Darius Milhaud



Modality & Structure in Music of the 1920s

DEBORAH MAWER

D.

PREFACE



This book offers the first major analytical study of a significant portion of Milhaud's music, as a revised and updated version of a doctoral thesis (1991: see below), translated into book form. Its primary aim is to offer an interpretation of pitch-structure in Milhaud's music of the 1920s. Thus, this study serves to complement the largely biographical or descriptive studies of Milhaud published to date, and, on a larger scale, to represent Milhaud alongside recent scholarship on other French composers of broadly similar stature, including Poulenc (Wilfrid Mellers) and Satie (Robert Orledge). The text is concerned primarily with eight analytical case studies on music belonging to that fruitful decade beyond the First World War, centring on the jazzinspired masterpiece *La Création du monde*. In this sense, the book belongs within what is still a fairly short, but hopefully growing, tradition of analytical texts on twentieth-century French music, including, notably, Richard Parks's work on Debussy.²

Doubtless, in the minds of some, the days for engaging in detailed analyses of individual works are over, or at least numbered, and this may be all well and good for areas of study that enjoy a strong and varied history of analytical research, but for studies in this area, where there has been little serious analytical probing, there is still a need to create a foundation upon which to build. It is detailed analytical investigation which Milhaud's music merits but has not in the past received—partly, as observed by Robert Orledge, because of the 'prevailing quest for unknown pieces by great composers at the expense of great pieces by unknown composers'. Of course Milhaud, much more so than Koechlin, has also been a victim of his own prolificacy and apparent lack of self-criticism, so that much sifting is needed to make sense of a vast, uneven compositional output; this notwithstanding, there are 'great

¹ W. Mellers, Francis Poulenc (Oxford, 1993); R. Orledge, Satie the Composer (Cambridge, 1990) and (with translations by R. Nichols) Satie Remembered (London, 1995).

² Most significantly, The Music of Claude Debussy (New Haven, 1989).

³ R. Orledge, Preface to Charles Koechlin (1867-1950): His Life and Works (Chur and New York, 1989), xiii.

pieces' and others which, though not great, are arguably as or more interesting. Whatever the inherent difficulties, the timing of this analytical enquiry seems now appropriate, both as its own post-centenary assessment and celebration, and in view of the fact that other supporting materials have recently appeared: a new, if somewhat free, English translation of Milhaud's full autobiography, My Happy Life, and Roger Nichols's Conversations with Madeleine Milhaud.⁴

Where its main analytical identity is concerned, this book tests out a broad range of approaches to Milhaud's music, focusing on applications of extended voice-leading and set theory, including pc set genera. Although modally conceived, this music still presents many challenges to traditional perspectives. And beyond its strictly analytical remit, this book acknowledges the need to contextualize the various case studies, both musically and historically. It also engages at some level with notions of intertextuality, in as much as there are collective technical and stylistic elements or 'texts' which develop across a range of works (for example, a prevalent jazz text-admittedly more varied than, say, Stravinsky's ragtime text); and, conversely, multiple texts (or parts of texts) which may be embraced in a single work: thus individual works are considered as 'relational events',5 rather than in a false isolation. In support, connection has been sought with the findings of more culturally and aesthetically orientated writings, including those of Glenn Watkins, David Meltzer, Stephen Walsh and Joseph Straus.6

⁴ D. Milhaud, My Happy Life, trans. D. Evans, G. Hall and C. Palmer, with an introductory essay by Christopher Palmer (London, 1995): the appearance of this new English translation also constitutes, sadly, a fitting tribute to Christopher Palmer for his work in this domain; R. Nichols, Conversations with Madeleine Milhaud (London, 1996). Both texts are favourably reviewed by Robert Orledge in 'Notes from a Happy Life', Times Literary Supplement, 13 September 1996, 10–11. Nichols's book usefully supplements historical understanding, in an accessible anecdotal form, although it appeared too late for much wider inclusion in this present study. One should also acknowledge the appearance of Barbara L. Kelly's doctoral dissertation, 'Milhaud and the French Musical Tradition with Reference to his Works 1912–31' (Ph.D dissertation, University of Liverpool, 1994), and her subsequent article, 'Milhaud's Alissa Manuscripts', Journal of the Royal Musical Association, 121 (1996), 229–45.

⁵ Joseph Straus, quoting Harold Bloom in discussing his theory of influence in Remaking the Past: Musical Modernism and the Tonal Tradition (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1990), 12.

⁶ G. Watkins, Pyramids at the Louvre: Music, Culture, and Collage from Stravinsky to the Postmodernist (Cambridge, Mass., 1994); D. Meltzer, Reading Jazz (San Francisco, 1993); S. Walsh, The Music of Stravinsky (Oxford, 1988); Straus, Remaking the Past.

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Regarding the revision and updating involved in the production of this study, it is probably useful to highlight one or two matters. In recognition both of the emphasis on modality as a structural determinant, and of the wide-ranging repertory involved (albeit with the main focus on chamber music), the original title of the thesis, 'The Early Chamber Music of Darius Milhaud: Style and Structure' (Ph.D dissertation, University of London, 1991, under my former name of Roberts). has been modified accordingly. In focusing on 'Modality and Structure', the intention here is simply to signal the areas of greatest emphasis; 'style' should still be seen to figure implicitly, since structure cannot in any case be viewed in isolation from matters of governing aesthetic and stylistic presentation. Hence, the designations used in individual chapter titles ('Early Exploration', 'Brazilian and Jazz-inspired Music', and 'Neoclassicism') have both structural and stylistic ramifications. (Having said this, one could argue that an emphasis on structural techniques is also quite appropriate for a body of music where technique can sometimes outstrip inspiration.) The inclusion of 'Modality' in the title serves to point up the significance of modal references in individual chapters: 'Chromaticism', 'Blues Scale' and 'Refined Modality'. The final part of the title, 'Music of the 1920s', acknowledges the inclusion of some works whose forces lie beyond generally accepted definitions of chamber music: 'Ipanema' (Case Study 4) is for solo piano, whereas, at the other end of the spectrum, L'Abandon d'Ariane, though nominally regarded as chamber opera, involves a total of some twenty-five singers and instrumentalists. This new title also acknowledges the broader scope and application of the book beyond the specific bounds of the case studies.

Whilst there have been additions and modifications during revision, most notably in the case studies (and accompanying examples), as a result of the inclusion of pc set genera and engagement with recent literature across the period 1991–96, there have also been omissions, primarily for reasons of space. Some examples in the Appendix have been condensed, or occasionally omitted when they serve largely to substantiate further a point that has already been illustrated: nevertheless, there are still over one hundred supporting examples, supplemented by many tables. Most of the original appendices have been incorporated within the main text, though some other material, such as the original Chapter 7 and the discography, has been omitted. (It is pleasing to observe that CD recordings of Milhaud's music are

increasing in number quite rapidly, so that any information supplied here would soon be out of date. The selected lists of recordings held at the BBC and the Phonothèque of the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris may still be consulted, if desired, in Appendix 3 of the original dissertation.)

Where readership is concerned, this book aims to be accessible both to music analysts/theorists and musicologists; in terms of level, it seeks to be relevant to established academic scholars and students alike. Whilst this may not be a book for reading from cover to cover, exploration of individual case studies is quite feasible—probably best in conjunction with the relevant introductory outline of Chapter 3, 4 or 5, and the conclusions of Chapter 6. Beyond the United Kingdom, and Milhaud's native France, it is hoped that this book may be of interest to readers in the United States where Milhaud himself exerted a strong influence beyond 1940 as a composer and teacher, and where analytical/theoretical interests, not least in set theory, have such a solid foundation. Beyond its specific focus on Milhaud, this book seeks to hold broader appeal for anyone concerned with analytical approaches to post-tonal musics, in particular those of Stravinsky, Ravel, Satie, and 'Les Six' (especially Poulenc) in the context of the 1920s.

Lancaster, April 1997

⁷ For the student reader, especially, it may be useful to note that a software Analytical Listening Guide has been prepared by the present author on 'Darius Milhaud: *La Création du monde*' (Lancaster University, 1996); this aims to offer an approachable introduction to this work through on-screen study and listening in 'real time', in conjunction with a commercial CD recording.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



THIS BOOK has had a long gestation, from the initial research begun in the mid-1980s, through its doctoral stage in 1991, to its final form here: consequently the acknowledgements, too, are extensive and varied.

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Where the early stages of research and writing were concerned, I am appreciative of the response from individuals and institutions in Paris, including correspondence with Madeleine Milhaud and François Lesure (then Conservateur en chef de la Musique at the Bibliothèque Nationale), generous assistance offered by staff at the Phonothèque of the Bibliothèque Nationale, and information provided by the Music Department of the Université de Paris-Sorbonne and the Conservatoire Nationale de la Musique. In the United States, I would like to acknowledge the assistance of Eva Konrad Kreshka of the Milhaud Collection at Mills College, Oakland, California. Information on the availability of elusive scores, articles, and books, was supplied by several publishers, including Universal Edition, Schott & Co. Ltd., and United Music Publishers, as well as by the British Library and University of London Library.

In the preparation of this text for publication, Rachel Lynch of Scolar Press has been most supportive and accommodating; the Music Library of Yale University has supplied the copy of Milhaud's self-portrait sketch which is reproduced with the library's permission as part of the jacket design; Thames and Hudson have kindly given permission to reproduce parts of the English translation of Blaise Cendrars's scenario for *La Création du monde*; Paul McFadden (Lancaster

University) has set the musical examples in the main text, whilst those in the Appendix which support the case studies have been set by John Dunn (Comus Music Printing and Publishing). Reproduction of the numerous musical excerpts is by kind permission of United Music Publishers (agents for Editions Durand, Editions Max Eschig, Editions Heugel et Cie, and Editions Salabert), and by permission of Universal Edition A.G. Wien, with specific details given below.

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So this collective body of assistance and advice is very much appreciated, but of course the responsibility for what follows remains mine alone.



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INTRODUCTION



THE AIM of this book is to offer an interpretation of Milhaud's early-period music, with primary reference to modality and structure. The abundant output of these years (especially the chamber music composed between 1917 and 1927) is regarded as one manifestation of the neoclassicism predominant in the 1920s.

Chapters I and 2 may be regarded informally as constituting the first part of the book, concerned with establishing a background. Chapter I places Milhaud's music and attitudes in historical context, making stylistic comparison with Stravinsky, Hindemith, Milhaud's compatriots, and other jazz-inspired composers, and then leads to more detailed discussion of the elements of (or tendencies in) Milhaud's music, these being the subjects of Chapters 3–5. The special place of the chamber music in Milhaud's output is emphasized, with the early period seen as dating approximately from the First Chamber Symphony (1917) to the Clarinet Sonatina (1927). Finally, criteria are established for the selection of eight works for analysis.

Chapter 2 seeks analytical approaches to the chosen repertory, commencing with discussion of Milhaud's short article-treatise 'Polytonalité et atonalité' (1923).² Subsequently some attempt is made, within circumscribed contexts, to develop and apply Milhaud's own ideas to his music, although essentially Milhaud's music is viewed as operating, at any one time, within a single composite modality. Thus compositional perspectives are contrasted with more recent analytical perspectives and interpretative strategies, as applied largely to the music of Stravinsky—and in transferring and adapting ideas from Stravinsky studies, it is hoped that approaches to Milhaud's music may in turn inform and feed back into further research on Stravinsky, amongst others. The priority lies in finding ways to interpret pitch-

¹ The interpretation of Milhaud's early-period music as constituting that composed before 1930 is supported by Jeremy Drake, in *The Operas of Darius Milhaud* (New York and London, 1989), 318.

² D. Milhaud, 'Polytonalité et atonalité', *La Revue musicale*, 4 (February 1923), 29-44.

structure in Milhaud's music, since this seems to predominate over metre and rhythm: 'For Milhaud, the metre serves primarily to give the melody the required rhythmic fluidity.'3

Although valuable biographical work on Milhaud has been undertaken by Paul Collaer,4 analytical thinking has tended to be conventional: Collaer, for one, is more concerned with stylistic and historical issues than with questions of polytonality. And despite Keith Daniel's early application of set theory to some of Milhaud's works,5 Drake's discussion of modality in the operas,6 and a number of American dissertations, no one has previously tested the modal concept analytically by applying a mixture of a broadly Salzerian voice-leading, motivic analysis and set theory (including genera) to a representative selection of Milhaud's music. Chapter 2 advocates this mixture, also embracing ideas of Pieter van den Toorn, Joseph Straus, Leonard B. Meyer and Paul Hindemith/David Neumeyer, dependent on context. In view of the paucity of analytical work on Milhaud's music, some experimentation seemed justifiable and desirable, so that alternative readings are sometimes offered. Finally, one should stress the need for open-mindedness and flexibility: the intrinsically French qualities which give Milhaud's music its 'life' cannot be comprehended purely from a structural standpoint. Above all, free melody is paramount.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 may be viewed informally as constituting a second part, specifically on the music, whose concern is to portray the forging of a style and development of structural techniques. (The reasoning behind the choice of subject-matter for these complementary chapters is detailed in Chapter 1, 'The Constituent Elements of Milhaud's Music'.) Each of these three chapters commences with an introductory outline, explaining the background and nature of a certain element, or tendency, and its typical structural techniques. Breadth of coverage has been gained by studying as much music as possible within the limits imposed by such a sizeable repertory: most chamber works with opus numbers between 40 and 100, together with some coverage of ballet and opera, since the early period is flanked by

³ Drake, The Operas of Darius Milhaud, 195.

⁴ P. Collaer, *Darius Milhaud* (Paris and Geneva, 1982); trans. and ed. J. Hohfeld Galante (San Francisco and London, 1988): this English translation henceforth differentiated from the French edition as Collaer/Galante, *Darius Milhaud*.

⁵ K.W. Daniel, 'A Preliminary Investigation of Pitch-class Set Analysis in the Atonal and Polytonal works of Milhaud and Poulenc', *In Theory Only*, 6 (1982), 22–48.

⁶ Drake, The Operas of Darius Milhaud, 'Modality', 201-7; 'Polymodality', 221-30.

masterpieces in these genres: L'Homme et son désir (1918) and Christophe Colomb (1928) respectively. Depth of coverage is the preserve of eight varied case studies, two or three of which are placed in each chapter.

Chapter 3 begins by discussing Milhaud's training at the Paris Conservatoire; beyond derivative student pieces, there is stylistic diversity, although this is still essentially late-Romantic. Music composed between about 1918 and 1922 develops chromaticism, in association with octatonicism and polarity, in a way that borders occasionally on atonality. These are amongst Milhaud's most radical and extraordinary works which mark a pivotal point in his career where one senses that neoclassicism was not the only option open to him.

Chapter 4 examines Milhaud's interest in Brazilian music and jazz, noting his visits to the United States to experience, assimilate, and express the jazz style within his own aesthetic; it also identifies typical structural techniques that focus on a blues scale. There is a stronger sense of pitch centre here than in the highly chromatic, exploratory pieces. Brazilian-inspired pieces, such as Saudades do Brazil (Case Study 4), lead to jazz-inspired ones, culminating in Milhaud's best-known work, La Création du monde (Case Study 5). This jazz-ballet, and subsequent Suite de concert, also owes much to a developing neoclassicism, and is, ultimately, a synthesis of the two styles. Equally, Milhaud's interest in Brazilian music and jazz is part of a wider, eclectic approach which also embraces Provençal and Jewish folksong, whilst the 'blues scale' is part of a broader modal approach, as is made clear in the following chapter.

Chapter 5 views the most important notion in Milhaud's music of the 1920s: neoclassicism and its use of a flexible, refined modality. Such neoclassicism firstly coexists with, and then supersedes, the overtly jazz-inspired element. Structural processes centre on modality and exhibit some common ground with those described in Chapters 3 and 4, although third relations, the 'triad motive', ostinato, 'pillar chords', ternary and fugal structures are both more prominent and finely nuanced than before. Many modes are employed in a free fashion,⁷ especially Lydian, Mixolydian, Dorian and a 'new' mode (Altered Mixolydian). Case studies include the Sonatine pour clarinette et piano, Op. 100, and the second of three 'Opéras-minute'.

⁷ The free use of modality demonstrates Drake's concept of 'inflectional polyvalency': ibid., 206.

The elements, or complementary traits, in Milhaud's music are brought together in the concluding Chapter 6 on Milhaud's 'Total Entity', as a product of the dictum that 'the whole is greater than the sum of its parts'. The subsequent 'Final Remarks on Milhaud' confirm him as a neoclassical modal lyricist who always maintained that he composed polytonally, comparable to a point with Stravinsky and Hindemith, and in keeping with the musical aesthetic of the 1920s. A final, short section indicating 'Scope for Future Research' highlights areas for further analytical research both within and beyond Milhaud's music.

Milhaud's Writings and their English Translations

Throughout the book, there is much translated material from Collaer's biography, *Darius Milhaud* and from Milhaud's own books and articles. Quotations from Collaer's biography are usually taken from the revised version, translated and edited by Jane Hohfeld Galante, with the assistance of Madeleine Milhaud (see above); occasionally, my own translation is given in preference, indicated as such where appropriate. Milhaud produced at least twenty pieces of writing on music and musicians, in the form of articles, essays and books: a full listing of those consulted for this study is given in the Bibliography. Several of these pay tribute to fellow composers, writers and choreographers, including Honegger, Gédalge, Diaghilev, Satie, Bartók, Claudel and Stravinsky; others include conversations, correspondence and Milhaud's views on the music of his own time.⁸

The two versions of Milhaud's autobiography provide witty, anecdotal accounts of his musical life, with some technical details, and are used frequently as a source of stylistic comment. The first French edition of Notes sans Musique (1949) was followed shortly afterwards by an English translation, Notes without Music (1952). Twenty-five years later, Milhaud completed his autobiography which was retitled Ma vie heureuse (1974); a reprint of this revised version subsequently appeared in Paris in 1987, 10 and the corresponding full English translation was published in London two years ago as My Happy Life (1995). This latest

⁸ The collected critical writings are available in French, edited by Jeremy Drake, as *Notes sur la musique: Essais et chroniques* (Paris, 1982).

⁹ D. Milhaud, Notes sans musique (Paris, 1949); id., Notes without Music, trans. D. Evans, ed. R. H. Myers (London, 1952).

¹⁰ D. Milhaud, Ma vie heureuse (Paris, 1987).

English edition is, essentially, an expanded version of *Notes without Music*, with translations pertaining to Milhaud's early years largely unchanged. Although it constitutes a readable account of Milhaud's whole life, I have favoured working primarily from the French edition of 1987, usually in the interests of a more strictly literal translation. Consequently, throughout this book, where the source is given as *Ma vie heureuse* the translation is my own.

Of greatest technical interest are the essays entitled *Études*,¹¹ the articles 'Polytonalité et atonalité',¹² and 'The Evolution of Modern Music in Paris and Vienna',¹³ and writings on Brazilian music and jazz.¹⁴ Again, translations are my own unless otherwise stated. Quotations from 'Polytonalité et atonalité' (in Chapter 2) are given in English translation, with the original French in footnotes; this policy was adopted for analytical clarity and consistency since the other analytical sources were in English. In the introductory outlines of Chapters 3, 4 and 5, however, which use a variety of French sources, it was more appropriate to quote in the original language, with English translations in footnotes. Occasionally, a phrase is left untranslated, because it conveys so much more in its original form.

Analytical Notation

Much of the analytical material in this book is in graphic form. The voice-leading notation (including abbreviations) is a combination of that used by Schenker in *Der freie Satz (Free Composition)*, ¹⁵ and by Salzer in *Structural Hearing*. ¹⁶ Terminology (including abbreviations) relating to the set-theoretic analysis is from Forte's *The Structure of*

¹¹ D. Milhaud, Études (Paris, 1927).

For full reference, see n. 2 above.

¹³ D. Milhaud, 'The Evolution of Modern Music in Paris and Vienna', North American Review, 217 (April 1923), 544-54; also Franco-American Musical Society Bulletin, 1 (September 1923), 8-16.

¹⁴ D. Milhaud, 'Brésil', La Revue musicale, 1 (November 1920), 'Chroniques et Notes', 60-1; 'L'Évolution du jazz-band et la musique des nègres d'Amérique du nord', in Études, 51-9.

¹⁵ H. Schenker, *Der freie Satz (Free Composition)*, trans. and ed. E. Oster (New York, 1979). A. Forte and S. Gilbert also offer a standardized version of Schenkerian notation in their *Introduction to Schenkerian Analysis* (New York, 1982).

¹⁶ F. Salzer, Structural Hearing: Tonal Coherence in Music, rev. ed., 2 vols. in 1 (New York and London, 1982), ii, xiv.

Atonal Music, 17 and from his later article on pc set genera. Traditional note-values indicate relative positions within a vestigial structural hierarchy, rather than rhythmic durations (though there is of course no strict middleground in the accepted Schenkerian sense). Essentially, four values are used: open-headed note with stem (beamed or unbeamed), filled-in note with stem, filled-in note with stem and tail, filled-in note without stem. Beamed pitches are of the highest structural order, whilst the smallest note-values represent foreground ornamentation. Modes of structural import are also denoted by open notes. and small-scale surface figuration by filled-in notes. Structural connections between pitches are indicated by solid slurs, or horizontal arrows. whilst broken slurs represent 'association' or actual prolongation, occasionally dissonant, 18 as well as transfer of register. (Context should clarify any potential ambiguity here). A note in brackets signifies the expectation of a voice-leading implication. Blues notes (especially thirds and sevenths) are indicated by an oblique line between the competing pitches. Roman numerals, and/or figured bass, indicate chordal identity, together with pc sets and generic designations, where appropriate. Occasionally, most often in a jazz-influenced context, it was more appropriate that the figuring which supplements Roman numeral designations should be taken from the chordal root (rather than literal bass note, in the case of first and, particularly, second chordal inversions): this more flexible figuring is indicated by the presence of inverted commas, e.g. 'V11'. In the Romance of La Création du monde, for instance, such a practice also makes for better connection with the jazz chordal symbols given in parentheses in the middle of the stave.

Octave designation complies with the system whereby middle C is c¹, one octave below is c, two octaves below is C, and three octaves below is C₁; when octave position is not specified, the note-name is given in upper-case lettering. In order both to establish Milhaud's patterns of practice with regard to 'major' and 'minor' modes (including the extent of deviation from standard major and minor scales), and to facilitate a compact form of reference (especially in the Appendix of analytical examples), upper-case lettering also denotes the pitch-

¹⁷ A. Forte, The Structure of Atonal Music (New Haven and London, 1973; repr. 1979).

¹⁸ See J. Straus, 'The Problem of Prolongation in Post-tonal Music', Journal of Music Theory, 31 (1987), 1-21.

centre of a major mode (or triad, seventh construct, etc.), whilst lower-case lettering denotes a minor mode. 19 The importance of internal consistency outweighed considerations of the niceties of prose in reversed designations: for example, the salient features of a 'shorthand' expression used on a graphic example: d [minor-third mode]: Aeolian [specific identity/inflection] are maintained in the prose reversal of 'Aeolian on d'. In the latter expression, even if the use of lower-case lettering seems initially curious, the designation of 'd' still has a useful summarizing function, and is justifiable since 'd' is not in any case a finite pitch designation, but an indication of the starting-point of a sequence of pitches. Similarly, the designation of a 'triad of/on d' implies the other pitches of that construction. The consistent employment of this policy across the study has revealed a notably evenhanded overall distribution of major and minor 'derivatives'. As before, context should clarify any potential ambiguity of pitch notation.

Figures in the text include short analyses, score extracts and tables which are labelled sequentially through Chapters 2–5 (Figure 2.1, 2.2, etc.). Each case study begins with a formal outline, which includes the total bars for each section and (despite its obvious limitations) does offer general guidelines for comparison since Milhaud's music is almost always regular in its metre. More extensive graphs, numbered sequentially by chapter as Examples (Example 3.1, 3.2, etc.), are given in the Appendix. Musical examples in both the main text and the Appendix are notated at sounding pitch, unless otherwise indicated.

¹⁹ 'Major' mode denotes any mode with a major third interval from its final to third scalic degree: i.e. Ionian, Lydian and Mixolydian; 'minor' mode denotes any mode with a minor third interval from its final to third degree: i.e. Dorian, Phrygian, Aeolian, or Locrian.

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