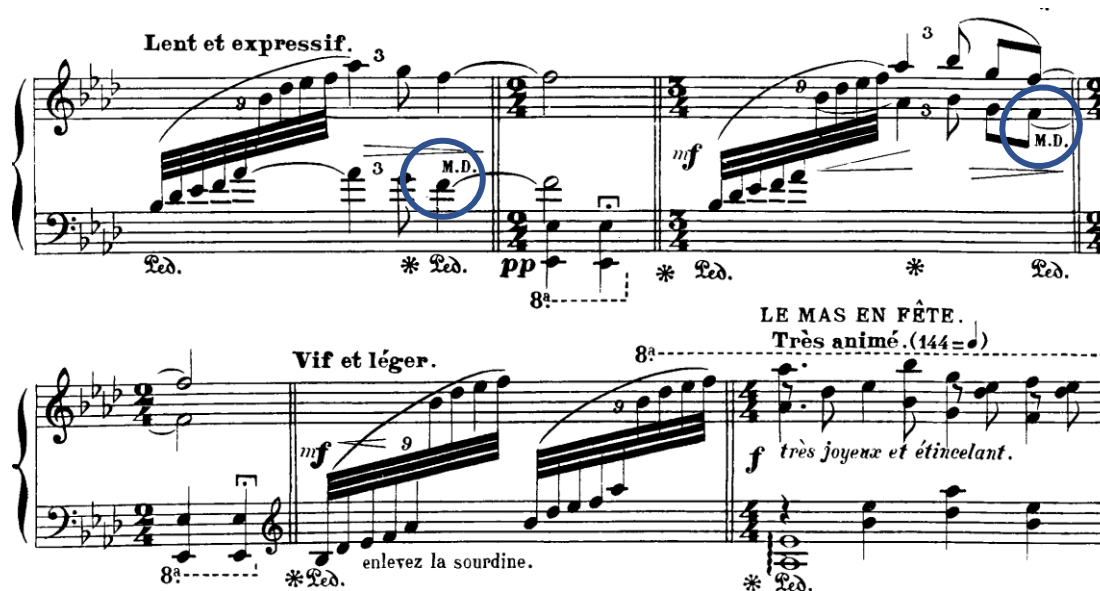


Fig. 4.15 – Séverac, *Cerdaña*, ‘Vers le Mas en fête’, bb. 124-129

1905 E. 3073.M. edition

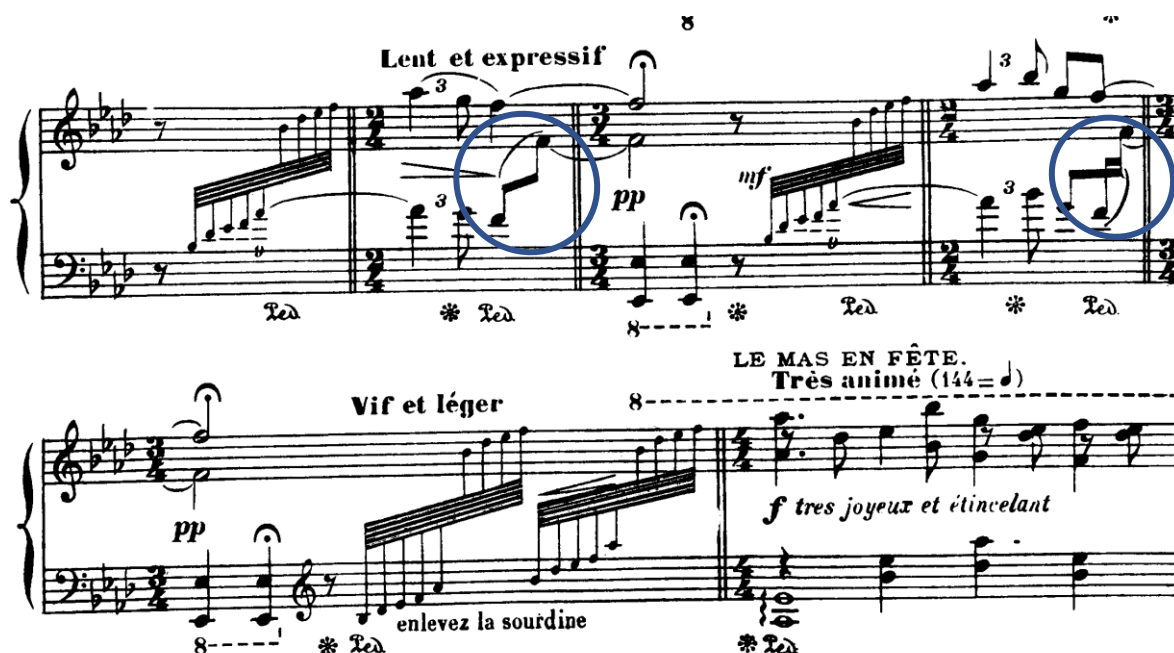


Fig. 4.16 – Séverac, *En Languedoc*, 'Ver le Mas en fête', bb. 124-129
1919 R.L. 11046 edition

Although in Selva's recording the only quaver rest that is audible is the one in b. 128, her playing of the small figurations with a light touch and clear direction towards the high ab'' reveal that she is playing from the 1919 score. This is also the case in Ciccolini's performance: he is more accurate than Selva and lifts the pedal in every quaver rest (as indicated by her). However, when listening to Barbier it becomes apparent that he was most likely playing from the 1905 score. The way he leans on the first $b\flat$ of the ascending figuration shows that he understands that note as athetic point in the bar. Moreover, he plays without any of the rests in the score and without differentiating the touch as much between the smaller and larger figurations.

As was highlighted above by Chiantore, it is regrettable that we do not have film recordings to watch the pianists' craft at play. However, this small passage also lets us see a little of Selva's own way at the piano. As marked with blue circles, the 1905 edition already bears an indication to play the bottom octave with the right hand so as to be able to hold the note through whilst playing the bass eb octaves. The 1919 solution is more sophisticated by halving the figurations and apportioning a half to each hand. In this way, the note is played with the left hand first, which is more

convenient, and the right hand takes over with hand substitution, so that the notes can be held. It is only a small point, but one that yet again shows Selva's meticulous attention to detail and care.

Of note, however, in her recording is her rhythmic inaccuracy in the opening theme. In b. 4, she plays the dotted minim as a minim instead, and thus the effect of the 5/4 is erased. It is of course not possible to ascertain whether this was an accident of the moment, or a mistake that was never picked up and stayed with her longer. In this regard, she also takes the Presque lent in b. 228 faster than indicated. The 1919 version states $\text{♩} = 56$, whilst in her recording Selva clearly plays this passage at $\text{♩} = 66$, which is coincidentally the tempo indicated in the 1905 edition. The other notable difference is found in bb. 52-53. Although the score indicates cresc. and ritardando ahead of the following *p*, Selva clearly plays diminuendo and ritardando in anticipation of the following bar.

Nevertheless, her recording does follow the score closely and there are remarkable moments in it. The 'Halte a la Fontaine' in particular (starting in b. 94) which is annotated in the 1919 score with *effleurez les touches; très léger et très lié. Toujours très fondu et avec une sonorité cristalline* is played with a delicate and beautiful tone that is unmatched by other recordings. It is suggested that the weightless approach as described by her in Vidal's letter concerning Bach's Menuets may have been used here to create this effect.

Baigneuses au soleil

Finally, the third of Séverac's pieces recorded by Selva is *Baigneuses au soleil*. Apart from her recording, there are valuable insights in Selva's letter addressed to Vidal. Many of her notes to her student refer to following the letter of the score, as Selva highlights the importance of the sonority and rhythmic fantasy 'par la simple caractérisation des durées indiquées par le texte de Séverac!' [by the simple characterisation of the indicated lengths of notes in Séverac's text].

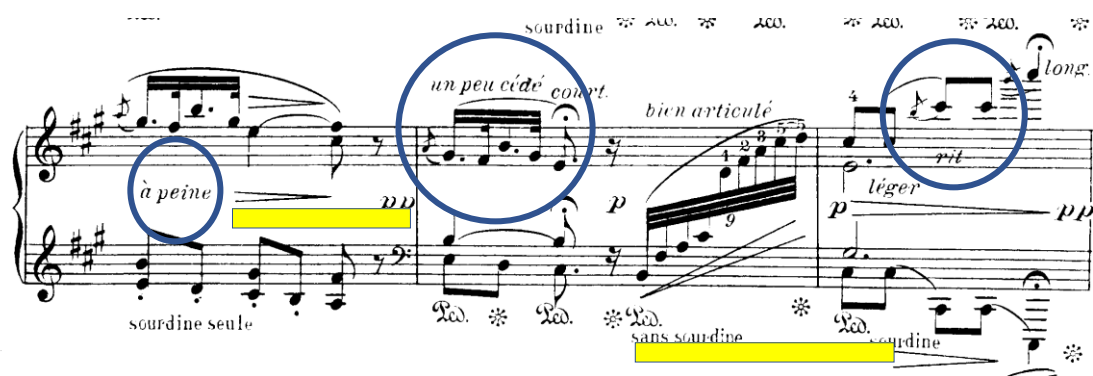


Fig. 4.17 – Séverac, *Baigneuses au soleil*, bb. 7-9

As shown in Fig. 4.17, in bb. 7-9 Selva reminds Vidal to observe the agogic indications (*à peine*, *un peu cédé* and the *rit*) exactly where they are marked and to return to tempo subito in between (marked yellow in Fig. 4.18). Furthermore, she asks Vidal to rise her arms a little apart ('le soulèvement un peu écarté des bras') at the end of the passage, no doubt to preserve a weightless touch onto the pianissimo. Selva also highlights the importance of undertaking all the written nuances on p. 2. In the span of 11 bars there are indications of: *poco cresc*, *f*, *p*, *dimin*, *pp*, *Très léger*, *diminuendo*, *ppp*, *cresc*, *f*, *p*, *sfz*, *p cédez à peine*, *cresc*, *mf*, *pp*, *plus f*, *mf*, *pp with cresc*, as well as detailed pedal markings, which entail combinations of only una corda pedal, only sustaining pedal, or passages with both. In fact, in b. 18 the score requires the player to execute a forte chord whilst holding both pedals, resulting in a more muted sonority which is audible in Selva's recording.

Proof that the type of weightless approach suggested by her for Bach's second Menuet has an application within Séverac's sound world for a very light type of playing can be found in her indication concerning the playing of the piano parts of the bar starting in b. 39. Selva states: 'plus mordant les temps 2, 3, 4 de mes.1 et ce qui suit (tension des doigts). Et aussi, en général, comme pour le 2^{ème} menuet de la Partita, le soulèvement un peu écarté des bras... il faut sentir de l'air sous les aisselles en écartant les bras jusqu'au coude' [sharper on the 2, 3, 4 beats of the first bar, and what follows (tension of the fingers). And as well, in general, as it was for the second menuet in the Partita, the arms slightly raised apart... You have to feel air under the armpits as you spread your arms to the elbow.]

[Do not worry if you still cannot get there. I worked on that passage for years with all the arm gestures as exaggerated as possible, all the left-hand chords separated with rests with the arm in the air vertically, and the right hand with rounded *articulation maxima*, with fast maximum action as well. In summary, the work of a maniac. This passage needs to sound like a harmonica.]

The 'Étincelant' is indeed one of the technically most demanding passages with octaves and chords in the left hand, and very fast and slightly awkward right-hand motifs. Indeed, b. 83 betrays some wrong notes on the second and third beats, which Selva then plays neatly in the repetition of the passage in b. 84. Nevertheless, the passage is played with a beautiful and poignant bravura light touch to great effect.

Indeed, her rhythmic accuracy and lightness of touch are on display throughout and are a hallmark of her interpretation of *Baigneuses*. This is especially noticeable when one compares it to other versions which seem far more muscular and heavy-handed, such as Ciccolini's. It is no accident that in her letter to Vidal, Selva continuously refers to the metaphor of water and splashing of water to create these effects.¹⁵⁹ Echoing the words of Leech-Wilkinson in reference to Cortot, Selva also 'devoted minute attention to explaining to [her] students what each moment in the score seemed to them to represent. It was an emotional-pictorial approach to understanding and communicating meaning'.¹⁶⁰

Juli Garreta, *Sardana*

The final piano solo work recorded by Selva is the *Sardana*¹⁶¹ by Catalan composer Juli Garreta (1875-1925), which is the third movement of his Piano Sonata in C minor. As advanced by Guy Selva, this appears to be a nod from Selva to her Catalan friends. However, proof of her sincerity in the selection of this piece can be found in an interview penned by 'J. LL.'¹⁶² in 1926.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹ This is further dealt with in Chapter 7.

¹⁶⁰ Leech-Wilkinson, 'Recordings and histories of performance style', p. 252.

¹⁶¹ The Sardana is a traditional Catalan dance.

¹⁶² Almost certainly her personal friend and collaborator, the pedagogue Joan Llongueras i Badia (1880-1953). See Chapter 1.

¹⁶³ J. LL., 'Blanca Selva, artista catalana', *D'ací i d'allà*, 101:15 (1926), pp. 533-535, p. 535.

In this interview we find that Selva is working at this piece ‘amb entusiasme’ [with enthusiasm], and that she finds it has a ‘musicalitat desbordant i abundosa’ [overflowing and abundant musicality]. She also highlights Garreta’s work as ‘ben curiosa i ben seductora’ [quite singular and quite seductive] and laments the recent passing of the composer.

The most striking feature of her recording is the chosen tempo. The score indicates $J=112$, but Selva’s tempo fluctuates with greater directionality in the region of $J=116$ - 120 , and sometimes even slightly ahead of the metronome at the higher tempo. By contrast, the Catalan pianist and Spanish music specialist Jordi Masó¹⁶⁴ keeps to the stated tempo, creating a very different effect.

Although both pianists employ accentuation to highlight the popular and dance-like character, both when it is expressly written, and when it is implied by the metre and slurring, Selva’s performance has an added element of virtuosity that brings more joy and excitement to the piece. It is also audible that she forgoes a strict enunciation of accents and timing in the transitional passages. Her version has greater direction for it and sense of structure as the times when the theme is repeated appear better defined by contrast.

Both pianists however approach the piece with minimal pedal and a sparkling and articulated touch, although again, Selva provides greater variety in tone, particularly in the piano sections. Despite Selva’s insistence that Vidal should count strictly in the trills and not shorten them, as was mentioned above in relation to Bach, it is very curious to hear Selva do just that. As she also respects the first repeat sign (although not the second), one can hear the trill played identically with a shortened resolution, twice.

Finally, Selva rounds off the piece with a small *rallentando* at the last semiquaver group. This is no doubt to emphasise the finale and gives consideration to the lower register. It appears, however, less idiomatic than Masó’s version, which, keeping the

¹⁶⁴ *Juli Garreta, Enric Morera, Jordi Masó (Anacrusi AC 009, 2000).*

direction to the end creates a more flamboyant ending, in contrast to Selva's perhaps slightly too refined ending.

Collaboration with Joan Massià

Massià and Selva began their collaboration around 1924 at the request of Massià for a recital at the *Associació de Música da Càmara*,¹⁶⁵ although the Catalan violinist had already heard Selva in her 1911 concert in Barcelona. They first met in Paris, and the first piece they played together was the Sonata in C minor op. 30 n.2 by Beethoven, a composer whose entire duo output they performed together.¹⁶⁶ Of that first performance together Selva reflected later that,

Em sorprengué el seu estil tan germà del meu i la seva fidelitat i justesa d'interpretació ja des dels primers compassos.¹⁶⁷

[I was surprised by the similar style he had to mine and his loyalty and correctness of interpretation even from the first bars.]

Indeed, her book on Beethoven's violin and piano sonatas is dedicated to him, 'el meu germà d'art i d'ideal' [my brother in art and ideal]. However, Selva partnered with several other violinists before Massià, some of whom, particularly Georges Enesco and Jacques Thibaud, have achieved a higher profile than the Catalan.¹⁶⁸

César Franck, Sonata in A major

Selva is a very sympathetic accompanist and the chordal passages accompanying the violin phrases are played without any indulgence, letting the violin shine. Massià plays with a detailed attention to the rhythm and articulation with a minimal use of portamento, and no timing inflections.

¹⁶⁵ J. Ll., 'Blanca Selva, artista catalana', p. 535.

¹⁶⁶ Selva previously played all of Beethoven's violin sonatas with Joseph Bilewski in February 1929. Guy Selva, *Beethoven, el nostre cantor i germà*, p. 20.

¹⁶⁷ J. Ll., 'Blanca Selva, artista catalana', p. 535.

¹⁶⁸ A full list of her violin duo partners aside from Massià is provided by Guy Selva in *Beethoven, el nostre cantor i germà*, pp. 19-20: Joseph Bilewski, Jules Boucherit, M. Caratozzolo, Jeanne Diot, Georges Enesco, Sébastien Gillardini, Francis MacMillan, Armand Parent, Pierre Sechiair, Théopile Soudant, Jacques Thibaud, P. Cuelenaere, and Leo Zeitlin.

well-crafted sense of tension and is very different from Cortot's measured and slightly languid rendition of this passage in the Cortot-Thibaud 1929 recording.

However, to much greater effect in Cortot's rendition is his playing of the counter melody in the *poco più lento* section (Fig. 4.20), which he plays with a very round tone that is well matched to his partner's. By contrast, Selva prioritises the *pp*, and although the notes are there, one has to really want to listen to those notes to hear them.

Overall, though, both versions have a very similar approach in the delivery of this movement, with its contrasting sections and passionate outbursts.

Fig. 4.20 – Franck, Sonata in A major, second movement, bb. 72-79

The third movement, 'Recitativo – Fantasia' is characterised by its distinct sections with abundant changes of character and tempo. Selva and Massià transition across them organically, and despite the piece's inherent freedom, their approach is measured and respectful of the text. There are no excessive freedoms. For example, given Selva's previous reflections on the *Prélude, Choral et Fugue* discussed above in connection with the *a capriccio* section, it might have been expected that the opening introductory chords could have been executed with greater delay into the resolution.

However, she adopts a stately approach playing them strictly in time, letting Massià be the one who approaches his section *con fantasia*.

One of the sections that is most remarkable in this movement, however, is the Moderato starting on b. 53. Selva is at her best here as an accompanist providing a true *pp* harp-like quality with the right amount of pedal, letting Massià shine through. Their phrasing is more flowing than that of Thibaud-Cortot, and the playing of Cortot in this passage is too 'notey' in stark contrast with Selva's *legatissimo*. Noteworthy is also their different approach in the small piano interludes marked *poco accel.* (bb. 63-64, bb. 69-70), where Selva's approach is more directional, and the tone is softer and more harp-like.

The approach of both interpretations is in general, however, quite similar, with matched tempos and a proximate sound world. This is also the case in the fourth movement. Nevertheless, a distinct difference between both pianists in the fourth movement happens during the piano solo interlude bb. 133-142. Selva finishes the cresc. passages with a *ritardando* that is not written in the score in anticipation of the following tempo change in b. 143 when the violin enters, whilst Cortot drives the music forward until the end. The ensuing *ad lib.* section is also more held back in the Selva-Massià performance.

The reviewer 'A.P.' wrote in the *Journal de Genève*:

Il a paru déjà diverses éditions gramophoniques de la *Sonate* de César Franck. Je n'hésite pas à affirmer que celle que nous offrent Blanche Selva et Joan Massia [sic] est la meilleure. L'entente entre les deux exécutants est parfaite, elle aboutit à une mise en valeur complète de la grande ligne et du détail de cette musique de genre essentiellement expressif. Bien équilibré dans ses sonorités, le piano de Blanche Selva chante, il donne à la phrase de Franck un modelé constamment vivant. Sans avoir une grande puissance d'archet – il n'atteint pas toujours à l'ampleur qu'on voudrait – M. Massia est un violoniste fin, un artiste sensible dont le style est irréprochable.

Les mêmes ont enregistré la gracieuse *Sonate* dit « le Printemps » de Beethoven. C'est une interprétation d'une fraîcheur délicieuse.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹ 'A.P.', 'La musique par les disques', *Journal de Genève*, 61:3 (1931), p. 4. (LT).

[Several recorded versions of César Franck's *Sonata* have already appeared. I do not hesitate to affirm that that which is offered by Blanche Selva and Joan Massià is the best. The relationship between both players is perfect, it encompasses a complete understanding of the great lines as well as the detail of this music which is of a general expressive genre. Well balanced in the sonorities, the piano of Blanche Selva sings, it gives Franck's phrase a constantly moving model. Without having a great power in his bow – he does not always achieve the depth one would want – Mr Massià is a fine violinist, a sensitive artist whose style is impeccable.

The same musicians have recorded the graceful sonata called "Spring" by Beethoven. It is a fresh and exquisitely fresh.]

Ludwig v. Beethoven, Violin Sonata op. 24 ('Spring')

Selva and Massià's rendition of the 'Spring' violin sonata by Beethoven op. 24, offers us other insights into their duo playing and interpretation of this composer. Selva wrote of this violin sonata that it should be interpreted as a 'primavera humana que no com una primavera de la naturalesa'¹⁷⁰ [as a human spring not like a spring in nature.] In fact, their interpretation is full of radiant lyricism, in stark contrast to the muscular interpretation of the Szigeti-Schnabel duo of 1948.¹⁷¹

Massià's and Selva's interpretation is well defined as can be seen in the identical musical resources employed in repeated passages. Nothing is left to chance, the musical elements are always organised and presented cogently whenever they appear. It is in the first movement where their use of agogic means to contour the structure of the piece is most acute and appears less idiomatic to modern ears. It is not a capricious rubato however, but a tacit understanding that some sections are played faster or slower depending on the musical requirements of the piece. The other three movements are characterised by a sophisticated approach and restrained dynamics.

For example, in the first movement Selva consistently plays her semiquavers in bb. 15 and 17 (Fig. 4.21), and relevant similar passages, faster, and is superbly accompanied by her partner who is always flexible with his quavers and exact with Selva.

¹⁷⁰ Selva, *Les Sonates de Beethoven*, p. 102.

¹⁷¹ Ludwig van Beethoven, *Violin Sonatas N. 5 and N. 10*, Joseph Szigeti and Artur Schnabel, live recording from 1948 (Columbia M6X-31513, 1972).



Fig. 4.21 – Beethoven, Violin Sonata op. 24, first movement, bb. 14-19

The *sf* in b. 36 (and similar sections), are not so much done through a dynamic accent, but through a different and slower speed, which then is in turn balanced by the acceleration in the following section when the accompaniment chords propel the music forward, through crescendo and accelerando (Fig. 4.33).

Fig. 4.22 – Beethoven, Violin Sonata op. 24, first movement, bb. 33-44

The *rinf.* that appears later in preparation of the piano section is likewise emphasised through a noticeable slowing down in tempo (b. 51).

The second movement, however, is surprisingly simple and refined. The tempo allows for a lyric cantabile and the dynamics are always measured. A clear reflection of their elegant understatement of this piece is the treatment they give to the *cresc.* in the demisemiquaver bars at the end of the movement. Selva and Massià approach these

cresc. subtly, going from *pp* to *p*. By contrast, the Szigeti-Schnabel duo produce a great crescendo effect which appears out of proportion to the lyricism of this movement.



Fig. 4.23 – Beethoven, Violin Sonata op. 24, second movement, coda

In the third movement, the cross-accentuation between the parts is emphasised, in a light and humorous Scherzo with pastoral overtones. The sonata closes with a light-touch Rondo, where Selva often plays ahead in her solo phrases. The *sf* are always played lightly and in proportion to the dynamic in context. Some rallentandos shape the ending of phrases leading up to the theme, but the modern listener may be surprised by the finesse and elegance of the performance.

Bach, 'Adagio', BWV 1023

The last piece recorded by the duo is the Adagio of the Sonata in E minor for violin and continuo (BWV 1023) of Johann Sebastian Bach. Massià and Selva held various lecture-recital series together in Barcelona where Selva introduced the pieces to the audience. Selva's manuscript notes to these lecture recitals are held in the Biblioteca de Catalunya and have been transcribed by Font Batallé.¹⁷² In reviewing these, it is clear that Selva focused her presentations on explaining the structure of the works to the audience and played small extracts of the pieces in the programme ahead of delivering

¹⁷² Font Batallé, Appendix XV.3.3.1.b, pp. 268-270.

their performance. Her manuscript notes contain all these musical excerpts copied out by her. The inference is that she delivered these presentations reading from her notes rather than a more spontaneous delivery. During the 1926-1927 season they devoted their series to the works of Bach and Mozart, and they performed the first two movements of this sonata in February 1927.

Selva wrote of the sonata that it was not a well-known work and specifically of the Adagio that it is 'una llarga i bella frase d'una peculiar construcció. Consta de sis períodes disposats en tres compartiments de desigual llargària' [a long and beautiful phrase of a peculiar construction. It is based on six periods arranged in three different sections of uneven length].¹⁷³ Although Selva states that the manuscript that was used for the edition of this work was found in the private library of the Kings of Saxony, she does not explain what edition she uses. It is not known therefore whether she was playing from the continuo part alone, or from a realized figured bass edition, and if the latter, how much, if at all, she deviated from it and introduced her own lines.

What can be ascertained from listening to her recording is that she plays it with a distinct piano accompaniment aesthetic and does not deploy any of the typical resources such as arpeggiatos or ornaments that could remind the listener of the instrument for which it was originally intended. However, her playing is considerate of a smaller Baroque chamber music duo. Her sound is always small and unobtrusive, accompanying her partner with a fairly detached sound without any pedal. She is most imaginative in the modulating third period, where she plays several discreet counterpoint melodic lines in quavers to Massià's melody, whilst remaining sensitively within a range that does not interfere with that of her partner's. Massià is at his best in this piece and one can hear him driving the music forward clearly but sensitively.

¹⁷³ As Selva's notes contain the first two or three bars of each of these sections, her proposed analysis sees this movement divided in the following manner: Section 1: first period in E minor bb. 1-9 (first beat); second and secondary period that drives the music from E minor to B minor b. 9 (from upbeat to the second beat) -b. 17; Section 2: third period, theme in B minor, which evolves into a new modulating melody in D major b. 18 (with upbeat) -b. 26. fourth period, from D major to A minor with secondary melody, b. 26- b. 33; fifth period in E minor b. 33-42; Section 3: sixth period in E minor built with the melody of the third period but in E minor, b. 43 (with upbeat) -end.

At only 3'38, this is a very small piece in comparison to the other two sonatas by Beethoven and Franck that were recorded in full. This was, however, the first piece that they recorded together and showcases their intimacy and presents Selva in a different musical role from the other duo pieces where the piano part has a strong leadership component. One can hear how she is able to execute both these different roles with ease.

Conclusion

Although Selva only left behind less than two hours of recorded music, analysing her catalogue provides valuable insight into her pianism, particularly when contrasting her recordings against the available contextual sources.

In the first place, given that, except for the *Sardana*, she had performed all these pieces frequently in her career before recording them, the coherence amongst the repeated passages and her general adherence to the score and her own editions when available, as well as contrasting her interpretations with her advice, show with a high degree of probability that her recordings conform to her own interpretative aesthetic, rather than being the product of a fortuitous performance. This is consistent with the conclusion drawn by Leech-Wilkinson when surveying other recorded artists.¹⁷⁴

Selva demonstrates throughout a rigorous approach in her interpretations. Her playing is full of nuance and fantasy, but this is always framed within the structure of the music, with particular regard to harmonic tensions as points of arrival and departure. Further, although she is generally faithful to the composer's text, she is also unafraid to make certain alterations in pursuit of greater structural balance or symmetry.

Her expressive melodic playing is achieved by elongating certain notes before their resolution, rather than delaying the actual downbeats, which she does extremely

¹⁷⁴ '[...][O]ne thing that emerges strongly from a study of later musicians is that, far more often than not (this is my impression, but one that seems increasingly borne out by recorded evidence), musicians played in consistent ways throughout their professional careers.' Leech-Wilkinson, p. 250.

sparingly. Her playing is thus characterised by a strong sense of continuity and line, with an impeccable dynamic control and scant use of pedal.

Despite her treatise exploring all the possibilities of arm weight in piano playing, her own performances exude a lightness of touch that demonstrates her versatile expressive means. Contrasting her own recordings against her writings also shows us how coherent she was in her approach overall. Her recorded legacy also lets us observe how comfortable she was as a solo pianist and as a chamber music player, both in the leadership role as well as purely secondary accompaniment voice.

It is also apparent in the study of her catalogue that Selva did not resort to the stereotypical interpretative devices at the beginning of the twentieth century discussed at the beginning of this chapter. In particular, Selva's recordings are devoid of dislocations and arpeggiations. These are resources that were used by some of her contemporaries until the mid-thirties: dislocations can be heard in Cortot's or Horowitz's recordings in the thirties,¹⁷⁵ whilst unnotated arpeggiation can be heard in recordings as late as the 1950s.¹⁷⁶

Further, Peres Da Costa's words noted above that '[t]o our modern ears these [early] recordings often sound shockingly foreign: their style bears little resemblance to anything heard today' have no application in Selva's case. Although some of her stylistic traits, for example, the *ritardandi* at the end of phrases in Bach or the structural use of *agoge* means in Beethoven, evidence a bygone interpretative understanding, her playing is in general terms decidedly modern. Referring back to Leech-Wilkinson's definition of general characteristics of modern performances, these are all met in Selva's recordings, namely: reliability, blend, synchronisation as well as

¹⁷⁵ Peres da Costa, *Off the record*, 'The legendary pianist Cortot was still using dislocation in his 1934 recordings of Chopin's Preludes 7, 13, 15 and 17 op. 28 and his 1949 recording of Chopin's *Berceuse* op. 5. And Vladimir Horowitz (1903-89) can be heard making dislocations to poignant effect in his 1935 performance of the first movement of the first of Brahms's Piano Concerto in D minor op. 15 with the New York Philharmonic conducted by Toscanini.' p. 97.

¹⁷⁶ Peres da Costa, *Off the record*, 'Unnotated arpeggiation is preserved on recordings until at least the 1950s. It can be heard in the playing of the oldest generation to record, including Reinecke, Leschetizky, and Saint-Saëns, as well [as] the younger generation of Pachmann, Pugno, Paderewski, Rosenthal, and many others. Generally, those who used dislocation also made use of unnotated arpeggiation.' p. 102.

an expressivity that is derived from thought out timing and gradations. Of note are her melodic rubato mentioned above, her colouring of phrases in relation to the harmonic foundations and a greater variation in the amount of pedal used. All these can be directly applied in current interpretations of those pieces and lend themselves well to being extrapolated to works by the same or different composers.

As such, exploring her recorded output does not only take us closer to her own pianistic voice, but exploring it to its full extent opens up rich interpretative solutions that can be valuable to the twentieth century performer. Her recorded output also shines a bright light into Selva's distinctiveness as a pianist with a unique voice at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Chapter 5 Testament of students

Introduction and methodology

Selva left ample written testimony about her teaching activities, writing about her students in letters to other colleagues as well as corresponding directly with some of them, guiding their piano instruction through epistolary form. Further, during November 1923 and April 1924 Selva wrote six issues of her own magazine *La Chaine Selvique* [The Selvian Chain] to be distributed among her students. In these texts, and the parallels with modern 'email newsletters' are quite significant, Selva wrote further about her method and how to practise and teach it, she listed the students' results in the exams that she had devised in accordance with her method, gave information about her subsequent concerts and masterclasses and listed those advanced students of hers that were allowed to teach her system under her name.

This last part troubled her in particular. In the first issue of *La Chaine*, Selva wrote:

[...] On s'intitulait donc « professeur de la méthode Selva », tandis qu'on la déformait à un point tel, que toutes les bases essentielles en étaient absentes, et qu'il m'était impossible, à l'inspection, de reconnaître quoi ce soit de moi dans ces caricatures.

[Some had therefore called themselves "professor of the Selva method", while they had distorted it to such an extent that all the essential elements were absent, and it was impossible for me, on inspection, to recognise anything of mine in these caricatures.]¹

And on p. 12:

Chacun est libre d'enseigner comme bon lui plaît mais, encore une fois, nul n'a le droit de prétendre « faire l'enseignement Selva », que Selva ne peut reconnaître pour sien.

[Everyone is free to teach as they please, but once again, no one has the right to claim to "teach Selva's teaching", which Selva cannot recognise as her own.]

¹ Blanche Selva, *La Chaine Selvique*, 1 (Paris: Roudanez, 1923), p. 11.

It follows that, despite Selva's statement in a letter to her friend Guy de Lioncourt in 1938 that she had taught over 2,000 students² not all of them (quite self-evidently) would have achieved a sufficient level of proficiency to be recognised by her as having acquired her method fully, let alone to teach it. However, those whom she allowed to promote themselves as teachers under her precepts, did so by having to acquire special accreditation: to pass an exam devised by her, ostensibly having acquired her technique and understanding of her method to a necessary degree. Fig. 5.1 shows the cover of the syllabus of the first level teacher's exam. The highest accreditation was that of third level, 'Degré Supérieur' [Superior degree].

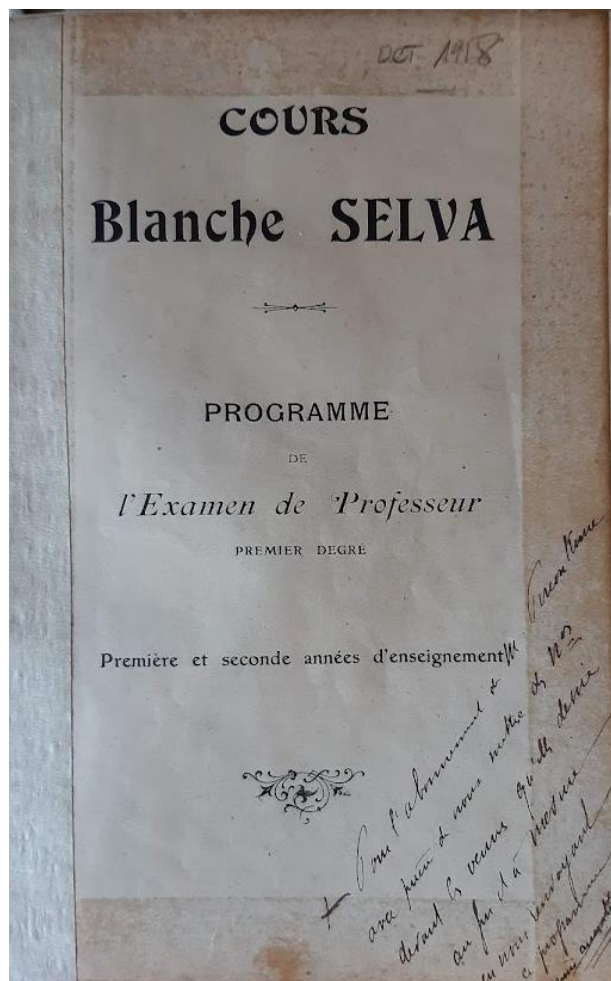


Fig. 5.1 – Selva, *Programme de l'Examen de Professeur*, cover page

As stated on p. 1 of the first exam syllabus, and expanded in the subsequent pages, aspiring teachers had to undergo three different tests: 1) the correct execution of the

² Guy Selva, *Blanche Selva, un professeur*, p. 1.

pieces, which included the ability to demonstrate how to work on particular passages that Selva would choose during the exam; 2) teach a lesson to a pupil in front of Selva; and 3) an oral exam that included questions on music and piano pedagogy as well as notions of style and music history in relation to the pieces played and taught.

This unusual level of oversight of the knowledge transmission of her own method, further prompted my enquiry as to its permanence over time. In fact, although other scholars before me have researched and provided information about Selva's students, notably, Guy Selva, in particular in the *cahier Blanche Selva, un professeur, des élèves*, and Font Batallé in her thesis, the focus until now has always been in providing biographical data of those students. As such, a wider discussion of the enduring impact of Selva's teaching on her students and beyond has not been undertaken until now.

I therefore set myself to examine whether I could find any traces of her pedagogy having permeated other teachers and pianists after her passing. Of course, given the chronology it was impossible to find pianists who had studied directly with her. I set out to find pianists who had studied with her accredited students, or with students of theirs, so once or twice removed from direct contact with Selva, and to interview them. William C. Adam defines semi-structured interviews as 'a blend of closed- and open-ended questions, often accompanied by follow-up *why* or *how* questions' 'conducted conversationally with one respondent at a time'.³ I decided upon this style of interview to allow my participants enough flexibility and space to discuss the issues at hand, also being conscious from the outset that they would be speaking about lessons from several decades ago. The outline of the interview questions can be found in Appendix 2. As Professor Ping-Chun Hsiung notes, in her online article 'The Complexity of Memory':

Memory is always a reconstruction, never a reflection of actual events. Consider how even direct observation is partial and selective. We cannot possibly perceive and process the infinite details of our experience in every moment. Moreover, our immediate perceptions of events are filtered through

³ William C. Adams, 'Conducting semi-structured interviews' in Kathryn E. Newcomer, Harry P. Hatry and Joseph S. Wholey, eds, *Handbook of Practical Program Evaluation*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2015), pp. 492-505, p. 493.

layers of emotion, expectation, language and cognition that omit or amplify aspects of “reality”. If experience itself is partial, memory is even more subject to selective processes.⁴

Another potential obstacle is selective memory, although as Professor Hsiang notes, that is only problematic ‘when researchers see their task as reconstructing historical events as completely as possible’. In deciding to conduct the interviews and present them in narrative form in my research, I have neither sought to reconstruct a particular historical event, nor present my interviewees’ recollections, their memories, as a reflection of actual events. Neither of these is assumed to be the case or expected.

My starting point is, rather, recognising that limiting the study of Selva’s impact on her direct students, and their own later work, to a record of biographical data without any interrogation of that experience itself, is not representative of the actual event and is not exempt from its own bias either. As stated by Sarah Wall in her article on writing autoethnography:

The privilege given to observations and ‘factual’ descriptions is based on realist ideology. The need to objectify data and record the facts in writing reflects the thinking of a positivistic age when personal impressions were not seen as important (Ottenberg, 1990). Given that there has been a move away from realism in ethnography toward a more critical stance, it might be appropriate to give up on traditional data collection to some extent (Clough, 1998). There is demonstrated value in relying on memory in ethnographic work [...] ⁵

Further, I agree with Professor Hsiang when she notes that ‘[q]ualitative interviewing involves a continuous process of reflection on the research. Reflexivity is the process of examining both oneself as researcher, and the research relationship’.⁶ As will be shown below, as well as presenting the experience of my participants, conducting the interviews and reflecting on them has also allowed me to get a greater understanding of Selva’s and my own playing and teaching. This chapter therefore, draws also on

⁴ Ping-Chun Hsiung, *The Complexity of Memory* (2010), <<https://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/~pchsiung/LAL/interviewing/complexity/memory>> [accessed 10 February 2023].

⁵ Sarah Wall, ‘Easier said than Done: Writing an Autoethnography’ in *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 7:1 (2008), 38-53, pp. 45-46.

⁶ Pin-Chun Hsiung, *A process of Reflection* (2010), <<https://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/~pchsiung/LAL/reflexivity>> [accessed 10 February 2023].

different forms of autoethnography: reflexive dyadic interviews as well as reflexive ethnography. As explained by Carolyn Ellis *et al* in their article 'Autoethnography: An Overview',

Reflexive, dyadic interviews focus on the interactively produced meanings and emotional dynamics of the interview itself. Though the focus is on the participant, and her or his story, the words, thoughts, and feelings of the researcher also are considered [...]. Even though the researcher's experience isn't the main focus, personal reflection adds context and layers to the story being told about participants.

Reflexive ethnographies document ways a researcher changes as a result of doing fieldwork.⁷

I also echo Hannula *et al* when they describe the cultural and historical background of narrative interviews:

One of the fields closest to the narrative interviews is oral history, the long tradition of collecting materials from a wide variety of spheres of human interaction. This is a tradition that characteristically is a meeting point for professionals and committed amateurs, people working as scientists, journalists, street workers or enthusiastic laymen. Oral history goes back to the sources of anthropology and ethnology but also has a strong presence in recollecting lived experiences so that these experiences are not forgotten.⁸

I suggest that the embodied knowledge that passes from teacher to student is a cultural object in and of itself. Encapsulating this experience in narrative form allows us to interrogate, study and further transmit the accumulated knowledge and that this is a legitimate object of enquiry despite, or perhaps because of, the aforementioned issues arising out of the frailty of human memory. Further, other important books on piano playing and teaching that have been quoted in this thesis also employ this research method as a valid knowledge transmission tool: Timbrell's *French Pianism* and Dean Elder's *Pianists at Play*. Another valuable example in the piano literature is the seminal work of James Francis Cooke, *Great Pianists on Piano Playing*.⁹ In the same

⁷ Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams, Arthur P. Bochner, 'Autoethnography: An Overview', *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 12 (1), Art.10, paragraphs 18 and 19.

⁸ Mika Hannula, Juha Suoranta, Tere Vadén, *Artistic Research Methodology, Narrative, Power and the Public* (New York: Peter Lang, 2014), p. 40.

⁹ James Francis Cooke, *Great Pianists on Piano Playing* (New York: Dover, 1999), which is a reissue of the edition published by Theodore Presser Co in 1917.

way as autoethnography itself is considered both a process and a product¹⁰ I suggest that this chapter records the experience of my interviewees and forms part, together with the rest of this thesis, of Blanche Selva's pianistic legacy.

I have been able to identify, locate and contact four descendants of Selva's teaching: Ludovica Mosca, Cecília Serra, Jordi Camell and Christiane Marandet. All my interviewees had ties to Selva through two of her main collaborators in Spain and France, Guillem de Garganta (1886-1973) and Cécile Piriou-Kunc (1884-1973) respectively. The interviews were conducted in Spanish (Mosca and Serra), Catalan and Spanish (Camell) and in French (Marandet). Fig. 5.2 below shows the relationship between my interviewees (highlighted in the green), their teachers and Selva.

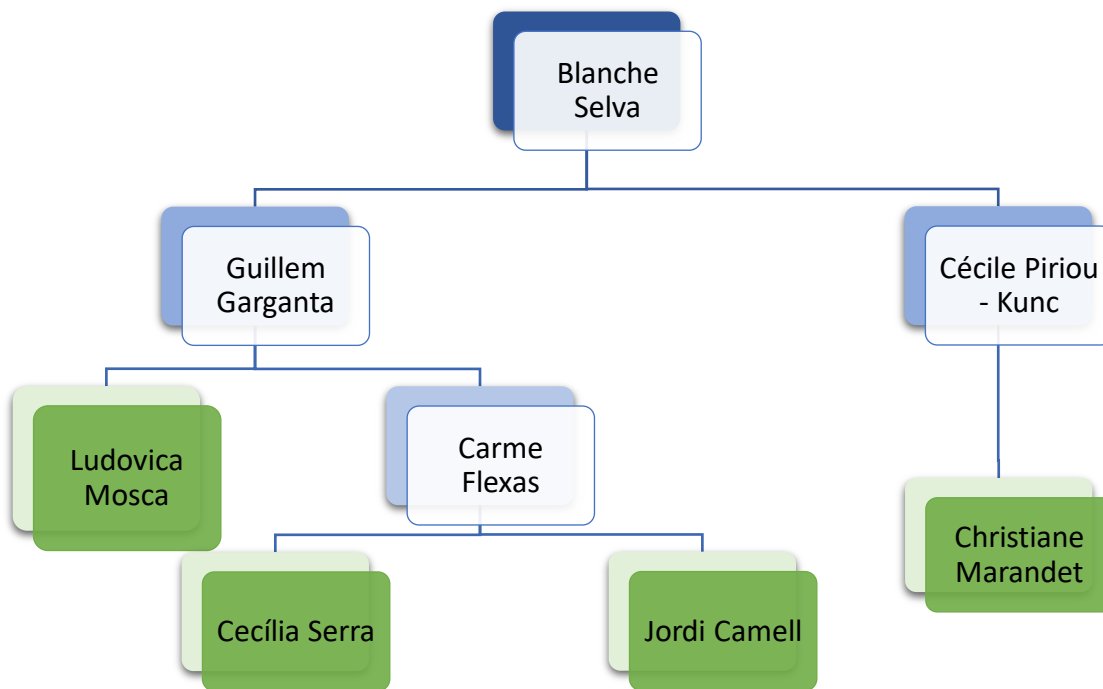


Fig. 5.2 – Pedagogical family tree

Selva's former assistant and friend Guillem de Garganta taught piano in Barcelona for over forty years. According to Fukushima he began his study with Selva in 1911.¹¹ He carried on attending her courses in Brive in subsequent years, and obtained his first

¹⁰ Carolyn Ellis, *Autoethnography*, paragraph 1.

¹¹ Fukushima, p. 458.

teaching diploma from Selva's school in 1923.¹² Fig. 5.3 below shows him as the only male in one of Selva's summer courses at her family home *Mas de Sol* in Brive. The students are wearing comfortable clothes to allow them to practise the daily *gymnastique* exercises.



Fig. 5.3 – Selva surrounded by students in Brive, 1923

Courtesy of the Archives de l'Association Blanche Selva (AABS)

Selva and Garganta worked together as partners in Barcelona, at the Acadèmia de Música amongst others,¹³ where Garganta was Selva's assistant. He also taught in the prestigious Liceo conservatoire in Barcelona from 1928 onwards.¹⁴

I was able to speak with one of his students, Ludovica Mosca, as well as with two other musicians who were taught by Carme Flexas (1925-2005), a student of Garganta. They are Cecília Serra and Jordi Camell.

This chapter also recalls my conversation with Christiane Marandet, who for ten years studied with Selva's assistant in France, Cécile Piriou-Kunc (1884-1973). Selva

¹² *La Chaine Selvique*, 1, p. 5.

¹³ Guy Selva, *Blanche Selva, un professeur*, p. 51.

¹⁴ Fukushima, p. 458.

recognised the important work of Piriou-Kunc and her sister (Catherine Kunc) in the LP1 of the LEMTP, published in 1922, in these terms:

[...]la justice et la reconnaissance nous demandent de mettre à une place d'honneur Madame Cécile Piriou-Kunc et sa sœur, Mademoiselle Catherine Kunc, qui furent les premières à savoir établir, dans leurs groupements respectifs, l'enseignement tel que nous le désirions. Leurs intelligentes initiatives, intimement dirigées dans le même esprit et orientées vers le même but que le nôtre, ont été pour nous la plus féconde des collaborations ; leurs recherches et leurs trouvailles de détail ont apporté un bon nombre d'indispensables mailles dans la grande chaîne d'expérimentation aboutissant à l'ensemble si clair et si puissant qui constitue l'enseignement actuel.

[Amongst them, justice and recognition demand that Madame Cécile Piriou-Kunc and her sister, Mademoiselle Catherine Kunc have a place of honour; they were the first to know how to establish, in their respective groups, the teaching as we desire it. Their intelligent initiatives, intimately guided by the same spirit and orientated towards the same goal as ours, have been for us the most fruitful of collaborations; their research and their detailed findings have forged several indispensable links in the long chain of experimentation leading to the clear and powerful matrix that constitutes the current teaching.]¹⁵

Like Garganta, Piriou-Kunc underwent Selva's teaching accreditation process. *La Chaîne Selvique* records her as being authorised to teach the first level in 1923.¹⁶

I thank Ludovica Mosca, Cecília Serra, Jordi Camell and Christiane Marandet for sharing their memories with me.

Ludovica Mosca

Ludovica Mosca (Paris 1953) is a versatile artist, with a background in music, dance and painting. She has performed all over the world and has given masterclasses in Europe, USA, Latin-America and Asia. Further, she gives courses and masterclass on Bach, Haydn, twentieth-century music, improvisation, pedagogy, body relaxation and musical memory, as well as courses on Baroque dance and castanets. She regularly teaches at the Escuela Luthier-Música y Danza and at the Escuela Juan Pedro Carrero.¹⁷

¹⁵ Selva, LP1, p. ix.

¹⁶ *La Chaîne Selvique*, 1, p. 6.

¹⁷ Further biographical details: Ludovica Mosca has an extensive repertoire spanning the early harpsichordists to contemporary composers. She has premiered several works, amongst

Ludovica studied for ten years with Blanche Selva's former pupil and assistant Guillem Garganta in Barcelona. She carried on her studies with Pere Vallribera, who himself had been a pupil of Garganta in the past. She then finalised her main formative years with Frédéric Guevers in Antwerp, where she obtained a Premier Prix.

I want to thank Ludovica again for kindly agreeing to collaborate in my research project and generously sharing with me her memories around her years of study and pianistic insights.¹⁸

The interview began with the first question on the list, 'What do you most remember from Guillem Garganta's lessons?' However, the remainder of the questions flowed from her narrative and did not usually follow the prescribed order I had set at the outset. Ludovica is an engaging communicator and there was a natural sense of flow in our conversation that would have been stifled had I followed the structure I had initially envisaged.

Background

Ludovica was only eleven years old when she began her studies with Garganta in 1964. She was his last student and Garganta had initially been reluctant to accept her as a pupil. This reluctance stemmed from his own age. He thought he was 'demasiado mayor para enseñar a una niña pequeña' [too old to teach a little girl]. Although Ludovica said he was 67 at the time of becoming her teacher, he must have been 77 or already 78, as Garganta was born in 1886.

others the *Sonata* by Elliot Carter and *For Christian Wolff* by Morton Feldman. Moreover, Ludovica partnered with the publishing house Boileau to create an analysed and commented Urtext edition of a selection of Bach's and Mozart's works and is also the editor of the 'Seis sonatas para piano' by Padre N. Casanoves published by the Abadía de Montserrat. Ludovica Mosca has been awarded several international prizes: the 'Alex Vries' prize in Belgium for her interpretation of *Rhapsody in Blue* with the Philharmonic Orchestra of Antwerp, the International Maria Canals Prize as part of the Dúo Linares-Mosca and the First Yamaha Prize with the Barcelona Klavier Quartet. The biographical information about Ludovica Mosca in the main text and in this footnote was taken from her own website

<<http://www.ludovicamosca.com/index.html>> [accessed 7 September 2020], with permission of the author.

¹⁸ Due to COVID-19, the interview took place via Skype on 6 August 2020, lasting one hour and ten minutes.

It was only through the mediation of her guitar teacher Gracià Tarragó (1892-1973) that he finally agreed to audition her. It had also been Tarragó who had recommended to the Mosca family that Ludovica should continue her studies with him as he was ‘el mejor’ [the best].

Ludovica remembered being slightly scared at first, as he had a reputation of being ‘estricto y severo’ [strict and severe]. She brought three little Bach preludes, a movement of a sonatina and a study to her audition and chose to play Bach first, which pleased Garganta. Ludovica strongly remembered that, already in that first meeting, Guillem Garganta spoke about ‘mi profesora, Blanche Selva’ and told her that she had performed the complete works of Bach. According to Mosca, the name Blanche/Blanca Selva was still heard in the 60s in Barcelona. Ludovica remembered that her own mother also knew who she was.¹⁹

Through the nearly ten years working with Garganta the affectionate relationship with her and her family grew strongly. Ludovica and her parents would go together to concerts with Garganta, for instance to listen to Sviatoslav Richter at the Palau de la Música. Ms Mosca estimates that she inherited around 90% of his library and showed me Garganta’s copy of the first edition of *Iberia* by the Édition Mutuelle. References to Selva as a woman (not just a pianist or piano teacher) were also frequent. Ludovica remembers that Guillem told her how in love Selva had been with Joan Massià, and the huge disappointment and heartache she had suffered when he decided to end their relationship. Selva appears to have taken solace in Garganta and his family at this time and stayed with them for two weeks following the news. Massià ended up marrying Maria Carbonell, a student of Selva’s, in 1938.

When asked about the methodology followed during the piano lessons there are several elements that are reminiscent of Selva’s teaching. However, there are also several aspects that appear to be different or lacking.

¹⁹ This is supported by the available evidence. A clear example is the concert in Selva’s honour that was celebrated on 21 April 1968, when Josep Jordi Llongueras (1911-1981) her former pupil and son of Selva’s friend and collaborator, Joan Llongueras i Badia, also offered a lecture entitled *Blanca Selva, plenitud i exemple*.

It is worth highlighting that by the time Mosca began to undertake lessons with Guillem Garganta, nearly 30 years had already passed since he would have last seen Selva.

Common elements

1. Bach

Guillem placed a huge importance on the study of Bach and the development of polyphony. This is directly aligned with Selva's own teaching although of course, by no means something exclusive to her. Ludovica remembers that Garganta emphasised the importance of studying more complex Bach pieces than the overall level of difficulty of the rest of the programme. As such, following the programme indications at the Liceu Conservatoire in Barcelona, the programme chosen by him always included a Bach piece from the list of the subsequent level.

Ludovica learned all of Bach's concertos with Garganta.

2. No work from memory

Like Selva to her own students, Guillem Garganta discouraged her from learning pieces from memory. His emphasis was on studying a large amount of repertoire covering all styles and genres, something that would have been slowed down by the requirement to commit the programme to memory. Ludovica highlighted, however, that all pieces had to be played to a high standard before moving on to the next. During her time with Garganta, Ludovica worked on an astonishing amount of repertoire, as evidenced by the fact that she worked on 27 out of the 32 Beethoven Sonatas.

3. Contemporary repertoire and pianists

Garganta placed a strong emphasis on learning contemporary music and becoming aware of and being part of the cultural fabric of the time. He traced this back to his own personal experience and told her how he had also played the music that had been current at the time. He always highlighted de Séverac and d'Indy and was a close friend of Mompou.

Further, he led by example and Ludovica remembers that he would often go to the music shops in Barcelona to explore what new music had been published and to share his findings with her and other pupils. This ‘amplitud de mente’ [openness of mind] was also noticeable in that he remained attentive and receptive to the new generation of pianists. Mosca fondly remembered how Garganta had listened to a then young Joaquín Achúcarro (b. 1932) on the radio, and being fascinated by his playing, bought the record. He then organised a listening session with some students so that they could also hear the Basque pianist.

Although these appreciations may be less tangible, they also remind one of Selva’s own understanding of her role as an artist and teacher. Her important collaboration with contemporary artists of her time has been described and her openness and willingness to learn are strongly evidenced in her treatise, which is a written testament of a quest for continuous learning and searching.

4. *Immobilité consciente*

Although not referenced with this terminology, Ludovica remembers working with Guillem at extremely slow tempi, and using immobilisation as a practice tool. This is something that she has also extrapolated to her own pedagogical practice. She told me that when she is working on big leaps with students, she makes them trace the trajectory incredibly slowly, counting 100 seconds from one point to the other. She is adamant that fixing the arch in this slow way enhances the reflexes and produces results reliably and quickly.

This element strongly resonates with Selva’s concept of *immobilité consciente* and the study with metronome markings of a surprisingly slow pulse of 40, as discussed earlier in Chapter 3.

5. Pianism

Ludovica described the technique she learnt as being that of ‘naturalidad’ [ease]:

La técnica de la naturalidad: El brazo pesa, los dedos se articulan, y se cultiva un buen sonido. Y cada autor es diferente. Todo viene de la música. Eliminar el martilleo; como una gasa.

[The arm has weight, the fingers articulate. One needs to cultivate a good sound and every composer is different. Everything stems from the music. Eliminate the hammering, like a gauze.]

She also highlighted the importance of articulating from the metacarpal joint. Although all of the above fit into Selva's pedagogy there is also a lack of specificity that highlights that some elements of her way of working were not transmitted.

Nevertheless, Ludovica shared with me that at the age of 17 she went to Paris to play for Jean-Marie Darré (1905-1999), as Guillem Garganta was very encouraging for her to travel and meet and play for many teachers. Darré was surprised at her technique and related it to Blanche Selva straight away. Ludovica then confirmed to her with whom she was working in Spain and the provenance of her technique.

Divergences

The most obvious one is a lack of terminology for the different types of attack. Although Ludovica emphasised Garganta's meticulousness in terms of sound quality and physical connection, these are always in conjunction with the repertoire and passed on in a more musical, 'on the go' way, rather than as a systematic approach to acquiring the different touches in a methodical way. There was no reference to any of the types of touch (*jeu appuyé, éclatant* or *indifférent*) nor any other Spanish or Catalan equivalent, nor was there a direct reference to Selva's text during her years of study with him.²⁰

Physical exercises away from the piano were also almost completely absent. I enquired about piano technique exercises such as the ones by Géry that Selva references in her

²⁰ Open questions were followed by some prompts of Selva's terminology, which were not recognised by Ms Mosca either directly or by analogy with a different terminology.

treatise,²¹ which Garganta could potentially have done as part of his training with Selva, but Ludovica was not aware of this exercise book.

Moreover, Mosca highlighted how, although Garganta did not want her to commit to learning the music from memory, he expected the corrections to be memorised and did not like writing on the score. As such, and contrary to Selva's own style (e.g., annotating arrows or bowings in the music), Garganta used no written indications in the music at all.

Influence on Ludovica Mosca

Ludovica considers her work with Garganta to have been hugely influential in her playing and understanding of piano technique. However, he has not been her sole influence. Most notably Ludovica studied in Antwerp with Frédéric Guevers.²² I inquired how the change had been and if there were things she had had to correct at that stage. In her words, he 'enlarged' (*ampliar*) that which she knew, rather than having to learn new elements, or needing to 'subtract' or correct faulty technical errors. Further, she considers the technique she was taught to be so organic and fundamental that she continued to connect with it and find new meaning in it throughout the rest of her career.²³

I also asked about her experience of having learned so much music at such a young age but without having worked from memory at that stage. 'Se lo agradeceré siempre' [I will always be grateful to him for that]. According to Ludovica this has been a hugely positive influence in her development, and she recalled Guevers' astonishment at her cultivated and extensive musical and pianistic knowledge at a relatively young age.

²¹ Josèphe Géry, *100 Exercices pour l'indépendance de l'accentuation entre les mains* (Paris: Dulieux, 1915) advanced in Chapter 3.

²² Frédéric Guevers (1923-1997), Belgian composer who exercised a notable influence on the Spanish and Catalan piano school. He studied, amongst others with Paul Rões, Wilhelm Kempff and Yves Nat. Apart from Ludovica Mosca, he was also the teacher of other prominent Spanish pianists and teachers, such as Albert Nieto and Guadalupe López Castelo.

²³ 'Tan natural, que he visto conexiones más tarde.' [So natural, that I saw connections later.]

Other elements of interest

Guillem Garganta had a Pleyel on which he demonstrated and an upright piano for the students. It was only when the students were ready for a recital that they were allowed to play the grand piano instead. It is possible that this piano was Selva's. Ludovica did not know the provenance of the piano but seemed to agree it may be a possibility. The piano was later sold to Núria Trias Llongueras.

According to Ludovica, Frank Marshall²⁴ and Guillem Garganta would exchange students for a month at a time before the exams. As such, according to her, Garganta had taught in this capacity both Alicia de Larrocha (1923-2009) and another acclaimed Spanish pianist of that generation, Rosa Sabater (1929-1983). This could explain some of the technical similarities observed in de Larrocha's playing and that of Selva:

[...] una pianista que se acerca de manera asombrosa a sus [de Selva] teorías y que ha contribuido más que nadie a la popularidad internacional de la música española: Alicia de Larrocha. Los paralelismos entre su técnica y las propuestas de Blanche Selva son evidentes: los dedos a menudo tendidos y casi verticales, una extraordinaria movilidad del antebrazo, los ataques desde una gran distancia seguidos de un elástico rebote sobre el teclado. Es más que probable que, desde un punto de vista manual, la música de Albéniz interpretada por Blanche Selva se acercara notablemente a las conocidas versiones de la pianista barcelonesa: un detalle decisivo para comprender el sentido de la escritura pianística de este compositor.

[...] a pianist who comes amazingly close to her [Selva's] theories and who has contributed more than anyone else to the international popularity of Spanish music: Alicia de Larrocha. The parallels between her technique and Blanche Selva's proposals are evident: the often stretched and almost vertical fingers, an extraordinary mobility of the forearm, the attacks from a great distance followed by an elastic bounce on the keyboard. It is more than likely that, from a manual point of view, the music of Albéniz performed by Blanche Selva was remarkably close to the well-known versions of the pianist from Barcelona: a decisive detail to understand the meaning of this composer's piano writing.²⁵

However, Alicia Torra, daughter of Alicia de Larrocha and custodian of her archive, has no knowledge that this was the case, nor was she able to find any documentary

²⁴ Frank Marshall (1883-1959), Spanish-born pianist of English descent. He is the most famous pupil of Enrique Granados, and after his passing, became the director of his Academia, the 'Academia Marshall', nowadays called 'Academia Granados-Marshall'.

²⁵ Chiantore, *Historia de la técnica*, p. 523-524.

evidence in the archive in support of it after my enquiry. I am incredibly thankful to Alicia Torra for her kindness and assistance in this matter.

Nevertheless, I have considered during the development of this thesis that it is plausible that Marshall himself could have had direct contact with Selva during the years in which they both resided in Barcelona, and that an exchange of technical views between colleagues could have ensued.

However, the only documentary evidence that I have been able to find linking both teachers is found in Font-Batallé's thesis. These are three letters addressed to Frank Marshall that reference Blanche/Blanca Selva, found in Appendix XV.3.1. They are letters number 90, 96 and 149.

Letter 90 from Joaquín Rodrigo, dated Valencia 20 August 1928²⁶

This is a very short letter, written in Catalan. The Spanish composer Joaquín Rodrigo (1901-1999) begins by thanking Marshall for his kind words regarding his work and then explains that he encloses two of his recent published pieces, *Suite* and *Bagatela*. He adds that one of his compositions for string orchestra has been recently performed in Paris and enquires about Marshall's work with Spanish music.²⁷ Rodrigo then adds that he has received a very friendly letter from Blanca Selva, in which she asks for his works.²⁸ The letter finishes with a postscript in which the composer asks Marshall for feedback on the works he has sent to him.

First, the letter clearly suggests that Frank Marshall was aware of who Blanca Selva was. This is implied by the fact that Rodrigo mentions her name without the need to include any form of introduction or explanation. The purpose of the letter is also quite explicit: Rodrigo is sending these two compositions with the intention of bringing them to the attention of Marshall, presumably so that he or one of his students may perform them in the future. The reference to the concert in Paris appears intended to heighten

²⁶ Font Batallé, p. 102 (Appendix).

²⁷ '¿Com van llurs treballs pera la organització de la música espanyola?' [How is your work for the organisation of Spanish music?] Presumably, this refers to a particular event or concert.

²⁸ 'He rebut una carta molt amable de Blanca Selva, en la que me demana les mevas obres'.

his status as a composer, and in that line, the passing commentary regarding Selva's request for his work may also be read as another line validating his own musical work by linking it to a highly regarded artist.

Letter 96 from Joan Ma Thomas, dated Barcelona, 30 December 1929²⁹

According to Font Batallé, Thomas (dates unknown) was a presbyter, organist and musicologist from Palma de Mallorca. Thomas writes to Marshall to ask him to advertise his 'Academia tan prestigiosa' [prestigious Academy] in the new music magazine *Philarmonia*.

As part of his sales pitch, Thomas explains to Marshall that there are at present in Mallorca many young piano students looking to go to Barcelona to perfect their technique.³⁰ There is a 'renewed impulse' for this (*renovellada*). Thomas highlights that 'a girl has just gone to Blanca Selva' and that 'a young [man] wants to go to work with Maestro Socies'.³¹ The passage finishes by explaining the reasons for this, the ease of the sea voyage between Palma and Barcelona and the lack of a specialised piano teacher with a reputation on the island.

As was evidenced in the previous letter, this epistolary example also confirms that the name Blanca Selva was well known to Marshall. Further, apart from attesting to Selva's reach as a teacher, it also appears that she is used here to lure Marshall into placing an advertisement. It highlights the strong possibility that Selva and Marshall may have seen each other as competing for students.

Letter 149 from Manuel Brescané dated Barcelona 12 March 1952³²

This letter is from Manuel Brescané, who signs the letter as *Perito Agrícola del Estado*³³ living in Murcia. The letter was written 24 years after the preceding two.

²⁹ Font Batallé, p. 108 (Appendix)

³⁰ 'A Mallorca, hi ha actualmente molts de joves qui treballan el piano amb desitjos d'anar a perfeccionar-se a Barcelona'.

³¹ 'Una noia acaba d'anar a Blanca Selva; un jove vol treballar amb el Mestre Socies [...]'

³² Font Batallé, p. 174 (Appendix).

³³ [State agricultural expert.]

From the content of the letter, it is clear that Brescané, as well as being a state agricultural expert, is also an aspiring pianist and had been in correspondence with Marshall before, who had declined to give him a lesson on the basis of his own ill health. Brescané laments that there are no suitable teachers near him, although he is in touch with Spanish concert pianist Leopoldo Querol (1899-1985), with whom he says he has a good friendship ('He una Buena Amistad con él [...]'). Querol will help him when he has some time amongst his many concerts, but he has advised him to surround himself with good pianistic literature that will aid him.³⁴

Brescané mentions that he has Cortot's *Principes rationnels de la technique pianistique* (which was recommended to him by Marshall himself). He is also working with the *Estudio pianístico sobre los pedales* (1919)³⁵ and *La sonoridad del piano* (1940), both of which are Marshall's works.

Brescané is asking for further bibliographical references and states that Leopoldo Querol mentioned to him the work of Blanca Selva, 'que dió unas conferencias en su Academia, sobre técnica de piano' [who gave some lectures on piano technique in your Academy] and asks Marshall whether he knows where he could get her treatise.³⁶

There are several interesting elements in this letter. The first is another confirmation that Blanca Selva was known to Frank Marshall, at least to the extent that the writer believes she gave some lectures in the Academia. Further, importantly, her name appears to still be spoken about as a pianistic reference ten years after her death, and by none other than Leopoldo Querol, who is the first pianist to have recorded the entire *Iberia* by Albéniz in 1952.

However, the Academia Granados-Marshall has no documentary evidence linking both pianists, or any other kind of evidence in support of Selva ever teaching or giving lectures there. Although I still maintain that it is plausible that they knew one another,

³⁴ 'La distancia que nos separa, ya consideramos Querol y yo que era una gran dificultad, pero recurrimos a la posibilidad de reunirme con buenos materiales de trabajo y con una acertada literatura pianística, que hicieran las veces del pedagogo a mi alcance'.

³⁵ Presumably Marshall's *Estudio práctico sobre los pedales del piano*.

³⁶ 'Leopoldo Querol me habló de la obra de Blanca Selva, que dió unas conferencias en su Academia, sobre técnica de piano. ¿Dónde podría conseguir esta obra?'.

and to an extent the letters do confirm that at least Marshall was aware of Selva and, potentially, her work, there is at present no other proof that elevates this hypothesis from mere conjecture.

Cecília Serra

Cecília Serra (Reus, 1977) is a prominent Catalan clarinettist and conductor with a strong background in piano performance. Having spent time in Austria she is fluent in German, which has led her to combine her interpretative and pedagogical career with German language coaching for singers. She currently teaches clarinet and piano in several schools, such as Afinarte in Madrid and her own studio, as well as being a German phonetics teacher at the Conservatorio Superior de Música de Aragón.

I contacted Cecília after reading one of her blog posts where she highlighted that her former piano teacher, Carme Flexas (1925-2005), had brought to her attention artists such as Blanche Selva.³⁷ At that point I had not previously come across the name Carme Flexas.

Serra told me in correspondence that what she remembered that connected Carme Flexas to Selva was that her teacher regularly checked in Blanche Selva's Bach editions when teaching this composer, something which 'lo hacía con gran devoción' [she did with great devotion]. Although Serra was quite certain that she had no further specific recollection linking both pianists, she agreed to talk to me.³⁸

I want wholeheartedly to thank Cecília for so generously agreeing to speak with me, particularly when considering that, initially, the object of my research seemed far removed from her own experience and memories. However, as it fortunately came to light early in our talk, Carme Flexas had been a student of Guillem Garganta, and Cecília's vivid recollection of her years with her, as well as her deep insight into the

³⁷ 'Me hizo conocer las figuras de los músicos Blanche Selva y Gaspar Cassadó [...]'.

³⁸ The conversation took place via WhatsApp video call on 11 August 2020 and lasted two hours.

application of these teachings in her own teaching practice, are an invaluable component of this chapter.

Serra studied with Carme Flexas for four to five years, after having begun piano lessons with her own father, Pere Serra, who had himself also studied with Flexas. Cecília considers her experience with Carme Flexas instrumental in her musical development, and although having finally chosen the clarinet over the piano, in her opinion, it is her experience with Carme that has influenced her the most in her musical life, enabling her to transfer much of her accrued knowledge in those years to her work as a clarinettist. Serra has a wide-ranging musical background studying in Spain and Austria, having been under the baton of many eminent conductors and playing chamber music with many colleagues of different backgrounds; but she was adamant that ‘nadie me ha dicho nada nuevo’ [nobody has told me anything new [other than that imparted to her by Flexas]]. She has a very vivid recollection of her student years and told me that she strongly felt that she had experienced a pedagogical praxis that was all-encompassing in a way that, in her opinion, hardly anybody knows how to do. She used the expression ‘trascendental’ and ‘muy especial’ [transcendental and very special] to refer to those lessons.

Common elements

1. Importance of physical relaxation away from the piano

Carme Flexas would begin each piano lesson by asking Serra to release her shoulders and connect the movement to her breath. Cecília was asked to lift her shoulders on an inhalation and hold the position for some seconds, after which a strong exhalation would bring the shoulders back down. She had to do this several times and Serra was adamant that each class began with this shoulder-releasing exercise which was also linked to a consistent breathing pattern.

Further, Flexas would ask her student to leave her arms relaxed in a neutral position away from the piano, that is, both arms simply suspended from their shoulder joint, and she would take the arm and throw it in different directions. The student had to leave the arm completely free and relaxed so that it would naturally rebound.

Finally, sometimes the weight of the arm was experienced by throwing the arm onto the closed lid of the piano. This exercise was done both from the shoulder as well as from the articulation of the elbow. However, this exercise was only done at some points, and not routinely as with the other two.

This attention to physical conditioning and relaxation and particularly its connection to the breath, is something that is very relatable to Selva's pedagogy. Figure 5.4 below shows one of Selva's proposed exercises to acquire 'de conscience des états de contraction et de décontraction musculaires appuyés sur l'inspiration et l'expiration du souffle' [awareness of the states of muscle contraction and relaxation on the inhalation and exhalation of breath].³⁹

Selva highlights that the exercise is done standing, and that it consists simply in the elevation and descent of the entire arm, 'mesurés sur le souffle' (measured on the breath). She has clear instructions that the in-breath is done through the nose, with the mouth closed, and that abdominal breathing is engaged. The arms must be completely elevated by the end of the inhalation and descend on the exhalation.

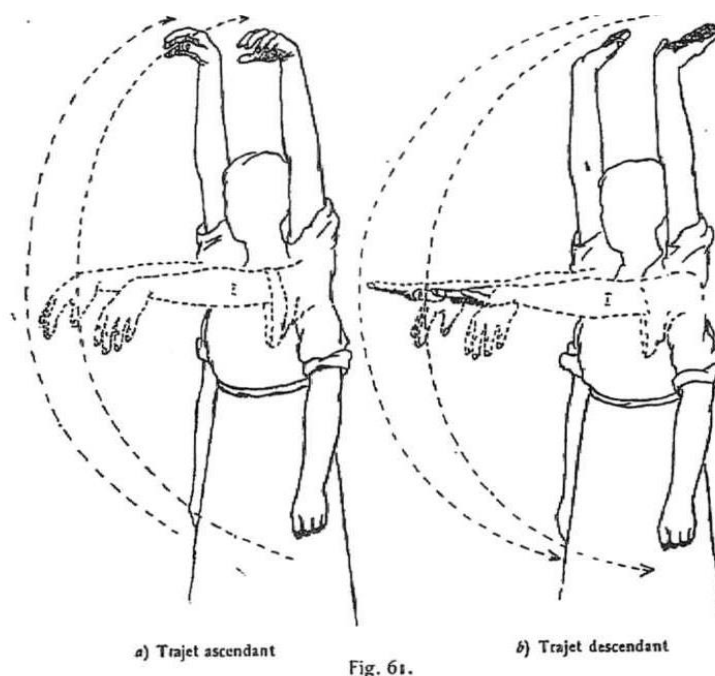


Fig. 5.4 – Selva, LEMTP, LP2, p. 137

³⁹ LP2, p. 137.

The same exercise is suggested raising and lowering the arms at the side of the body, as shown in Fig. 5.5.

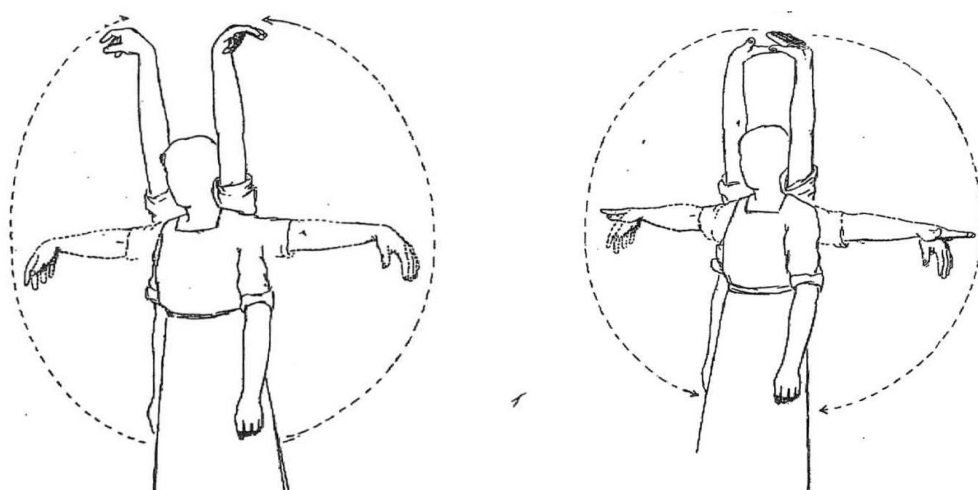


Fig. 5.5 – Selva, LEMTP, LP2, pp. 128-129

Although Selva's exercises are not focused on the shoulders, like Flexas', their emphasis on the breath, as well as relaxation and body conditioning more generally as an important and constant feature in each piano lesson, do appear to be strikingly similar.

The following exercises on LP2 (which appear in the same order as are described here) are also similar to the ones detailed by Serra.

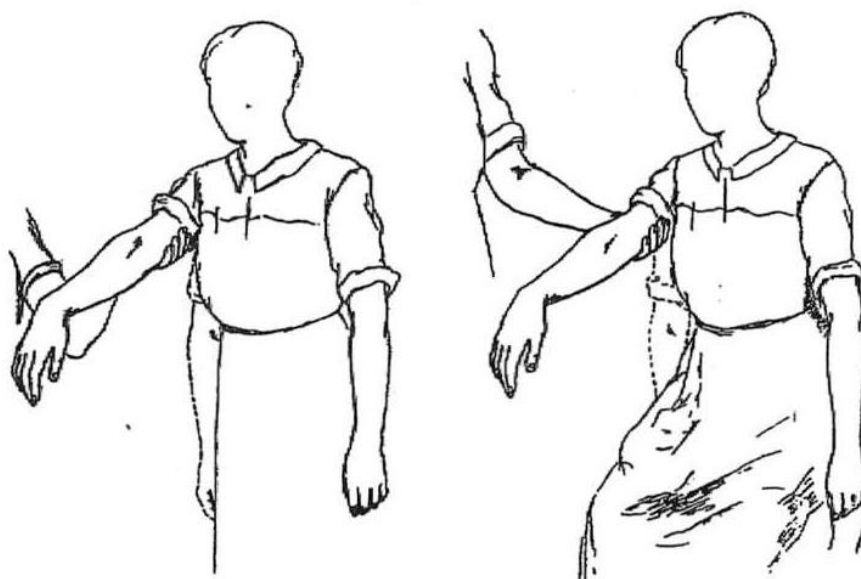


Fig. 5.6 – Selva, LEMTP, LP2, p. 129

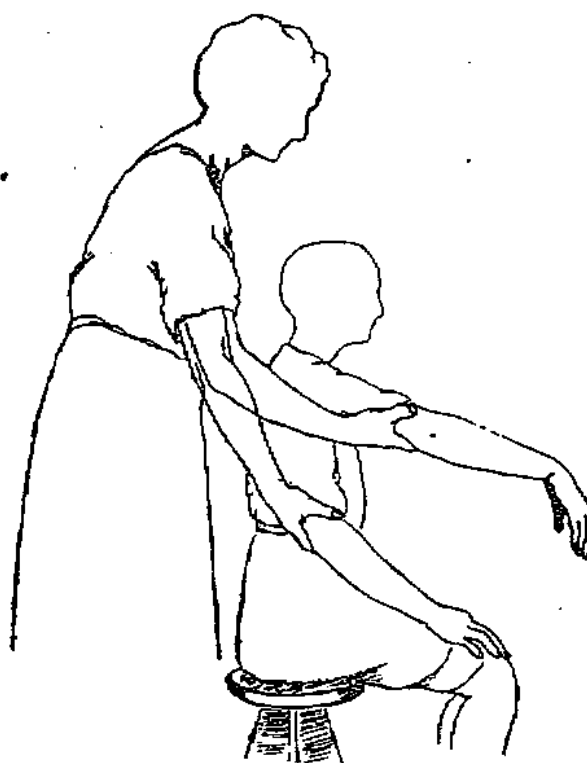


Fig. 64 a

Fig. 5.7 – Selva, LEMTP, LP2, p. 131

Both Fig. 5.6 and 5.7 show exercises where the teacher ‘lance’ (throws) the student’s arm in several directions. ‘Il [the arm] doit revenir librement à son point de départ, en oscillation, quelle que soit la direction dans laquelle le professeur l’a lancé’.⁴⁰ As illustrated in the examples, these exercises are suggested both in standing and seating positions.

2. Preparatory period

Although Cecília had previously studied with her father, who, as mentioned above, had also studied with Carme, her new teacher decided to spend some time reconditioning her technique. She used Stamaty’s *études*.⁴¹ This retraining process was a staple of Flexas’ pedagogy, and it was centred on finding a neutral touch. Flexas emphasised the quality of movement first and later the quality of sound. She would praise small improvements in the physicality of the touch even when the improvement was so slight as not to produce the desired acoustic effect yet.

Like Ludovica Mosca above, Serra was not familiar with the Géry études recommended by Selva. These are substantially different from the Stamaty method used by Flexas, as they are exclusively focused on the independence of accentuation across the hands whilst Stamaty offers many different pieces to develop a greater range of technical means.

When working on Stamaty and during this retraining process, Flexas asked for two different touches, which were ‘preparado’ [prepared] and ‘sin preparar’ [unprepared]. The former required an elevation, whilst the latter was produced from the key. Serra demonstrated the touches by playing them on her left arm. I related them to the *articulation maxima* and *minima* with ease. Flexas’ emphasis was placed on releasing

⁴⁰ LP2, p. 128. [It has to return freely to the starting position, swaying, from whichever direction the teacher threw it.]

⁴¹ Camille Stamaty, *Chant et mécanisme, études progressives divisées en 3 livres* opp. 37, 38, 39 (Paris: Heugel, 1859).

the fingers and avoiding any tension. The recurrent expression used by Flexas was ‘sin agarrotar’ [without stiffness] in either fingers or wrist and arm.

These exercises were also played at a very slow tempo, placing awareness on the student’s breath. Further kinaesthetic emphasis was placed by making the student feel and see the finger in action. Flexas considered this the basis of piano playing.

Although this initial stage differs from Selva in that it is centred exclusively on the ‘neutral’ touch, which is most analogous to Selva’s *jeu indifférent* but excludes the other two main modes of attack, other similarities are relevant and striking: in particular, the link between touch and breath as well as heightening the kinaesthetic awareness of the student by appealing to different senses — touch, sight and hearing.

Another important aspect in common is the importance placed on relaxation and playing without any tension. Most teachers will at one point or another speak in similar terms, however, in my experience not as many have it embedded in their own pedagogy to such an extent that they spend so long and go to such rigorous controls (e.g., leading a body warm-up ahead of every session) to transmit and cultivate it. Although the approach may be different, for instance the use of Stamaty as opposed to Selva’s preference for Géry, their priorities can be understood to be broadly the same.

The first piece that Cecília was allowed to play once her teacher considered she was ready, was the Scarlatti-Tausig *Pastoral and Capriccio*.⁴² This was striking because, although I have not found any evidence of Selva ever teaching these pieces, her connection with Scarlatti has been well documented.⁴³ In fact, Scarlatti is one of the composers that d’Indy advised Selva to play first upon starting lessons with him, and a composer she also encouraged her students to learn early on.

⁴² Tausig paired two Sonatas of Scarlatti, K9 and K20, characterised respectively as Pastorale and Capriccio. In order to present them more cogently as a pair, Tausig transposed K9 from its original key of D minor to E minor. The Capriccio is in E major, creating a good contrast between them. The Tausig set was very popular particularly in the first half of the twentieth century and many pianists of the time recorded it, e.g., Benno Moiseiwitsch, Josef Hofmann and Emile Gilels, amongst others.

⁴³ Maite Aguirre Quiñonero and Barry Ife, Appendix, Table 7. Selva performed these two Scarlatti Sonata at least once in her career, in Paris on 31 January 1905.

3. Importance of relaxation of the thumb

Flexas also placed strong emphasis specifically on the relaxation of the thumb. Serra mentioned that Carme would check the fingers by touching them. She expected them to feel elastic. Most importantly, as Serra remembered from Flexas verbatim ‘cómo llevas la mano, se ve en el pulgar’ [how [good or not] you move the hand, can be seen in the thumb]. Flexas would seek to ascertain the condition of the thumb by touching it with one of her fingers and expecting it to rebound. This reminded me straight away of a remark by Selva ‘c’est le plus fréquemment sur le pouce qui s’écarte mal de la main’⁴⁴ [it is frequently the thumb which deviates badly from the hand] where she also identifies the thumb as the most frequent point of misalignment in the hand. Selva provides two illustrations providing the optimal position, and an incorrect one (Fig. 5.8).

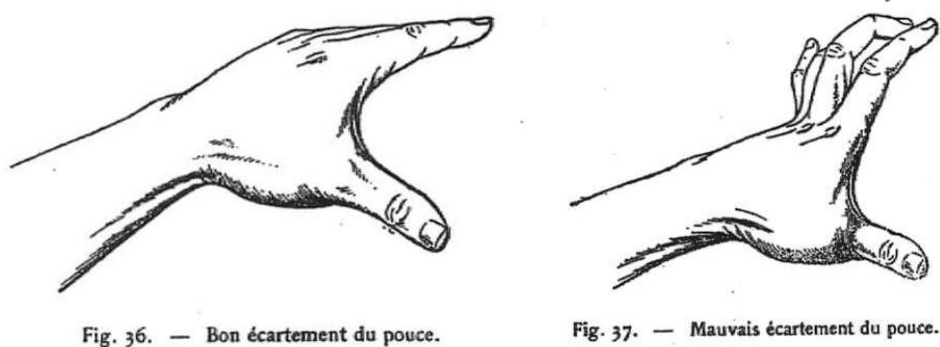


Fig. 5.8 – Selva, LEMTP, Vol. 2, pp. 18-19

4. ‘Al servicio de la música’⁴⁵

Another of Flexa’s main pedagogical tenets was that technique ought always to be at the service of music, that is, that every technical need stemmed from the particular musical expression or effect of the music. Music always came first. Although the phrase may sound strange in English, the Spanish expression used by Serra-Flexas is

⁴⁴ Vol. 2, p. 18.

⁴⁵ [At the service of the music].

identical to Selva's core principle in her pedagogy, when she refers to technique being at the *seul service de la Musique*:

À ce prix seulement existera l'enseignement logique du vrai jeu de piano, par lequel toutes les ressources instrumentales actuelles seront mises au *seul service de la Musique*.⁴⁶

[This is the only price at which the logical teaching of real piano playing will exist, through which all the current instrumental resources will be employed *only* towards the *service of Music*.]

Of course, as French and Spanish are grammatically so similar it is not so surprising to find two different musicians using an identical expression to mean the same thing. It does not necessarily follow that this was passed on verbatim from Selva to Garganta and then to Flexas. However, it is suggestive at least of certain general core principles being transmitted from one teacher to another.

5. Importance of the breath in music and in oneself

'Si no respiras, te agarrotas' [if you don't breathe, you become stiff] was an often-repeated phrase by Carme Flexas. The importance of the breath was already highlighted earlier when discussing the initial preparation undertaken by Cecília, and the same connection was established with reference to Selva on the same preparatory conditioning exercises.

Moreover, Serra stated that discussing the breath was another constant in their lessons, where it was considered an integral part of the musical expression and oneself. I consider this another key similarity with Selva. The connection with the breath and singing was already established when discussing her key principles in Chapter 3 of this thesis. The following quote from Selva's treatise further highlights the relevance in her pedagogy and understanding of the breath in the artistic context more fully, as a quasi-metaphysical tenet of her artistic credo:

Tout geste vient de l'esprit, s'élance avec le souffle, et réalise ainsi au dehors ce qui est conçu au-dedans.

⁴⁶ Vol. 1, p. vii.

De là, l'Art tout entier, -esprit- manifesté par la matière.

De là, la loi de tout labeur artistique. Toute possibilité de réalisation est enclose dans le geste, et à sa base dans le souffle.⁴⁷

[Every gesture comes from the spirit, soars with the breath and thus realises outside what is conceived within.

From there, all of Art, -spirit- manifested by matter.

From there, the law of all artistic labour. Every possibility of realisation is enclosed in the gesture, and has its foundation in the breath.]

6. Relating sound and gesture

This is undoubtedly the core of Selva's principles, which led her to establish different categories of touch to encapsulate the embodiment of sound. Flexas did not use terminology such as *jeu éclatant* or *appuyé*. Serra also considers that most of the repertoire on which she worked with her teacher was not the large concert repertoire that would require such a variety of attack, particularly where a more muscular sound is concerned. However, she remembers a very detailed piece of work with her teacher, who was very precise in illustrating and asking her to produce a particular sound, for a particular phrase with a particular gesture. This was done 'on the go', responding to the musical demands as they arose. Nevertheless, Serra recounted working on specific and different types of attack, which could be from the fingers, the wrist, forearm and to a lesser degree, shoulder. It is noteworthy that Flexas would never refer to the Spanish word *toque* but would always use the Italian *tocco*, perhaps due to her contact with the famous Italian pianist Guido Agosti (1901-1989).

Serra remembers a strong emphasis on gesture and a clarity in the tools employed in any given music to create the desired effect.

7. Singing tone

Regarding sound, Flexas always highlighted singing tone as the connecting line ('buscaba el canto como línea conectora'). Serra considers this a form of analysis in and of itself by focusing on the textural sound of the music. This emphasis on singing tone and the voice clearly resembles Selva's precepts already discussed in Chapter 3,

⁴⁷ Vol. 2, p. viii.

where the analogy between the breath and singing is transferred into the weight of the arm for its pianistic realisation:

C'est au moyen de la pesanteur que le pianiste fait le son, au piano, comme c'est au moyen du souffle que s'émet le son, au chant.⁴⁸

[It is through weight that the pianist makes the sound, at the piano, as the breath is the vehicle with which one effects the sound, in singing.]

Also, in accordance with Selva's teaching there appears not to have been a connection between creating a singing line at the piano and rotation or lateral movements.

8. Bach and polyphonic works

Flexas always advocated working on polyphonic pieces not hands separately but studying each part or voice independently, attending to the correct melodic inflection of every line. She followed a strict sequencing of Bach's works beginning with the *Little Preludes*, progressing then to *Inventions*, then *Preludes and Fugues* from the *Well-tempered Clavier*, the *Suites* and finally the *Partitas*.

The importance and ongoing study of Bach is a recurrent feature in Selva's pedagogy. However, her own sequencing of the works is markedly different, and in my opinion more sophisticated than that of Carme Flexas. As can be seen in the repertoire lists within her *Cours Blanche Selva*⁴⁹ she does not ascribe a particular level of difficulty to any genre or establish a sequence between them. As an example, in the repertoire list of the *Sixième Année* (the lowest level at the superior degree) Selva offers a wide-ranging selection of pieces from the *Well-tempered Clavier*, *French* and *English Suites*, a *Partita* and two concertos amongst others⁵⁰ from which the students and teachers can select their programme.

⁴⁸ Vol. 1, p. 3.

⁴⁹ Blanche Selva, *Cours Blanche Selva. Programme de l'examen de professeur de troisième degré. Degré Supérieure : Sixième, septième, huitième, neuvième année d'enseignement* (Paris: Roudanez, 1924).

⁵⁰ Full list: *Well-tempered Clavier* Book I, C major, C-sharp major, E-flat major, A major and A minor. Book II: C-sharp major; Three-part *Inventions*, D minor, F major, G minor. *French Suite* D minor; *English Suite* G minor; *Partita* B-flat major; *Italian concerto*; *Fantaisie* in A minor; *Aria variata alla maniera italiana*; *Prelude with fugue* in A minor; *Prelude* in G major; *Fantasia* with *fughetta* in B-flat major; *Prelude with fughetta* in D minor, E minor and A minor; *Prelude* with

9. Studying octaves through Kullak's method

Finally, without any prompting by me, Serra remembered being taught to play octaves through Kullak's method.⁵¹ This is a fairly strong link, as it is a book listed many times by Selva in her treatise⁵² and a method for which Selva provided her own preliminary exercises and preface to the 1915 Roudanez edition.⁵³ The three books of Kullak's method were thus advertised as '*Revue, classée et précédée d'exercices préliminaires avec la manière de travailler par Blanche Selva*'. [Reviewed, classed, and preceded by preliminary exercises with the way of working of Blanche Selva.]

As above, whilst it is not possible to say with a high degree of certainty that this was passed on to Flexas by Garganta through his own experience with Selva, I think that it is at least plausible to suggest that it may have been.

Divergences

Although it is clear that Flexas taught to play with a variety of attacks and placed a strong emphasis on the *tocco*, she did not use any clear terminology to designate different touches. As such, her pedagogy is devoid of the notion of Selva's *jeux*.

I enquired whether there had been any notion of 'long and short fingers', i.e., a distinction of finger movement stemming from the metacarpophalangeal joint (MCP) and the proximal interphalangeal joint (PIP). This distinction wasn't made, and the touch, as exemplified by Serra via the camera corresponded exclusively to MCP.

Finally, Serra stated that Flexas wrote very little in the students' music generally, and no notation similar to bow markings or arrows were made to signal attacks or

fugue in A minor; Petite fugue in two-parts in C minor; Fuga in C major, Fugue in B minor, D minor, A minor; Piano Concertos in D major and E major.

⁵¹ Theodor Kullak, *Die Schule des Octavenspiels*, op. 48, (Berlin: Schlesinger, 1841).

⁵² 14 times in total.

⁵³ Théodore Kullak, *L'Etude des Octaves d'après la Méthode du Jeu d'Octaves. Revue classée et précédée d'exercices préliminaires avec la manière de travailler par Blanche Selva* (Paris: Roudanez, 1915).

groupings. This is contrary to Selva's own practice, as she marked her students' scores profusely as has been discussed in Chapter 3.

I could not discern any other clear divergence between Serra/Flexas and Selva, although, as explained above, many elements did not have a literal correspondence either. However, throughout the interview with Serra I had a strong sense of familiarity and connectedness between her exposition of the overarching ideas of Flexas and my understanding of the application of Selva's treatise.

Other elements of interest

Serra's vivid account introduced me to Carme Flexas's pedagogy, and it clearly emerged in the conversation that she also was a highly unique mentor whose pedagogy merits attention in her own right. In Cecília's words, Flexas was a highly emotive teacher who brought the music alive through her playing and explanations. Regarding the former, Serra recollects that her demonstrations were always short and focused. Her own experience with other teachers (both in piano and clarinet lessons) is that often, teachers play too much or too long excepts when demonstrating for their students. This makes both teacher and student lose sight of what the teacher was demonstrating in the first place. However, whenever Flexas played, she made sure that the student was aware of what and why they had to listen to and/or observe in a certain physical movement.

I felt that this point was very well observed by Cecília and I have reassessed the way I demonstrate to my students ever since, making sure that I explain to my students the purpose of the demonstration and making them see the point.

Regarding touch, Serra also said that a recurrent feature in Flexas' teaching was to demonstrate how a given passage was to be played on Serra's forearm. This was so that she would feel the amount of weight and pressure (or lack thereof) that the music needed in that section. Serra was always surprised at the lightness of touch demonstrated to her in this way and it was a useful tool to learn to calibrate it as necessary.

When talking about Flexas's own musical upbringing and other pedagogical influences, Serra remembered that she often talked about 'Mestre Garganta' and Guido Agosti, with whom Flexas studied in two different summer courses. Flexas had also told her that she once played for the famous Nadia Boulanger, who did not tell Carme Flexas anything new.

As stated above, Serra considered Flexas's teachings transcendental and hugely influential in her musical understanding to this day. As far as pianism is concerned, there is a certain way of playing, an 'artesanía' [craft] that she thinks was very much of Carme's School and that is best exemplified in Jordi Camell's playing, 'entiendo como toca Jordi Camell' [I understand how Jordi Camell plays].

Jordi Camell

Jordi Camell (1959) is a prominent Catalan concert pianist and piano professor at the Escola Superior de Música de Catalunya (ESMUC) (Barcelona). He was personally known to me, as I studied at ESMUC between 2003-2007 when he was Head of Keyboard at the School. However, the link to Flexas and Selva was unknown to me until Serra pointed it out. I interviewed Jordi Camell on 14 October 2021.⁵⁴

Like Serra, Camell did not know of the Selva-Garganta-Flexas link. In most respects, Camell's memories overwhelmingly matched those of Serra, including how crucial Flexas had been in his own career. To avoid repetition only divergences between their accounts are given in this summary of our conversation.

Camell told me that he had begun piano lessons with a different local teacher, but upon seeing him play in a public performance in Tarragona, Flexas 'discovered' him and took him under her wing. He studied exclusively with her from age 8-9 years old for around ten years. Although Camell studied with other teachers in Paris, and then in London, he highlighted the influence of Maria Curzio (1919-2009), Camell and Flexas remained close throughout her life. Coincidentally, like Mosca with Garganta, Camell

⁵⁴ Due to COVID-19 this interview was undertaken via WhatsApp video call, and it lasted 1h and 15 minutes.

also became the legatee of Flexas's estate upon her passing, evidencing very strong emotional ties in both cases.

Jordi Camell mentioned something very specific about Flexas's priorities that did not transpire in any of the other conversations, and that strongly resonated with my own appreciation of Selva's method. It is not presented in isolation as such in her treatise, but it is a corollary of her approach and visible in some (although not clearly in all) drawings by Chupin. This is the need to keep the bridge of the hand high, 'puente muy alto' in his words, a colloquialism for the metacarpophalangeal joints. This shape can be appreciated in Fig. 5.7 highlighted above.

Further, Camell did remember that Flexas would work on different touches with him, highlighting different ones as 'apoyado e impulsado'. The former was described in similar terms as Selva's *appuyé*. The latter appeared different from the *éclatant*, as it was described as an upwards thrust. However, it does match the way Christiane Marandet was taught the *éclatant* touch by Selva's assistant (see below).

Camell stated that Flexas had a small repertoire and would only teach those works she felt herself comfortable with. This is vastly different from Selva who had an ample repertoire and her own guidance in her courses suggests that the range of repertoire choices she considered for her students was broad.

Another contrast between their teaching practices was that Flexas placed a more sequenced approach to developing the physical apparatus of the pianist. This consisted in focusing first on fingers and hand, and later on, on wrist and arms. Selva's way is more holistic, and Serra's own experience with Carme Flexas was also different. This may be due to their different age when beginning to work with Selva. Camell was only 8-9 whereas Serra was already a teenager. This change in approach is consistent with my own, and the way I have evaluated the viability of free-fall arm weight keyboard exercises depending on the age of the pupil. In essence, the more the hand is already 'formed' (in terms of muscular build) the more suitable the free-fall arm weight exercises are. When this is not the case, I have shortened the distance of the fall against the keyboard, focusing on an attack that is from the elbow and uses arm-

weight, but is not a pure free-fall, as the hands of those players do not have the strength yet to absorb the fall without compromising the natural curve of the fingers. Free-fall exercises away from the piano can still be used in anticipation of more wide-ranging forms of attack at a later stage. My experience teaching young children this form of controlled elbow attack with isolated vertical finger, which I have called 'pointy fingers' to capture the imagination of my youngest students, has been extremely positive. The students learn to connect finger and arm movements from the start, the independence of the fingers is therefore worked in tandem with the wider body apparatus, allowing them to play with different dynamic ranges by controlling the speed of the fall. The vertical position of the fingers develops the bridge of the hand quickly and naturally, preparing the hand without the need of arduous held-notes exercise or other repetitive mechanical exercises.

In contrasting the evidence of Mosca, Serra and Camell it was noticeable that Serra's and Camell's experiences seemed closer to Selva's pedagogy. This could initially surprise, as she is one link further removed in the chain of transmission.⁵⁵ However, I think this is easily explained by the fact that Flexas studied with Garganta approximately twenty years earlier than Ludovica Mosca. It is very plausible to infer that Garganta's way of teaching resembled Selva's more closely in the earlier years of his teaching career, at a time that was closer to his own experience as a student and assistant of Selva. Further, although largely similar, comparing Serra's and Camell's accounts, it was interesting to note that although Camell had been taught concepts akin to Selva's different touches, this had not been the case with Serra. It is possible that Flexas herself adapted her own practice over the years.

Christiane Marandet

The fourth person I had the pleasure of talking with in connection to her experience of receiving Selva's pedagogy indirectly was Christiane Marandet, who studied with Selva's collaborator mentioned above, Cécile Piriou-Kunc, for ten years from 1955 to 1965.

⁵⁵ Selva>Garganta>Ludovica Mosca as against Selva>Garganta>Flexas>Cecília Serra.

She is in fact the first person I interviewed, in September 2019. Meeting her was a real surprise as unbeknownst to me, the Archive de la Association Blanche Selva is located near her home. It was Guy Selva who arranged our meeting and who so kindly drove me to her house, where she received me with open arms. At that stage I had not yet planned the structure of the interview and our conversation was even more informal and spontaneous than the other three.

Ms Marandet is not a professional musician but has retained her love of piano playing through her entire adult life. I consider my encounter with Ms Marandet of huge significance on my work. By the time we met, I had worked on the treatise on my own for a year and I was able to clearly distinguish what elements of Selva's pedagogy had permeated into Marandet's own practice with Piriou-Kunc. Moreover, Christiane and I ended the afternoon playing a piano duet and this experience validated my research further, not just for its investigative value but by offering a strong emotive and affective connection with another pianist in close contact with Blanche Selva. In fact, this affective connection is something I have experienced with all my interviewees. At the end of the day, as Jordi Camell put it, 'tocamos como somos' [we play as we are]. Our own technique, understood in the broad sense, as our whole approach to the instrument, becomes an inherent part of our musical, perhaps even personal, identity. I believe that where this has been received, as it was for the four of them, with thoughtful and caring instruction it becomes a joy to share it with others. My four interviewees shared a sense of belonging and deep gratitude to their own teachers and a manifest willingness to pass on to me what they remembered.

It was precisely this affection that I found deeply moving when meeting Christiane Marandet. She began by saying that the classes had been a long time ago, roughly 60 years, and that she was uncertain whether she was going to be able to tell me anything meaningful for my research. However, a little later she told me that she was moved by the fact that my questions were allowing her to remember things she hadn't thought of in a very long time. Christiane also thought that the most important thing she received from Piriou-Kunc was her love for music and the piano, and that revisiting this experience was joyful for her.

In the first place, Christiane, who notably also became acquainted directly with Selva's own written work later in life herself, discussed with me her viewpoint that in the later books Selva had possibly gone too far. She referred to the amount of detail and the huge volume of preparatory exercises away from the piano found in the later books. Importantly, in her lessons with Cécile their work was almost exclusively focused on musical expression, binding gesture, musical thought and sound together. Nevertheless, there was a small circular pattern joining a downward weight release movement and oblique upward gesture that she had learned from Piriou-Kunc to be practised away from the piano. Christiane demonstrated it to me and there was something very moving about executing this embodied practice together.

Further, Christiane's recollection and demonstration highlighted a significant divergence with regard to the *jeu éclatant* from that explained by Selva. This resonated strongly with my own technical reflections, as I had noted in her text a lack of a fast, upward attack that produces a powerful sound, a type of touch that I use often.

In the third book Selva briefly discusses this type of touch, an upward thrust originating from the wrist.⁵⁶ For this, she references Breithaupt, who defines two main types of attack which Selva translates from the original German to *chute basse* and *chute haute*. Selva links Breithaupt's *chute basse* with her *jeu appuyé*. However, the *chute haute*, which she explains is outwardly similar to her *geste d'allègement*, is an inversion of the weight (*renversement de la pensanteur*). As such, for Selva, the sound that it can produce is 'diametrically opposed' to the soft *geste d'allègement*. Nevertheless, Selva does not link this to the *jeu éclatant*, nor does she use it as a means to obtain a strong attack, but as an 'equaliser' of the intensity, for instance in repeated notes, where one needs to alternate the origin of the attack to avoid muscular tension.

However, when Christiane demonstrated to me how she had been taught the *jeu éclatant* by Piriou-Kunc this did not correspond with the third attack described by Selva, but the type of upward motion, *chute haute* as defined in the treatise by Selva in

⁵⁶ Vol. 3/1, pp. 10-11.

reference to Breithaupt's upwards thrust explained above. This type of attack is also similar to Jordi Camell's recollection of the 'impulsado' touch he described. It is not clear to me whether Selva eventually adopted it and taught it this way instead of her first explanation of *jeu éclatant*, or if this is Piriou-Kunc's as well as Garganta-Flexas's own interpretation as a result of trying out Selva's technique in their own capacity as pianists and teachers. It is important to note that Ms Marandet considered the *geste d'allègement*, the light touch version of an upward movement, of paramount importance in Piriou-Kunc's teaching. She remembered her teacher stressing the necessity to finish each musical phrase in this way. This is in accordance with Selva's own understanding of articulation and phrasing at the piano, as was shown in Chapter 3 and exemplified through, amongst others, the Géry exercises. As seen earlier in this chapter, emphasis on musical phrasing was also an inherent element in Garganta's and Flexa's teaching.

As explained earlier, it was never the intention of this chapter to prove a tangible connection to Selva's technique and pedagogy — it is simply impossible to objectively verify and quantify. I suggest however, that given the ties that link all of them to important collaborators of Selva, interrogating those experiences is legitimate and valuable in and of itself, and for the unique contributions that they bring forward to the discussion and study of Selva's technique and its viability. As stated above, they also have had an impact on my own appreciation and development of my own playing and teaching through Selva's method.

I suggest that finding some inconsistencies between their recollections and Selva's work does not diminish the value of working with Selva's treatise. On the one hand, it is expected that a text can never be definitive and that an artist's and teacher's work will continually change and become more refined over time. On the other hand, it is also plausible that every other teacher or student adapts the learned strategies and varies them to suit their own application or that of their students. As such, the text becomes a source of constant self-reflection. Musicians should be encouraged to share the results and discoveries of their own practice in writing to a greater extent and read and learn from other practitioners in this way, creating a meaningful dialogue and expanding the cumulative knowledge of the craft.

Although my interviewees were not formally aware of the links to Selva's method, I think there were enough common elements to show some links to it, showing that, although mostly not acknowledged, her pianistic legacy is still alive to an extent. However, given the degree of departure, Selva may not have recognised this as such, given her own words in 1923 in *La Chaîne Selvique* discussed earlier. Reflecting on my experience teaching through her framework, I have also varied the degree to which I refer to her concepts over the last four years. For instance, like all the teachers discussed in the interviews, I do not teach my students the names of the forms of attacks themselves either. I demonstrate them, and I train my students to feel and hear the differences (emphasising body awareness and ear training), as well as teaching them to recognise their applicability with regard to notions of musical style. I do not use the word *neume*, but I refer to 'grouping' in relation to phrasing, and despite having to account for different musical styles in the repertoire, I actively teach my students to see the commonalities in the toolbox of gestures that they have acquired. In fact, I suggest that one of the greater reference points from Selva's technique and pedagogy is the classification of a myriad of individual possibilities into concrete, meaningful umbrella categories — what these are ultimately called, I do not consider that important. I accept that Selva may not have viewed it in the same way as I do.

When reflecting on the experiences of all my interviewees, I could not but marvel at the richness of their experiences, particularly in comparison to my own musical upbringing already briefly discussed in Chapter 3. Further, in the cases of Flexas and Piriou-Kunc these were teachers providing really high-quality instruction, but away from important musical centres, in terms of geographical location or under the auspices of an important Conservatoire. They were doing so therefore almost 'silently', in circumstances, where attracting a greater pool of talented pupils and so forging for themselves the reputation as a 'great pedagogue' was not possible — a not dissimilar experience to that of Selva herself in the later years of her career. This reminded me of Dean Elder's interview with the famous French pianist Robert Casadesus (1899-

1972).⁵⁷ Casadesus' official teacher was the renowned French teacher Louis Diémer, but as he told Elder, his real teacher was his aunt, Mademoiselle Simon:

a wonderful teacher, but nobody knew her. She was a pupil of Marmontel, a very famous teacher; and I studied with her until, I must say, I was 30 years old. Each year I went to the country in Normandy, to play something for her; and so, she also heard my son Jean. Her teaching was absolutely wonderful, and she was my real teacher. Diémer was a good teacher, but I learned much more from her.⁵⁸

In presenting Flexas's and Piriou-Kunc's students' experiences of their teaching, this chapter not only interrogates and explores possible links with Selva's technique and pedagogy, but also gives voice to other outstanding but largely unknown female pedagogues.

⁵⁷ Elder, pp. 27-34.

⁵⁸ Elder, p. 28.

Chapter 6 Blanche Selva and Isaac Albéniz

First encounters

Albéniz and Selva first met in July 1904, after one of the Bach concerts at the Schola.¹ She played the *Chromatic Fantasy* for him and sight-read, brilliantly, his 'Seguidillas' from the *Chants d'Espagne*. Albéniz was bowled over and thus began a collaboration between composer and interpreter that Collet described as 'unique dans l'histoire de l'art' [unique in the history of the art form].²

Shortly afterwards, on 30 November 1904, Selva included the 'Seguidillas' in a concert in Compiègne, organised by the Schola Cantorum.³ Other concerts including this and other pieces from *Chants d'Espagne* or *Espagne, Souvenirs* followed in Belgium and in Paris. The highlight came on 6 May 1905 when, together with Ricardo Viñes, Maria Gay and Miguel Llobet, they offered a concert of Catalan music at the Schola Cantorum.⁴ Marguerite de Saint-Marceaux writes in her diary for that day that 'Selva joue fort bien des morceaux d'Albéniz'.⁵ [Selva played some pieces by Albéniz very well.]

¹ See Chapter 2.

² Henri Collet, *Albéniz et Granados*, (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1926) p. 73, fn. I. Selva collaborated with Collet in the writing of this book and it is very possible that this was reported directly to Collet by her. Font Batallé locates their first meeting in 1893, at her salon in Rue de Varenne, but this does not fit the chronology.

³ Programme BS001/142 MMB. This was the first time that Selva had included a work by Albéniz in one of her programmes.

⁴ Programme BS001/175 MMB, reproduced here in Fig. 6.1. According to Collet (p. 148), Selva's performance of *La Vega* in this concert was its première, but as noted by Clark (p. 202), this was first done by José Vianna da Motta in 1899.

⁵ p. 392. She does not mention Viñes or Llobet, and did not like Gay's singing.

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GRANDE SALLE de la SCHOLA CANTORUM, 269, rue St-Jacques

Samedi 6 Mai 1905, à 9 heures du soir

Concert de Musique Catalane

AVEC LE CONCOURS DE

M^{me} Maria GAY

Cantatrice

DE

M^{lle} Blanche SELVA & M. Ricardo VINES

Pianistes

ET DE

M. LLOBET

Guitariste

PROGRAMME

- | | |
|---|-----------|
| 1. Rapsodie Espagnole à deux pianos (*)..... | ALBENIZ. |
| M. Ricardo VINES & M^{lle} Blanche SELVA. | |
| 2. Deux Danses Espagnoles (*)..... | GRANADOS. |
| La Tour Vermeille (*)..... | ALBENIZ. |
| Sevillane (*)..... | — |
| M. Ricardo VINES. | |
| 3. Deux Mélodies (genre populaire)..... | J. CIVIL. |
| Cancion de Susita (*)..... | J. GAY. |
| Mes de Maix (*)..... | — |
| M^{me} Maria GAY & M. CIVIL. | |
| 4. Menuet (*)..... | SOR. |
| Granada (Sérénade)..... | ALBENIZ. |
| M. LLOBET. | |
| 5. Chants d'Espagne (*) : a) Prélude ; b) Prélude (Espagne, Souvenirs) ; | |
| c) Séguidille..... | ALBENIZ |
| M^{lle} Blanche SELVA. | |
| 6. Chansons populaires Catalanes (*) : a) Marimer ; b) Filadora ; | |
| c) Compte l'Arnau ; d) Canço de Nadal. | |
| M^{me} Maria GAY & M. CIVIL. | |
| 7. Airs populaires Catalans, harmonisés par M. Llobet : | |
| a) Lo Testament de n'Amelia ; b) La filla del marchand ; c) La Pastoreta. | |
| Jota (*)..... | TARREGA |
| M. LLOBET. | |
| 8. La Vega (*)..... | ALBENIZ |
| M^{lle} Blanche SELVA. | |

(*) DOTESIO, Éditeur, 47, rue Vivienne, Paris.

PIANOS ERARD ET PLEYEL

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Fig. 6.1— Concert in Paris, 6 May 1905

Courtesy of the Museu de la Música de Barcelona, Fons Blanca Selva, BS001/176

By the time they met, Albéniz's playing was already 'rusty', according to Collet,⁶ and Turina's description also supports this:

Decidido, como siempre, se sienta al piano e intenta tocar una de [las piezas de *Iberia*] tecleando con las manos y cantando a toda voz. ¡Qué desastre! Pero Blanca Selva corre en su auxilio, y con su maestría interpreta magníficamente la maravilla *Iberia*. Es todo un mar de poesía: Evocación, El Puerto, Triana... Albéniz, desde el rincón, regocijadísimo, nos señala a la pianista que navega segura por el teclado sin miedo a las dificultades.⁷

[Determined, as always, he sits at the piano and tries to play one of the [pieces from *Iberia*] playing the keyboard with his hands and singing at the top of his voice. What a disaster! But Blanche Selva runs to his aid and with her mastery interprets the wonderful *Iberia* magnificently. It is a total sea of poetry: Evocación, El Puerto, Triana... Albéniz, from a corner, absolutely delighted, gestures to the pianist who navigates with assurance across the keyboard without fear of the difficulties.]

Selva was present at the première of the opera *Pepita Jiménez* and the zarzuela *l'Ermitage Fleuri* in Brussels on 3 January 1905, which was a success for Albéniz⁸ and he was a regular guest at her gatherings in Rue de Varenne. In fact, when Georges Jean-Aubry⁹ wrote his eulogy, the memory, the image, that the writer conjures in his article situates Albéniz precisely at Selva's salon:

Pauvre Albéniz ! Je le verrai toujours tel qu'en cet après-midi de dimanche, il y a près de deux ans, chez M^{lle} Selva... il jouait des parties de son 3^e *Cahier d'Iberia* qui était sur le point de paraître. La difficulté de ses œuvres surpassait maintenant ses moyens d'ancien virtuose : mais n'importe, il chantait les notes qu'il n'arrivait pas à faire à temps, il expliquait, il riait, s'attendrissait, il vivait. La page colorée et pittoresque surgissait, splendide et vigoureuse. Nous n'entendrons plus cet être extraordinaire, turbulent et bon, grand cœur et bel artiste, donnant, dans une époque de mercantilisme et arrivisme, le spectacle du plus entier détachement de l'intérêt immédiat.¹⁰

[Poor Albéniz! I will always see him as on that Sunday afternoon, nearly two years ago, at Mlle Selva's... he played extracts from his third *Cahier* of *Iberia* that was about to be published. The difficulty of these pieces by then was too

⁶ Collet, p. 35. 'et Mlle Blanche Selva, sa magnifique interprète, le connut déjà « rouillé », suivant la pittoresque expression familière.' [and Mlle Blanche Selva, his magnificent interpreter, found him to be, as we say colloquially, rusty.]

⁷ As quoted by Font Batallé, p. 228.

⁸ Collet, p. 72.

⁹ Pen-name of the music critic Jean-Frédéric-Emile Aubry (1882-1950).

¹⁰ Georges Jean-Aubry, 'Isaac Albéniz', *Mercure de France*, 288 (1909), p. 763.

much for this former virtuoso: but it did not matter, he sang the notes that he could not play in time, he explained, he laughed, he was tender, he was alive. The colourful, picturesque page emerged, splendid and vigorous. We will not hear this wonderful person again, turbulent and good, big hearted and beautiful artist, giving a performance utterly devoid of self-interest at a time of mercantilism and arrivisme.]

Another testimony describing the musical gatherings at the Rue Varenne comes from Madeleine Octave Maus:

Ah! ces dimanches de Selva, quels délices et quelles leçons ! D'Indy écoutait, en tournant les feuilles, la lecture des *Baigneuses au Soleil* de Séverac et celui-ci demeurait stupéfait des jaillissements d'eau, des miracles de lumière qu'en tirait l'interprète ; Albéniz éprouvait le même ravissement à l'audition des douze pièces d'*Iberia* ; Dukas posait sur le piano ses *Variations sur un thème de Rameau* ; Bréville, sa réduction de *Stambul* ; Roussel, ses *Evocations*. Et c'était, en ce cercle d'amis unis dans le même idéal d'art, l'intimité d'heures trop courtes passées dans l'amour de la musique et l'admiration de celle qui en entretenait la flamme.¹¹

[Ah! Those Sundays at Selva's, what delights and what lessons! D'Indy listened, turning pages, to the reading of *Baigneuses au Soleil* of Séverac whilst he himself was amazed at the sprays of water, the miracles of light that the interpreter drew out; Albéniz experienced the same rapture when listening to the twelve pieces of *Iberia*; Dukas placed his *Variations on a theme by Rameau* on the music stand; Bréville, his reduction of *Stambul*; Roussel, his *Evocations*. And that was, within that circle of friends united by the same ideal of art, too short a time of intimacy spent in the love of music and admiration for the woman who nurtured the flame.]

Although Jean-Aubry saw Albéniz play himself, it was most usual in these events to see Selva performing the music of her guests. As Dukas explains to Georges Favre 'Ses amis

¹¹ Madeleine Octave Maus, *Trente années de lutte pour l'art. Les XX. La Libre Esthétique 1884-1914* (Brussels: Librairie l'Oiseau Bleu, 1926), p. 280. Born Madeleine Simon (1874-1944), she was the wife of Octave Maus (1856-1919) founder in 1894 of the Libre Esthétique, who engaged Selva multiple times. Both he and his wife visited Selva at home, and Madeleine also recounts how Selva would fix her concert dates with Maus there: 'Les dates, nous les fixions à l'un des « quatre à sept » qui réunissaient chaque dimanche dans son petit appartement de la rue Varenne l'élite des musiciens contemporains. « Le troisième mardi de mars, cela va ? Bon. Je l'incris. » Et sa fine écriture, si pareille à celle de son maître, elle inscrivait rapidement sur son carnet de poche : « Bruxelles Libre Esthétique » puis se remettait au piano.' [The dates, we would fix them with her in one of the 'from four to seven' that brought together every Sunday in her small apartment in rue Varenne an elite of contemporary musicians. 'The third Tuesday of March, that works? Good. I'll ink it in'. And with her small handwriting, so similar to that of her master, she would quickly annotate in her pocket notebook: "Brussels Libre Esthétique" then sit down once again at the piano.]

vont chez elle le Dimanche vers cinq heures. Elle joue pour eux tout ce qu'ils veulent',¹²
[Her friends visit her every Sunday about five. She plays for them everything they
want] and later, 'Cher ami, Ravi de votre impression de Dimanche. N'est-ce pas que
Selva une manière de génie ?'¹³ [Dear friend, delighted about your impression of
Sunday. Isn't Selva some kind of genius?]

Selva's salon, if it can be called that, was not a semi-public space, like those of the
Princess of Polignac and other prominent hostesses, but an intimate gathering of her
closest musical acquaintances. It resembled more an open rehearsal studio, where
there was room for humour, and newly minted works were presented to one another,
fostering creativity between the different composers. The following reflection from
Bunzel and Loges is very apt:

the salon can be understood as an iterative process around culture and
sociability undergoing continual reshaping through the emergence of new
practices born of new structures, media and technologies.¹⁴

In her salon, Selva was an enabler of her composer-friends' creative impulses. She was
the connecting thread. As Maus writes, it was Selva who kept the flame.

Another example from which to understand further the dynamic between Selva and
her composer friends comes from a letter from Blanche Selva to Madame de Castéra,
dated 21 October 1907. In this letter she first mentions that the following musical
personalities had been in attendance the preceding Sunday: Coindreau, Poujaud,
Albéniz, Maus, Roussel and de Bréville; and then explains: 'De Bréville était venu de
bonne heure pour travailler avec moi à faire des coupures dans *Eros*... vous pensez si
j'en ai profité!'¹⁵ [De Bréville has come early today to work with me to make some cuts
to *Eros*... You can imagine how much I took advantage of it!] This shows on the one
hand how other composers relied on her advice to make emendations to their work,
but her confidence in doing so is also tangible from this letter. It also bears stressing to

¹² Letter from Dukas to Georges Favre, dated 22 October 1907. Font Batallé, p. 64.

¹³ Letter from Dukas to Georges Favre, dated 5 November 1907. Font Batallé, p. 64.

¹⁴ *Musical Salon Culture in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Anja Bunzel and Natasha Loges
(Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2019), p. 2.

¹⁵ Letter from Blanche Selva to Madame de Castéra, 21 October 1907. Copy from the AABS.

contextualise better her role that in 1907, Selva was 23 years old, whilst the composer Pierre de Bréville would have been 46.

It is therefore plausible that the first ever try-outs or run-throughs of the entirety of *Iberia* were given at Selva's salon, sometimes by her and sometimes, rudimentarily, by the composer. On the other hand, we know that she sometimes stayed at his house¹⁶ and it can be inferred that she would have rehearsed the works with him there too, and we know that she also performed his pieces at his home for others. On this last point, Selva wrote:

J'ai dîné Jeudi chez Albéniz avec Dukas : je lui ai joué ses pièces très mal : son piano est un Érard que je déteste et il lui ferme le couvercle et installe un pupitre si haut que tout cela joint à la présence de Dukas qui tournait les pages m'a déroutée et a fait que je n'ai pas joué ses pièces comme je le savais.¹⁷

[I had dinner on Thursday at Albéniz's with Dukas: I played his pieces for him, very badly: his piano is an Érard that I hate and he closes the lid and puts the music stand up so high that all of this, together with the presence of Dukas who was turning pages, confused me and as a result I did not play the pieces as I knew them.]

Iberia. The premières

Selva is usually acknowledged as being the first pianist to have performed the work, although regrettably some of the dates and places offered by Collet are inaccurate¹⁸ and have been repeated ever since the appearance of his book. Notable exceptions include Guy Selva, who has researched this question in depth, and also, to an extent, Cécile Quesney¹⁹ and Jacinto Torres.²⁰ *Iberia* consists of twelve pieces grouped in four

¹⁶ From some letters of Séverac, Selva was staying at Albéniz's on 26, 27 March 1907. From a letter of Blanche Selva to René de Castéra 8 April 1907, AABS, she left on 8 April 1907.

¹⁷ Letter from Blanche Selva to Madame de Castéra, dated 19 October 1907, AABS.

¹⁸ Collet, p. 166 fn. II.

¹⁹ Cécile Quesney, 'Blanche Selva et Isaac Albéniz: un « tyran des pianistes » et son interprète dévouée' in *Blanche Selva, naissance d'un piano moderne*, ed. by Jean-Marc Warszawski (Lyon: Symétrie, 2010), pp. 85-103.

²⁰ Isaac Albéniz, *Iberia, Edición facsímil de los manuscritos y estudio histórico-documental*, ed. Jacinto Torres (Madrid: Editorial de Música Española Contemporánea, 1998) and Jacinto Torres, *Catálogo sistemático descriptivo de las obras musicales de Isaac Albéniz* (Madrid: Instituto de Bibliografía Música, 2001).

sets, or *Cahiers*. **Table C** provides an outline of the work, when it was composed and premièred.

Table C – Outline of *Iberia*

<i>Cahier</i>	Title	Date of composition	Première
<i>Cahier I</i>	Prélude /Evocación ²¹	Paris, 9 December 1905	20 March 1906 (Brussels) B. Selva
	Cadix/El Puerto	Paris, 15 December 1905	20 March 1906 (Brussels) B. Selva
	Séville (La Fête-Dieu)/Corpus Christi en Sevilla	Paris, 30 December 1905	20 March 1906 (Brussels) B. Selva
<i>Cahier II</i>	‘Rondeña’	Nice, 17 October 1906	14 September 1907 (St Jean de Luz) B. Selva
	Almería ²²	Paris, 27 June 1906	11 September 1907 (St Jean de Luz) B. Selva
	Triana	Paris, 29 January 1906	11 September 1907 (St Jean de Luz) B. Selva
<i>Cahier III</i>	El Albaicín	Nice, 4 November 1906	14 September 1907 (St Jean de Luz) B. Selva
	El Polo	Nice, 16 December 1906	14 September 1907 (St Jean de Luz) B. Selva
	Lavapiés	Nice, 24 November 1906	unknown
<i>Cahier IV</i>	Málaga	Paris, July [no date] 1907	15 September 1908 (Saint-Jean de Luz) B. Selva
	Jerez	Nice, January [no date] 1909	unknown
	Eritaña	Paris, August [no date] 1907	19 October 1909 (Paris) B. Selva

²¹ Where two titles appear, the first one to the left is the name that was given by Albéniz in the manuscript, the second the one most frequently used nowadays. Spanish names of the works have been used throughout for consistency.

²² Albéniz did not write any of the titles with their correct grammatical accent. Likewise, he usually signed his own name without it. For consistency, all accents required by conventional grammatical rules in Spanish words (including his name) have been added throughout the sources.

Cahier I: The date of the first performance given by Collet and repeated in most sources is that of 9 May 1906, at the Salle Pleyel. However, there were at least two earlier occasions, one public and one private in the strict sense, when Selva performed the first *Cahier*.

The first was on 20 March 1906 in Brussels at the Libre Esthétique,²³ in a concert where she was also partnering four hands with Fauré in a performance of his *Dolly Suite*. In anticipation of this concert, she wrote to Octave Maus requesting a Pleyel piano as that would suit her Séverac and Albéniz in particular: 'J'aimerai mieux un Pleyel surtout pour le Languedoc et les Albéniz. Cependant s'il y avait un empêchement je me contenterais d'un Érard.'²⁴ [I would much prefer a Pleyel particularly for *Languedoc* [by Séverac] and the Albénizs. Nevertheless, if there is a problem with this, I would make do with an Érard.]

However, she also performed this *Cahier* at the Polignac salon on 25 March 1906.²⁵ As such it is clear that when Collet referred to the Salle Pleyel date as the *première*, this was more accurately the public *première* in France. As will be discussed below, however, her performance of the works at the Polignac salon may have been as important as, if not more so, the public performance in creating the necessary engagement with the audience ahead of the May concert. Regarding the chronology, it is also necessary to underscore her earlier appearance in Belgium, as she committed to perform the work only three months after the last piece was finished. The fiendishly difficult 'Corpus Christi', as it is known amongst Spanish pianists, or 'Fête-Dieu à Seville' as it was first published, was only completed on 30 December 1905.

As stated by Quesney, '*Iberia* est d'une difficulté inouïe pour cette époque et que peu de pianistes sont alors techniquement capables de l'interpréter.'²⁶ [*Iberia* is exceptionally difficult for the period and very few pianists then were then capable of

²³ Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 49. The complete programme is also printed in Maus, pp. 353-54.

²⁴ Letter dated 11 March 1906 from Blanche Selva to Octave Maus. The original is at the *Fonds Octave Maus*, in the Bibliothèque Royale de Bruxelles. A transcription of it was made available to me at the AABS.

²⁵ Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 49.

²⁶ Quesney, p. 87.

playing it.] Indeed, although ‘Corpus Christi’ has some Lisztian technical overtones which were already familiar to Selva, the extremely complex writing of Albéniz is already at the fore in this first *Cahier*, making even the simple deciphering of the music at a slow tempo a challenging exercise in and of itself, let alone bringing the necessary quality of touch to execute the voicings with the razor-sharp accuracy that Albéniz requires. This is even more remarkable when, due to the timeline, it is most likely that Selva performed these pieces from the manuscript itself. Albéniz’s small handwriting poses yet another hurdle to overcome.

Cahier II: Collet states that the première of the second *Cahier* took place in Saint-Jean de Luz on 11 September 1907. According to the printed programmes, this is only partially correct. Selva had ‘Triana’ and ‘Almería’ in the programme on that date, but ‘Rondeña’ was left to 14 September. Furthermore, in this second concert she already played ‘El Polo’ and ‘El Albaicín’ from the third *Cahier*.²⁷ This means that in the span of one and a half years after the première of the first *Cahier*, Selva prepared five more of the *Iberia* pieces. This is not much time given her busy concert schedule,²⁸ but also considering that the works may have been with the engraver for some time in between.

Cahier III: As stated above, two of the pieces, ‘El Polo’ and ‘El Albaicín’ were premièred in St Jean de Luz 14 September 1907, and so almost 4 months earlier than the date usually given of 2 January 1908 at the Polignac Salon.²⁹ However, according to Selva’s handwritten annotation, she did not play ‘Lavapiés’ on this occasion, nor at Polignac’s neither.³⁰

Cahier IV: Regarding the première of this *Cahier*, the wrong date of 9 February 1909 at the Salon d’Automne in Paris has been repeated uncritically ever since Collet’s work, with the exception of Guy Selva, who points out that there is no ‘autumn’ Salon in

²⁷ Selva, Guy, *Une artiste*, p. 49.

²⁸ An overview of her concert engagements is given in Chapter 2.

²⁹ As will be shown later in this chapter, Selva also performed these pieces from the third *Cahier* in London in November 1907.

³⁰ Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 40.

February.³¹ Instead, it is most likely that she offered most (but not all) of *Iberia* at the aforementioned Salon d'Automne but on 19 October 1909, as appears in the *Le Courrier Musical*.³²

It has also been possible to locate a brief review of this concert in an album of press cuttings relative to Albéniz's performances, held at the Museu de la Música de Barcelona.³³ Titled *La Musique au Salon d'Automne* and with a handwritten date of 15 November 1909, the review notes that the concert contained 'd'importants fragments d'*Iberia*, l'un des plus grands chefs d'œuvre de la littérature moderne pour piano, interprétés par Mlle Selva'.³⁴ However, rather than referring to Selva's playing, the reviewer notes that Albéniz himself stated that no-one played it like Mlle Sansoni, a pianist of whom we also know at present too little, and praised the 'justesse des accents et la précisions des rythmes'.³⁵

Although Font Batallé also refers to the wrong date of 9 February 1909, she provides a valuable reference from a letter from Selva to Claire de Castéra, in which the programme date is given as 19 October 1909.³⁶ In the letter Selva presents her programme as consisting of the entire *Iberia*, except for 'Lavapiés' and 'Jerez', adding instead the 'Prélude' and 'Séguedille' from *Chants d'Espagne* and the 'Prélude' from *Souvenirs*.

It is therefore unclear at what point Selva performed the entirety of the work and whether she was indeed the first to do so. However, my contention is that her contribution as an *Albéniziste* goes beyond being the first performer of all, or some of the works of *Iberia* and that limiting her references in the wider musicological

³¹ Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 50.

³² *Le Courrier Musical*, 12^{ème} année, N 21, 1^{er} Novembre, p. 603, a transcription of which is available at the AABS.

³³ Unitat documental simple R1973-Àlbum de recull d'articles relatius la trajectòria professional d'Isaac Albéniz <<https://arxiu.museumusica.bcn.cat/album-de-recull-darticles-relatius-a-la-trajectoria-professional-disaac-Albeniz>> and the review in question <<https://museumusica.clipfiles.tv/lilibre/Main.php?MagID=37950&MagNo=37950#page/12>> [accessed 27 July 2021].

³⁴ [[I]mportant fragments of *Iberia*, one of the greatest masterworks of the modern piano literature, performed by Mlle Selva.]

³⁵ [[T]he accuracy of the accents and rhythmical precision.]

³⁶ Font Batallé, p. 231.

literature to this fact alone is a reductive assessment of her role as performer generally, as well as within the specific context of her collaboration with and advocacy of Albéniz's work.

Iberia. A collaboration between performer and composer

Every composer who is not capable of performing their own music, needs an interpreter to do as much. That Albéniz was not the pianist he once had been and could not present *Iberia* to the world himself is also clear.

There is a contemporary letter from Albéniz to Carlos de Castéra in which his appreciation of Selva's work as an interpreter of his pieces is palpable as is the general obscurity in which the pieces lay in 1907 and the despair that this caused him:

Remerciez la chère Blanche pour le dévouement qu'elle met à jouer le second *Cahier* à Bruxelles ; j'insiste à croire que ma musique n'est pas assez profonde pour qu'elle se donne la peine de la travailler sérieusement ; c'est donc un acte d'abnégation de sa part de vouloir bien la jouer pour courir à un succès d'épaules certain ; du reste vous voyez bien que cette année-ci, mes *Iberia* sont restées dans l'ombre et que personne ne les a jouées à Paris, ni ne veut les jouer, comme c'est le cas de Pierret³⁷ qui dans une lettre, du reste fort aimable, s'excuse de les jouer à la Nationale ; je vous assure, mes amis, que je suis chaque jour de plus en plus navré de me trouver si vieux et de ne pouvoir entreprendre le noble métier de marchand de souliers ; je suis absolument sûr que cela me rapporterait gloire et argent.³⁸

[Thank the dear Blanche for her devotion in playing the second *Cahier* in Brussels; I still believe that my music is not deep enough for her to go to the trouble of working on it seriously; it is very much an act of self-sacrifice on her part to strive to play it well enough to gain a hard-won success; for the rest you can well see that this year, my *Iberia* have remained in the shadows and that nobody has played them in Paris, nor are they going to, as is the case of Pierret who in an otherwise quite amicable letter excuses himself from playing them at the Nationale; I assure you my friend, that every day I am more sorry to find myself so old and unable to undertake the noble job of shoe salesman; I'm absolutely certain that would make me rich and famous.]

³⁷ Most likely the pianist and composer Auguste Pierret (1874-1916) who played chamber music with the violinist Eugène Ysaÿe. Michel Stockhem, *Eugène Ysaÿe et la musique de chambre* (Liège: Pierre Mardaga, 1990), p. 104.

³⁸ Collet, p. 164.

Although we can read Albéniz bitterly complaining about the slow take-up of his work, any earlier attempts by Selva to simplify his writing, which would have eased other pianists into *Iberia*, had been completely rejected by him. Selva had on occasion changed the voicings in the works, no doubt to avoid the profuse hand crossings and awkward fingerings that plague every pianist attempting to play them.

In correspondence between Albéniz³⁹ and his *liaison* at the Édition Mutuelle, René Castéra, it is clear how much this had displeased the Spanish composer. In a letter dated 10 (11) November 1906:

[...] Maintenant cher ami, et au risque de que tu trouves importun de ma part de te parler des affaires d'édition, il faut que je te supplie de nouveau de vouloir bien dire à Blanche de s'abstenir de changer l'écriture de mes manuscrits pour en faciliter l'exécution; il faut qu'elle soit convaincue qu'un passage écrit d'une certaine façon a une sonorité qu'il n'atteint pas quand on l'écrit d'une autre.

Je te dis cela parce que dans les épreuves que vient de m'envoyer Senart j'ai trouvé trois passages dont l'écriture a été absolument changée, et dont je me suis vu dans la nécessité de donner l'ordre de remettre tout en place à Senart ce que probablement nous vaudra l'inutilisation de deux ou trois planches.

J'ai la plus grande affection et la plus grande admiration pour Selva, je lui suis très reconnaissant du travail qu'elle prend à corriger mes épreuves, mais vraiment je voudrai qu'elle se rappelle que je suis un assez bon pianiste et qu'elle peut se fier à moi en ce qui concerne l'écriture pour le piano.⁴⁰

[Now, my dear friend, at the risk of your finding it an impertinence on my part to speak to you about matters concerning publication, it is necessary that I implore you again to tell Blanche to stop changing the writing in my manuscripts to facilitate their execution; it is necessary that she understands that a passage written in a certain way has a sonority that is not obtained when written differently. I tell you this because in the proofs that Senart just sent me, I found three passages where the writing has been entirely changed, and where I have then needed to put everything back in place for Senart with the result that two or three engraved plates are probably unusable now. I have the greatest affection and the greatest admiration for Selva, I very much acknowledge the work that she undertakes correcting my proofs, but really, I

³⁹ All the letters from Isaac Albéniz from the AABS quoted here have been read in the form of photocopies from the originals obtained by the AABS.

⁴⁰ Letter from Isaac Albéniz to René de Castéra, 10 (11) November 1906, AABS. The inclusion of both dates suggests that the letter had been begun on one day and finished the following one.

would like her to remember that I used to be quite a good pianist and that she can trust me in matters concerning writing for the piano.]

Nevertheless, what this letter also shows, unequivocally, is that Albéniz had access to proofs before the release of the first edition and showed his disapproval when certain elements in the proofs did not match his intentions. This is significant, because, as will be shown below, there are divergences between the first edition and his manuscript, but in view of this, it does not necessarily follow that the manuscript reflects Albéniz's final intentions.

Further, it is also clear from the letter that it is Selva who is the intermediary between Albéniz's score and the *graveur* at Senart. Her role was that of a copy editor, picking up on errors and inconsistencies and pointing out when the text is confusing or does not make sense.

Not all pieces have direct markings attributable to Selva, and it is in the manuscript of 'Rondeña' where her input is overwhelmingly most evident. The entire score has red pencil markings, and on p. 12 of the original manuscript Albéniz wrote:

à Monsieur Senart – bon à graver avec la correction de Mlle Selva

[To Mr Senart – good to print with Mlle Selva's correction.]

with his signature below.

However, all of the pieces in the first edition of *Iberia* show significant editorial divergences from the manuscripts. This thesis proposes that it was Selva who edited all of them, that this was done with the consent of Albéniz, who expressed his disagreement when he thought it necessary, and that for this reason, the first edition is a closer representation of Albéniz's final thoughts than the manuscripts themselves.

That there were no hard feelings between Albéniz and Selva despite his admonition about her initiative as editor, is evidenced by a humorous letter, again from Albéniz to René, some days after:

Cher, espiègle, et gentil petit farceur ; Depuis quand avez-vous formé avec la chère, espiègle, et grande farceuse de Blanche Selva un syndicat pour vous

moquer et vous payer la tête de ce pauvre Albéniz ? ¿Tant de chichis pour une misérable petite octave?⁴¹

[Dear playful and kind little prankster; since when have you joined up with the dear, playful, and big prankster that is Blanche Selva to mock and tease poor Albéniz? So much fuss for a miserable little octave?]

When cross-referencing the manuscript with the first edition it is apparent that Albéniz's wishes were completely respected as far as the layout of his voicing is concerned. This leads us to infer that all other deletions that can be observed when comparing the manuscript with the first edition (mostly concerning dynamics, expression and timing indications), although originating from Selva were printed thus with his full approval.

Further confirmation of his detailed proof reading is found in a letter dated 25 January 1907 to René

[...] Almería, page 1^{me} (13 du second *Cahier*) 2^{me} ligne, 1^{re} et 3^{me} mesure, liez les deux sol supérieurs de la main droite. Almería. Page 16 du 2^{eme} *Cahier*, 2^{me} ligne, 5^{me} mesure, enlevez le bémol du sol inférieur de la main droite et mettez le su si.

Je ne sais pas si ces corrections ont été faites par Selva, mais dans une épreuve, qui vient de me tomber sous la main, elles n'y sont pas, or donc, si elles n'ont pas été corrigées sur les planches il faut absolument les faire à la main avant de lancer l'Édition.⁴²

[Almería, first page (13 of the second *Cahier*) second line, first and third bars, tie the top two Gs of the right hand. Almería. Page 16 of the second *Cahier*, second line, fifth bar, remove the flat from the bottom G of the right hand and put it next to the B. I do not know if these corrections were done by Selva, but in one of the proofs that just arrived, they are not there, or if they were not corrected on the plates it is absolutely necessary to do them by hand before publication.]

The Édition Mutuelle reflects accurately Albéniz's input and so, regardless of whether this was an editorial oversight or overreach by Selva, or an error of Senart, it was picked up by Albéniz, and corrected before the final print.

⁴¹ Letter dated 30 November 1906, photocopy at the AABS.

⁴² Letter dated 25 January 1907, photocopy at the AABS.

That Selva was involved until the last *Cahier* can be seen from a brief postscript in a letter to Carlos de Castéra:

J'avais corrigé le manuscrit de « Málaga » dès que je l'avais reçu : le paquet est longtemps resté sur la table, et Maman l'a donné au facteur la semaine dernière, en l'envoyant recommandé à Albéniz qui l'aura reçu, j'espère, depuis quelques jours.⁴³

[I proofed the manuscript of 'Málaga' after receiving it: the parcel remained for a long time on top of the table, and Mama gave it to the postman last week, sending it registered to Albéniz, who should have received it, I hope, some days ago.]

Iberia. The Corrections

The present examination takes as its starting point the second *Cahier* for it is the one that has the most visible marks of Selva's input and is the one that Albéniz dedicated to her. For the present analysis the copies of the manuscript of *Iberia* as published by Jacinto Torres⁴⁴ have been compared with the first edition published by Édition Mutuelle.⁴⁵

It is important to note that the facsimile published by Jacinto Torres excludes the front page of 'Triana', although he mentions its existence.⁴⁶ It is the only *Cahier* that has such an extra cover page for a piece. The motivation for omitting this first page from the facsimile edition is not explained, although it is implied that Torres may have considered it unimportant. I strongly believe that this is an action that unfairly contributes to Selva's invisibility by adulterating the sources and presenting an incomplete view of the relationship between these two musicians. The cover page is reproduced here with the permission of the Centre de Documentació de l'Orfeó Català (CEDOC) in Fig. 6.2. The score itself bears another dedication to her, which can be seen in the top left of the first page of the manuscript, Fig. 6.3.

⁴³ Letter from 21 August 1907 from Blanche Selva to Carlos de Castéra, photocopy at the AABS.

⁴⁴ See footnote 20 in this Chapter.

⁴⁵ Document available at the MMB online at <https://museumusica.clipfiles.tv/lilibre/Main.php?MagID=2206&MagNo=2206#page/1> > [accessed 15 July 2023].

⁴⁶ Jacinto Torres, Isaac Albéniz *Iberia*, Edición facsímil, p. XXIII.

The date given by Albéniz to mark the completion of 'Triana' coincides with Selva's own birthday, 29 January. This could explain the extra care taken by Albéniz when presenting the manuscript, possibly to her first before anyone else, with the extra cover page with her name at the top, although this is mere conjecture.

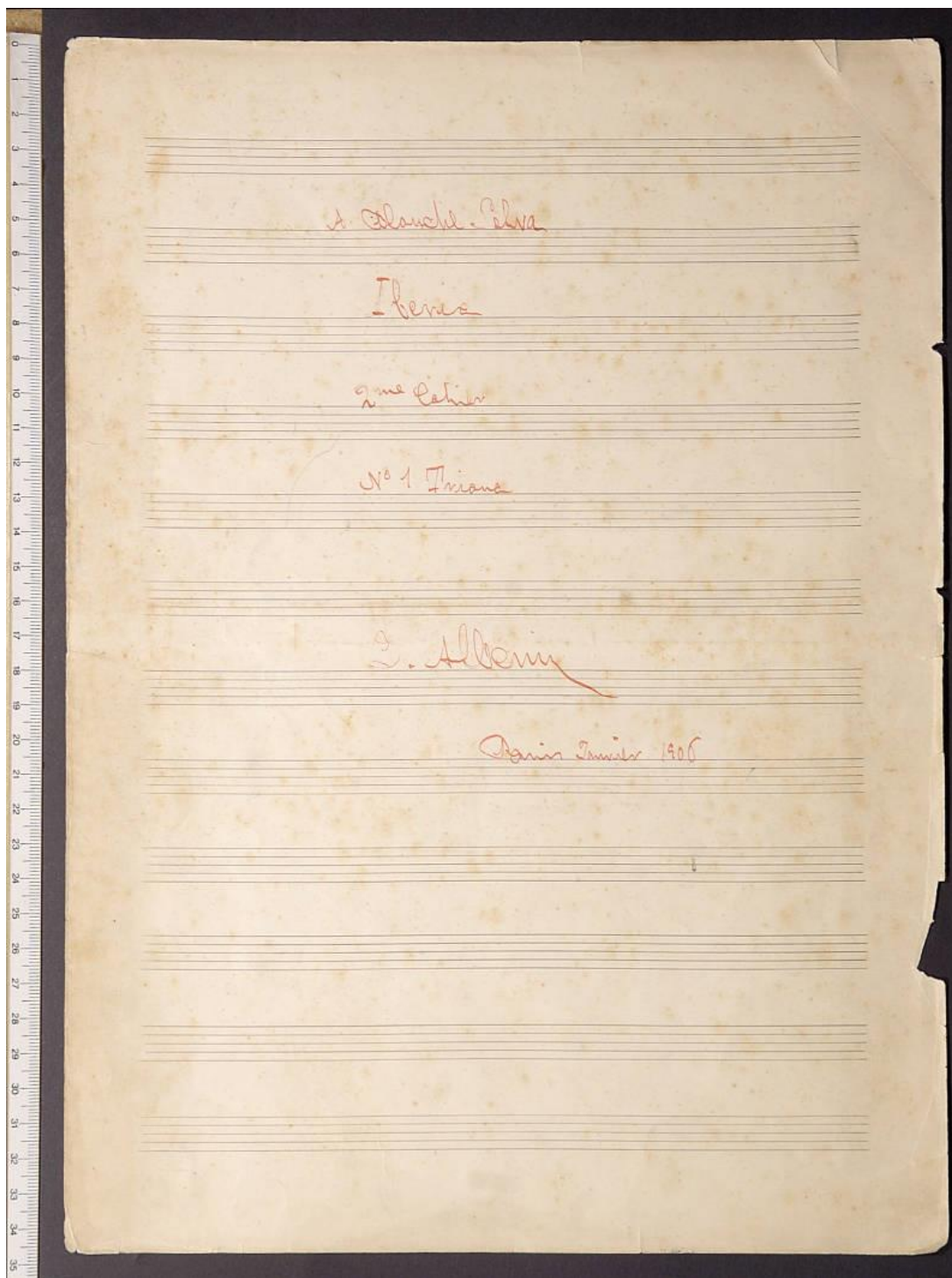


Fig. 6.2 – Cover page of 'Triana', dedicated to Blanche Selva
Courtesy of the Centre de Documentació de l'Orfeó Català (CEDOC)



Fig. 6.3 – Opening bars of ‘Triana’ with dedication to Selva
 Courtesy of the Centre de Documentació de l’Orfeó Català (CEDOC)



Fig. 6.4 – Final bars of ‘Triana’, finalised on the day of her birthday
 Courtesy of the Centre de Documentació de l’Orfeó Català (CEDOC)

‘Triana’ was initially conceived as the first piece of the second *Cahier* but it ended up being published as the third. This is most likely explained by the joyous and exuberant nature of the work, which if placed in third position, leads to finishing the *Cahier* with a ‘bang’. Indeed, Selva performed ‘Triana’ the most, and used it often as a closing of other combinations of *Iberia* pieces, or general recital programmes.

That Selva was also part of the decision-making process regarding the order of the pieces in this *Cahier* can be seen from a letter from Blanche Selva to Carlos de Castéra:

Je vais donner le 3^e morceau d'Albéniz à Senart mais comme il faudra encore naturellement du temps avant qu'il soit bon à trier on peut encore réfléchir à la place qu'il occupera. Mais je crois qu'il faut le laisser tel quel et simplement intervertir l'ordre en les jouant.⁴⁷

[I am going to give Albéniz's third piece to Senart but as it will, of course, still take time until it is good to publish, we can still think about the place that it will occupy. But I think that it should be left where it is and simply change the order when playing them.]

Although Selva does not name the piece, it is 'Rondeña' which bears the Roman numeral III in the manuscript, which is dated 17 October 1906, and so one month before this letter. The only other piece that was finished at this point is 'El Albaicín', which is clearly numbered as 1 by Albéniz, while the other pieces in the third *Cahier* had not yet been finalised.

It is therefore inferred that Selva is referring to the placement of 'Rondeña', the third piece, within the context of the second *Cahier*. Her view, at least as expressed in this letter, is to leave it where it was, and simply reverse the order in performance. It also gives an insight into the timings, for there is a span of a month between Albéniz finishing the piece and Selva sending it in with her corrections to Senart. It is however not known when Selva first received it and the time she had to go over the composition.

'Rondeña'

This is of all the manuscript pieces, the one that has the most visible marks of having been worked on, and as stated above there is unequivocal evidence of its attribution: 'à Monsieur Senart – bon à graver avec la correction de Mlle Selva' [good to print with the correction of Mlle Selva] and is signed by Albéniz.

⁴⁷ Letter from Blanche Selva to Carlos de Castéra, 20 November 1906. Quesney, p. 93.

These corrections are visible throughout the entire document. The original pen colour of Albéniz is black, and most of Selva's markings are in red.

These corrections are of different kind and most abundant are crossing-outs of dynamic, and articulation markings. When consulting the document closely, it becomes apparent that the editorial deletions of Selva simplify the score by eliminating those indications that are redundant.

For example, in b. 2 the indication 'sec et précis' has been kept, but all other subsequent 'sec' indications in the following bars where the texture is the same have been crossed out. On another occasion, contradictory dynamics across both hands have been amended, by deleting one of them, b. 5 and similar passages. For Quesney this is so because 'la pianiste pense vraisemblablement qu'il n'est pas possible d'exécuter ces nuances très précises et contradictoires'.⁴⁸ There are, however, good reasons to question this conclusion. Selva deletes opposing hairpins in the left hand from b. 5 onwards, but she has clearly left them in bb. 1 and 3. As with much of her other editorial input, I believe that once she thinks that the musical message has been clearly conveyed, any reiteration of similar markings unnecessarily burdens the score. The hairpin cresc. that she opts to delete is the easier to produce of the two, as it is an ascending line in the left hand. What the performer needs to remember the most, and she preserves, is the decrescendo in the right hand.

This process of simplification can be seen throughout the entire document. For instance, the section starting in b. 17, the *f* in b. 18 is erased (as it follows from the previous bar), but the next *sf* and *f* in bb. 19 and 20 are there. However, all subsequent *f* and *sf* in each of the next 7 bars have been erased, no doubt because the motivic material is the same and the pianists will understand clearly which bars need a *sf* and which an *f*.

Another type of correction arises from crossing out musical performative indications, e.g. 'gracieux toujours' in b. 74, 'sempre dolce et sonoro' in b. 99 or 'marcato

⁴⁸ Quesney, p. 92. [[T]he pianist most certainly thinks that it is not possible to execute such precise and contradictory nuances.]

expressivo' in b. 107, to mention a few, because they appear repetitive or unnecessary; another is Albéniz's spelling, with his consistent use of 'stacatto' instead of staccato, or 'rubatto' instead of rubato to mention only a few, which Selva painstakingly corrects over the entire piece.

She also makes helpful clarifications for the engraver: in b. 162, she spells the notes of the chord for clarity whilst a note in the margin of b. 197 asks the engraver to 'gravez comme ici' pointing out the same passage written out an octave higher. Albéniz's original is crossed out, and the alternative is written at the top. Selva does not use her red ink but having seen many of her letters, it is clear that the 'gravez comme ici' [engrave it like this] is her handwriting, and it is also visible that the alternative passage notes are written differently from the way Albéniz does: Albéniz always puts the stem at the right-hand side of the notes, whilst the alternative bars have most of the stems crossing at the centre of the notes, clearly suggesting a different hand.

Cross-referencing the manuscript with Selva's annotations and the first editions, shows that most of it was printed according to the indicated amendments by Selva. There are some divergences though, showing that extra thought, whether by Albéniz, Selva or perhaps Castéra still made it into the final version. A tempo indication of ♩ = 116 has been added which is not in the manuscript; b. 17 the 'bien martelé et canaille' has been left out; the passage starting in b. 102, her left hand legato cross outs have been ignored in the first edition which includes them (I think rightly), but Albéniz's overarching legato mark that Selva kept is absent from the first phrase, although it appears later. Similarly in bb. 143-144 Selva's erasure of legato markings in the left hand has been disregarded, and further b. 144 now is changed to just one slur and not two as in Albéniz's text.

When undertaking the same comparison between the manuscript and the first edition, it becomes apparent that the type of corrections that are observed in 'Rondeña' are present in all the other pieces, even if their attribution is not readily observable.

However, given how involved Selva was in the process, it is possible that she may on other occasions have sent a list of corrections separately from the manuscript, or that she communicated the changes *in situ* to Senart.

Quesney includes 'Lavapiés' as one of the pieces in which Selva's red pen marks are visible.⁴⁹ Although Selva's input can be inferred from a number of alterations in the first edition,⁵⁰ I believe that the oversized fingerings in red ink are actually by the Spanish pianist Joaquín Malats (1872-1912), who received the manuscript score after Albéniz received it back from the engraver. The fingerings written in red appear in bb. 66-67, 115, 192, 218 and they are characteristically oversized in a way that does not appear in any other place in the manuscript. There is also a red number over a black ink sequence of fingerings in b. 218. This could signify a later, and presumably important correction, but it does not feature in the Édition Mutuelle score which I think it is another strong indication that these are later additions to the manuscript after it went to print.

However, 'Lavapiés' has other fingerings that are not included in the first edition either (in bb. 84, 110, 114, 124, 218, 220). The only fingerings present in the first edition and which are visible also in the manuscript in black ink are those in bb. 88 and 146. The case of b. 88 is quite peculiar, not all the fingerings in the manuscript have been included, only the 4 on the *ab'*. (Fig. 6.5).



Fig. 6.5 – Albéniz, 'Lavapiés', bb. 88-91

⁴⁹ Quesney, p. 91.

⁵⁰ For example: dynamic simplification in bb. 6-8, spelling mistakes in bb. 13 and 21, bb. 34-35 the expression 'avec un gout exagerement mauvais' [sic] left out) which are entirely consistent with her attributable work in 'Rondeña', and there are some black ink annotations that could be hers and not Albéniz's (clarifications by spelling the name of the notes in bb. 154, 187, 194, and perhaps less likely markings that indicate notes to be played with a different hand and are reflected thus in the first edition, bb. 86, 88, 90, 91, 92, 94, 96, 98, 99, 100, 108, 107, 109, 123, 128, 132, 136, 157, 214, 215, 216).

In the manuscript, the g' in the bass clef adjacent to the ab' has fingering 5, and the db', finger 2. Realising the fingerings as written in the manuscript requires the fourth finger to be placed over the fifth. This type of position is a *chevauchement*, a way of moving along the keyboard overlapping the fingers which was much more common among earlier harpsichordists and fortepiano players and is quasi anathema to modern pianists who invariably would put the fifth finger on the black key instead. This is also the solution given by Guillermo González in his 1998 revised edition.⁵¹ It is difficult to determine whether these fingerings may have originated with Selva or Albéniz. On the one hand, Selva had small hands, and the given fingering requires a significant stretch between finger 2 and 4. On the other hand, we know from her other editorial work that she favoured overlapping of the fingers, or *chevauchements*.

Other scholars before me have wondered whether Albéniz's manuscripts are the final and definitive version of the pieces, among them Torres:

do they [the manuscripts] represent the final definitive version? All the evidence suggests an affirmative answer, but then a problem arises of how to explain the considerable differences existing between the manuscripts and the printed versions.⁵²

[...] but the evidence often compels us to accept that these are modifications introduced at the last moment by the composer himself, or made with his consent and, consequently, they constitute a more authoritative version than the manuscript reflects.

In my opinion, in view of the analysed sources, the first Édition Mutuelle edition is the most authoritative version. Selva was the leading actor in editing the score and presenting it in an accessible way for future performance, and all her amendments had ultimately to be approved by Albéniz, for, when he did not do so, he made it known and his wishes were respected. Her approach has the advantage of conveying to the pianist a greater sense of line, for Albéniz's reiterative and profuse indications result in

⁵¹ Isaac Albéniz, *Iberia, Edición Revisada*, ed. Guillermo González (Madrid: EMEC, 1998).

⁵² Torres, p. XXX.

an almost pointillistic view of the music and render the score unnecessarily cumbersome.

Collet transcribes a dialogue between Selva and Albéniz which, it is implied, was recounted to him by Selva herself,

El Polo portait un *pp*, à chaque ronde de la dernière page. « C'est fou ! » s'exclamait M^{lle} Blanche Selva. « Non, il les faut ! » répliquait Albéniz. « Toi, tu le sais, mais les autres ? Ils feront quelque chose de différent, si je ne précise pas... »⁵³

[‘El Polo’ had a *pp*, on each semibreve of the last page. “That’s crazy” exclaimed Mlle Selva. “No, they are necessary” responded Albéniz. “You, you know it, but the others? They will do something different if I am not precise...”.]

‘El Polo’ does not have semibreves (‘rondes’) on the last page, and this anecdote, if it ever happened, has to refer to ‘Corpus Christi’, which is the only piece that has them. Albéniz did not just write *pp*, but *pppp* and *ppppp* on this last page. Despite Selva’s apparent dismay, his view prevailed, and the Édition Mutuelle score reflects the manuscript closely apart from the final chord, which instead of five pianos has ‘only’ four. This evidences the dialogue between the two musicians; whilst Albéniz convinced Selva in this instance, in many others, the Édition Mutuelle evidences a toned-down version of *Iberia* in which Selva’s pragmatism appears to have ultimately persuaded the Spanish composer.

Nevertheless, from a pianistic point of view it is regrettable that Selva’s solutions have not been preserved. Albéniz always refused to include her suggested voicings and arrangements even though they would have made his music easier to play. Although I agree and sympathise with Albéniz’s sentiment that the music written in a specific way will lead the performer in a given direction more readily than if not, *Iberia* is such a demanding score that I do not think there is a pianist who does not resort to their own arrangements at the very least in a handful of passages. The numerous ‘revised’ versions that exist, most notable perhaps that of Guillermo González, bear this out. That we do not have Selva’s own is a tangible loss.

⁵³ Collet, p. 164.

Exporting Albéniz's work outside France

During his lifetime, Albéniz also benefited from Selva's programming of his music outside of France. As noted earlier, she took Albéniz's *Iberia* to the Libre Esthétique in Brussels, but the following statement of Madeleine Octave Maus is important to contextualise better Selva's role as an advocate of Albéniz's work even before the appearance of his *chef d'œuvre*:

Isaac Albéniz est encore ignoré en Belgique [in 1904] comme compositeur. [...] Or, en 1905, voici, apportée par Blanche Selva, la notion nouvelle du compositeur Albéniz, avec ces Chants d'Espagne qui n'ont pas encore la maîtrise et le prestige ensorcelant d'*Iberia*, mais le préparent et l'annoncent.⁵⁴

[Isaac Albéniz is still unknown in Belgium [in 1904] as a composer. [...] So, in 1905, the new notion of the composer Albéniz is brought by Blanche Selva with the *Chants d'Espagne* which do not have yet the mastery and the bewitching prestige of *Iberia*, but prepare it and announce it.]

Further, although other scholars have noted Albéniz's involvement in the organisation of concerts for Malats,⁵⁵ the same cannot be said of his input to Selva's diary.

However, Albéniz arranged a series of concerts for Selva in London, where she performed seven concerts in the Steinway Hall in the autumn of 1907.⁵⁶

From the surviving letters, it has been possible to ascertain that the management of these concerts at the London end was agreed with an L. G. Sharpe,⁵⁷ who failed to arrange the agreed publicity. Selva thus lamented:

De plus nous sommes démoralisées de voir la façon lamentable dont tous les concerts ont été organisés. De réclame, pas trace, nul n'a vu d'annonces dans les journaux : nulle part aucune affiche. L'agent se ballade en Amérique et il n'y a à sa place qu'un petit employé lambin qui ne sait rien. J'ai écrit tout ceci à Albéniz en lui disant de m'envoyer au plus vite un mot de recommandation

⁵⁴ Maus, p. 345.

⁵⁵ Paula García Martínez, 'El pianista y compositor Joaquín Malats (1972-1912)' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Universidad de Oviedo, 2007), *passim*.

⁵⁶ 12,13,15,18,20,22, and 25 November 1907. Some were solo recitals and others in partnership with violinist Jean Diot.

⁵⁷ Copies read at the AABS.

pour Coutts.⁵⁸ Je m'étonne qu'il ne m'en a pas donné. Il faut absolument qu'il le fasse. Veillez-y n'est-ce pas ?⁵⁹

[Moreover, we are demoralised to see how poorly our concerts have been organised. No sign of advertisement, nothing in the announcement pages in the papers: no publicity anywhere. The agent has left for America and in his place there is only a little servant who knows nothing. I wrote all this to Albéniz, telling him to send me a word of recommendation for Coutts as soon as possible.]

Albéniz does not appear to have forwarded his patron's contact this time around either and Selva must have obtained it from somewhere else. This, however, did not please Albéniz at all, and in a letter to Castéra, there is a vivid testament of the very different social conventions governing these types of situations at the time

Ci joint une letre [sic] de Blanche, dirigée à Monsieur Coutts et qui es bien un comble d'indiscretion et d'afollement !!!!!!! [sic]

¿ Mais ah, ça, elle perd donc la tête [sic] notre pauvre amie ??? et qui pu bien l'autorize [sic] à commettre un tel faux pas et à me rendre responsable de tout ce qui arrive ? Pour une leçon, c'est pour moi un bone [sic] leçon, et cela m'apprendra à ne meller des affaires des autres,

¿ mais lis donc ça ??? c'est tout simplement admirable d'inconscience et de juvenilité audaciuese !!!!!!! [sic]⁶⁰

[Attached a letter from Blanche, directed to Mr Coutts which is packed with indiscretion and panic!!!!!! But, hey, has she lost her marbles, our poor friend??? And who has authorised her to make such a faux pas and to make me responsible for everything? This is a lesson, a good lesson for me, to not meddle with the affairs of others. But read it yourself??? It is simply a marvel of recklessness and juvenile bravado.]

⁵⁸ Francis Money-Coutts, 5th Baron Latymer (1852-1923) was an English poet and librettist born into a family of bankers. He was a friend and patron of Isaac Albéniz, who set some of his poems and librettos to music. Walter Aaron Clark, 'Money-Coutts, Francis Burdett' in *Grove Music Online* (2001), <<https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.46380>> and Maite Aguirre Quiñonero, 'Isaac Albéniz. His time in London and his relationship with F. Money-Coutts', *La Revista*, Issue 237 (2014), 35. Albéniz lived in London from 1890 to 1893.

⁵⁹ Letter From Blanche Selva to René de Castéra 16 November 1907, AABS.

⁶⁰ Letter from Isaac Albéniz to René de Castéra dated 22 November 1907. Often his correspondence had been dictated to his daughter Laura, but this letter is handwritten by Albéniz himself, with a noticeably fast and shaky handwriting. The spelling errors and exaggerated punctuation have been presented as in the original to best convey the effect of the letter.

It is unclear whether Selva was unaware of the conventions she was expected to follow, at least as regards Albéniz and Coutts himself (who had clearly forwarded Selva's letter to Albéniz) or whether, as we would say nowadays, she let herself be guided by a 'can do attitude' and pragmatism.

However, as Mc Veigh notes, in Edwardian London 'the wealthy and leisured classes' played an 'essential role'⁶¹ in fostering the necessary networks to attract an audience and in any event, private salon engagements, also known as 'At Homes' were more lucrative than concerts.⁶² Therefore, although clearly Coutts and Albéniz viewed it as an impertinence on her part, Selva may have demonstrated sound judgement and commercial acumen in trying to salvage a foreign tour for which the agent had not made the necessary promotion.

In fact, despite her *faux pas* and lack of advertisement, Selva did win the London audience over. *The Times* reviewer noted on 23 November 1907:

Each day increases the high esteem in which the beautiful pianoforte-playing of Mlle. Blanche Selva is held by musical people; while her reading of Bach was dignified, her Beethoven broad and intellectual, and her Schumann so sympathetic that she seemed to be a pupil of the composer or of his wife, her first recital of modern composers, yesterday afternoon, showed her in a new light, and made the compositions she played appear of the greatest value. [...]⁶³

Last came three pieces ['Evocación', 'El Puerto', 'Triana'] from a series by Señor I. Albéniz, called "*Iberia*". The composer was formerly well known in London, and his recent adoption of the ultra-modern style is not an uninteresting circumstance. The pieces given, which profess to give Spanish landscapes, have for their model the clever "*Soirée dans Grenade*" played earlier in the recital; the brilliant conclusion of the last piece gave opportunity for the display of the player's neatness of finger and delicacy of touch.

And Albéniz's satisfaction is also on display in a letter to Carlos de Castéra dated 9 December 1907:

⁶¹ Simon Mc Veigh, 'Building a concert career in Edwardian London' in *The Music Profession in Britain, 1790-1920. New perspectives on status and identity*, ed. by Rosemary Golding, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), pp. 189-216, pp. 195-196.

⁶² Mc Veigh, p. 202.

⁶³ Press cutting from AABS, *The Times* 23 November 1907.

Je me suis intéressé à la presse de Londres, pendant les trois premiers concerts de Blanche Selva, et pour savoir si tous les succès que j'avais prévu, s'était réalisé. [...]

La recaudation⁶⁴ [sic] des concerts Selva à Londres m'a tout à fait étonné, je ne m'attendais pas à un si beau résultat : maintenant j'espère que quand vous aurez réalisé tous les comptes, tu auras l'obligeance de me dire la quote [sic] part qui me correspond [...]⁶⁵

[I took an interest in the London press throughout the first three concerts of Blanche Selva, and to ascertain if all the success that I had envisioned, had materialised. The [box-office] receipts from the concerts of Selva in London astonished me, I did not expect such a good result: now I hope that when you have done all the accounts, you will be kind enough to let me know my share.]

Apart from performing these three pieces in the first concert dedicated to 'Modern Composers', Selva included two of Albéniz's works in the second concert dedicated to the contemporaries, performing 'Almería' (from the second *Cahier*) and 'El Polo' (from the third). In this second concert, the *Iberia* pieces did not come at the end of the programme, but preceded Paul Dukas' Sonata which she played as her finale.

Besides these two public appearances, Selva performed in some London salons, of which two handwritten programmes by Selva have been seen.⁶⁶ The first one, recorded as 'Soirée Evans' dates from 24 November 1907⁶⁷ where she closed her recital with 'Triana'.

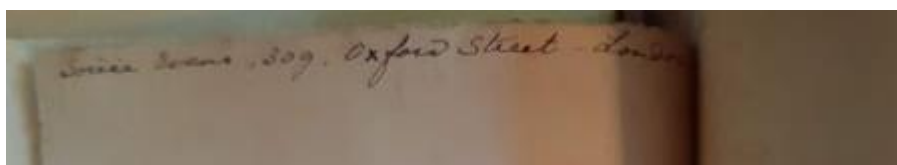


Fig. 6.6 – Handwritten annotation: Soirée Evans, 309, Oxford Street, London, 1907
Courtesy of the Archives de l'Association Blanche Selva (AABS)

Although described as 'Soirée Evans', which would suggest a private musical evening, the only references that it has been possible to find in relation to the 309 Oxford Street address at the time relate to the 'Society of British Composers'. It was founded in 1905

⁶⁴ This is a 'false friend' from his native language, 'recaudación' meaning 'collection'.

⁶⁵ Letter from Isaac Albéniz to Carlos de Castéra dated 9 December 1907, AABS.

⁶⁶ Concert album compiled by Selva preserved at AABS.

⁶⁷ Selva provides the following address: 309 Oxford Street, London.

by the musician Frederick Corder (1852-1932) and had an 'Evans' as its treasurer.⁶⁸ It is unclear whether several different tenants occupied the space, or perhaps more likely, that the registered address of the Society was the personal address of Mr Evans. It has not been possible to ascertain whether Selva played for the Society itself or for a private gathering of Evans.⁶⁹

In the second concert, which is also dated 24 November, she performed 'El Albaicín', 'Almería' and 'Triana' combining, therefore, pieces from *Cahiers II* and *III*. The address given on this occasion is 30 Old Burlington Street; Soirée de M^{es} Hunter.

Selva's handwritten programme for the Hunter soirée is reproduced here in Fig. 6.8. It was possible to locate a 'Mrs Charles Hunter' at 30 Old Burlington Street in a 1909 register of members of the Folk-Song Society.⁷⁰ Selva may well have played at one of the musical evenings hosted by the famous London socialite Mrs Charles Hunter, born Mary Smyth (1857-1933), the sister of the composer Ethel Smyth (1858-1944) and a close friend of the painter John Singer Sargent.⁷¹ His 1898 portrait of her is reproduced here in Fig. 6.8.

⁶⁸ 'John Blackwood McEwen', *The Musical Times*, 89:1265 (1948), pp. 221-222.

⁶⁹ Curiously, 309 Oxford Street was the address of English pianist and teacher Tobias Matthay's 'Pianoforte School for instruction under his teaching methods' during the year 1906, as found in an advertisement in *The Musical Times* of 1906. *The Musical Times*, 47:761 (1906) pp. 441-448, p. 443.

⁷⁰ *Journal of the Folk-Song Society*, 4:14 (1910), pp. vii-xiii. I also thank Dr Trudi Darby for providing me, amongst other things, with the probate calendar which shows that in 1917 the Hunters still gave 30 Old Burlington Street as one of their addresses. Already by the time Selva visited the address, the building was not a private home but the address of the famous Burlington Hotel.

⁷¹ It has not been possible to ascertain Selva's fee for this engagement. However, Simon Mc Veigh notes in relation to the Australian pianist Percy Grainger's (1882-1961) fees in "At Homes" in 1906, that Mrs Hunter paid beyond the norm, £50 the evening when the usual was £10. Mc Veigh, p. 206.

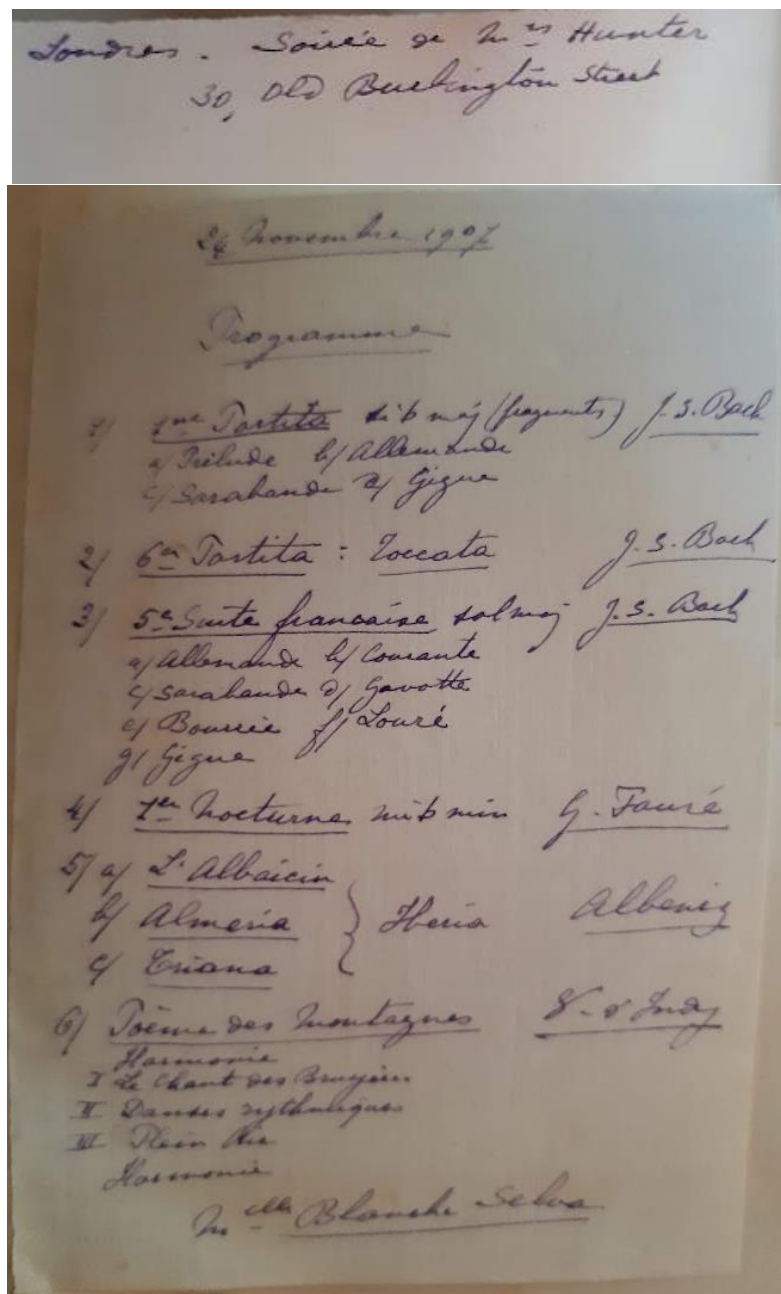


Fig. 6.7 – Programme of Selva's second London Soirée, Soirée Hunter, London, 1907
 Courtesy of the Archives de l'Association Blanche Selva (AABS)



Fig. 6.8 – Mrs Charles Hunter (1898)

Portrait by John Singer Sargent, Tate Britain, London⁷²

Therefore, as early as November 1907 Selva gave performances that included half of the entire *Iberia*. It is also significant to note from a pianistic point of view how she varied every single programme, creating different constellations of the works.

Iberia in the Parisian salon

Selva's role within the Parisian salons has not been widely studied and especially not in relation with her promotion of Albéniz's work within this *milieu*. The importance of private concerts is in general terms overlooked as part of 'la petite histoire',⁷³ with

⁷² John Singer Sargent, Mrs Charles Hunter, 1898, Tate (N04469), digital image © Tate released under Creative Commons CC-BY-NC-ND (3.0 Unported).

⁷³ [The small history.] Term quoted by Myriam Chimènes in *Mécènes et musiciens*, p. 11 citing M. Agulhon, *Le Cercle dans la France bourgeoise*, p. 12.

scholars almost exclusively focusing on public appearances instead. Three notable and comprehensive exceptions to the general rule are found in Chimènes', Sylvia Kahan's and Bunzel and Loges' works.⁷⁴

We can find further valuable insight into the musical and social life of Paris at the beginning of the twentieth century from the words of the Spanish pianist Malats, who is usually credited with being Albéniz's favourite pianist.⁷⁵

By way of background, in February 1904 Malats was returning to Paris as a former laureate of the Dièmer prize to perform a concert at Colonne and La Trompette society. Apart from these, he had arranged two concerts at the Salle Érard. However, as hardly any tickets were sold, he first decided to cancel the first concert, and finally both of them, or else he would have seen himself forced to pay the costs of the hall from his own pocket.⁷⁶

He explains to his wife the reason for this:

[...] hay demasiados conciertos en París (cinco por lo menos al día) y uno ha de tocar aquí para ser el rey de Prusia, como suele decirse [...]⁷⁷

[There are too many concerts in Paris (at least five a day) and as we say, one has to play here to become the king of Prussia.]

and two days later, before finally cancelling both concerts,

[...] Dijo [Bériot] que efectivamente tenía razón de no dar más que un concierto, pues para ganar dinero con ellos es necesario estar aquí todo un invierno yendo de casa en casa a tocar, y luego las familias a cuyas se ha ido a regalarle [sic] los oídos, toman billetes más por compromiso que por otra cosa. Como te dije en mi carta del lunes, la causa de todo esto es que hay

⁷⁴ For Chimènes' text see fn. 72 above; Sylvia Kahan, *Music's Modern Muse: A Life of Winnaretta Singer, Princesse de Polignac* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2003); for Bunzel and Loges, see fn. 14 above.

⁷⁵ Walter Aaron Clark, *Isaac Albéniz: Portrait of a Romantic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 248.

⁷⁶ García Martínez, Anexo II, Letters of 15, 17 and 20 February 1904, pp. 18-21.

⁷⁷ Letter of 15 February 1904, p. 18.

demasiados conciertos, y la gente de París está cansada de tanto concierto de piano. [...] ⁷⁸

[Bériot said that indeed I was right to give just one concert, because to earn money with them it is necessary to be here all winter, coming and going from house to house to play, and then the families where one has been to ingratiate oneself with, they buy tickets more because they feel obliged to than anything else. As I told you in my letter of Monday, the cause of all of this is that there are too many concerts, and the people of Paris are tired of so many piano concerts.]

He asks his wife not to mention any of this to their relatives, no doubt to keep the aura of success, by focusing on the Colonne concert alone. ⁷⁹ It is in this last letter of 20 February 1904 that he also tells her that, apart from there being too many concerts, the issue is that some of them are really poor, causing the audience to feel lost.

This is consistent with the situation in London around the same time. ⁸⁰ Against this backdrop, the role of Selva playing as she did Albéniz's music at the Polignac salon (both earlier pieces and parts of *Iberia*), as well as performing more generally within this particular milieu ahead of her public concerts, directly and indirectly benefited the reception of Albéniz's music amongst the Parisian elite by virtue of his association with a highly regarded pianist who had direct access to these influential circles.

In fact, Chimènes notes that, despite moving to Paris earlier than Selva, Albéniz was actually introduced to the influential Marguerite de Saint-Marceaux by Selva herself as well as thanks to a warm recommendation from Fauré. ⁸¹ Albéniz was not received at Saint-Marceaux's salon until 26 January 1906 ⁸² whilst Selva's first recorded appearance there happened three years earlier, on 27 February 1903.

⁷⁸ Letter of 17 February 1904, pp. 19-21, p. 19. In this letter Malats also explains to his wife the habit that a fraction of the audience at the Colonne and Lamoureux had acquired of booing the pianists loudly. He indeed suffered such an unwelcoming reception, (Letter 21 February, pp. 23-24) but as the journalists sided in his favour in the reviews, this resulted in what would be termed nowadays an unintended but very beneficial PR stunt.

⁷⁹ Letter 20 February 1904, pp. 21-22.

⁸⁰ Mc Veigh, *passim*.

⁸¹ Saint-Marceaux, p. 1286.

⁸² Saint-Marceaux, p. 417.

Further, appearances in salons did not just contribute to selling tickets for future concerts, as was indicated by Malats. For a composer, apart from another chance to get their music heard and secure further patronage, it was also an opportunity to get their music, quite literally, sold to an audience of *amateur* musicians, sometimes very good musicians themselves, who could in turn further disseminate their music more widely.⁸³

In the case of Selva and Albéniz, a pertinent example can be found in a letter from Selva to their mutual friend René de Castéra of 19 January 1905:

Cher Camarade

Hier soir j'ai dîné et fait de la musique chez la P^{esse} de Polignac ! Ceci vous est égal, mais ce qui vous fera plaisir c'est de savoir que je lui ai joué les Albéniz et qu'elle les a beaucoup aimés....

Elle désire posséder les pièces que je lui ai jouée et aussi la partition de *Pepita*.

Comme je ne sais pas où on peut trouver tout ça je m'adresse à vous pour que vous lui fassiez envoyer contre remboursement.⁸⁴

[Dear Comrade, Last night I had dinner and made music at the Princess of Polignac's! This is all the same to you, but what you will like is to know that I played for her the Albénizs and that they liked them very much... She wishes to own the pieces that I played for her as well as the score of *Pepita*. As I do not know where one can find all of this, I'm getting in touch with you so that you can send it to her, cash on delivery.]

She then writes down the list of works: The score of *Pepita Jiménez*, followed by the piano pieces: *La Vega*, 'Séguidille', 'Prélude', 'Prélude Espagne', 'Orientale', 'Aragon'. As will also be seen in Chapter 7 in relation to her role promoting Séverac's music, Selva acted almost as a sales agent, or an intermediary between the salon audience/purchasers and those composers published by the Édition Mutuelle.

⁸³ Marguerite de Saint-Marceaux for instance had studied with Marmontel, the teacher of Debussy, or Francis Planté, as had Jeanne Chausson, the widow of the composer and a good friend of Albéniz. Saint-Marceaux's *Journal*, p. 578. Saint-Marceaux's entry of 26 December 1906, p. 417 reveals that she played, amongst other pieces, the *Rondo espagnol* [sic] of Albéniz with Marthe [Mathey.]

⁸⁴ Letter from Blanche Selva to René de Castéra, 19 January 1905, AABS.

As was mentioned earlier, Selva presented some of the Parisian *avant-premières* at the Polignac salon: the first *Cahier* on 25 March 1906, and the second and two pieces of the third on 2 January 1908. She also returned later to the salon, on 11 April 1908.⁸⁵ These appearances no doubt contributed to creating some interest amongst the Parisian elite, who perhaps needed to be further acquainted with the work to embrace it fully, than Malat's native Spanish audience, for whom the pieces would have more readily resonated.

On Selva's relationship with Winnaretta Singer, Kahan underlines the existence of a copy of Selva's composition *Les Ancêtres du Lys* with a handwritten dedication: 'à Madame la Princess Edmond de Polignac en vive reconnaissance et en très respectueuse affection, Blanche Selva, 24 Novembre 1907' [to Madame the Princess Edmond de Polignac with great regard and very respectful affection]⁸⁶ which suggests a bond between the two women.

That the reception of Selva in the context of this semi-public space was also important to Albéniz can be gauged by a letter from Albéniz to the Castéra brothers, dated 29 October 1906:

Je suis tout étonné de votre silence et que le cas se soit produit d'avoir des nouvelles de la brillante exécution de Selva au salon par d'autres bouches que les vôtres.⁸⁷

[I am very surprised by your silence and that I have received news of Selva's brilliant performance at the salon from other sources than yours.]

It is not clear to what salon appearance this letter is referring, and admittedly Albéniz does not directly state that Blanche was playing one of his pieces. However, given her active performing schedule and relevance at the time⁸⁸ it seems implausible that Albéniz would have been praising Selva's playing in a salon unless this was in direct connection with his own work.

⁸⁵ Kahan, p. 152.

⁸⁶ Kahan, p. 452, fn. 20.

⁸⁷ Letter from Isaac Albéniz to René and Carlos de Castéra, 29 October 1906, AABS.

⁸⁸ See Chapter 2.

The years after the premières

Selva's mentions in connection with *Iberia* tend to be limited to her role as a first performer of the work. However, her advocacy of Albéniz's work stretches far beyond performing the pieces in the early years. She committed to the repertoire, which she maintained throughout her career until her unfortunate retirement from the stage in 1930.

Selva also performed a concert at the Libre Esthétique in Brussels on Tuesday 12 April 1910 in memory of Isaac Albéniz and Charles Bordes. In this programme, where the music of both composers appears interwoven through the concert, Selva played several of Albéniz's pieces: 'Prélude' (*Chants d'Espagne*), 'Zortzico', 'Séguidille'; 'Evocación', 'El Puerto' (First *Cahier*), 'Almería', 'Triana' (second *Cahier*). Although Selva was not the only performer in this concert, Maus highlights her as the principal interpreter.⁸⁹

She carried on working on this very difficult repertoire, which she hoped to keep improving, so in a letter to Claire de Castéra, 10 July 1914 where she details that she keeps persevering with the fiendishly difficult 'Lavapiés' and hopes to completely master it within two years. Her humorous analogy expressing this practice process as a battle with the piece will not be lost on performers who have attempted it.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Maus, p. 418. 'La séance consacrée à la mémoire de Charles Bordes et d'Isaac Albéniz avait pour interprète principale Blanche Selva, leur amie à tous deux. L'intimité de la Libre Esthétique, où leurs œuvres avaient été exécutées au fur et à mesure de leur création, et où elles furent réentendues avec une émotion admirative, convenait à cette commémoration.' [The evening dedicated to the memory of Charles Bordes and Isaac Albéniz had Blanche Selva, friend of both of them, as the main performer. The intimacy of the Libre Esthétique, where their works had been performed as they had been composed, and where they were heard again with admiring emotion, suited this commemoration well.] The other performers in the programme were M.V. Houx, A. Strauwen, A. Zimmer, G. Ryken, L. Baroen, E. Doehaerd and Marguerite Rollet, who performed Bordes' chamber music works in the programme. Programme in Maus, p. 413.

⁹⁰ Letter from Blanche Selva to Claire de Castéra, 10 July 1917. AABS. 'Oui, je pense arriver à dompter le « Lavapiés » ! pour le moment, je m'empoigne ferme avec lui, mais je l'ai contraint tout de même de me livrer à peu près toutes ses notes aujourd'hui. C'est un résultat. Je crois que j'arriverai d'ici un ou deux ans à jouer vraiment bien les Albéniz.' [Yes, I think I will manage to tame the 'Lavapiés'! For the moment, I fight hard with it, but today I have forced it to give me the notes step by step.]

She took 'Triana' with her for a series of concerts in Switzerland in 1917, as well as her 1919 tournée to Czechoslovakia, where Janáček had the opportunity to hear her and the work,⁹¹ as well as to Spain, where the *Diario de San Sebastián* noted:

Mlle. Blanche Selva es, pues una "virtuosa" del piano, pero lo es en el mejor sentido de la palabra. Matiza las obras sin exageración, prestando a cada frase su valor verdadero y dando a todos sus fragmentos una expresión justísima, impecable [...] Y sus manos, servidoras activas de su cerebro, realizan el milagro de dar vida a las armonías muertas que yacen en el pentagrama.

Sin ser española, Mlle. Blanche Selva sabe adaptarse, y sentir nuestra música, la música verdaderamente española, la música de Albéniz y de Falla y de Turina y de Granados [...] La señorita Selva cuyo dominio del teclado es una maravilla, no es solamente un prodigio de mecanismo y de facultades, sino un alma que vibra al unísono de la del compositor.⁹²

[Mlle Selva is a 'virtuosa' of the piano, but in the best sense of the word. She nuances the works but without exaggeration, giving each phrase its true value and giving to every phrase an accurate expression, impeccable [...] And her hands, active servants of her brain, realise the miracle of giving life to the inert harmonies that lie in the score. Without being Spanish, Mlle Blanche Selva knows how to adapt to and feel our music, the truly Spanish music, the music by Albéniz, and Falla, and Turina and Granados [...] Miss Selva whose command of the keyboard is a marvel, is not just a prodigy of the mechanical and technical possibilities, but a soul that vibrates in unison with that of the composer.]

In 1923 in Paris, she offered a series of four recitals where she performed each of the *Cahiers of Iberia* at the end of the programme and the French critic was likewise very enthusiastic about her Albéniz playing:

Mlle Blanche Selva a fini chacun de ses concerts par un des quatre *Cahiers d'Iberia* d'Albéniz. Il n'est pas possible de s'y montrer plus évocatrice, ni plus

⁹¹ Janáček was in attendance in her recital in Brno on 24 October 1919, Guy Selva, *Blanche Selva, double ambassadrice*, p. 27. Her programme for that concert has been found in the archive of the MMB, reference BS002/192. She performed *Triana* to close the programme. Janáček left his impressions of the concert written on the back of the programme (Guy Selva, *Blanche Selva, double ambassadrice*, p. 27, who provides a French translation). About her playing he wrote 'Ses doigts sèment le vent – répandent le parfum posent les brumes – tissent la clarté du soleil.' [Her fingers sow the wind – spread the fragrance, lay the mist – weave the light of the sun.] Regarding the programme he wrote 'le milieu des compositions nous est étranger – Dieu nous garde d'y error !' [The format of the compositions is foreign to us – God protect us from making that mistake!]

⁹² *Diario de San Sebastián*, 5 July 1919, Font Batallé, p. 237.

espagnole, de mieux pincer la guitare et de faire claquer les castagnettes, au moins sur le piano.⁹³

[Mlle Blanche Selva finished each of her concerts with one of the four *Cahiers* of *Iberia* from Albéniz. It is not possible to appear more evocative, more Spanish and to better pluck the guitar and crack the castanets at the piano.]

Selva, teacher of *Iberia*

Selva was always very involved in the promotion of contemporary music, which she included in her teaching practice, and there is a letter dated 21 October 1907 in which there are already references to her teaching pieces of *Iberia*, specifically 'Triana' and 'El Polo', which had been finished less than a year before.

Je sors de mon cours de la Schola où j'ai fait travailler les Albéniz. Cours orageux. J'ai attrapé ferme une malheureuse inintelligente qui semblait déchiffrer « El Polo ». J'ai demandé de m'exécuter la fameuse basse qui se promène à travers tout le piano et dame, comme j'ai vu qu'elle n'avait pas travaillé cela dans le sens voulu. J'en ai raconté de dures... Si vous aviez entendu ça !

Au moins Jacqueline de Bréville et surtout Marcelle Pons m'ont joué Triana presque au mouvement. Jacqueline en bâchant un peu trop sur toutes les notes mais Marcelle avec quelques nuances déjà.⁹⁴

[I just finished my class in the Schola where I made my students work on the Albéniz. Stormy lesson. I caught an unfortunate and unintelligent student who seemed to be sight-reading 'El Polo'. I asked her to play the famous bass that walks throughout the piano, gosh, how I could tell she had not worked with the required approach. I told her off... You should have heard it! At least Jacqueline de Bréville and especially Marcelle Pons played for me 'Triana' almost in time. Jacqueline hammering each note a bit too much but Marcelle already with some nuances.]

Apart from showing how early she introduced the repertoire, it is also apparent how meticulous she is in her approach, demanding that the students undertake their study by voices, or at least hands separate, and severely admonishing a student when she has been caught red-handed with insufficient preparation. However, the letter also

⁹³ *Le Monde Musical*, December 1923, Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 18.

⁹⁴ Letter from Blanche Selva to Madame de Castéra, dated 21 October 1907. Copy from AABS.

shows the high level that at least some of her students at the Schola had reached, as they could be trusted to tackle this very challenging repertoire in the first place.

She softened her approach somewhat through the years, but Selva was always a very demanding teacher, and not always patient with her students. Her exasperation when her students do not follow her instructions is very apparent. However, it is also evident that she laid clear foundations for her students to adopt optimal practice strategies. It is important to highlight that Selva was only 23 years old at the time.

Nevertheless, and in line with her concert work, her pedagogical involvement with these pieces was not limited to the early years. In 1922 she offered an interpretation course on the four *Cahiers* at the École Normale de Paris⁹⁵ and in 1923 one of her students, Rosy Dupond, played 'El Puerto' in a public concert-demonstration of her method.⁹⁶

Finally, Selva also included some of Albéniz's pieces in the list of works presented at her *Programme de l'examen de professeur de troisième degré*.⁹⁷ For the Sixième Année, Albéniz's *Prélude* from *Espagne, Souvenirs*; Septième Année, his *Azulejos* and *Navarra*; Huitième Année, the first *Cahier* of *Iberia*. However, in the original, consulted at the Archives de l'Association Blanche Selva, the 'Corpus Christi', third piece of this first *Cahier*, had a pencil mark, with a 9. There is another annotation "9^e cours" next to some sonatas on p. 15, suggesting that there were some mistakes in these lists and that Selva or other teachers of her method had given some corrections as to the suitability of the repertoire for a later course. It is not at all surprising that 'Corpus Christi' is separated from 'Evocación' and 'El Puerto' as the technical demands are far higher. Finally, for the 'Neuvième Année', the only piece in the programme is *La Vega*. It is a little surprising that no other works of *Iberia* are offered as a possibility for this

⁹⁵ Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 146.

⁹⁶ As reported by *Le Monde Musical*, 11, June 1923. Transcription facilitated by the AABS.

⁹⁷ Blanche Selva, *Cours Blanche Selva. Programme de l'examen de professeur de troisième degré* (Paris: Roudanez, date unknown).

last course, and that she did not include 'Triana', a piece she hugely enjoyed playing, for it is the work that she performed most often.⁹⁸

She never played the entire *Iberia* in a recital, but she undoubtedly commanded the entire set. Not only did she play most of it already by 1909, but in 1923 she played all four *Cahiers* in a series of four weekly recitals at the Salle Pleyel.⁹⁹

Scholarly reception of her work

As has been shown, Selva played an integral part in the early gestation and dissemination of *Iberia*, not just because she performed some of its premières, as she is usually credited with, but for a lifelong advocacy of the composer that has been largely overlooked.

Despite having clear evidence of her involvement with the work, most scholars have taken scant notice of it. Her involvement with *Iberia* is given very short shrift as its first performer and is caveated by the assertion that it was not her, but the Spaniard Joaquín Malats, mentioned earlier, who was the favourite pianist of the Spanish composer.

One such example — and a crucial one owing to its importance in Albéniz studies — is found in the comprehensive monograph on the composer by Walter Aaron Clark,¹⁰⁰ who after stating that Selva was the dedicatee of the second book of *Iberia*, and that she worked from the manuscript and performed the pieces, writes:

But in fact, the Catalan pianist Joaquim Malats (1872-1912) was Albéniz's favourite interpreter of these pieces, and they were composed for him. Though Selva was the first to present entire books in concert, Malats premièred some of the individual numbers in concerts in Spain. [...] ¹⁰¹

And later:

⁹⁸ Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 10. She performed this piece over 50 times.

⁹⁹ These concerts are analysed in greater detail in Chapter 2.

¹⁰⁰ Walter Aaron Clark, *Isaac Albéniz: Portrait of a Romantic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 248.

¹⁰¹ Clark, p. 248

That Albéniz had Malats and not Selva in mind when composing *Iberia* is clear from a letter dated Paris, 22 August 1907, in which he declared ‘this work, this *Iberia* of my sins, I write essentially through you and for you.’ Nine months earlier (Nice, 27 December 1906) Albéniz informed Malats that he had just finished composing, ‘under the direct influence of your marvellous interpretation, the third book of *Iberia*.... [sic] I believe that in these numbers I have taken “españolismo” and technical difficulty to the ultimate extreme, and I feel compelled to confirm that you are at fault for it.’¹⁰²

It cannot be doubted that Albéniz and Malats were good friends, and that they had been so for far longer than Albéniz had befriended and worked with Selva. In fact, as stated by García Martínez, Isaac Albéniz was perhaps one of the personalities with whom Malats had the closest friendship. Albéniz dedicated a photo to him, dated 9 October 1895 ‘Al querido amigo el eminente pianista Malats’¹⁰³ [To my dear friend, the eminent pianist Malats.] That Malats was also a first-class pianist is not in doubt either.

What is not explained by Clark nor García Martínez directly, however, is that the letters from Albéniz that are quoted praising him all come in response to Malats’ own, with which he had attached reviews of his success performing ‘Triana’ in Spain.

Albéniz’s letter from Nice of 9 November 1906, where he writes ‘your magnificent interpretation has succeeded in convincing me that not in vain have I scribbled on so much paper during my life’¹⁰⁴ comes in response to Malats’ letter of 7 November 1906¹⁰⁵ and a telegram that he had sent to him the previous day recounting his success with ‘Triana’ in Barcelona.

Albéniz’s letter of 27 December 1906 telling him that ‘no escribo más que para ti; acabo de terminar bajo tu directa influencia de intérprete maravilloso el tercer cuaderno de *Iberia*,’¹⁰⁶ [I only write for you; I have just finished working on the third

¹⁰² Clark, pp. 249-250.

¹⁰³ García Martínez, p. 33.

¹⁰⁴ Clark, p. 249.

¹⁰⁵ García Martínez, Anexo II, p. 78.

¹⁰⁶ García Martínez, p. 308.

book of *Iberia* under your direct influence] comes in response to Malats' where he also attaches a favourable review of his concert in which he had played Albéniz's 'Triana'.¹⁰⁷

Further, in that letter Malats also tells him that he intends to perform 'Evocación', 'El Puerto' and 'Triana' subsequently, which in the event did not happen. It is also very important to understand the context and to note that Malats enjoyed a very high status in Spain, that saw him performing on several occasions for the Spanish royal family such as the Infanta Isabel and the Marquesa de Nájera, including 'Triana', which 'entusiasmó a la Infanta' [delighted the Princess].¹⁰⁸

Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that Albéniz was anything other than effusive in his response to Malats and that he may have seen him, and his playing of *Iberia* in Spain, as a way of earning the recognition in his home country which had proved to be elusive to him in the past.¹⁰⁹ Albéniz did write some dedications to Malats in the manuscript pieces of the third *Cahier*. However, it is completely apparent that these dedications were written in the score after Albéniz received his manuscript back from Senart and was forwarding the originals to Malats to start practising the pieces. One can see that Albéniz even attempted to erase the original dedicatee of the work, Marguerite Hasselmans, who is the dedicatee in the published work. Albéniz ostensibly forgot to erase her name in the second piece. It is important to recall Albéniz's own words on this third *Cahier*

[...] je ne hésite pas a le considérer comme le meilleur cahier quoique je reconnais qu'il est le plus difficile et rébarbatif; ce Lavapiés surtout [...]¹¹⁰

[I do not hesitate to consider the third *cahier* as the best although I recognise that it is the most difficult and off-putting; particularly the 'Lavapiés'.]

Although I do not doubt Albéniz's general appreciation for Malats, rather than confirming this, in my view those last-minute dedications in the manuscripts before

¹⁰⁷ García Martínez, pp. 302-304, review of Malats' concert of 17 December 1906 by Cecilio Roda for *La Época*.

¹⁰⁸ García Martínez, p. 305.

¹⁰⁹ Laplane, p. 60.

¹¹⁰ Letter from Albéniz to Carlos de Cáster, from 18 December 1906, AABS.

forwarding them to Malats show Albéniz's way of 'sugar coating' *Cahier* III, hopeful that the Spaniard may be keen to take it on board.

Clark also uses Malat's purported greater success with *Iberia* in Spain as a basis to downplay Selva's own role as an *Albéniziste*.

[T]he papers in France took scant notice of Selva's *Iberia* premières. In Spain, however, a Malats concert was always worthy of mention in the press, and the critics gave unqualified praise to the works.¹¹¹

This comparison fails to take adequate account of the cultural and social realities, and differences, of both countries. As explained by Malats himself in correspondence with his wife detailed earlier in this chapter, the sheer volume of concerts in Paris cannot be compared with those in capitals such as Madrid and Barcelona. Malats made a mark in Spain not only because he was an outstanding pianist, but because there were significantly fewer such good pianists at the time in Spain, as well as significantly fewer concerts, which in turn would have been appreciated in greater measure. Further, the taste of the audience itself, irrespective of who the performer was, may also have been at play.

In any event, some reviewers in Paris did in fact take note of Selva's performances of these works, for example:

Pierre Lalo, in *Le Temps*, 13 July 1906:

Mlle. Selva a joué toutes ces pièces [first *Cahier*] à merveille. Cette étonnante jeune fille est, je crois bien l'interprète la plus musicale qu'il y ait aujourd'hui dans l'univers du piano [...] Elle en exprime la pensée, le sens, le mouvement, la poésie, la couleur, tantôt avec force, tantôt avec délicatesse [...] elle conçoit les œuvres non par le détail, comme font ordinairement les pianistes [...], mais par l'ensemble, c'est vraiment l'idée qu'elle s'efforce d'attendre et de révéler [...]¹¹²

[Mlle Selva played all of these pieces wonderfully. I very much think that this astonishing young woman is the most musical performer that there is nowadays within the piano world [...] She expresses the thought, the sentiment, the movement, the poetry, the colour sometimes with force, sometimes with delicacy [...] she conceives the pieces not from the details, as

¹¹¹ Clark, p. 250.

¹¹² Font Batallé, p. 231.

ordinary pianists do [...] but from the whole, it is really the idea that she strives to understand and reveal.]

Le Mercure Musical, 1 June 1906:

Mlle. Blanche Selva apparait comme une étoile [...] sans pâlir de cette splendeur, *Iberia* d'Albéniz évoque toute l'Espagne moderne, pays d'orient encore, qui ne veut rien ignorer des raffinements occidentaux [...]¹¹³

[Mlle Blanche Selva appeared like a star [...] without fading from this bright light, Albéniz's *Iberia* evokes all modern Spain, still a country from the East, that does not set its face against any Western refinements.]

Nevertheless, that Selva's performances of *Iberia* were not always felt to be as relevant by the Parisian audience can be seen in a diary entry of Marguerite de Saint-Marceaux, on 8 January 1910.¹¹⁴ Referring to a concert by Selva at the Salle Érard that same day, Saint-Marceaux notices her marvellous playing of d'Indy, but makes no mention of her performance of 'Eritaña'. However, whether this reflects the fact that Selva was considered more suited to other repertoire, or is down to the taste of the listener, is a matter for debate.

In any case, this should not detract from the importance that Albéniz himself attached to Selva's performing of his work. In a letter to René de Castéra dated 30 November 1906 and so contemporaneous with the correspondence with Malats mentioned above, he rejects that his *Iberia* is simplified by changing voice dispositions so as to make them more accessible to a wider range of pianists stating,

je ne tiens pas du tout à ce que les pianistes de moyenne force s'acharnent sur mes œuvres, Selva, et encore une demi-douzaine d'élus me suffiront et tu t'en convaincras quand tu verras le troisième *Cahier* qui est presque fini et où la complexité de ma façon d'écrire est poussée, j'ose le dire à l'extrême limite [...]¹¹⁵

[I do not care at all that pianists of medium level struggle with my work, Selva and half a dozen chosen ones are enough and you will be convinced when you see the third *Cahier* which is almost finished and where the complexity of my way of writing has been pushed, I dare say, to its limits.]

¹¹³ Font Batallé, p. 233.

¹¹⁴ Entry of 8 January 1910, pp. 571-572.

¹¹⁵ Letter to René de Castéra dated 30 November 1906, AABS.

Albéniz is clear, ‘Selva and half a dozen chosen ones will suffice’. That he does not mention Malats directly in this context is no doubt a strategic choice given the close relationship between the recipient of this letter, René de Castéra, and Blanche Selva and the working relationship between the three of them in the publishing of *Iberia* by the Édition Mutuelle which was examined earlier.

Both García Martínez¹¹⁶ and Torres¹¹⁷ have also noted that there is a constant difference in tone between Albéniz and Malats, with Albéniz always effusive and affective, against a more distant Malats who always refers to him with the archaic ‘vos’. However, this does not permeate further into their analysis, and the relationship between these two musicians and their respective motives or motivations, is always presented, in my opinion, in a very two-dimensional way. Albéniz’s clear, and very natural, ambition for his exceedingly difficult masterpiece to be performed as much as possible, is never fully acknowledged.

Clark also mentions¹¹⁸ that Albéniz wanted Malats, as a Spanish pianist, to play his work. In a letter demonstrating this, Albéniz writes to Malats:

además hay mucho deseo de oír música Española, tocada por un español de tu tamaño, y por último, hay mucho dinero que ganar en Francia, en cuanto un artista reúna, como te sucede a ti, el clasicismo, con la nota especial y exótica.¹¹⁹

[[M]oreover, there is a great desire to hear Spanish music played by a Spaniard of your stature, and finally there is a lot of money to be made in France, when an artist brings together, as you do, classicism with special, exotic touch.]

However, as was shown earlier Albéniz despaired that no one else but Selva was embracing his work in Paris, and his desire for it to be played more widely is very apparent.

¹¹⁶ García Martínez, p. 287

¹¹⁷ Torres, p. XXIV.

¹¹⁸ Clark, p. 249.

¹¹⁹ Letter from Isaac Albéniz to Joaquín Malats, García Martínez, Anexo II, pp. 44-45.

Conclusion

Presenting Selva as merely the first-performer of most of *Iberia* alone is a superficial and partial representation of her life-long undertaking with Albéniz's work and the relationship between the composer and one of his main interpreters and collaborators. Further, Blanche Selva's role in the creation and dissemination of *Iberia* has not been accurately portrayed, and indeed has been negligently obscured. The extent of Selva's work with Albéniz's compositions is meritorious in its own right.

Selva presented his works in public and private concerts across several European countries, in France, Spain, Brussels, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia and the United Kingdom, but an ignorance of her stature and reputation as a performer in the early twentieth century has impeded other scholars from realising how important she was in the early diffusion of Albéniz's work, particularly in France and Brussels and the credibility that she gave to his compositions.

Selva is one of the first pianists ever to have taught *Iberia*, a masterwork with which she was intimately acquainted through her role as Albéniz's editor of the collection. She painstakingly proofed the manuscripts, not only the multiple and exaggerated musical remarks, and misplaced notes, but also his abundant spelling mistakes across the entire score. It may appear unseemly to point out Albéniz's dismal spelling of French and Italian, it may feel petty and against the tenets of the 'Grand Histoire' of the 'Great Composers'. However, not discussing it is yet another way, as was noted by Jane Bower in the introduction chapter of this thesis, in which a woman's labour is made invisible and held to be unimportant, which this research seeks to redress. It is Selva, who painstakingly corrects every misplaced 't' and accent and lets Albéniz shine brighter for it.

I hope that pointing out the extent of her work with *Iberia* and other earlier piano works of Albéniz in this chapter may contribute to enhancing her visibility as an *Albéniziste* as she so much deserves.

Chapter 7 Blanche Selva and Déodat de Séverac

Blanche Selva and Déodat de Séverac: a unique collaboration

This chapter presents the relationship and collaboration between Selva and Séverac, a composer with whom she was bound not only by strong professional ties, but by a life-long friendship. A holistic study of Séverac's compositions, predominantly his piano pieces, allows us to further understand Selva's pianism and contextualise her capabilities as a multifaceted artist: performer, writer, editor, and promoter of a composer's work.

Déodat de Séverac (1872-1921) is not a household name outside France and even in his home country he is generally considered to be a composer of little importance, on account of his small catalogue of works.¹ However, his position during his lifetime was very different. He was a highly regarded and sought-after composer, on a par with Debussy and Ravel. For instance, Henry Sauget spoke of the three composers as a trio at the helm of music of that period.²

In his book, Waters also notes that Séverac:

[...] was regarded as one of the more creative composers in fin de siècle France. His composition teacher, Vincent d'Indy, described him as "one of the great figures in our music," and Gabriel Fauré called attention to the fact that "Séverac has something to say and says it quite simply". Debussy characterised his works as "exquisitely orchestrated and rich with ideas", while further noting that Séverac "composes great music that feels good and one breathes with a full heart."³

He composed instrumental music, both solo and chamber works, and vocal pieces, from *mélodies* to opera. However, naturally, the emphasis in this chapter will be on his

¹ In Ludovine Isafo, 'Collaboration entre un compositeur et une interprète : Déodat de Séverac et Blanche Selva' in *Blanche Selva, naissance d'un piano moderne*, ed. by Jean-Marc Warszawski (Lyon: Symétrie, 2010), pp. 69- 84, p. 70.

² In Robert R. Waters, *Déodat de Séverac, Musical Identity in Fin de Siècle France* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), p. 32.

³ Waters, p. 10.

main piano compositions. These will be presented in chronological order illustrating through them Selva's multifaceted collaboration with and influence on the composer.

A unique aspect of the relationship between Selva and Séverac is the fact that she is also his first biographer. Therefore, approaching Séverac also entails listening to Selva's own voice, inevitably also learning about her along the way. It is worth noting that, according to Guy Selva,⁴ she also intended to write a biography of Albéniz in Catalan, with the aim that a subsequent French translation would 'albenize' [*albéner*] the French public more effectively than the work written by Henri Collet.⁵ However, regrettably, Selva never completed this work, and no preliminary drafts survive.

Written in 1930, her monograph *Déodat de Séverac*⁶ is a heartfelt homage to her friend. Selva's meticulous scholarship is also in evidence throughout. Selva gathered as much documentary evidence as was available to her. However, this was something in which she considered she was at least partially unsuccessful. In her writing she blames some of Séverac's friends for failing to share their memories with her.

D'autre part, parmi ceux qui furent, ou se dirent, amis de Séverac, beaucoup de négligence apparaît qui prive d'utiliser des souvenirs que soit la paresse, soit l'indifférence ou l'incompréhension empêchent de communiquer. La partie matérielle biographique, donc, doit ainsi être forcément limitée et, sinon superficielle, du moins peu loquace en petits faits et en détails de vie privée.⁷

[Further, amongst those who were, or were said to have been, Séverac's friends, there seems to be a great deal of negligence that has deprived us of memories that either laziness, indifference, or misunderstanding have prevented from being communicated. So, the material part of the biography is therefore necessarily limited, if not superficial, at least less eloquent in matters and details of his private life.]

Elaine Brody, in her thesis on Séverac,⁸ attests to the veracity of Selva's account, having compared Selva's account with the reminiscences of Séverac's widow,

⁴ Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 176.

⁵ In reference to Henri Collet, *Albéniz et Granados*, discussed in Chapter 6.

⁶ Blanche Selva, *Déodat de Séverac. Les Grands Musiciens par les Maîtres d'Aujourd'hui* (Paris: Librairie Delagrave, 1930).

⁷ Selva, *Déodat de Séverac*, p. 7.

⁸ Elaine Brody, *The piano works of Déodat de Séverac: A stylistic analysis* (unpublished doctoral thesis, New York University, 1964).

Henriette Tardieu (1884-1977), whom Brody was able to interview and work with during the summer of 1961. In fact, Brody admits that her biographical essay on the composer is heavily dependent on Selva's work.⁹

Further, Selva tried to ensure that her monograph reflected her friend holistically. For instance, despite stating that she knew Séverac intimately, she decided not to be the sole voice telling his story.¹⁰ ('Pour cela, malgré que nous ayons longuement et intimement connu Séverac, nous ne nous sommes pas contenté de l'écrire nous-même.') After her preface, she makes way for others of Séverac's friends. The first chapter of the book, *L'Homme et l'Artiste*, comprises the testimony of Paul Poujaud (1856-1936), to whom the book is dedicated, Marc Lafargue (1876-1927) and Gustave Violet (1873-1952). Final evidence of her fine scholarship is demonstrated by her compilation and inclusion of a comprehensive catalogue of his works, the first of its kind. In it she records his published works, including their first performance information (date, place and performer) and publishing house, as well as his unpublished pieces, works commenced but left unfinished, and those that were lost.

Her biography of Séverac has been extensively quoted when discussing his life and work, as in the aforementioned books and thesis by Waters and Brody respectively. And yet, Selva's importance and influence on Séverac's work is never highlighted in these texts. As an illustrative example, Waters includes a small sub-section 'Ricardo Viñes' in chapter 9 'Catalan Regionalism: Politics and Music' in which he states that Viñes 'had an important influence on Séverac's career and compositional direction'.¹¹ Not only is there no other relevant section or mention of the subject dedicated to Selva, but the fact that Séverac himself insisted from 1919 onward that his compositions reflect Selva's own input in them, is not even acknowledged by Waters at all. As will be discussed further below, Séverac's later compositions include the statement 'avec indications des nuances et des doigtés par Blanche Selva' [with

⁹ Brody, *The piano works of Déodat de Séverac*, p. 24.

¹⁰ Selva, *Déodat de Séverac*, p. 8.

¹¹ Waters, p. 190. Waters describes Selva as a French pianist on p. 21 but as Catalan on p. 186, footnotes 16 and 52 respectively.

expressive indications and fingering by Blanche Selva] on the opening page of the scores.

More consideration of Selva's work has been given by Pierre Guillot, who describes her as Séverac's 'interprète indéfectible et premier vrai biographe' [indefatigable interpreter and first true biographer].¹² However, in his book there is no real examination of her pianistic work and her importance in the development of Séverac's musical persona.

Certainly, as is noted by all other authors, Ricardo Viñes was another favourite interpreter of Séverac's music, but as Ludovine Isafo poignantly shows, his and Selva's collaborations with Séverac were at least on a par.¹³ Isafo states that there was a 'concurrence amicale' [friendly rivalry] between both pianists, who would première Séverac's works in tandem, that is, if one of them gave the first performance in Paris, the other did the same in Brussels, and vice versa.¹⁴ It is important to note that some pieces were performed by Selva exclusively in both locations as will be shown below.

Outline biography

Déodat de Séverac (1872-1921)¹⁵ was born in Saint-Félix-Lauragais, not far from Toulouse to Gilbert de Séverac and his cousin Aglaé de la Fleuraussié.¹⁶ Séverac was initially taught music by his father, 'flute, piano and harmonium'¹⁷ and later by the organist in their locality. He first enrolled to study law in Toulouse, which he quickly abandoned to enter the Conservatoire in the same city, studying *solfège* and harmony between 1893 and 1896.¹⁸

¹² Pierre Guillot, *Déodat de Séverac, musicien français* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2010).

¹³ Isafo, p. 72.

¹⁴ Isafo, p. 72.

¹⁵ Birth year incorrectly stated in Selva's book as 1873. Unequivocal proof given by Brody, *The piano works of Déodat de Séverac*, p. 397, where a copy of his birth certificate is provided.

¹⁶ Selva, *Déodat de Séverac*, pp. 28-29.

¹⁷ Waters, p. 18. Also Selva, p. 29.

¹⁸ Selva, *Déodat de Séverac*, p. 29.

He enrolled at the Paris Conservatoire in 1896.¹⁹ Like Blanche Selva, he did not last long in the institution, and despite the director's protestations, he left that same year to begin his studies at the Schola Cantorum, where he remained for ten academic years.²⁰ There, he studied in Vincent d'Indy's composition class. From 1899 Charles Bordes, another of the founding fathers of the Scola, made it compulsory for composition students to attend different instrumental classes with a view to learn about them, something which Selva in her biography describes as an excellent method of education.²¹ It is in this capacity that Séverac became a 'student' of both Albéniz, and later Selva herself.²² In fact, they first met in Brussels on 25 March 1902, on the occasion of the performance of his work *Le Chant de la Terre*. Selva subsequently gave the first Parisian performance of this work in 1903.²³

The boundaries between the roles of student and teacher were often blurred at the Schola during this period and Séverac also undertook some work there as a teacher. Selva states that Bordes entrusted him with choir rehearsals.²⁴ In this regard, it is to be noted that Selva herself was a piano teacher at the Schola as well as a composition student.

Shortly after or around the time Séverac completed his studies, he met his future wife, the actress Henriette Tardieu. They married in 1912 and had a daughter named Magali.²⁵

Throughout his professional career, much like Selva, the composer had to work for a living.²⁶ Selva notes that he helped Bordes with the Schola choirs, played the organ in different churches, whether in Paris or its surroundings, as well as teaching harmony or

¹⁹ Waters, p. 19.

²⁰ Selva, *Déodat de Séverac*, p. 32.

²¹ Selva, *Déodat de Séverac*, p. 34.

²² Apart from piano, Selva states that Séverac attended lessons in oboe, French horn, trumpet, flute, clarinet as well as string instruments, p. 34. Isafo's account that Séverac had only a background in oboe studies, and that if he wrote predominantly for piano it was because of his relation to a devoted pianist such as Selva is not supported by the evidence, p. 77.

²³ Selva, *Déodat de Séverac*, p. 37 and p. 104.

²⁴ Selva, *Déodat de Séverac*, p. 32.

²⁵ Waters, p. 37.

²⁶ Waters, p. 26.

musical culture.²⁷ In fact, as explained by Selva, Séverac's allowance from his family fortune was very modest; he always lived without any luxury as his share of the family legacy was insufficient to cover his maintenance costs. ('La fortune de Séverac a toujours été très modeste. Il a vécu toujours sans aucun luxe et en ayant besoin de gagner sa vie, car sa part du bien familial ne pouvait suffire aux frais de la vie à son époque.')²⁸

Déodat submitted his dissertation at the end of his period in the Schola.²⁹ *La Centralisation et les petites Chappelles en musique*, is a criticism of the centralised musical education system and according to Selva, his 'artistic *Credo*'.³⁰ True to his beliefs, he decided to leave Paris to return first to his native Saint-Felix. He settled permanently in Céret from 1910, interrupted only during the war years, when he was posted to four different towns in southern France as part of the medical corps.³¹

Séverac was demobilised in January 1919 and returned to Céret. However, he was already ill.³² Waters explains that Séverac contracted uremia a year later, in the summer of 1920 and passed away on 24 March 1921.³³

Le Coeur du Moulin – Séverac's first opera

The main focus of this chapter is an analysis of Selva's relationship with Séverac's solo piano pieces. However, it is relevant to begin by mentioning Séverac's first opera, *Le Coeur du Moulin*, as it is highly illustrative of the active and multifaceted role that Selva had in promoting her friend's musical work more generally.

Isafo writes that it was Selva who opened the doors of the Parisian salons to Séverac.³⁴ Indeed Selva was well positioned in the Parisian milieu, playing his pieces often in the most sought-after soirées. For example, in 1902 the Princess of Cystria became an

²⁷ Selva, *Déodat de Séverac*, p. 33.

²⁸ Selva, *Déodat de Séverac*, p. 33, fn. 2.

²⁹ Selva refers to it as 'thèse', e.g. *Déodat de Séverac*, p. 45.

³⁰ Selva, *Déodat de Séverac*, p. 45.

³¹ Waters, p. 38.

³² Selva, *Déodat de Séverac*, p. 79.

³³ Waters, p. 39.

³⁴ Isafo, p. 74.

enthusiast of Séverac's music, which she had first heard performed at her salon by Selva.³⁵ Nevertheless, Isafo's statement that it was Selva who introduced Séverac to Marguerite de Saint-Marceaux, who became one of the most ardent supporters of his new opera,³⁶ appears to be incorrect.

Saint-Marceaux had indeed first met Selva very early on in her career, first mentioning her in her diary on 27 February 1903.

La grosse Selva vient dîner avec Bréville. Elle joue du piano toute la soirée, de jolies pièces pour le piano de d'Indy, des valse de lui également exquises d'un joli rythme distingué.³⁷

[The fat Selva came to dinner with Bréville. She played the piano all evening, beautiful pieces for piano by d'Indy, exquisite waltzes, also by him, with a beautiful, distinctive rhythm.]

The dismissive tone suggests a certain familiarity, which makes it at least possible that this may not have been their first encounter. However, Saint-Marceaux is unequivocal in her later entry of 26 May 1905,³⁸ when she writes that Castéra introduced Séverac that evening. ('Déodat de Séverac vient le soir présenté par Castéra.')

In any event, Selva, as well as Saint-Marceaux, did indeed have a very active part in promoting Séverac's first opera. In a letter from Selva to her friend René de Castéra on 19 January 1905, she writes that she will be playing and singing the two acts of his

³⁵ Chimènes, p. 183. 'En 1902, la princesse de Cystria s'enthousiasme pour la musique de Déodat de Séverac, qu'elle attire chez elle par l'intermédiaire de Blanche Selva.'

³⁶ Isafo, p. 74.

³⁷ Saint-Marceaux, p. 295.

³⁸ Saint-Marceaux, p. 395.

opera at Mme Payen's.³⁹ Selva also played and sang *Le Coeur du Moulin*⁴⁰ at the salons of Polignac, Misia Edwards,⁴¹ Sérieyx⁴² and Vaucher.⁴³

On 12 February 1906 Misia hosted a dinner followed by an 'audition', a private performance, of the opera at her home, inviting Albert Carré, the director of the Opéra-Comique to attend.⁴⁴ Selva played the piano reduction of the opera in this private setting, as well as in the two rehearsals undertaken in preparation for this event, which had happened at Saint-Marceaux's on the 26 January and 11 February 1906. Saint-Marceaux's diary entry of 26 January states that 'Selva accompagne merveilleusement'⁴⁵ [Selva accompanies marvelously].

All these collective (and female) efforts were successful, and Carré agreed to stage the opera, which was finally premièred in December 1909. However, before that, performances of the opera at private salons continued, with Selva at the helm, for example, at the Polignac salon on 27 May 1906.⁴⁶ Séverac was not present on this

³⁹ Isafo, p. 74. Most likely the wife of the French librettist Louis Payen (1875-1927), who wrote, amongst others the libretto of Massenet's *Cléopâtre*.

⁴⁰ Isafo, p. 74.

⁴¹ Born in Saint Petersburg, Marie Sophie Olga Zenaïde Godebska (1872-1950), was later known famously simply as 'Misia'. She came from a family of artists and was herself a piano prodigy having played for Liszt when she was only 8 years old. She became a student of Fauré's and during a period of time earned a living teaching piano. She married three times, first Thadée Natanson, then Alfred Edwards and lastly José María Sert. It is through her second marriage that she reached the financial status that permitted her to act as an important figure as a patron of some artists. Chimènes, *Mécènes et musiciens*, pp. 145-155.

⁴² Auguste Sérieyx (1865-1949) was a French composer and musicologist. He studied under d'Indy and collaborated with him in the publication of d'Indy's *Cours de composition musicale*, Elaine Brody, revised by Andrew Thomson, 'Sérieyx, Auguste (Jean maria Charles)' in *Grove Music online* (2001), <<https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.25461>>.

⁴³ It has not been possible to ascertain the identity of Ms or Mr Vaucher.

⁴⁴ Chimènes, *Mécènes et musiciens*, p. 149 and p. 657. Unsurprisingly, the opera is dedicated to her.

⁴⁵ Saint-Marceaux, p. 421. Her diary entry also states that Selva played another of Séverac's pieces, *En Languedoc*.

⁴⁶ Sylvia Kahan, *Music's Modern Muse: A Life of Winnaretta Singer, Princesse de Polignac* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2003).

occasion, but Albert Roussel in correspondence with the composer, wrote that it had been well executed particularly by Selva, Pironnay⁴⁷ and Gébelin.⁴⁸

Selva therefore actively promoted her friend's opera through the Parisian salons, first as a "one-woman" act, playing and singing the parts herself, and later, when the singers had been cast, providing the orchestral reduction. She also lent her services for the important private performance for Carré and continued to bring the opera to the small stage of the salons thereafter.

The importance of her role cannot be overstated, particularly when noting the significance that securing a production at the Opéra-Comique would have for any aspiring composer trying to forge a reputation at the time.

Séverac's reliance on and trust in Selva's, as well as René Castéra's musical judgment is also illustrated in a letter to Castéra before the publication of the opera:

Avant de livrer ça au graveur, je t'en prie, lisez-le avec Blanche. Si ça ne vous plaisait pas, dites-le-moi et nous arrêterons tout avec Carré !⁴⁹

[Before handing it to the publisher, I beg you, read it with Blanche. If it does not please you, tell me and we will stop everything with Carré!]

Furthermore, another of the crucial roles that Selva had in forging the reputation of her friend and the promotion of his music, is her position as a de facto sales representative. From the beginning, once Selva began playing his piano pieces in her appearances in the salons, she took orders from interested parties. As quoted by Isafo concerning the piece *Le Chant de la Terre*⁵⁰

Mlle Selva en fera vendre certainement une grande quantité car dans tous les salons où elle l'a joué on lui demande si l'on pourrait trouver cette œuvre chez quelque éditeur.

⁴⁷ Marie Pironnet, also known as Mary Pyronnay (1876-1934) was a mezzo-soprano who studied at the Schola Cantorum and remained within the circles of influence of the institution.

⁴⁸ Chimènes, p. 102 and fn. 4. Albert Gébelin, dates unknown, appears to have been a bass affiliated to the Schola Cantorum. André Coeuroy and Theodore Baker, 'Present Tendencies of Sacred Music in France', *The Musical Quarterly*, 13:4 (1927), 582-604, p. 589.

⁴⁹ Letter from Séverac to René de Castéra, 12 February 1908, quoted by Selva, *Déodat de Séverac*, p. 55.

⁵⁰ Isafo, p. 76, quoting from *La Musique* by Séverac, p. 167.

[Mlle Selva will certainly sell a large quantity [of copies of *Le Chant de la Terre*] as in all the salons where she has played it, she gets asked whether this piece can be found at any publisher's.]

Of course, the publisher was the Édition Mutuelle, led by their mutual friend René de Castéra and affiliated to the Schola Cantorum.

Finally, it is also relevant to note that Selva also performed some of his *mélodies*. Further, in doing so she might have contributed to strengthening the ties between Séverac and at least one of his benefactors, the Princess of Cystria. Chimènes notes that Séverac was rejoicing at having conquered the Princess musically after she and Blanche had performed some of his *mélodies* together.⁵¹ ('Le musicien [Séverac], qui a l'occasion d'entendre la princesse chanter ses mélodies («pas mal du tout ») accompagnée par Blanche Selva, se réjouit d'« avoir fait la conquête musicale » de la princesse, étant donné les relations de cette “mécénesse” ».)

Séverac's main works for piano

Regrettably, lack of space in Selva's monograph on Séverac prevented her from writing a commentary on the interpretation of his works, something that she would have liked to do but, due to the constraints upon her, she thought it better to abstain than do it badly.⁵² ('Nous aurions désiré compléter ce livre par l'étude détaillée au point de vue expressif, des principales œuvres de Séverac. Les limites de cette collection nous obligent à n'en rien faire, car il vaut mieux s'abstenir de traiter un sujet que de le mal traiter [...]')

Le Chant de la Terre

Prologue (L'Ame de la Terre)

I Le Labour

II Les Semailles

Intermezzo (Conte à la Veillée)

⁵¹ Chimènes, p. 183.

⁵² Selva, *Déodat de Séverac*, p. 11.

III La Grêle

IV Les Moissons

Epilogue (Le Jour des Noces)

This suite for piano was composed in 1901 and later première in Brussels at the Libre Esthétique by Jean du Chastain on 25 March 1902. This is precisely the occasion when Séverac and Selva first met. As Selva writes in her monograph, this is when she became his interpreter.⁵³ She gave the Parisian première at the Société Nationale de Musique almost a year later, on 24 January 1903. The work was first published also in 1903 by the Schola Cantorum's Édition Mutuelle, bearing the plate number E.M. 3033. It was later reissued by Rouart, Lerolle and Cie., Plate 11201.

As such, in this work there was no collaboration during the compositional process itself. But as has already been mentioned above, Selva had an important role raising the visibility of Séverac in many salons of the period with this work and acted almost as a sales agent or promoter of it.

Séverac's admiration for her playing, in his own works in particular, is also in evidence from the very early stages of their acquaintance and in this particular composition. In a letter to his sister Alix of 17 January 1903, and therefore a week before her official première of the suite:

Selva a joué le Chant de la Terre d'une façon admirable, tellement admirable que j'étais à me demander si cette musique était bien de moi.⁵⁴

[Selva has played *Le Chant de la Terre* admirably, so admirably that I wondered whether this music was really mine.]

Decades later Selva reflected fondly, although not completely uncritically, on this first piece that set them on a path of mutual collaboration

Dans cette œuvre, malgré quelques faiblesses de jeunesse, la pensée de Séverac apparaît vraiment *créatrice*, animée par le souffle de vérité profonde

⁵³ Selva, *Déodat de Séverac*, p. 37: 'C'est à l'occasion de cette œuvre que Séverac et Bl. Selva [sic] se rencontrent pour la première fois, et qu'elle devient aussi pour la première fois son interprète.'

⁵⁴ Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 116.

que sa nature de vrai poète lui permet de ressentir à travers les réalités augustes ou charmantes de la vie.⁵⁵

[In this work, despite some weaknesses of youth, the thinking of Séverac appears truly *creative*, animated by the breath of deep truth that his nature as true poet permitted him to feel through the august or charming realities of life.]

En Languedoc

*I Vers le Mas en Fête*⁵⁶

II Sur l'Étang, le soir.

III A cheval dans la Prairie

IV Coin de Cimetière au printemps

V Le Jour de la Foire, au Mas

Written between 1903-1904, it originally bore the title *Loin des Villes*.⁵⁷ As with the preceding work, it was first published by the Édition Mutuelle in 1905, Plate E. 3073.M., reprinted later by Rouart, Lerolle & Cie., 1919. Plate 11046 and by Salabert after 1941.

The movements of this suite were premièred at different stages as the composition progressed, and the pieces were written in a different order from their final placing within the suite. As a complete suite it was premièred by Ricardo Viñes, to whom the work is dedicated, in Paris, at the Schola Cantorum on 25 May 1905 and in Brussels a year later by Blanche Selva, 20 March 1906 at the Libre Esthétique. In the diary of Marguerite de Saint-Marceaux the entry of 26 January 1906 states that Selva played the *En Languedoc* 'avec un art fin'. [With fine art.] It is unclear whether she only played

⁵⁵ Selva, *Déodat de Séverac*, p. 37.

⁵⁶ The manuscript of the first movement of the Suite has been found at the Centre de Documentació de l'Orfeó Català, CEDOC in Barcelona, after Selva donated it to the institution.

⁵⁷ Selva, *Déodat de Séverac*, p. 105.

a selection from the suite, or whether she played it all.⁵⁸ She also played the score at the Polignac salon.⁵⁹

According to Brody, this work 'represents Séverac's most important contribution to the literature for the piano'. [...] 'The infrequency of performance of the suite — both here and in France — results from the difficulties of execution.'⁶⁰

For Selva, this is the work where 'sa jeune maîtrise s'affirme'⁶¹ [his young mastery is affirmed.] She concedes that, despite some reflections of the *debussyan* influence, the piece brings with it new sentiments and expressive musical elements. However, Déodat can be reassured, she says, that the work is far from being just a *reflection*.⁶² Of course, Selva's play on words alludes to Debussy's *Reflets dans l'eau*.⁶³

As discussed at the beginning of this section, *En Languedoc* was republished by Rouart Lerolle & Cie in 1919. In this reissue, there is a new indication, absent from the original Édition Mutuelle copy, at the bottom of the first page stating: *Indications d'interprétations par Blanche Selva*. Brody states that this indication 'may well arouse our suspicions regarding performance instructions in other pieces as well'. She goes on to ask, whether Selva or Séverac are responsible for these details. Brody believes 'that in every piece where performance directions are not specifically attributed to

⁵⁸ Chimènes, p. 421 fn. 5, states that Selva gave the first performance of the complete suite on 2 February 1906 for La Trompette, and later on 3 February at SNM. However, according to Selva's own notes in the biography of the composer, she only played three numbers of the suite at the concert on 3 February, and there is no mention of the previous concert. The pieces were, 'Ver le Mas en Fête', 'Sur l'Étang, le soir' and 'Le Jour de la Foire'.

⁵⁹ Chimènes, p. 102.

⁶⁰ Brody, *The piano works of Déodat de Séverac*, p. 148.

⁶¹ Selva, *Déodat de Séverac*, p. 39.

⁶² Selva, *Déodat de Séverac*, p. 39: 'Cette œuvre, malgré quelques reflets fugitifs et purement extérieures de l'écriture debussyste, (ceci d'ailleurs uniquement dans la première pièce en date du recueil : *Sur l'Étang*), est vraiment neuve de sentiment et d'éléments expressifs musicaux. [...] Déodat peut se rassurer, il est loin de n'être qu'un *reflet*.'

⁶³ The animosity between d'Indy and Debussy as well as the animosity between the Schola Cantorum and the Conservatoire are well documented. However, unlike many scholists, Déodat did not become partisan. Brody (*The piano works of Déodat de Séverac*, p. 38) did not believe that both composers had met, but the more recent scholarly work by Waters (pp. 32-33) disproves this. Séverac's own admiration for Debussy is attested in an excerpt from a letter to René de Castéra in 1902, quoted by Selva on p. 38: 'Car en art, une seule chose est nécessaire : *trouver*... Or est-il possible de trouver encore après *Pelléas*?' [Because in art, one thing only is necessary: to discover... But is it still possible to discover any more after *Pelléas*?]

Selva, they originated with Séverac' and in the case of *En Languedoc*, as the first edition did not have that annotation, she concludes, that Selva is only responsible for the very minor alterations in the later 1919 version.⁶⁴

In the first place, I do not agree with the assertion that the changes between the first edition and the later reprint are only minor. Of course, in terms of notes on the page, the work is entirely the same. However, the amount of musical indications, by way of either written expressions, articulation and dynamic markings as well as pedalling instructions is much superior in the 1919 score. Taking as an example the opening page of 'Vers le Mas en fête', in the span of only 13 bars, Selva makes the following changes:

b. 1 *pp* instead of *p*

b. 2 addition of the indication *cristallin* [crystalline]; staccato markings on the last two crotchets

b. 3 new dynamic marking *mf* and tenuto markings on the first quaver and crotchet

b. 4 addition of *p* and *ombre* [shadow]

b. 6 metronome marking changed from 200 to 208; *très confus mais sans sécheresse* [very confused but without dryness]

b. 9 *f* instead of *mf*

But of course, this does not answer the question whether it was Séverac alone who was responsible for the previous 1905 annotations. To further analyse this, the manuscript of 'Vers le Mas' has been compared with the 1905 and 1919 editions. The manuscript of this first movement of the suite is available for online inspection at the Centre de Documentació de l'Orfeó Català,⁶⁵ and I thank Marta Grassot Radresa from

⁶⁴ In fn. 22 on p. 152.

⁶⁵ 'Vers le Mas en fête'/Déodat de Séverac

<<https://mdc.csuc.cat/digital/collection/MMautors/id/4758/rec/2>> [accessed 27 February 2022.]

the CEDOC for her assistance in this matter. The score was donated by Selva herself to the museum, at an unknown date.

Contrasting these three scores, I come to a different conclusion from Brody's. I think that it is more likely than not that already at this point, in 1905, Selva was proof-reading and adding the performance indications of *En Languedoc*. It was, however, not until much later, in 1919, during the reissue of *Cerdaña* (discussed in this chapter below), which, based on the plate numbers precedes that of *En Languedoc*, that he was willing to acknowledge this collaboration and pay due tribute to his loyal friend by having her name appear on the scores.⁶⁶

In the first place when examining the manuscript, it is clear that there are different indications written with different pen/pencil markings hinting strongly at the possibility of a different pair of hands proofing the manuscript. A very strong case to attribute these to hands other than Séverac's is found in b. 105, Fig. 7.1.



Fig. 7.1 – Séverac, *En Languedoc*, 'Vers le Mas en fête', manuscript, bb. 105-108
Reproduction by permission of the Centre de Documentació de l'Orfeó Català (CEDOC)

As can be seen in b. 105, there is a natural mark in pencil before the A. On top of it, there is a question mark, also written in pencil. The 1905 edition incorporates the natural sign. This is therefore unequivocally an addition that was made before the first edition. The fact that it is preceded by a question mark strongly indicates that it was not done by Séverac, as the composer would have no reason to doubt his own melodic line.

⁶⁶ See below.

Furthermore, there are many musical and pedal indications in the 1905 edition that are absent from the manuscript itself, suggesting a pianistic revision process before the score was first published. There are no metronome markings at all in the manuscript either, but they abound in the 1905 score as there are several tempo changes in the piece.

It is not in doubt that a composer can have a clear sense of tempo structure for their own work. However, the fact that these were not in the manuscript and added later, together with other indications that will be detailed below, suggests to me that there was a practical approach to choosing the correct metronome indications for the tempi, and that these may have been decided by a pianist, not by the composer. For example, there are some 'cédez' indications that do not feature in the manuscript that were added to the 1905 first edition and maintained in Selva's 1919 revision. She consistently plays them in her recording a decade later as well. These are in b. 56, and b. 215. Further, the 1905 score includes several pedallings, notably with the use of the una corda pedal that are also absent from the manuscript, bb. 1, 8, 9, 63, 66, 98, 195, 213, and 233. Of these, only the indication in b. 98 was deleted in the 1919 reissue showing great consistency between the 1905 and the later 1919 score that is credited to Selva.

However, the manuscript itself also has musical indications marked in pencil that were incorporated in the 1905 edition. Apart from pedal indications, these are mostly dynamic and agogic indications. The several ritardandi that were added also suggest to me a willingness by a pianist to give a layout of a written rubato that had not been conceived by the composer himself. For example, in bb. 52, 92, 209, 208.



Fig. 7.2 – Séverac, *En Languedoc*, 'Vers le Mas en fête', manuscript, bb. 192-197
Reproduction by permission of the Centre de Documentació de l'Orfeó Català (CEDOC)

Fig. 7.2 shows bb. 192-197. In b. 192 the pedal marking written in light pencil is noticeable as is the 'et rit' that precedes the change in section, in b. 193. This is also an instance where the metronome marking is absent in the manuscript but is present in the 1905 edition. Although less clear, it also appears that some of the indications in the manuscript may be from a different pen and hand. The 'Moins animé' has a thickness in the lines that cannot be seen in the indications of 'loco' and 'très doux'.



Fig. 7.3 – Séverac, *En Languedoc*, 'Vers le mas en fête', manuscript, bb. 48-55

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Another illustrative example arises in the passage detailed in Fig. 7.3. Bar 49 shows a *decrescendo* pencil marking that was incorporated in 1905, as is the *rit* in b. 52. The 'expressif' in b. 53 is in a different ink from the 'même mouvement', which ended up changed to 'À l'aise' from the 1905 score onwards, evidencing that the manuscript never did contain all the elements that were incorporated into the published version. On the other hand, the *f* in b. 53 is a later addition, in pencil, most likely by Selva as this only appeared in the 1919 score onwards.

En Languedoc was first published by the Édition Mutuelle, at the time, under the direction of René de Castéra, Selva's and Séverac's close mutual friend. Selva was an avid collaborator in Réne's work from the beginning, proof-reading and editing many of the works they published. A clear, and contemporaneous example is the work undertaken by her for Isaac Albéniz in *Iberia*, as detailed in Chapter 6, as well as the

contemporaneous piano album *Album pour enfants* (1905) from the same Édition Mutuelle. In this collection of piano pieces for children, Séverac as well as Albéniz and Selva contributed as composers, and it was Selva who edited and added fingerings to all the pieces in the book. In all these cases Selva's work was always 'hidden' and not publicly acknowledged.

It is impossible to pin the attribution to Selva conclusively in what concerns the 1905 edition. However, I think the circumstantial evidence is strong enough at the very least to cast a doubt on to Séverac's exclusive authorship of them, as suggested by Brody, and given the working relationship between the parties involved, as well as Selva's role within the Édition Mutuelle, I think that it is likely that most of them must originate with her.

En Languedoc also exemplifies clearly Selva's advocacy for Séverac's work. She included it in her London tournée in 1907, much to Séverac's surprise and gratitude. In correspondence with the pianist, Séverac wrote:

Il faut que Blanche pousse bien loin l'esprit de camaraderie pour exporter « En Languedoc » dans la Grande-Bretagne !...La Taupe⁶⁷ en est profondément touchée, mais eux... qu'ont-ils dû penser ! Il paraît que l'ail ne se vend là-bas que chez les Pharmacopes et au gramme tout au plus. Enfin ! Mille bons souvenirs reconnaissants.⁶⁸

[Blanche has had to really stretch the spirit of camaraderie to export *En Languedoc* to Great Britain! The Mole is deeply touched, but they... what will they think! It seems that garlic is only sold over there at the apothecaries and by the gram. Oh well! A thousand grateful greetings.

Finally, one of the few pieces Selva left recorded is 'Vers le Mas en fête'.⁶⁹ An analysis of her recordings is provided in Chapter 4.

⁶⁷ 'La Taupe' in the original French was Selva's nickname for her friend in reference, presumably although not directly explained, to his dark hair and physical complexion. Selva, *Déodat de Séverac*, p. 38 notes: '*La Taupe et les petits Grillon* – Déodat et ses amis Carlos et René de Castéra, – comme les appelle leur amie Bl. Selva.' [The Mole and his little Crickets – Déodat and his friends Carlos and René de Castéra – as their friend Blanche Selva calls them.]

⁶⁸ Selva, *Déodat de Séverac*, p. 39. Postcard from Séverac to Selva, 18 December 1907.

⁶⁹ Columbia D15140/WLX93, 794. Recorded in Paris, 11 January 1929.

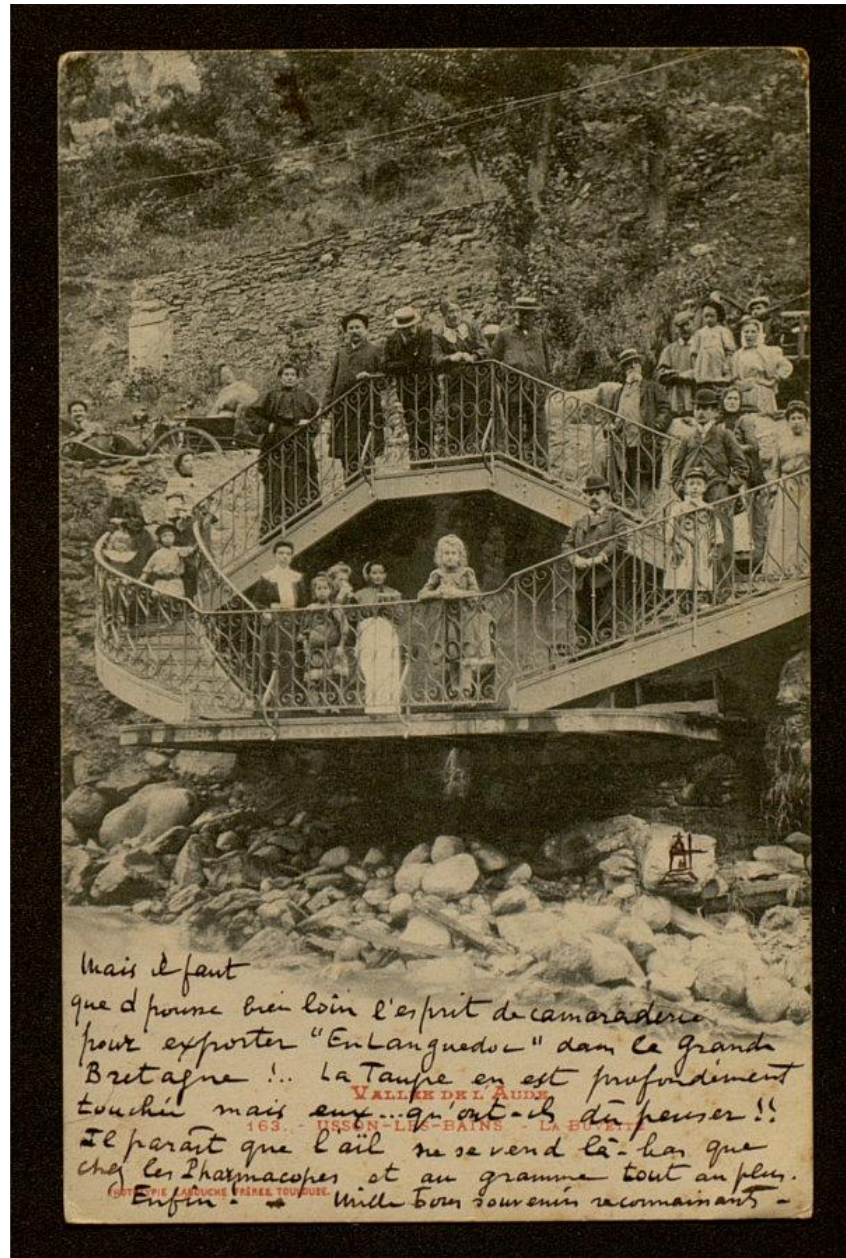


Fig. 7.4 – Postcard from Séverac to Blanche Selva 18 December 1907

Reproduction courtesy of Centre de Documentació de l'Orfeó Català (CEDOC)⁷⁰

Baigneuses au Soleil (Souvenir de Banyuls-sur-Mer)

Composed in 1908, this piece was published by Rouart, Lerolle & Cie in 1909, Plate 11283. Following the previous analysis, this thesis supports the idea that, although not

⁷⁰ Postcard found within the Fonds Lluís Millet i Pagès, wrongly attributed to the Catalan composer instead of Séverac. CEDOC C10.01.03.01.

acknowledged in the score, all the abundant pianistic indications (pedal markings, fingerings and expressive annotations) are in fact by Selva.

Blanche Selva premièred this piece both in Brussels and Paris, on 30 March and 24 April respectively. As Selva explains in her biography, Séverac wrote this work in the same period in which he began to compose the individual numbers of his following suite, *Cerdaña*. In fact, originally, *Baigneuses* was intended to form part of the suite, but Séverac thought, jokingly, that 'il valait mieux laisser ces dames seules et nues'.⁷¹ [It would be better to leave the women alone and naked.]

This piece featured prominently in Selva's programmes and its inherent demand for a sophisticated palette of pianistic colours allowed her to display her range to the full. Indeed, the critic Léon Vallas (1879-1956), who had previously criticised Selva for an excess of *chiaroscuro*,⁷² wrote in these terms at the Salut Public on 4 March 1922:

On peut en admirer sans réserve aujourd'hui le merveilleux résultat. Tout le monde a toujours apprécié sa profonde intelligence et l'intensité expressive de son interprétation, mais il faut l'avoir entendue jouer dimanche les Baigneuses au soleil de Déodat de Séverac pour se rendre un compte exact de ses étonnantes qualités de peintre ou de coloriste ainsi que de la beauté sonore de son jeu velouté.⁷³

[One can admire today without reservations the marvellous result. Everyone has always appreciated her deep intelligence and the expressive intensity of her interpretation, but one has to have heard her play Déodat de Séverac's *Baigneuses au soleil* on Sunday to realise exactly her astonishing qualities as a painter or colourist as well as the beauty of sound of her velvety touch.]

⁷¹ Selva, *Déodat de Séverac*, p. 55, quoting from a letter from Séverac to Carlos de Castéra from 1910.

⁷² Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, pp. 118-119: 'En perfectionnant encore son art du toucher, M^{lle} Selva a peu à peu transformé une qualité personnelle en un indéniable excès. Les oppositions d'ombre et de lumière sont aujourd'hui trop accentuées. Les lignes mélodiques essentielles d'une œuvre son mises par elle en plein jour, dans une clarté parfois même un peu crue, mais les dessins accessoires, et en général l'accompagnement, sont estompés, restent imprécis, presque indiscernable. Un semblable clair-obscur me semble fâcheux.' [...] [In continuing to perfect the art of her touch, Mlle Selva has little by little transformed a personal quality into an undeniable excess. The contrasts of shadow and light are today too accentuated. The essential melodic lines of a work are put by her in broad daylight, with a clarity which is even a little too raw, but the accessory patterns, in general the accompaniment, are blurred, remain imprecise, almost indiscernible. I find such chiaroscuro annoying.]

⁷³ Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 119.

An analysis of Selva's interpretation of this piece based on her recording is also provided in Chapter 4.

In this piece Séverac did not acknowledge Selva's input for the pianistic details. However, a clean copy found in the BnF Gallica archive shows copious amounts of pianistic details in pencil mark in a hand other than Séverac's (Fig. 7.5) showing Selva's handwriting. Her annotations are taken on board wholesale throughout the piece. In this first page clear hallmarks of her input are evidenced by the abundant and detailed use of *una corda* pedalling for colouristic effect, the addition of precise metronome markings in the pieces, and other musical indications that try to ignite the pianist's imagination such as '*doux mais cristallin*' [sweet but crystalline].

Baigneuses au soleil

Souvenir de Banyuls

Avec Sent et un peu manière — *cont.*

Très légèrement *(bien articulé)*

pp *résistant* *mf* *pp*

Sourdine seule *Ped* *selon le sonner* *Sourdine seule*

(104 = 1) *my mas cristallin*

mf *f* *p* *Ped* *long*

un peu cédé *bien articulé* *molto* *légère*

a peine *pp* *p* *rit* *pp*

Sourdine seule *Ped* *Pu* *légère* *noyer*

Sans sourdine *légère*

m.g. *mf* *p* *cresc.* *poco* *à*

Ped *légère* *noyer* *légère*

Sans sourdine *pes à chaque temps*

Fig. 7.5 – Séverac, *Baigneuses au soleil*, first page clean copy

Source gallica.bnf.fr/ Bibliothèque nationale de France

à Alfred CORTOT

Baigneuses au soleil

(SOUVENIR DE BANYULS SUR MER)

DÉODAT DE SÉVERAC

Assez Lent et un peu manière
très légèrement (bien articulé)

PIANO

pp hésitant
sourdine seule

court
mf
enlevez la sourdine

pp
sourdine seule

(104.) *doux mais cristallin*
mf
enlevez la sourdine

p
sourdine

f
sourdine

p
sourdine

un peu cédé court.
pp
sourdine seule

bien articulé
p
sans sourdine

long.
rit
léger
pp
sourdine

mf
p
sans sourdine

resc. poco a poco
à chaque temps

EDITIONS SALABERT S.A.
22, rue Chauchat, Paris

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R. L. 11.283 & C^{ie}

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Fig. 7.6 – Séverac, *Baigneuses au soleil*, first edition, 1909

Another interesting piece of documentary evidence elucidates Selva's understanding of this work, both in terms of her own interpretation and what she transmitted to her pupils,⁷⁴ but most importantly for this chapter, some of Séverac's own preferences in its interpretation. This is the unfinished letter from Blanche Selva to her pupil Andrée Vidal dated 23 May 1939.⁷⁵ The letter is a commentary on Vidal's performance previously on Radio Nice, when, amongst other pieces, she played *Baigneuses au soleil*.

Selva's meticulous analysis of different movements and actions are described in Chapter 3, which is centred around her treatise. But in her letter, these are often coated with a highly pictorial language that is very effective in transmitting the essence of the music and its embodied meaning. For instance, by deploying water-related images and metaphors.

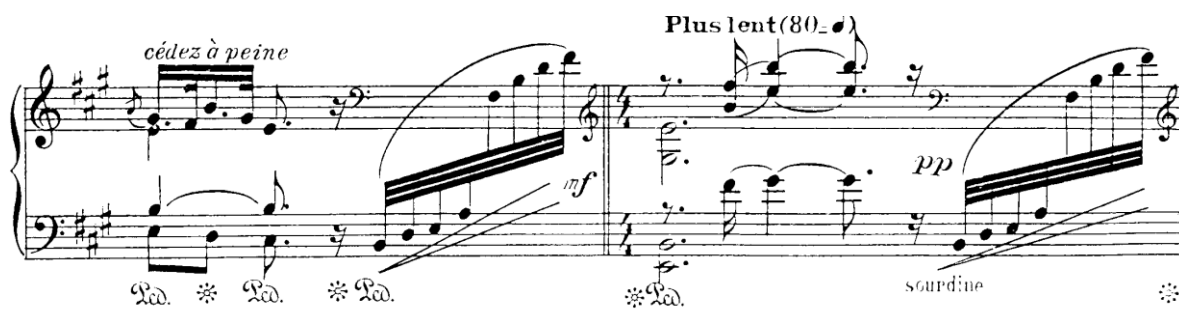


Fig. 7.7 – Séverac, *Baigneuses au soleil*, bb. 21-22

To play these demisemiquaver figurations (Fig. 7.7) in these two bars and in the following two, Selva advises: More 'tourbillon d'eau' [whirlwind of water] for the gurgling in every bar.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Apart from teaching Séverac's music to her students generally, in 1921 she dedicated her sixth *Cours Supérieur d'Interprétation* at the École Normale de Musique to the study of this composer. Guy Selva, *Blanche Selva-Déodat de Séverac entre musique et amitié*, p. 34.

⁷⁵ Other parts of this letter were discussed in Chapter 4.

⁷⁶ 'Plus « tourbillon d'eaux » les garouillades en t [sic] de toutes ces mesures-là.'

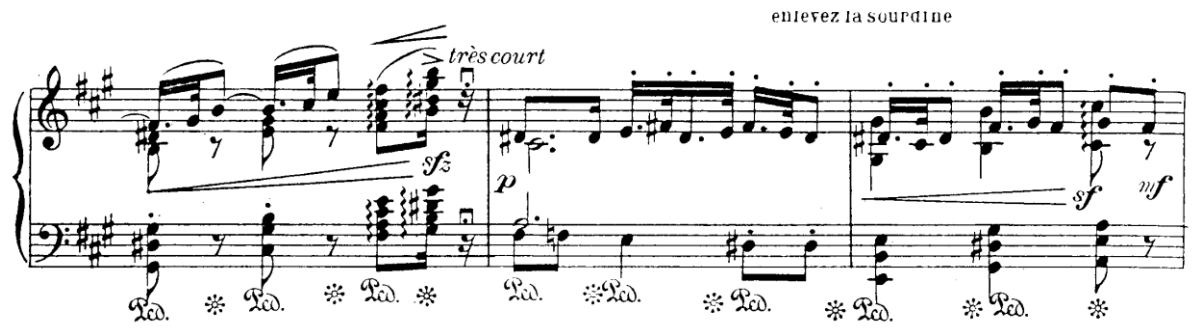


Fig. 7.8 – Séverac, *Baigneuses au soleil*, bb. 27-29

In another example, Selva's instruction to play the final chords of bar 27 (Fig. 7.8) reads: 'Barbote d'avantage dans l'eau pour les arpègements' [Splash around more in the water to play the arpeggiated chords]. Further, Selva expands on how these chords are to be played and shares that Séverac was particularly fond of her way of playing this.

Moi j'avais instinctivement joué ça d'une manière que Séverac aimait particulièrement mais qu'il n'a jamais réussi à noter graphiquement quelque chose comme ça. Mais moi, j'aimais surtout l'impression de barboter dans l'eau durant les arpèges et de rester avec les mains élevées dans l'espace après le si aigu que je ne tenais pas du tout, je terminais en un claquement sec de l'eau mon précédent barbotage.

[I have instinctively played this in a way that Séverac particularly loved, but one that he never managed to graphically annotate successfully like that. But for me, I especially loved the impression of splashing water during these arpeggios and to keep the hands elevated in the space after the high b, which I did not hold long at all, I finished my previous splashing with a dry snap of water.]

This passage is very revealing for several reasons. First, it corroborates that there are elements discussed between the composer and his first interpreter that are elusive to the written page, and usually get forever lost, unless as here, when we have a rare glimpse into these conversations. It also illustrates Selva's own musical instincts and the ability that she had to capture the essence of the pieces she worked on. Moreover, despite her ability to synthesise musical features and movements into all the constituent parts discussed in Chapter 3, Selva does not always resort to this granular approach to teaching. She also uses vivid and colouristic metaphors to convey the necessary musical and technical meaning.

In my opinion, the passage also highlights one of her most distinct interpretative features: her way of being ‘at one with the music’, something which was praised in so many of her concert reviews, is explained here in its purest form. Rather than merely playing two arpeggiated chords, and thinking about the timing of the spread, Selva visualises and embodies their musical meaning, as an act of ‘splashing water’, something which is both in perfect alignment with the musical narrative as well as the actual physical and pianistic gesture that gives the passage its characteristic sound. It is not difficult to communicate music effectively when one believes in it and embodies it in the way that Selva appears to have done.

Finally, it is also highly illustrative of the level of detail and introspection of someone who is not only able to become the music, that concept that emanates from her treatise, *le corps musicalisé* that was discussed in Chapter 3, but is also willing and able to transmit it to others through her words.

Her musical and dramatic characterisation are also in evidence in her next phrase:

‘Après ça, je repartais comme si de rien n’était dès le 1^{er} temps suivant.’ [After this, I set off again as if nothing had happened from the following first beat.]



Fig. 7.9 – Séverac, *Baigneuses au soleil*, bb. 33-34

Another good example is the advice she gives to play the sforzando going into *ff* (b. 33, Fig. 7.9), Selva does not in this case ask her student to play a simple *appuyé* but a ‘bon plongeon appuyé,’ that is a good dive into the *appuyé* attack,⁷⁷ once again uniting the extramusical elements linked to the idea of water to enhance the embodied musical

⁷⁷ The different attacks in Selva’s technical framework are explained in Chapter 3. Broadly speaking, the ‘*appuyé*’ touch is produced through a greater arm support and is reserved for the accented parts of a musical phrase.

meaning of the passage. Further, the way she explains to Vidal how she carried on through the line develops the idea further: 'j'en ressortais brassant l'eau en draperies durant les volutes de toute cette ligne.' [I came out stirring the water in draperies during the swirls of all this line.]



Fig. 7.10 – Séverac, *Baigneuses au soleil*, bb. 73-74

Some other interesting observations stem from her description of bars 73-74, represented in Fig. 7.10:

Et j'avais des plongées et des sorties de plongées nageantes page 7 2^{ème} ligne, qui m'amusaient beaucoup. Au 3^{ème} temps, loin d'abaisser les bras pour le cresc. Je faisais le contraire : j'entrais davantage dans le clavier, mais en écartant peu à peu les bras, complètement durant le 2^{ème} temps. Au mi du 3^{ème} j'avais les coudes à peu près à hauteur d'épaule, et je revenais doucement durant le 3^{ème} temps, à une position normale pour le 1^{er} temps suivant. Ça faisait un effet cocasse de sonorité que Séverac aimait beaucoup, et je me suis resservie dans les tremblements subitement doux qu'il y a dans Ménétriers et glaneuses.⁷⁸

[And I had dives and exits from swimmers' dives on page 7 2nd line [bb. 73-74] which amused me a lot. On the 3rd beat of the 2nd line, far from lowering the arm for the crescendo, I did the opposite: I entered more into the piano, but spreading the arms little by little, completely during the 2nd beat. On the E of the 3rd beat, I had the elbows more or less at the height of the shoulders, and I returned gently through the 3rd beat to a normal position for the following first beat. This created a comical effect of sonority that Séverac loved a lot, and I deployed this again in the subito piano tremors that there are in *Ménétriers et glaneuses*.]

In the first place, the idea of fun, or amusement is highly interesting, because it is not that often that musicians express their joy at playing or the idea of having fun whilst playing. However, Selva is receptive to enjoying and finding joy not just in the music

⁷⁸ This is the third piece of the suite *Cerdaña*, to be discussed later.

but in the movements themselves. The description of the arm gesture accompanying the extended arpeggio is quite a natural movement and one that I had found on my own when working on this piece, no doubt, however, under the influence on my playing of studying Selva's treatise.

The combination of separating the arm from the body with a high elbow and leaning into the piano makes playing the eb''' easier, as it is at a considerable distance from the centre of the piano, particularly for me, as I have narrow shoulders. By following the arpeggio with the arm and obtaining maximum height at the eb'', which is played with finger 4, the note is supported and reinforced by its alignment with the arm. It is possible to create a solid *mf* effortlessly and securely, that is with minimal risk of missing the note.

What is also interesting is that she remarks that this gesture had the effect of creating a comical sound, or 'comical effect of sonority'. I postulate that there is nothing intrinsic in this way of approaching the arpeggio that makes the sound itself any more comical. However, what I believe this passage shows is that at the time, producing such ample gestures, using the arm in such an obvious way, was so unusual, that it created a comical effect for an attentive viewer.

The musical score for Séverac, *Baigneuses au soleil*, measures 90-95, is presented in two systems. The top system shows measures 90-92, and the bottom system shows measures 93-95. The piano part is characterized by arpeggiated chords, with markings for *cresc. molto*, *ff*, *dimin.*, *très arpergé*, *très doux*, *p*, *dimin.*, *pp*, and *sourdine*. The vocal line includes markings for *cresc. molto*, *ff*, *dimin.*, and *très doux*. The score is in G major and 2/4 time.

Fig. 7.11 – Séverac, *Baigneuses au soleil*, bb. 90-95

The final passage that has a strong embodied meaning refers to bars 92-95, shown in Fig. 7.11 i.e., beginning on *fff*. Selva writes:

Même page, 4^{ème} ligne m.g. (tandis que la main dr. continue son clapotement, bien, son balancement maximum de canard enragé) mais cependant en observant un magnifique diminuendo allant de *fff* à *ppp*, les H [sic] de m.g. se fond en diminuant comme ceci : toujours l'impression de soulever l'eau durant qu'on réalise l'arpège et rester en l'air la main émergente de l'eau...

[...] the left hand (whilst the right hand continues its swashing, well, its maximum rocking of an enraged duck) but however observing a magnificent diminuendo from *fff* to *ppp*, the quavers in the left hand are made to diminish like this: always the impression of lifting water during the realisation of the arpeggio and keeping the hand in the air when it emerges from the water...]

This passage is revealing, because, although the prehensile touch at the piano, the grasping motions, appear less prominently in her treatise, it is clear that they formed part of her pianistic tools, which she not only kept to herself, but taught. At least, this is the understanding I make of the embodied image that is 'lifting water', which involves a grasping movement closing the fingers towards the palm of the hand. Stopping in between each arpeggiated chord ('keeping the hand in the air after it emerges from the water'), ensures that the chords are distinct and detached from one another. Finally, the humorous note regarding the 'enraged duck' sound, with a direct reference to a rotatory movement (*balancement*, rocking or swaying) is also very poignant. Of course, it is impossible to know whether this is just Selva's reference, or a joke shared with Séverac, but it adds flavour to our understanding of a piece she knew very well.

Most of the other notes to Vidal stress the importance of following the details that are marked in the score accurately. In fact, the only reference where she is adding something that the score does not reflect, is with regard to b. 58 (Fig. 7.12), where she tells her that it is possible to *céder* a little.⁷⁹ The strong consistency between her interpretation and the annotated text further supports the idea that all indications are

⁷⁹ 'pag.5, 4^{ème} ligne : en diminuendo continuel la montée en octave et ici on peut un peu céder durant la dernière mesure de cette ligne.'

hers, as the contemporary score of *Cerdaña* published some years later unequivocally shows. A consistency that is also reflected in her recorded interpretation, which includes the *céder* in b. 58 that she suggests to Vidal.



Fig. 7.12 – Séverac, *Baigneuses au soleil*, bb. 56-58

Suite Cerdaña : Souvenir d'un Pèlerinage à Font-Romeu, Suite des Etudes Pittoresques
(1908-1911)

I En tartane : l'arrivée en Cerdagne

II Les fêtes : souvenir de Puigcerda

III Ménétriers et glaneuses : souvenir d'un pèlerinage à Font-Romeu

IV Les muletiers devant le Christ de Llivia

V Le retour des muletiers

Selva herself explains that this Suite was composed in different stages.⁸⁰ Séverac first wrote 'Les fêtes' in 1908, adding 'En tartane', 'Ménétriers' and 'Le retour' in 1910. Accordingly, these pieces were also premiered at different times. Selva first premiered 'Les fêtes' in Brussels on 30 March 1909, and in Paris on 24 April 1909, whilst 'En tartane', 'Ménétriers' and 'Le retour' were first performed by Selva in Brussels at the Libre Esthétique on 11 April 1911, and by Ricardo Viñes in Paris later that month (29

⁸⁰ Selva, *Déodat de Séverac*, p. 56, and also Brody, *The piano works of Déodat de Séverac*, p. 212.

April 1911). This is one of the instances where both performers gave their première in a different locality in tandem. In fact, with regard to the Parisian première at the Nationale, Déodat wrote as follows to René de Castéra

Je serai obligé de laisser jouer en première audition à la Nationale *Cerdaña* par Vines qui s'est plaint de ne m'avoir encore jamais « joué » en première audition à la N[ationale]. Ce qui est vrai. Dis-le à Blanche. Cela n'empêchera pas qu'elle le « joue » ensuite.⁸¹

[I will be obliged to let Vi[ñ]es play the première of *Cerdaña* at the Nationale as he complains of never having 'played' me in a première at the N. which is true. Tell Blanche. This will not prevent her from 'playing' it thereafter.]

As mentioned in the previous section, it appears that Séverac had intended to include *Baigneuses* as part of this suite but decided against it. Further, it was Selva who advised him that the Suite needed a greater moment of *repos*, an idea that germinated with the composition of 'Les muletiers devant le Christ de Llivia'. In an undated letter from Séverac to Selva,⁸²

Amie Blanche, vous avez eu bien raison de me faire dire par le cher René qu'il manquait « en repos » entre « Ménétriers et Glaneuses » et « Le Muletiers » de « Cerdaña » Je viens de faire quelque chose qui, tout en étant dans l'esprit général de « Cerdaña », y apportera, je crois, un sentiment nouveau ; c'est une sorte de cantilène purement expressive : « Le vieux Christ de Llivia ». Vous souvient-il de cet admirable Christ espagnol que vous avez dû voir jadis ? C'est une des œuvres de réalisme espagnol les plus émouvantes que je connaisse. Il est, pour moi, aussi beau que celui de Perpignan mais moins cruellement réaliste. J'ai essayé de dire cela dans la petite pièce de piano que j'envoie à René. Vous me direz si j'ai réussi.

[Friend Blanche, you were right to have the dear René [de Castéra] tell me that a moment of 'respite' was missing between 'Ménétriers et Glaneuses' and 'Les Muletiers' of *Cerdaña*. I have been doing something here, which, while totally within the general spirit of *Cerdaña* will bring, I think, a new feeling; it is a kind of purely expressive cantilena: 'Le vieux Christ de Llivia'. Does it remind you of that admirable Spanish Christ that you must have seen before? It is one of the most moving works of Spanish realism that I know. It is, for me, as beautiful as the one in Perpignan but less cruelly realistic. I have tried to say that in this little piano piece that I have sent to René. You will let me know if I was successful.]

⁸¹ Letter from Déodat de Séverac to René de Castera, December 1910. Copy at the AABS.

⁸² Selva, *Déodat de Séverac*, pp. 56-57.

Testimony of Selva's appreciation for this particular piece can be found in the fact that she recorded it in her first recording session for Columbia in Paris in 1929.⁸³

Cerdaña was first published by the Édition Mutuelle in 1911 and reprinted by Rouart, Lerolle & Cie in 1919, plate number 11028. The reissue of this work in 1919, the same year as *En Languedoc* was also being reprinted by Rouart, Lerolle, carries the following excerpt from a letter from Séverac to Selva: '*Avec indications des nuances et des doigtés par Blanche Selva*' [with expression markings and fingerings by Blanche Selva]. Blanche Selva cites the letter from Séverac to her in which he expresses his intention as follows:

Je vous envoie le passage retouché de *Cerdanya* [sic] et il me semble que maintenant vous trouverez que ça va mieux, car j'ai essayé de faire cette retouche dans le sens indiqué per usted... Mais comme c'est gauche de raccomoder une vielle chose !! Dès que vous l'aurez lu, si vous approuvez, vous seriez bien aimable de faire suivre l'exemplaire de *Cerdaña* [sic] à René, puisqu'il en est pressé... mais j'aimerais bien que, sur la nouvelle édition, on lise cette phrase : « Avec indications de nuances et des doigtés par Blanche Selva »... Cela me serait très agréable ! Mille affections en LA majeur et à bientôt, à très tôt, j'espère et nous espérons.⁸⁴

[I send you the retouched passage from *Cerdanya* [sic] and it appears to me that now you will find that it works better, as I have tried to do this retouching in the manner indicated *per usted* [by you in Catalan, in reference to Selva's heritage] ... But how difficult it is to mend an old thing!! After you have read it, if you approve, would you be so kind as to forward the copy of *Cerdaña* to René, as he is in a hurry... but I would really like that, in the new edition, one can read this phrase: 'With expression markings and fingerings by Blanche Selva'... This would please me greatly! Many affections in A major and see you soon, very soon, I hope, and we hope.]

This letter is not only revealing in that it expresses the intention, and emotion with which Séverac wants to pay homage to his friend and collaborator with a mention in the score, but also because it allows us a further insight into the creative compositional partnership between them. Not only had Selva advised him to add an extra, calmer piece in the suite, but Séverac's letter also alludes to a passage having been revised at her instruction. Selva's own footnote on p. 81 clarifies that the correction undertaken

⁸³ Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 180. The first session of recordings took place between 5 and 11 January 1929.

⁸⁴ Selva, *Déodat de Séverac*, pp. 81-82.

by her also belongs to this piece, 'Les Muletiers', before its definitive publication by Rouart-Lerolle, but as she does not provide exact bar numbers it is not known what passage she refers to.

The closing phrase, sending 'affections in A major', the key that has been considered to represent sincere and pure love,⁸⁵ also gives us an indication of the level of intimacy and friendship that the artists had with one another, an element that has not been reflected in most of the recent scholarship on Séverac, with the exception of Isafo.

Further, analysing the documentary evidence around this piece also allows us to understand the influence that a performer, in this case Selva, can have in the creative decision-making process, as well as the moving effect that a trusted and devoted performer can have on a composer.

In May 1918, during World War I, as part of the many charitable concerts given by Selva during that time, she performed in Perpignan. Séverac was mobilised there and working in the hospital of the nearby locality of Prades. He was able to attend the concert, where, amongst other pieces, Selva performed *Cerdaña*. Selva recounts it thus:

Après *Cerdaña*, le public et son interprète le forcent à monter sur l'estrade, recevoir les hommages d'enthousiasme de l'auditoire. Il y vient à la fin, mais son visage bouleversé et heureux est inondé de larmes quand il s'approche de Bl. Selva et l'embrasse au milieu des acclamations...⁸⁶

[After *Cerdaña*, the public and his interpreter forced him to get up on stage to receive the audience's enthusiastic tribute. He finally came, but his shaken and

⁸⁵ The affective properties of keys have been an interest of composers and scholars for centuries, taking particular prominence in the nineteenth century. One example is Schubart who lists the characteristics of all keys. Christian Schubart, *Ideen zu einer Ästhetik der Tonkunst*, (Vienna: J.V. Degen, 1806), p. 379. 'Charakteristikstück der Töne. [...] A dur. Dieser Ton enthält Erklärungen *unschuldiger Liebe, Zufriedenheit über seinen Zustand; Hoffnung des Wiedersehens beym Scheiden des Geliebten; jugendliche Heiterkeit; und Gottesvertrauen.*' [Characteristics of key signatures: A major. This key acknowledges *innocent love, contentment with one's situation; hope of a re-encounter at the departure of the beloved; juvenile merriment; and trust in God.*] Vincent d'Indy himself throughout his *Cours de composition*, (Paris: Durand, 1912) postulated several theories based on the interrelationships of different keys and this would have also been passed on to his students.

⁸⁶ Selva, *Déodat de Séverac*, p. 76.

happy face was covered in tears when he got close to Bl. Selva and kissed her amidst the acclamations.]

Séverac himself recounted his experience to Carlos de Castéra in a letter dated 2 July 1918, where he described Selva as a ‘Musical Titan’:

Je suis encore sous le charme de cette audition et absolument épaté !! Cette Blanche est devenue quelque chose comme un Titan de la Musique. Tout ce qu’elle a interprété, depuis les vieux jusqu’aux éphèbes, fut sublime de beauté, de compréhension et d’enthousiasme. Tu m’avais dit l’évolution merveilleuse subie par elle, mais je ne m’attendais pas à cette *révélation*. Elle m’a même révélé *Cerdaña*... Tu sais que je voulais retoucher ou raccourcir cette œuvre ; maintenant je ne veux rien retoucher ni raccourcir... tant qu’il y aura une Selva pour la jouer. Je tâcherai d’écrire de nouvelles choses.⁸⁷

[I am still under the spell of that performance and absolutely amazed!! This Blanche has become something like a Titan of Music. Everything that she interpreted, from the oldest to the most recent, was of a sublime beauty, comprehension and enthusiasm. You had told me of her marvellous development, but I was not prepared for this *revelation*. She has even revealed *Cerdaña* to me... You know that I wanted to revise it or shorten this piece; but now I don’t want to revise or shorten anything... as long as there is a Selva to play it. I will try to write some new pieces.]

This letter exemplifies the profound effect that a performer can have on a composer, going so far as to enable him to understand his own work, and contributing indirectly to the creative decision-making process, in this case, not to make further amendments or to shorten it. Sometimes, as has been shown earlier, the influence can be more direct, either by encouraging the composer to write a work or to make changes to it.

There are further clues in the available documentary evidence to allow us to infer the possible interpretative resources deployed by Selva to ‘reveal’ the work to the composer and which are available to the modern interpreter of Séverac’s *Cerdaña*.

⁸⁷ Selva, *Déodat de Séverac*, p. 77.

Séverac thought this suite and all his works had development sections that were too long, where the music gets diluted.⁸⁸ This is a fair analysis and is particularly noticeable in *Cerdaña*, due to its inherent length.⁸⁹

Although she only recorded one of the pieces of the suite, 'Les Muletiers', this recording exudes a forward momentum that seems very fitting to the piece and applicable to the entire suite.⁹⁰ Of course, the work was recorded more than ten years after the performance that captivated Séverac, and one needs to be careful about drawing firm conclusions. However, the piece was not recorded in the context of the entire *Cerdaña* suite, but as a stand-alone work. This supports the idea that carrying the line forward throughout was a deliberate choice befitting this particular piece, even in isolation, which would make adopting a similar strategy throughout the performance of the five movements in succession even more pressing.

Selva never goes ahead of the beat, or rushes, but she does not make any concessions to the line even at moments where the composer's notation would in itself invite the performer to take greater space. For example, in the transition to the F major section, detailed in Fig. 7.13.

⁸⁸ Selva, *Déodat de Séverac*, p. 76. In a letter from Séverac to René de Castéra dated 6 June 1918: 'Or dans « Cerdaña », comme dans toutes mes œuvres, il y a des développements trop longs, du délayage inutile.'

⁸⁹ Throughout her writings, Selva advocates for the role of the interpreter as an important agent in delivering the musical artwork, even offering practical examples where interpretative choices can assist in mitigating the shortcomings of a composition. One such example is found in her book *La Sonate*, p. 771 where she is discussing Schumann's violin Sonata in G minor op. 22. She finds that there is a 'disastrous' structural mistake, as the theme of the exposition is presented in its original key 25 bars before its real recapitulation. Very tellingly, she continues writing that this mistake needs to be 'palliated' by the interpreter as much as possible, 'continuing to give lots of movement to the pre-recapitulation, until the real entry of the theme'.

⁹⁰ A complete analysis of this recording is offered in Chapter 4.



Fig. 7.13 – Séverac, Cerdàña, 'Les Muletiers', bb. 71-76

Although Selva duly performs a ritardando in bar 74, it is really discreet and there is barely a touch of a *fermata*, leading almost directly to the next section. Her directionality and lack of characteristic pianistic rubato gives this performance a unique orchestral dimension.

It is suggested that this may have been her approach also in that concert in Perpignan where she 'revealed' the music to the composer himself; having previously thought that the work may need reshaping or shortening, he decided against it based on her performance.

Sous les Lauriers-roses ou Soir de Carnaval sur la Côte Catalane, Fantasia pour Piano
Dédiée à la Mémoire des Maîtres Aimés : E. Chabrier, I. Albéniz et Ch. Bordes (1919)

Composed in 1919, this work was published shortly thereafter by Séverac's new publishers, Rouart, Lerolle & Cie in 1920, with plate number R.L. 11080 & Cie. This work indicates on its first page, as did the 1919 reissues of *En Languedoc* and *Cerdàña*, that the annotations of nuances and fingerings are by Blanche Selva. This is unequivocally her input from the first stage of the work's life as a printed version but is something that is not mentioned in scholarly works, such as Waters'.

Selva herself premièred it first in Paris, 31 January 1920 at the Societé National and later in Brussels, at the Libre Esthétique on 3 May 1921.

The work originally had the title *Sous les Orangers* but was changed to its final version at Selva's own request, evidencing once again her power of persuasion and influence on the composer.⁹¹ In a letter to her, Séverac explained what he had intended to achieve with this work. He called it a 'suite in one movement' and it is a musical homage to three composers that Séverac admired greatly, Chabrier, Albéniz and Bordes. In this letter, their friendship and camaraderie are also evidenced through an in-joke from their time together at the Schola in d'Indy's composition class.

Ce morceau est une sorte de « Suite en une partie » (Quelle arithmétique !) Il avait beaucoup plu aux amis qui me l'ont entendu jouer (si j'ose dire) à Paris, mais vous plaira-t-il autant ? Je le souhaite de tout mon cœur. Voici ce que j'ai voulu faire, vous me direz si j'ai réussi : Parmi les musiciens que j'aime le mieux sont Chabrier et Albéniz. Cette petite œuvre leur est dédiée ; aussi ai-je essayé d'écrire de la musique qui, me semble-t-il, aurait dû leur convenir. C'est une fantaisie où il y a des turlututus de Banda militaire espagnole, des danses de carabiniers, une Sardana, un petit Scherzo à la Chabrier, des rythmes basques pour Ch. Bordes, des Coucous pour Daquin et un petite « fugue folichonne » – que je n'oserais pas dédier à Mlle Sixte Napolitaine !!! – et même un piano mécanique !⁹²

This piece is a type of 'Suite in one movement' (What arithmetic!) It pleased the friends who heard me play it (if I can say this) in Paris, but will you like it as much? I really hope so from all my heart. This is what I wanted to achieve, you will let me know if I managed: amongst the musicians that I have loved the most are Chabrier and Albéniz. This work is dedicated to them; I have also tried to write the music that, it seemed to me, would have suited them. It is a fantasy where there are the turlututus of a Spanish military band, dances of riflemen, a Sardana, a small Scherzo alla Chabrier, Basque rhythms for Ch.[arles] Bordes, cuckoos for Daquin and a little 'crazy fugue'- that I would not dare dedicate to Miss Neapolitan Sixth!!!- even a mechanical piano!

⁹¹ Selva, *Déodat de Séverac*, p. 80 fn. 1: 'Publiée sous le titre de *Sous les Lauriers-Roses*, selon le désir que nous en avons exprimé à Déodat.' [Published with the title '*Sous les Lauriers-Roses*', according to the wish we conveyed to Déodat.]

⁹² Selva, *Déodat de Séverac*, pp. 80-81.

Séverac's reference to Miss Neapolitan Sixth alludes to a nickname given to someone in their class, whose input to the lessons was almost entirely limited to pointing out this harmonic device in every class.⁹³

The piece bears many interesting indications by Selva that show a razor-sharp precision in her interpretative choices, shaping Séverac's work clearly. As is common with all the preceding works discussed above, one of the most notable and striking features is the detailed pedalling, including profuse damper pedal and sordino markings.

However, Selva is also unafraid of a truly secco and staccato sound and the first five and a half bars are to be played exclusively with the soft pedal. This includes keeping it depressed also during the *sfz* marking in bar 5, Fig. 7.14.

⁹³ Selva, *Déodat de Séverac*, p. 81 fn. 1: 'Surnom donné à une élève des Cours de Composition de d'Indy à la *Schola Cantorum*, parce que cette demoiselle avait coutume de dire, lors des analyses d'œuvres : « N'est-ce pas, M'sieu, c'est une sixte napolitaine ? » C'est à peu près l'unique phrase qu'on lui entendait dire, et elle la répétait presque à chaque cours.' [Nickname given to a student in Vincent d'Indy's Composition Class at the Schola Cantorum, because this lady had the habit of saying, as we were analysing the pieces: 'Is this not, Sir, a Neapolitan Sixth?' This is pretty much the only phrase that we ever heard her say, and she repeated it in almost every single lesson.]

Déodat de SÉVERAC

LA BANDA MUNICIPAL

Tempo di "Pazzo doble" (Pas redoublé) (♩ = 120)

PIANO

(Quelques rantanplans)

pp

Sourdine seule

p *sfz* (1)

mp *mf*

enlevez la Sourdine *Red.* *

Fig. 7.14 – Séverac, *Sous les lauriers roses*, bb. 1-8

Of course, this beginning is a homage to Albéniz, echoing the Spaniard's 'rataplán' beginning of 'Corpus Christi' (*Iberia, Cahier I*).

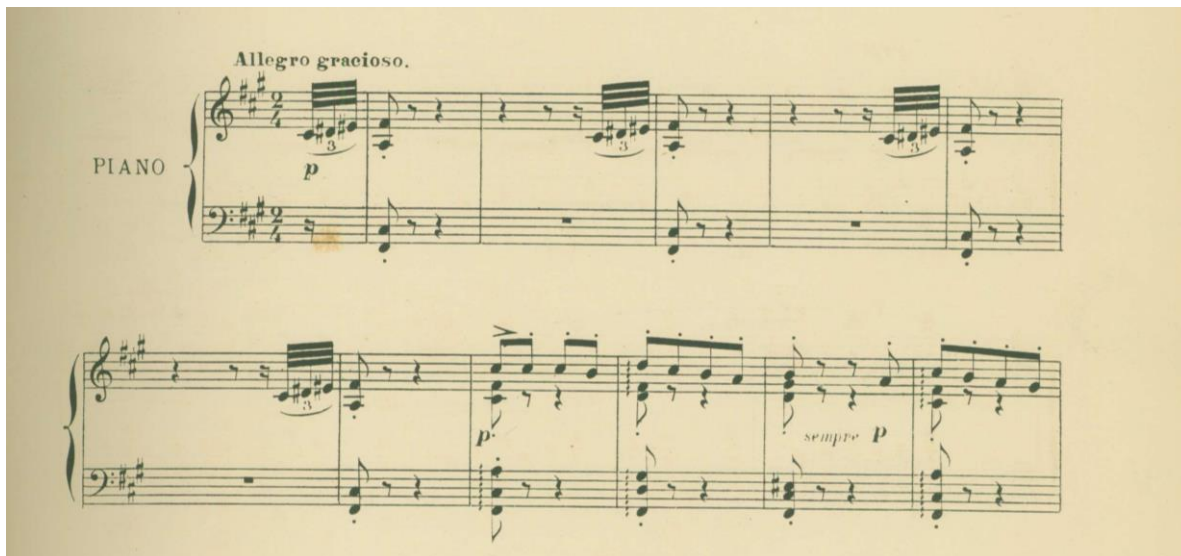


Fig. 7.15 – Albéniz, *Iberia*, 'Corpus Christi', bb. 1-11

A further example of her detailed and colouristic approach to the use of the soft pedal can also be seen in bb. 276-287 (Fig. 7.16), the section dedicated to Charles Bordes. At first, the soft pedal is used only in the *pp* or *p* sections (bb. 276, 277, 278) and released during the *cresc.*, *mf* or *f* sections. However, from b. 281 onward the *mf* is to be played whilst holding the soft pedal without the support of the damper pedal (with the clear intention to emphasise the staccati). Further, the following *f*, and *ff* chords are also to be played whilst still keeping the soft pedal down (*gardez la Sourdine*), and if the player were tempted to play with the three strings, in the following section, beginning with *ff* in the left hand, Selva reminds us *Sourdine toujours* [always with soft pedal], which does not have to be lifted until the final *ff* tension chord on in b. 289, shown in Fig. 7.17.

mf p legato p subito
Sourdine seule sans Sourd. Sourdine seule
lontano
crescendo mf con suono sfz sfz
allargando assai
Sourdine seule
breve a Tempo 8
f ff mf staccato ff
gardez la Sourdine Sourdine toujours
8
dimin. mp cresc.
sans Sourd. Sourd. Sourd. Sourd. Sourd. Sourd. Sourd. Sourd. Sourd. Sourd.

Fig. 7.16 – Séverac, *Sous les lauriers roses*, bb. 276-287

breve piacere serré
mf f ff laissez vibrer rit.
con suono al - lar - gando
Sourdine seule sans Sourdine

Fig. 7.17 – Séverac, *Sous les lauriers roses*, bb. 288-290

Another hallmark of Selva's indications is to be found in the detailed articulation markings, the execution of which becomes very clear from Selva's discussion of different touches examined in Chapter 3. As an example, the little extract comprising bb. 193-198, Fig. 7.18, provides a succinct but very clear example of this.

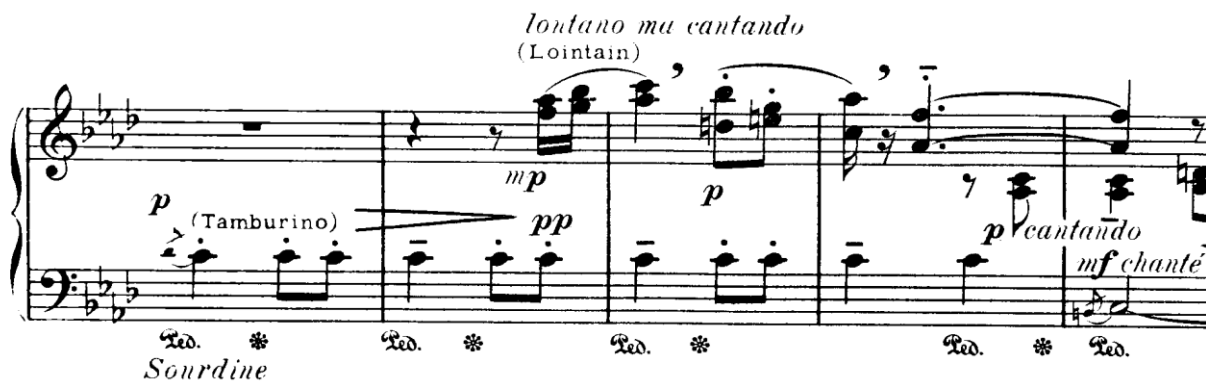


Fig. 7.18 – Séverac, *Sous les lauriers roses*, bb. 193-198

The small semiquaver figuration can be easily translated pianistically with the concept of the *neume* and an overall down-up gesture, where hand and pedal are coordinated to produce the effect of the comma. The following quavers, in portato articulation, to be played with an *éclatant* touch that is quite close to the keys and is propelled from the wrist. The arch is again a down-up, releasing into the semiquaver rest, which must be clearly observed before placing the following tied crotchet with its tenuto over the staccato mark with an *appuyé*.

Selva's clear preference for articulating commas is also reflected in another little section in b. 65, Fig. 7.19



Fig. 7.19 – Séverac, *Sous les lauriers roses*, bb. 64-65

This passage shows another instance where the release into a comma is matched by an absence of pedal, creating a distinct separation. Although it is always dangerous to make sweeping generalisations, it seems that contemporary pianists tend to be more reluctant to use true breaks in sound, often having pianistic gestures that match the intention of the commas indicated by a given composer, but where the pedal is still fully or partially depressed, with the result that the acoustic effect does not match the musical intention. Observing Selva's clear markings, all the punctuation falls naturally into place.

Finally, a good example of how Selva's own humour or personality shows through her indications in the score, in the following bars, bb. 66-68, Fig. 7.20:



Fig. 7.20 – Séverac, *Sous les lauriers roses*, bb. 64-68

Here, the melody of the 'Naïade de Banyuls' section is to be played indulgently and freely. To that effect, Selva provides the indication 'avec un bon mauvais goût!..' [with good bad taste!..], which together with her punctuation marks, reminds us of Selva's humour and sense of joy at the piano.

For me, this piece unequivocally shows that when reading Séverac's work one is penetrating Selva's own musical and interpretative sound-world. Her input enhances, through its clarity and detail, any pianist's understanding of the piece. This experience can also be magnified if Selva's teaching and methodology are known and put into practice.

‘La Vasque aux colombes’, from *En vacances II, Petites pièces romantiques de Moyenne difficulté pour piano* (1921)

The last piano piece that will be analysed in the context of the collaboration between Séverac and Selva is ‘La Vasque aux colombes’, the second piece of the set *En vacances II, Petites pièces romantiques de Moyenne difficulté pour piano* (1921). The other two works in the collection are ‘La Fontaine de Chopin’ and ‘Les Deux Mousquetaires’. This group of pieces was issued posthumously by Séverac’s publishers, Rouart, Lerolle, gathering the works from manuscript pieces left behind by the composer after his death. ‘La Vasque’ was incomplete, and Selva was commissioned to finish the piece.⁹⁴ She did this with great care, following the compositional style of her friend closely.

The entire piece is six pages long, and comprises 121 bars, of which Séverac composed the first 54. A note by Selva at the end of this bar explains that the remainder of the piece has been composed following the sketches of the composer and a logical and expressive continuation of that material. Selva’s note in the score states:

Ici s’arrête la copie manuscrite de D. de Séverac. La suite est indiquée par fragments dans ses notes manuscrites, c’est d’après ces notes qu’on a essayé de terminer l’œuvre, ne se servant que de matériaux thématiques, d’éléments harmoniques ou architecturaux indiqués par l’auteur, ou découlant logiquement et expressivement de la composition déjà terminée.

[Here finishes the manuscript copy of D. de Séverac. The following is indicated by fragments in his manuscript notes in line with which an attempt has been made to finish his work following these notes, only using thematic material, harmonic or structural elements indicated by the author, or through logical and expressive elements that arise directly from the already composed piece.]

Apart from Selva’s clear indication of where Séverac’s own work finished and hers began, it is suggested that her writing of a sudden *sffz* chord in b. 55 (Fig. 7.21) unequivocally signals this musically, lest the player or listener be in any doubt of it, perhaps with the view to preserve the integrity of her friend’s own work.

⁹⁴ Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 142.

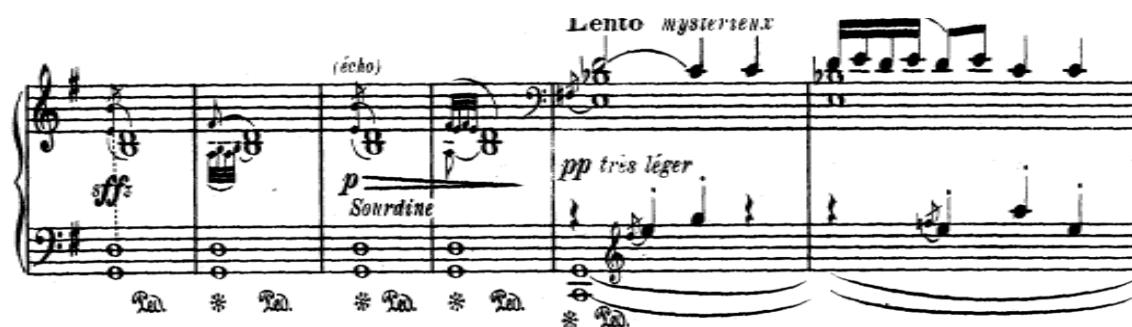


Fig. 7.21 – Séverac, *En Vacances II*, 'La Vasque aux colombes', bb. 55-60

What ensues is a 9 bar *Lento* section, a transition which is very much *alla Séverac*, including a change of tempo within a section held with a harmonic pedal, in this case a fifth, C-G.

In b. 68 Selva resumes with an *a Tempo*, having taken the initial two bar motif, but this time an octave higher. There is another small difference. The *acciaccatura* note is not held in dissonance in the higher register. Selva is after a "cleaner", perhaps a more transparent effect in its transposition in the upper register. She also extends the harmonic material and adds interest through the crossing of hands from b. 76 until the pick-up of the theme in b. 81, the repetition of which is almost literal apart from minor alterations adding the occasional note, bb. 83, 86 and 91.

Her bass line onto the VI chord of the relative minor is a welcome colouring in the piece, as are the descending broken chords in demisemiquavers starting in b. 105, Fig. 7.22, which, without being a literal copy of any work by Séverac, are in fact very idiomatic.

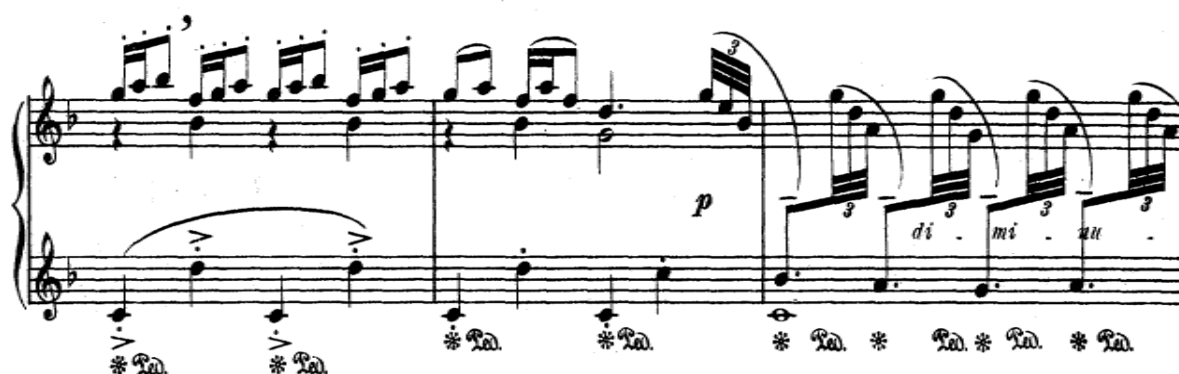


Fig. 7.22 – Séverac, *En vacances II*, 'La Vasque aux colombes', bb. 103-105

Very sensitively as well, Selva takes up the accompaniment pattern written by Séverac from b. 30 onward, using it in the passage preceding the perfect cadence in the tonic in b. 114. However, she goes a step further writing leaps of over 3 octaves (e.g., b. 109), which is challenging pianistic writing, particularly with regard to the addressees of these pieces, who are players of an intermediate level. One of Selva's most interesting contributions appears in the final coda, the harmony sequence of the last 7 bars. The sixth degree in b. 115, is followed by a tension chord, with the bass playing B $\flat$ -f $\sharp$, and the right hand playing an F major chord. This is followed by another dissonance with the left-hand crossing over the right playing a major third, d'-f $\sharp$ ', whilst the right hand carries on in the minor. The second degree with a suspended second precedes a dominant seventh chord leading to the tonic.

Les Vendanges, a missing piano concerto and *L'Encens et la Myrrhe*, a lost work

To conclude this review of the collaboration between Séverac and Selva through an analysis of the former's principal works for piano, it is necessary to mention two missing works. Their absence is particularly regrettable, as they seem to have contributed to the marginalisation of Selva with regard to her importance as an interpreter of Séverac's music because, unlike many of her contemporaries, she was not a dedicatee of any of Séverac's work.

Yves Nat, Marguerite Long, Ricardo Viñes and Alfred Cortot, amongst others, had works dedicated to them. None to Selva. However, as found in a letter from Séverac to René de Castéra in August 1919, when Séverac was already ill, he was at that point revising his *L'Encens et la Myrrhe*, a 'suite pieuse' [pious suite], which he unequivocally states he was going to dedicate to Selva, whilst he was also due to write a work for piano and orchestra which she had been requesting him to write for her.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Selva, *Déodat de Séverac*, p. 81: 'En ce moment je suis à retoucher « L'Encens et la Myrrhe », suite pieuse – ça t'épate ? – dédiée à Blanche, en attendant les « Vendanges » pour piano et orchestre, qu'elle me réclame trop amicalement, car je ne sais pas si je pourrai écrire quelque chose digne d'Elle et de la Vigne...' [In this moment I am about to retouch *L'Encens et la Myrrhe*, a pious suite- are you amazed?- dedicated to Blanche, whilst waiting for the *Vendanges* for piano and orchestra, that she has been pressing me for in a friendly way, as I do not know whether I will be able to write something worthy of Her and of the Vine...]

Further, some months later, in 1920, he wrote to René's brother Carlos in the following terms:

Je mets au point mes pièces sur « L'Encens » ... Elles sont restées sur le chantier plus que de raison peut-être, mais je tenais à les faire « mariner » comme doit tout bon cuisinier.... [sic] J'essaye de condenser.... [sic] Beaucoup de mes pièces de piano sont trop délayées, à mon goût actuel. Notre génération, un peu trop façonnée par les méthodes importées d'Outre-Rhin, est tombée souvent dans le travers stigmatisé par ce vieux Boileau – (qui n'était pas si sot que le croient les « avancés »). – De là sont nés tant de quatuors, de sonates, de symphonies longues comme un jour sans vin.... [sic]

Je suis tombé dans ce Travers comme les autres, mais j'essaye de me ressaisir et d'aller vers la clarté et la simplicité qui sont vraiment de chez nous....[sic]⁹⁶

[I'm finishing my pieces on *L'Encens*... They have perhaps remained in the building site longer than is reasonable, but I had to 'marinate' them like every good cook must do.... I try to condense.... Many of my works for piano are too extended for my present taste. Our generation, a bit too influenced by the imported methods from beyond the Rhine, has often taken the paths stigmatised by old Boileau – (who was not such a fool as the avant garde believe him to be). – Many quartets, sonatas, symphonies as long as a day without wine are born from this. I have fallen on this path like the others, but I am trying to get back and go towards the clarity and the simplicity that is truly ours.]

As such it appears that the suite that never saw the light, the one that was to be dedicated to Selva, is the one he was being most precious and careful about in terms of refining or even, redefining his compositional style.

One is bound to agree with Guy Selva, who states that Blanche Selva must surely have waited with disappointment to have a work dedicated to her.⁹⁷ And one is also bound to ask why this did not happen with any of the earlier pieces.

There is a very interesting remark regarding the influences a composer is subject to and their acknowledgement thereof; Waters quotes Taruskin and Bloom in the following terms:

Richard Taruskin cites Harold Bloom's idea that artists conceal their influences through repression, sublimation, and defence mechanisms, and therefore the

⁹⁶ Selva, *Déodat de Séverac*, p. 83.

⁹⁷ Guy Selva, *Une artiste*, p. 175.

critical task for historians is to penetrate the artist's defences by analyzing the artist's misreadings.⁹⁸

Waters himself does not extrapolate this to an analysis of Selva, in fact the quote alludes rather to the influence of other composers, and his main point of reference later when discussing performers, although also brief, is, as was noted earlier, Ricardo Viñes. However, I think that it is at the very least legitimate to enquire whether there may have been on the part of Séverac, consciously or unconsciously, a desire to conceal her influence on his work at the beginning of his career. A feeling that may have subsided over time, proof of which is his acknowledgement from 1919 onwards of her role in his pieces.

Alternatively, perhaps he was just waiting for the "right" piece, as his letters to both Castéra brothers about *L'Encens* imply. Then again, one must not forget, that often the reasons why a composer decides to dedicate a piece are not always so reverential or altruistic. Composers, very naturally, seek to have their works performed as much as possible, and an alternative reading is that he knew that Selva was going to be by his side and did not have to court her favour.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown the multifaceted collaboration of Selva and Déodat de Séverac for whom she was more than a loyal friend and performer. She became his all-round musical *confidante*. Séverac relied on her editorial work to enhance the interpretative understanding of his scores, which clearly reflect her sophisticated pianistic resources. She also gave him input to amend his pieces or restructure his suites. She taught them and performed them, exporting the name Séverac together with her own. Séverac's work cannot be completely understood unless one also knows about Selva's.

⁹⁸ Waters, p. 12.

Conclusions

As noted in the Introduction, I began this research by following an altogether different line of enquiry: initially, I saw Selva as a way into Albéniz rather than the main subject of the thesis. Thanks to the previous work of mostly French and Spanish musicologists, I was able to ascertain relatively quickly that Selva was in fact a remarkable artist worthy of study in her own right. Moreover, it became very clear to me that there were large parts of her work that had remained overlooked or under-studied and that mainstream music scholarship, particularly in the English language, had only dealt with her superficially, when at all.

Blanche Selva was a remarkable artist with a truly versatile career, who left behind a rich legacy: her own treatise, several other books, recordings and over 200 edited scores. This documentary evidence, together with the hundreds of concert programmes that she collected throughout her career, press reviews and her surviving correspondence, has illuminated the life and work of a formidable pianist who developed a unique and sophisticated piano technique that looked and sounded different from that of most of her French contemporaries. She lived her life devoted to music and to God, with an indefatigable work ethic that propelled all her endeavours. Admired by those who knew her, she was a trusted advisor to many male composers of her time. Self-assured, she was very comfortable critiquing their work.

But there were also shadows over her life and career. She was often mocked for her appearance, bore a heavy burden as the sole financial provider for her family, and suffered the final tragedy of illness and relatively early death. Her association with d'Indy and the Schola Cantorum *milieu* represented an initial tailwind in her career — it is thanks to d'Indy that she returned to Paris and began her career in the capital in earnest. However, it has become clear that there were negative aspects to this association that tied her performance commitments and repertoire almost exclusively to the Schola's own interests. Her absence from modern historiography might also be attributed to this association: modern musicology has been far less interested in the

Schola Cantorum and its composers and performers than in those associated with the Conservatoire.

Her success and the respect she commanded amongst her male peers is the more admirable when considering the unequal social context in which she lived; for example, women were not granted suffrage in France until July 1944, two years after her death. Selva lamented in correspondence that she was a single woman, and it is easy to see the impact that this might have had in her personal and professional life. She was unable to find a long-term partner with whom to share the everyday joys and disappointments of life and lamented her solitude at the end of her life. The financial responsibility she bore as head of her household also contributed to favouring the secure income of extensive teaching commitments over performing contracts. The poignant contrast with the biography, and later musicological reception, of Marguerite Long has already been noted. And yet, I think that I have demonstrated that Selva's pianism and pedagogy were far more innovative and forward-looking than those of Long.

In fact, Selva's general ideas about piano technique, advocating the use of the entire body apparatus, are largely reflected in the way many, if not most, professional pianists play nowadays, although it is accepted that it is qualitatively and quantitatively difficult to ascertain how much influence her method had over time. However, the interviews with students of her pupils have shown that there was indeed a central ethos to her pedagogy that has persisted to this day. Given that Selva had more than 2,000 students over her lifetime, it is reasonable to suggest that her ideas have had a greater impact and wider dissemination than she has often been given credit for. Several younger contemporary pianists of the time, as interviewed by Timbrell, remembered her decades later as someone with a unique style of playing, something which is also clearly noted in many of the reviews and backed up by the contextual analysis of her recordings undertaken in this thesis: her immaculate technique, the reliability, blend and synchronisation of her playing, predate the time when these became mainstream pianistic traits. Indeed, her recordings surprise for their modern approach, with a sensitivity and an interpretative ethos that are quite aligned with our

modern taste, and do not conform to the general trends observed in most pianists of the time.

In writing this thesis, I aimed to present a comprehensive view of her work, and to contribute to the dissemination of her legacy to a wider audience, both scholars and practitioners. I strongly believe that it was necessary to redress the neglect her work has suffered. Moreover, in doing so, I also hope that this work serves, more broadly, as a reminder of how many other female musicians have been overlooked in this way. The narrow, mostly male-centric view that most 'Histories of Music' convey to us, oftentimes obscures a reality that was less patriarchal than is presented. British historian Dr Bettany Hughes estimates that only around 0.5% of recorded history includes women, despite their having always been 50% of the population.⁹⁹ The result of relying on these partial accounts of music history, is that girls and women unjustly lack strong historical role models. I am unafraid to admit that, as a female researcher, I am particularly interested in the histories of other female artists and I think that shining a light on them enriches our understanding of our cultural past.

I echo the words of medievalist Janina Ramirez:

All historical accounts are products of the human concerns of their time and I freely acknowledge that I am focusing on a group I sympathise with [women], interpreting the evidence with my own interests at the fore. Yet it is ultimately an attempt to open up different ways of engaging with history. This quote by the medievalist Kolve is my concession: "We have little choice but to acknowledge our modernity, [and] admit that our interest in the past is always (and by no means illegitimately) born of present concerns."¹⁰⁰

Paraphrasing Dr Ramirez, in my work, by casting a light back on Blanche Selva and turning many lenses on the evidence — in my case, from historical to practice-based and autoethnographic research methods — I want to illuminate a different version of the musical landscape in Paris in the early twentieth century.

⁹⁹ English Heritage, 'Why were women written out of history? An interview with Bettany Hughes' (2016), <<https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/inspire-me/blog/blog-posts/why-were-women-written-out-of-history-an-interview-with-bettany-hughes/>> [accessed 10 May 2023].

¹⁰⁰ Janina Ramirez, *Femina. A New History of the Middle Ages Through the Women Written Out of It* (London: WH Allen, 2022), pp. 17-18.

In fact, Selva left behind a rich body of work in many forms. Some of it has already been with us, unacknowledged, for a long time. For example, her fingers are in every page of *Iberia* which she meticulously proof-read, her interpretative ideas shape a significant amount of the works by Séverac through a myriad of annotations in those pages and her recordings have been available to listeners since she made them. Other work, like her treatise or editions, no longer in print, has lain dormant. By rediscovering these works, providing a detailed examination of her treatise and application of her technical ideas, analysing her recordings and interpretative processes, and interviewing some musicians with connections to her pedagogy, this thesis becomes itself part of her legacy. The reader of this thesis will be able to comprehend her ideas and put them into practice. Blanche Selva's pianistic legacy will be alive in every movement undertaken under her guidance, as it is alive in my practice and that of my students.

This work has also allowed her voice to be heard again through the selected original and translated excerpts of her writings and letters, showing the artist and the person that was Blanche Selva: an immensely talented woman, independent and strong-willed, who accomplished an astonishing amount in her career and never gave up when faced with adversity. She committed to composing and writing when she could no longer play, she did not wallow in her sorrows and always found the strength to fight back. Her legacy is also about this. About living life with passion, with energy and conviction and sharing what we learn with those around us.

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Appendix 1

Recordings

Cloches dans la brume and Cloches au soleil (1905) by Blanche Selva – Maite Aguirre Quiñonero (piano)

Recorded live in Milton Hall Concert Hall 1 October 2021 as part of the Festival of Music of Women Pianist-Composers from Spain and Hispanic America organised by FIMTE (Festival Internacional de Música de Tecla Española).

[Media link](#)

Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0kyjxkuhEPo>>

Appendix 2

Interview questions – Chapter 5

1. What do you most remember from X's piano lessons?

1.b. How influential was X in your own pianistic development?

2. Were you aware of X's own study with Selva? And do you recall being aware of any instructions or exercises assigned to you by X belonging to Selva's piano school?

2.b. If not, I will prompt with some elements to establish whether X imparted some of Selva's precepts forward, despite not directly mentioning their origin, e.g., 'three touches', Selva's different biomechanical exercises, study of Dalcroze, etc.

2.c. Do you still have any scores with markings, or a teacher notebook detailing any such information? If yes, could they be seen?

2.d. Did X ever talk about Selva, and if so, what did they say about her/her teaching/her interpretations, etc?

3. What repertoire did you work with X? And were there any pieces that were characteristic of their teaching methods and may relate to their own study with Selva?

4. Have you carried on passing some of X/Selva's teaching to your students? If affirmative, have you modified any, if so, how? Are there elements that you find aren't suitable?

5. Is there any other element not discussed already in this interview that you believe is relevant to understanding X's/Selva's pedagogy?

Appendix 3

Research Ethics Committee – Grant of approval

Confirmation of the grant of full ethical approval by the Research Ethics Committee of the Guildhall School of Music & Drama was evidenced in a letter dated 23 October 2019 signed by Sarah Bell, Doctoral Research Coordinator. A copy of the letter is on p. 390.

**RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
GUILDHALL SCHOOL OF MUSIC & DRAMA**

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

MAITE AGUIRRE
RESEARCH
Guildhall School

23RD OCTOBER 2019

Dear MAITE,

Re: Research Ethics Application

Thank you for submitting your research ethics application, entitled *The pianistic legacy of Blanche Selva* which has now been reviewed by the Research Ethics Committee.

I am pleased to confirm that the Committee are satisfied with the research proposal submitted and that **full ethical approval has been granted** for your project.

Please note that you should report any untoward events or unforeseen ethical problems arising from the execution of your project to the Research Ethics Committee within a week of any occurrence. Any feedback which you provide to the participants of the project should be forwarded to the Ethics Committee.

Should you have any queries relating to this letter, please get in touch.

We wish you every success with your project.

Yours sincerely,



Sarah Bell, Doctoral Research Coordinator

