

Mel Bonis: Six Works for Flute and Piano

by

Jenna Daum

A Research Paper Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Musical Arts

Approved April 2013 by the
Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Elizabeth Buck, Chair
Amy Holbrook
Albie Micklich
Martin Schuring
Kay Norton

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

May 2013

ABSTRACT

The end of the nineteenth century was an exhilarating and revolutionary era for the flute. This period is the Second Golden Age of the flute, when players and teachers associated with the Paris Conservatory developed what would be considered the birth of the modern flute school. In addition, the founding in 1871 of the Société Nationale de Musique by Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921) and Romain Bussine (1830-1899) made possible the promotion of contemporary French composers. The founding of the Société des Instruments à Vent by Paul Taffanel (1844-1908) in 1879 also invigorated a new era of chamber music for wind instruments. Within this groundbreaking environment, Mélanie Hélène Bonis (pen name Mel Bonis) entered the Paris Conservatory in 1876, under the tutelage of César Franck (1822-1890).

Many flutists are dismayed by the scarcity of repertoire for the instrument in the Romantic and post-Romantic traditions; they make up for this absence by borrowing the violin sonatas of Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924) and Franck. The flute and piano works of Mel Bonis help to fill this void with music composed originally for flute. Bonis was a prolific composer with over 300 works to her credit, but her works for flute and piano have not been researched or professionally recorded in the United States before the present study. Although virtually unknown today in the American flute community, Bonis's music received much acclaim from her contemporaries and deserves a prominent place in the flutist's repertoire. After a brief biographical introduction, this document examines Mel Bonis's musical style and describes in detail her six works for flute and piano while also offering performance suggestions.

DEDICATION

For Derek

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost I would like to thank my family for their love and endless support from the first day I picked up a musical instrument. I would like to thank my committee members, Elizabeth Buck, Amy Holbrook, Albie Micklich, Martin Schuring, and Kay Norton, for their guidance, time, and enthusiasm in helping me complete my research. I would especially like to thank Amy Holbrook for her extra assistance in helping me with the later half of this document. Thank you to my collaborative pianist, Drew Quiring; without his enthusiasm and eagerness to play Mel Bonis's music, I may not have fully discovered its true beauty. Finally, I would like to thank my mentor and friend, Elizabeth Buck, for her endless support and faith in me throughout my entire education. I am extremely grateful.

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CHAPTER 1

BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

Introduction

The end of the nineteenth century was an exhilarating and revolutionary era for the flute. This period is the Second Golden Age of the flute, when players and teachers associated with the Paris Conservatory developed what would be considered the birth of the modern flute school.¹ In addition, the founding in 1871 of the Société Nationale de Musique by Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921) and Romain Bussine (1830-1899) made possible the promotion of contemporary French composers. The founding of the Société des Instruments à Vent by Paul Taffanel (1844-1908) in 1879 also invigorated a new era of chamber music for wind instruments. Within this groundbreaking environment, Mélanie Hélène Bonis (pen name Mel Bonis) entered the Paris Conservatory in 1876, under the tutelage of César Franck (1822-1890).²

Many flutists are dismayed by the scarcity of repertoire for the instrument in the Romantic and post-Romantic traditions; they make up for this absence by borrowing the violin sonatas of Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924) and Franck. The flute and piano works of Mel Bonis help to fill this void with music composed originally for flute. Bonis was a prolific composer with over 300 works to her credit, but her works for flute and piano have not been researched or professionally recorded in the United States before the present study. Although virtually unknown today in the American flute community,

¹ Nancy Toff, *The Flute Book: A Complete Guide for Students and Performers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 253.

² The author has chosen to use Bonis's surname, pen name, and given name interchangeably for the remainder of this document.

Bonis's music received much acclaim from her contemporaries and deserves a prominent place in the flutist's repertoire. After a brief biographical introduction, this document examines Mel Bonis's musical style and describes in detail her six works for flute and piano while also offering performance suggestions.

In the beginning stages of uncovering the life and music of Mel Bonis for this document, an OCLC WorldCat search revealed that no writings or biographies existed about Bonis in the English language and that much of Bonis's biographical information had been disseminated by her heirs, and most prolifically by Christine Géliot, Bonis's great-granddaughter. A search revealed that Christine Géliot was a founder of l'Association Mel Bonis in France.³ The author of this document initially contacted the association to ask for assistance in locating more source material, and Géliot was more than willing to assist; however, correspondence with Géliot was not the direction in which this research needed to be taken.

In February 1997, after being contacted by German cellist Eberhard Mayer, Bonis's descendants began to search through piles of scores and manuscripts left by the composer. Mayer had come across the name of Mel Bonis in a manual of chamber music by Wilhelm Altman, published in 1937, and wanted to find out more about the composer.⁴ At the time the works were being maintained and preserved at the

³ Géliot is a pianist, professor at the Asnières Conservatoire, President of l'Association Mel Bonis, and daughter of the celebrated harpist Huguette Géliot.

⁴ Christine Géliot, "Compositions for Voice by Mel Bonis, French Woman Composer, 1858-1937," *Journal of Singing* 64, no. 1 (September/October 2007): 48.

Bibliothèque Nationale in France.⁵ Géliot described the initiative to further explore the works of her great-grandmother in her own words:

It was an amazing path that led me to my great-grandmother, Mel Bonis. Many of us in the family are musicians and thus her heirs... We were all surrounded by music, but none of us was interested in the compositions of our ancestor. We knew vaguely that she had been a composer, but we never talked about it. Whenever her name came up, it was almost always in the context of the many unwanted piles of scores occupying space in the basements of Aunt Jeanne and Aunt Yvette. Her image was colored by an old family secret revealed little by little, but even that didn't really interest any of the present generation.⁶

Only one comprehensive biography of Mel Bonis exists, Géliot's *Mel Bonis: femme et compositeur*, written and published in French in 2000.⁷ Several additional documents are available in French and German, including, most significantly, several articles by Géliot and Mayer, and a dissertation, "'Très douée, bonne musicienne': die französische Komponistin Mel Bonis (1858-1937)" written in Germany in 2005 by Dorothea Schenck; however, nearly all of the source materials from these items originated with Géliot and her biography of Bonis. Because the present study relies heavily on the author's own translation of Géliot's biography, it is essential to understand Géliot's sources and materials. In explaining her resources, Géliot offers reason for scholars to proceed carefully with assessments:

I wrote Mel Bonis's biography using various sources. First, there is testimony by those who still remember her, mainly family members; then, family archives and newspapers from the period; finally, the work itself, especially the songs, which are ultimately revealing of mood and events. I must admit that my personal

⁵ Christine Géliot, "Mel Bonis." *Traversiere Magazine*, No. 78 (First Trimester 2004): 32.

⁶ Géliot, "Compositions for Voice by Mel Bonis," 47.

⁷ Christine Géliot, *Mel Bonis: femme et compositeur (1858-1937)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000). A second edition, which serves as the main reference for this document, was published in 2009.

inspiration is such that I have found myself plunged into a sentimental musical thriller which has so stimulated my imagination that I have not been able to resist at certain moments setting my players on stage.⁸

From this point onward, the potential strengths (noteworthy intimacies) and weaknesses (biases or perpetuation of family lore) of this familial biography should be assumed. A more objective account of Bonis's life would offer different insights; in absence of alternative biographies, the present author draws freely and gratefully from Géliot's narrative. A look into Géliot's writings on the rich life of Mel Bonis provides insight into the inspiration, development, and dissemination of her musical works. Due to her circumstances, Bonis was not motivated to compose for financial reasons. For this reason it would be impossible to understand the emotional depth of her music without a thorough examination of her life and influences. In addition, the social conditions of female musicians and artists of the time and the unique limitations Bonis faced must be examined. Her musical output is filled with compositions that seem to reflect events in her life and her inner emotions. Unfortunately, such interpretations must remain open-ended because the composer made few statements that offer direct insight about her music.⁹

⁸ Ibid., 48.

⁹ The following biographical account is taken from the author's own translation of *Mel Bonis: femme et compositeur*, unless otherwise specified.

Biographical Sketch of Mel Bonis

Mélanie Hélène Bonis was born in the fourth arrondissement of Paris on January 21, 1858, into a middle-class working family. Her father, Pierre Bonis, was a foreman at Bréguet watches, and her mother, Anne Clémence Mangin, was a lace-dealer and homemaker. Unlike many successful female composers of the time, such as Cécile Chaminade (1857-1944), neither of Mel's parents had a background in music, and Bonis had very little encouragement to pursue music at a young age. Strict adherence to fundamental Catholic values was central to Bonis's upbringing; the family maintained an extremely austere religious regimen while raising their two girls. The sisters were required to confess every week, say prayer in the morning and evening, and most importantly, attend Mass every Sunday. Géliot relates that Bonis was strictly warned against the "horrors of the flesh" and the "dangers of sensuality," and was taught to be wary of men.¹⁰ This deep religiosity would remain with Mel her entire life. She writes, when referring to her first communion, that even at a young age, "I was very imbued by the mystery about to be accomplished in me."¹¹

Although the family did have a piano, nobody in the family played. Consequently, Bonis was a self-taught pianist until the age of twelve and she spent increasingly more time practicing piano, even though she did not receive any formal music education. Géliot writes that Bonis would play whenever she could, but that her mother did not approve. In another writing Mel described the atmosphere of her home and her

¹⁰ Géliot, *Mel Bonis: femme et compositeur*, 27.

¹¹ Quoted in Géliot, *Mel Bonis: femme et compositeur*, 27.

relationship with her mother: “Never in my life has my mother offered me a word of tenderness.”¹²

Gélot writes that Bonis dreamed of playing the organ, especially because of the instrument’s variations in timbre and polyphonic possibilities. Her Catholic upbringing was also influential and Bonis wanted to play organ because of its prayerful atmosphere and the capacity of the instrument “to approach God.”¹³ When Bonis was eighteen, Henri Maury, cornet professor at the Paris Conservatory and a friend of the family, heard her play and noted that she improvised with an “overflowing imagination.”¹⁴ Maury took a great interest in the girl and proposed to present Bonis to César Franck at the Paris Conservatory. In November 1876, Franck accepted her as a piano student, and one month later she began classes in harmony and piano accompaniment with Ernest Guiraud.¹⁵

Other professors whom Bonis encountered at the Paris Conservatory included Napoléon Alkan (1826-1910), Alexandre Lavignac (1846-1916), Antoine Marmontel (1816-1898), Adolphe-Léopold Danhauser (1835-1896), and Jules Massenet (1842-1912).¹⁶ She mingled with students in her composition classes and frequently with singers, due to her enrollment in accompanying and the necessary collaboration between singers and pianists. Her fellow students included Alfred Bruneau (1857-1934), Gabriel

¹² Gélot, *Mel Bonis: femme et compositeur*, 28.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 30. “Elle veut approcher Dieu par l’orgue. Elle sait la qualité mystique de son inspiration.”

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

Pierné (1863-1937), Ernest Chausson (1855-1899), Claude Debussy (1862-1918), and Isidore Philipp (1863-1958).¹⁷

Documentation in the National Archives of Paris reveals Bonis's excellent reputation with her professors and her peers. Géliot's look into the report of June 1880, written by Auguste Bazille (1828-1891), gave insight into the type of student Bonis was at the Conservatory in comparison to her classmate Claude Debussy. Bazille said of Debussy, "Great talent. Good reader, very good fingers. Could work more. Good harmonizer, a little fanciful. A lot of initiative and eloquence." Bazille writes of Bonis, "Very talented, good musician, beautiful harmony. Reads well with the orchestra. Unfortunately, too fearful. I am very happy with the pupil."¹⁸ Other memoirs indicate that Bonis was an excellent and intelligent student, but again, her stage fright was mentioned. Reportedly, she accompanied so well that Franck used her as an example to foreigners who visited the Conservatory.¹⁹ Géliot writes that Bonis was cheerful, sometimes even very funny, and was well-liked by her peers.²⁰

In 1877 Bonis obtained the "premier accessit d'harmonie et accompagnement" (the honorable first prize in harmony and accompaniment) in Guiraud's class, and

¹⁷ Géliot, *Mel Bonis: femme et compositeur*, 32.

¹⁸ As quoted in Géliot, *Mel Bonis: femme et compositeur*, 34. Original source: Archives du Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et Collections Dunant aux Archives Nationales. "Il dit de Debussy (18 ans) 'Grande facilité. Bon lecteur, très bons doigts. Pourrait travailler davantage. Bon harmoniste, un peu fantaisiste. Beaucoup d'initiative et de verve.' Il dit de Bonis: 'Très douée, bonne musicienne, jolie harmonie. Lit bien l'orchestre. Malheureusement, a trop peur. Je suis très content de cette élève.'"

¹⁹ As quoted in Géliot, *Mel Bonis: femme et compositeur*, 35. Original source: Notice biographique de 1947 par les enfants et petits enfants de Mel Bonis. "On rapporte que Mélanie 'accompagnait si bien le Plain-chant que César Franck la montrait en exemple aux étrangers qui venaient quelquefois visiter la classe.'"

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

received second prize in accompanying in 1879.²¹ The following year she received the first prize in harmony, but did not receive a first prize in accompanying due to “paralyzing stage-fright.”²²

According to Géliot, 1881 was a pivotal year for Bonis; in that year, Bonis really began to find her unique compositional voice and started structuring her improvisations. Reportedly, Bonis realized her gender would inhibit her ability to truly be accepted as a composer and was told by her peers that a woman composer could never be taken seriously.²³ This realization influenced Bonis greatly, and from that point on she decided to sign her works Mel Bonis, a gender-neutral name. According to Eberhard Mayer, Bonis used other pseudonyms throughout her life, including Henry Wladimir Liadoff, Melas Benissouvsy, Jacques Normandin, and the names of her sons Pierre or Edouard Domange.²⁴

Bonis’s encounter with fellow student Amédée Landely Hettich in 1879, during her third year of classes, would be a turning point in her personal life and compositional career. Hettich, the son of a French mother and Italian/German father, was a gifted singer who wrote beautifully in French, Italian, and German. As a writer for the journal *L’Art musical* (a journal still in publication today), he contributed a weekly column, one of

²¹ Géliot, *Mel Bonis: femme et compositeur*, 32.

²² As quoted in Géliot, *Mel Bonis: femme et compositeur*, 34. Original source: Archives du CNSM et Collections Dunant aux Archives Nationales. “Elle obtient un second prix d’accompagnement en 1879 et n’aura pas le premier prix l’année suivante pour cause de trac. ‘Excellente élève, écrit encore son maître en janvier 81, la plus forte de la classe mais la peur la paralyse.’”

²³ *Ibid.*, 37.

²⁴ Eberhard Mayer, *Mel Bonis (Melanie Domange, geb. Bonis 1858 - 1937): eine bemerkenswerte und doch vergessene Musikerin und Komponistin aus Frankreich* (Leverkusen: Selbstverl, 1998), 4.

which was entitled “Causerie musicale: Schubert, Schumann, Mendelssohn,” and also wrote concert reviews.²⁵ These opportunities gave him important contacts in the network of Paris musicians.²⁶

Hettich had a strong influence on Bonis; on numerous occasions they collaborated on Bonis’s musical settings of Hettich’s poetry. This working relationship grew into mutual love, and in September 1881, Hettich asked Bonis’s parents for her hand in marriage.²⁷ Unfortunately for Bonis, her parents did not approve of her marriage to a musician; they were especially disapproving of singers. Her parents required Bonis to withdraw from the Paris Conservatory, and in November 1881, Conservatory registers show the notation “démissionnaire” (resigned).²⁸ According to Géliot, Hettich promised to write her, yet the communication eventually stopped.²⁹

After resigning her appointment to the Conservatory, Bonis secured a job as a seamstress, which was her parents’ original choice of vocation for her. At the same time, her parents searched for a suitable husband, and through mutual friends, discovered someone they considered to be a fitting partner in Albert Domange, an industrialist twenty-five years her senior.³⁰ Domange was the successor to SCÉLLOS, an enterprise

²⁵ Géliot, *Mel Bonis: femme et compositeur*, 33.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁸ Christine Géliot, “La compositrice Mel Bonis,” in *L’accès des femmes à l’expression musicale: apprentissage, création, interprétation, les musiciennes dans la société contemporaine* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2005), 58.

²⁹ Géliot, *Mel Bonis: femme et compositeur*, 41.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

that still exists today under the name “DOMANGE.”³¹ Bonis married Domange, the father of five boys and twice a widower, on September 15, 1883.³² Géliot writes that Bonis, as the wife of Albert Domange, fulfilled her parents’ wish that their daughter become an obedient, faithful wife, as she took charge of the household and the education of her husband’s five children, and eventually, three more of their own.³³

Due to the professional successes of her husband, Bonis was free to live a financially comfortable life. Without financial concerns she had the luxury of servants and other household help. However, the difficulties of balancing domestic and personal goals remained and Bonis would wait ten years before seriously composing again. She writes about the responsibility of raising children:

The Christian mother who doesn’t allow evil thoughts to linger in her mind, but who instead makes sure to develop a sense of beauty and goodness, doesn’t know which purifying, cleansing atmosphere she creates around herself, which will benefit her children. To tease and spoil have absolutely no moral value. One believes oneself is good because one becomes tender, but that’s incorrect. The spoiled child will be more and more demanding; he will revolt as soon as someone refuses to give in to his demands, which will only multiply each time one gives in, and which is often nothing but laziness. To give in in order to have momentary peace, is to expose oneself to continued assaults.³⁴

³¹ As quoted in Mayer, *Mel Bonis*, 3. DOMANGE, specializing in automotive transmissions, hydraulic transmission, and industrial filtration merged with RFIH in 2009 and is owned by MPC group. www.domange.fr. Accessed February 3, 2013.

³² Géliot, *Mel Bonis: femme et compositeur*, 43.

³³ *Ibid.*, 45.

³⁴ As quoted in Géliot, 61. Original source: ‘Souvenirs et réflexions’ de Mel Bonis. Ed. Du Nant d’enfer, 1974. “La mère chrétienne qui ne permet pas aux mauvaises pensées de s’attarder en elle, qui s’applique au contraire à développer le sens du bien et du beau, ne sait pas quelle atmosphère purifiante, bienfaisante, elle crée autour d’elle, dont ses enfants bénéficieront. Cajoler, gater, n’a aucune valeur morale. On se croit bon parce qu’on s’attendrit, c’est une erreur. L’enfant gâté sera de plus en plus exigeant ; il se révoltera dès que l’on refusera de céder à ses caprices, lesquels se multiplieront par l’assentiment qu’on y donne et qui n’est souvent que de l’indolence. Céder pour avoir la paix momentanément, c’est s’exposer à de perpétuels assauts...”

Throughout her marriage, Bonis struggled to balance her domestic duties with her passion for composing. Nonetheless, the influence of friends, including Jeanne Monchablon and Hettich, inspired her to compose once again. Bonis's teacher Guiraud wrote to her in a letter, "I hope that marriage will not make you forget your good intentions to work."³⁵

Between 1886 and 1887, Bonis casually ran into Hettich on various occasions within the music world, most frequently at the publishing house of Alphonse Leduc, with whom Bonis had a friendship. Leaving a concert one evening, Hettich asked Mel to read a poem he had written about Christmas. They ended up working on the song for three hours, and Hettich's definitive role in Bonis's private and professional life was re-established.

Her frequent encounters with Hettich created a passionate conflict: a conflict between her deep attraction to Hettich and the rigid religious education she received as a child. Despite the resulting emotional turmoil her attraction caused, this conflict would later become the source of much musical inspiration. Bonis wrote the following about love:

Love, true love desires happiness for the person loved at the expense of any sacrifice, even those which consist of blocking the way, if possible, where it would lead to the eventual compromise of one's own soul's salvation. If he resists, the lover would then only be able to suffer in silence "the painful martyrdom of love." One suffers to the same extent that one loves.³⁶

³⁵ As quoted in Géliot, *Mel Bonis*, 50. Original source or date not given. "J'espère que le mariage ne vous fera pas oublier vos bonnes intentions de travail."

³⁶ As quoted in Géliot, *Mel Bonis*, 92. Original source: *Souvenirs et réflexions de Mel Bonis*. Ed. du Nant d'enfer, 1974. "L'amour, le véritable amour veut le bonheur de l'être aimé au prix de tous les sacrifices, même celui qui consiste à lui barrer le chemin, si possible, au cas où il s'engagerait dans une voix tortueuse de nature à compromettre le

Five years after she and Hettich reconnected, Bonis was traumatized by the loss of her father, an event that reinforced many of the values about marriage and fidelity that she had been taught as a child. She attempted to end her relationship with Hettich, who was also married; however, the affair eventually resumed, and at forty-two years old, she realized she was pregnant. She recalls having to perform her Trio for flute, violin and piano while pregnant and nauseated:

One night I was supposed to play my little ‘Trio for flute, violin and piano’ in public. I had a bad headache and felt nauseated; I was very uncomfortable. He [Bonis’s six-year-old son Edouard] was trying to convince me; ‘I beg you, Mama, don’t go there, you’ll get sick.’ He was crying and hanging on to me. I [told] him: ‘come with me, it’ll calm you down.’ I was able to play my piece with a heavy heart, then return quickly home with the dear little one, who was at last reassured.³⁷

Bonis took several months to tell Hettich about the pregnancy, and with his helpful arrangements, she was able to hide the truth from her family by telling them that she had to go to Switzerland to undergo treatment for an unknown illness. It was there that she gave birth to their daughter, Madeleine. The baby was eventually given to a foster family and Bonis and Hettich once again went their separate ways. The name of the baby’s mother was declared “unknown.” Madeleine’s birth marked the end of their affair, but Hettich and Bonis still worked together on a professional level. Although the nature of Madeleine’s early relationship with Hettich and Bonis is unknown, she called her

salut de son ame. S’il résiste, celui qui aime n’a plus qu’à souffrir en silence ‘le douloureux martyr de l’amour. On souffre dans la proportion où l’on aime.’”

³⁷ As quoted in Géliot, *Mel Bonis*, 111. Originally from *Souvenirs et réflexions*. “Un soir, je devais jouer en public mon petit ‘trio flûte violon piano.’ J’avais la migraine avec des nausées, j’étais très mal à l’aise. Il me suppliait : je t’en prie, Maman, n’y va pas, tu vas être malade.’ Il pleurait et s’accrochait après moi. Je lui dis : ‘Viens avec moi, tu seras tranquille.’ Je pus, bien péniblement exécuter mon morceau, puis rentrer bien vite avec le cher petit, enfin rassuré.”

adoptive parents “Papa et Maman.” In 1906, after the death of his wife, Hettich told Madeleine that she was adopted, yet simply told her he was her “god-father.”³⁸ Madeleine’s birth was documented by Hettich in a poem, which shows Hettich’s obvious affection for his daughter:

L’amour qu’on rêve est plus doux
Madeleine, ô ! Madeleine
L’amour qu’on rêve est plus doux
Serions-nous aussi bien chez nous
Pour filer à deux la laine³⁹

The love of which one dreams is softer
Madeleine, oh! Madeleine.
The love of which one dreams is softer
Besides, would we be at home
In such a perfect relationship (love/union).

Bonis’s writings clearly indicate her distress at having to lie to her own children about her whereabouts and the “cure” she undertook. This guilt would never leave her for the rest of her life. She wrote shamefully of her relationship with her children:

They’re good, honest, sincere, unaware, with good manners, incapable of doing anything wrong. They [understand neither] envy nor jealousy, nor lowly rancor. They know how to keep quiet and keep a secret: They don’t like idle gossip. Nothing worried them, not even fickle drama. They possess the self-control that their mother lacks. Who then is this mother?⁴⁰

³⁸ Eventually Hettich told Madeleine he was her biological father, but Melanie waited much later to do the same. Géliot, *Mel Bonis: femme et compositeur*, 195.

³⁹ Géliot, *Mel Bonis: femme et compositeur*, 113.

⁴⁰ As quoted in Géliot, *Mel Bonis*, 117. Original source *Souvenirs et réflexions de Mel Bonis*. “Ils sont bons, honnêtes, sincères, désintéressés, chevaleresques, incapables de duplicité et de félonie. Ils ne connaissent pas l’envie ni la jalousie, ni la basse rancune. Ils savent se taire, garder un secret : ils n’aiment pas les commérages. Rien de trouble en eux, rien de mesquin ou de versatile. Ils possèdent la maîtrise de soi que leur mère n’a pas. Qui donc est cette mère?”

The inner turmoil Bonis experienced led to a renewed sense of musical purpose and the most musically productive period of her life. In 1899, Bonis joined the Société des Compositeurs de Musique, and eventually became secretary in 1910. This important opportunity allowed her to be in contact with leading composers of the period and to be included in the society bulletin, which informed the members of activities, concerts, and new musical releases. The period from 1900-1914 saw Bonis's greatest musical output, including the *Sonate pour flûte et piano* of 1904.

In 1901, despite solely publishing under Leduc, Bonis moved to the publishing house Eugene Demets, which had opened in 1899. Géliot suggests that a likely reason for this change was that Bonis was at that time devoting most of her composing to chamber works and religious music, representing a different market than the music accessible to amateurs, which Leduc tended to prefer.

As talk of war increased around 1914, Géliot notes that Bonis spent more time at the organ improvising in the solemnity of the church, inspired, perhaps, by the stained glass.⁴¹ This activity is documented because much of her organ music was written just preceding World War I, and also at the end of her life, around 1930. She became the organist of the parish at her summer home of Étretat, which allowed her to play consistently on a Cavallé-Coll organ.⁴² However, between 1914 and the intensification of World War I, Bonis's composing was curtailed significantly; afterward, the majority of her projects were written for her grandchildren. As France moved into a war economy,

⁴¹ Géliot does not indicate the exact church Bonis attended.

⁴² Aristide Cavallé-Coll (1811-1899) is considered by many to be the greatest organ builder of the nineteenth century, who inspired composers of the French Romantic organ school, including Franck and Charles-Marie Widor (1844-1937).

around 1914, Bonis's compositional activity ceased almost entirely, a hiatus that extended through 1922. Instead of composing, and while most of her male relatives were sent to war, she took care of the four grandchildren, worked in an orphanage, and went to church every day. According to Eberhard Mayer, the deployment of her sons to war and her commitment to prisoners and orphans drained her physically and mentally.⁴³

Albert Domange died in 1918. The widowed Bonis busied herself in the events of the household and invited Madeleine to the family's summer home. However, this created another dilemma: Madeleine and Bonis's son Edouard (neither of whom knew they were half-siblings) had begun to fall in love, and Edouard intended to ask for Madeleine's hand in marriage. Bonis told Madeleine the remaining truth of her parentage, and although both Madeleine and Edouard ended up marrying suitable spouses, an emotional rift was created between Madeleine and Bonis. According to Géliot, this very likely added to the depression and guilt the composer had felt since Madeleine's birth.

During the last fifteen years of her life, Bonis spent most of her time in the quiet of her studio. Starting in 1922 she felt a new urge to create; however, the time spent composing was less sustained than her most fruitful period of 1900-1914. The music of this last period is predominantly spiritual; personal writings from the time indicate reflections on life and God. Her great-granddaughter summarized that Bonis wrote "music she liked, for those who thought like her, for her God."⁴⁴ Bonis wrote, "Music is

⁴³ Eberhard Mayer, translation Geneviève Debuysscher, preface to *Suite dans le style ancien: pour flûte, violon, alto (ou clarinette) et piano* by Mel Bonis (Rheinfelden: Edition Kossack, 2005).

⁴⁴ Géliot, *Mel Bonis*, 223. "Au mépris des modes, Mélanie compose la musique qu'elle aime, pour ses frères de pensée, pour son Dieu."

like the depths of one's soul: one doesn't understand it until one is surrounded by like beings."⁴⁵

Bonis eventually had fifteen grandchildren, and although she continued to compose towards the end of her life, increasing health problems and fatigue slowed her down. Géliot writes that from her late fifties, Bonis spent most of her time lying down and isolated.⁴⁶ As the world progressed around her both musically and socially, Bonis could not adjust and found sanctuary in her religion, in trying to uphold the values of moral purity, and in passing them on to those around her. Bonis wrote:

Watch out for seductions and luxury. Life's worst surprises, those which want to trick you to the fullest, refuse to allow themselves to contribute to the proper functioning of society. They will find it good that others accept the daily struggle to live up to the expectations of a good citizen or the head of a household. They want peace and tranquility to the extent that their guilty consciences will allow. You can be sad, but don't be a martyr or a 'woe is me'. Get rid of the pessimism, discouragement, defeatism. Defeatism! That sums it up: it's the recourse of bullies. That is to say, the giving up in battle or the abandonment of one's post during an enemy attack. It's normal to be afraid. You don't hide for that.⁴⁷

Mel Bonis described her existence in 1928:

⁴⁵ As quoted in Géliot, *Mel Bonis*, 223. Original source: *Souvenirs et réflexions de Mel Bonis*. "La musique est comme l'essence de l'âme : on ne se comprend qu'entre gens de même affinité."

⁴⁶ Géliot, "La compositrice Mel Bonis," 61.

⁴⁷ As quoted in Géliot, *Mel Bonis*, 222. Original source: *Souvenirs et réflexions de Mel Bonis*. "Défiez-vous des séductions et du luxe...Les embusqués de la vie : ceux qui veulent en jouir à tout prix, refusant de contribuer pour leur part au fonctionnement de la pratique sociale. Ils trouveront bon que les autres acceptent la lutte de chaque jour pour remplir le devoir de citoyen, de père de famille. Ils veulent la paix, la tranquillité dans la mesure où leurs moyens pécuniaires le leur permettent...Il est permis d'être triste, mais il ne faut pas en prendre l'air ni avoir l'esprit chagrin. Bannissons le pessimisme, le découragement, le défaitisme. Le défaitisme! Cela dit tout : c'est le retranchement des lâches! c'est-à-dire la capitulation avant le combat ou fuite devant l'ennemi. Il est naturel d'avoir peur. On ne se dérobe pas pour cela."

It's hard to be crushed by anxiety, embarrassment, or indignation...to be obsessed by a single controlling thought that robs you of rest, breaks your heart, that diminishes all of your resistance...in one word, absorbs your life drop by drop. All intellectual thought becomes impossible.⁴⁸

Bonis's ill health was compounded by the death of her youngest son in 1932, and a long history of psychiatric problems, including insomnia, migraines, and a hypersensitivity to noise.⁴⁹ On March 18, 1937, Mel died in Sarcelles, France, at the age of eighty. Ironically, Hettich died just a few days afterward.

In 1933, near the end of her life, Mel Bonis wrote insightfully to young American flutist Norman Gifford:

Much limited in my young days by family obligations, although always haunted by musical composition, I could only start working late in life and thus, despite my age, I am not a very old composer.⁵⁰

Obviously Bonis's struggle to balance composition and family troubled her endlessly. Mel Bonis left flutists six pieces for flute and piano, aiding in filling the void in repertoire and bridging the gap between Romanticism and Impressionism. The composer did not receive widespread performances of her works that her compositions deserved, and she had a difficult time finding publishers for many chamber works. Although Bonis's style lingered behind the times and by the end of her life she had less

⁴⁸ As quoted in Géliot, *Mel Bonis*, 220. Original source: *Souvenirs et réflexions de Mel Bonis*. "C'est dur d'être broyée par l'inquiétude, le chagrin, l'indignation...d'être obsédée par une idée fixe qui vous prend votre repos, vous brise le cœur, affaiblit en vous toute résistance...en un mot absorbe votre vie goutte à goutte. Tout travail intellectuel devient impossible."

⁴⁹ Mayer, *Mel Bonis*, 5.

⁵⁰ Géliot, "Compositions for Voice by Mel Bonis, French Woman Composer, 1858-1937," 50.

energy to market her work to publishers, efforts by l'Association Mel Bonis have made access to her works easier for flutists throughout the world.

Women Composers of *Fin de siècle* France

Examination of the repertoire composed by Mel Bonis and the timeline of her life clarifies that the events and circumstances of her generation directly and profoundly affected her compositions. At the forefront of these influences was her strict Catholic upbringing and the issues facing women in late-nineteenth-century France. Bonis's biography describes a woman who was clearly struggling to balance many aspects of her life. Mélanie lived in the Third Republic of France, a time when depopulation, nationalism, and women's issues were at the forefront of French politics. The majority of the French population at the time was Catholic, and the *Rerum novarum* of 1891 dictated the role of a woman:

Women, again, are not suited for certain occupations; a woman is by nature fitted for home-work, and it is that which is best adapted at once to preserve her modesty and to promote the good bringing up of children and the well-being of the family.⁵¹

Societal expectations made it difficult for girls and women to pursue music, let alone composition. Anne Alyse Watson in her dissertation, "Selected Works by Female Composers Written for the Clarinet During the Nineteenth Century," acknowledges that the documents that address women in music throughout history place them in categories: "1) as mothers of creators; 2) as inspiration for great musical works; 3) as the stabilizing

⁵¹ The Vatican, "Rerum novarum Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII On Capital and Labor," Vatican: The Holy See, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum_en.html (accessed February 3, 2013).

influence in a man's life, such as provider of emotional support and a good, quiet home life; 4) as a negative influence on men; and 5) as an interpreter of creativity."⁵²

A survey of girls in 1870s Paris found that many aspired to be schoolteachers, although most thought they would likely become seamstresses.⁵³ Many marriages, including Bonis's, were dictated by financial expectations, not romantic attraction or the woman's choice. Robert McGraw writes that in *fin-de-siècle* France, "debate about women's 'right' to sexual satisfaction in marriage was blamed for the spread of adultery and divorce and alarming evidence of male sexual anxiety and impotence."⁵⁴

France was experiencing a declining birthrate in the latter half of the 1800s, and the problem was blamed in part on irresponsible women's neglect of their infants and avoidance of pregnancy.⁵⁵ The nationalistic implications of this decline (including fear of invasion from densely populated Germany) resulted in legislative action.⁵⁶ In 1892, legislation was passed to regulate and limit the number of hours working women could spend in industry. One prolific antifeminist nationalist writer, Theodore Joran, who was only one of the many commenters on the subject, described the appropriate role of women:

⁵² Jeanie G. Pool, *Women in Music History: A Research Guide* (New York: by the author, 1977), 2; quoted in Anne Alyse Watson, "Selected Works by Female Composers Written for the Clarinet During the Nineteenth Century" (DMA Thesis, Arizona State University, 2008), 17.

⁵³ Roger Magraw, *France, 1800-1914: A Social History* (Harlow: Longman, 2002), 325.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 253.

⁵⁵ Karen Offen, "Depopulation, nationalism, and feminism in Fin-de-Siècle France," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 89 No. 3 (June 1984): 652.

⁵⁶ Between 1810 and 1850 the French population increased by 3.4 million, while during the same period the German population increased by 25 million. Offen, 651.

Good households are those where the man considers the woman as an object made for his own personal pleasure and well-being and where the woman believes she ought to please her husband, to serve him, and applies herself exclusively to that end.⁵⁷

Jules Simon, a senator in the Third Republic from 1875-1896, wrote, “There are good and bad wives, [but] there are only good mothers. A bad mother, if such exists, is against nature. One would not know how to classify her, nor understand her.” Not only was it against Catholic values for a woman to pursue her own interests outside of the family, but it was against the moral obligation of a woman to her nation, and women found that their contribution to their country was based upon their success as mothers.⁵⁸

In the case of women artists, a look into the writings of the *Union des Femmes Peintres et Sculpteurs* may provide insight into the feelings of women in the artistic world; no comparable organization for women composers can be identified. In 1883, addressing the motivation behind forming the union, Mme Leon Bertaux wrote:

The woman artist is an unknown power, unrecognized, held back from developing fully! A type of social prejudice still weighs her down, and despite this, every year, the number of women committed to art increases with a frightening rapidity: I say frightening because our institutions still do nothing for the greater cultivation of these minds hard at work, the results of so many efforts are often powerless or ridiculous...Should one conclude from this that women should abstain [from art] or resign themselves to occupying an inferior place amongst artists? This is not how I see it. Wherever there is feeling and the will to express it, there is a vital power which a country allied to progress has neither the right to ignore nor to leave unactivated.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Offen, 662.

⁵⁸ Joshua Cole, *The Power of Large Numbers: Population, Politics, and Gender in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cornell University Press, 2000), 19.

⁵⁹ Tamar Garb, *Sisters of the Brush: Women's Artistic Culture in Late Nineteenth-Century Paris* (New Haven: Yale University Press: 1994), 44.

The changes in women's roles and the development of feminist ideas were not accepted lightly by the Catholic community. A document dated February 5, 1896, in the *Archives de la Prefecture de Police* detailed these concerns:

The Catholics are following the French feminist movement attentively. They are quite disturbed to see the feminine element escape, step by step, from them. They have found out that more and more attempts are being made to attract women to freemasonry and they, themselves, want to form women's groups with the mission of checking this movement.⁶⁰

The comments of critics and authors of the time show the bias the public had against women composers. In his manual for piano quartets of 1937, Wilhelm Altmann commented briefly on Bonis's first quartet: "We would never think that this final movement was composed by a woman; this compliment is also intended to the preceding movements."⁶¹ In addition, Saint-Saëns notably wrote to Jean Gounod, son of Charles Gounod, "I never thought a woman could write this: she knows all the tricks of the art!"⁶²

Coincidentally, Bonis was born the same year as another more well-known female composer, Cécile Chaminade. In her personal life, Chaminade married the music publisher Louis-Mathieu Carbonel, but became a widow only six years later. Professionally, however, Chaminade was able to gain much more success during her lifetime than Bonis, most likely due to her freedom from domestic responsibilities. A look at Chaminade's views on the difficulty of being a woman composer provides insight that extends also to Mel Bonis. Chaminade wrote:

I do not believe that the few women who have achieved greatness in creative work are the exception, but I think that life has been hard on women; it has not

⁶⁰ Quoted in Garb, 63.

⁶¹ Quoted in Mayer, *Mel Bonis*, 2.

⁶² Géliot, "Mel Bonis," *Traversiere Magazine*, 35.

given them opportunity; it has not made them convincing...There is no sex in art. Genius is an independent quality. The woman of the future, with her broader outlook, her greater opportunities, will go far, I believe, in creative work of every description.⁶³

Importantly, Géliot explicitly writes that Bonis was not touched by feminist ideas, and did not call into question her societal role. However these social transformations must have affected Mel Bonis and her compositions, though she and Géliot do not acknowledge it.⁶⁴ At most, one can see how the dynamics of Catholicism, extra-marital relations, illegitimate children, and mothering in Mel's life mirrored the issues relentlessly facing the country at the turn of the century in France.

⁶³ Sun-Young Oh, "The Piano Works of Cécile Chaminade (1857-1944)" (DMA thesis, University of Cincinnati, 2000), 12.

⁶⁴ Géliot, "La compositrice Mel Bonis," 581.

CHAPTER 2

COMPOSITIONAL PHILOSOPHY AND STYLISTIC TRAITS

The compositions of Mel Bonis number over 300, including 150 works for piano, twenty-nine chamber works, twelve works for orchestra, forty pieces for organ, twenty songs and religious works for voice with organ accompaniment, and one unaccompanied Mass.⁶⁵ While the majority of these works are for piano or voice, the number of pieces for flute and piano, coupled with the absence of music for any other wind instruments, suggests that Bonis had a special fondness for the instrument. Indeed, Géliot indicates that Bonis had a particular preference for the violin, cello, and flute.⁶⁶

Although the majority of Bonis's works were written between 1892 and 1914, Géliot divides her output into three distinct periods delineated by personal events in her life. The first period, between 1892 and 1900, comprised predominately "charming" music; the second period, between 1900 and 1914, was "scholarly"; and the third period, between 1922 and 1937, was Bonis's "spiritual" period of composition.⁶⁷ Approximately one-third of Bonis's works were neither printed nor published in her lifetime.⁶⁸

Bonis's most productive period of composition, and the height of her composition of chamber music, was from 1900 to 1914. Géliot considers it to be the most mature of

⁶⁵ Mayer, *Mel Bonis*, 5.

⁶⁶ Géliot, *Mel Bonis: femme et compositeur*, 129.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 129. "Première période, 1892-1900: dominante musique 'de charme'; Seconde période, 1900-1914: dominante musique 'savante'; Troisième période, 1922-1937: dominante musique 'spirituelle'."

⁶⁸ Ibid., 130.

her works.⁶⁹ The piano almost always plays a central role in her chamber music, and not merely as an accompanying instrument but as an important element of the ensemble.⁷⁰

The fact that she was an excellent pianist undoubtedly contributed to this output.

Bonis composed at a time when flute repertoire was facing a turning point. The flute had recently undergone significant mechanical changes that facilitated greater technical capacity, which in turn influenced a new set of repertoire featuring the improved capabilities of the Boehm flute.⁷¹ In 1876, Joseph Henri Altès (1826-1899) was in his eighth year as flute professor at the Paris Conservatory. Had Bonis attended the flute sections of the *Concours du Prix* while a student, between 1876 and 1881, she would have heard a very limited selection of flute repertoire, all composed by either Altès himself or Jean-Louis Tulou (1786-1865), flute professor from 1829 to 1856.⁷² The music was not written to display the singing quality of the flute, but rather to showcase its recently expanded technical capacity.

An 1890 contributor to *Musical Opinion* offers this mocking description of contemporary flute performances:

...air first, then common chord variation, [staccato] ‘runs’ variation, slow movement with a turn between every other two notes, and a pump handle shake that wrings tears of agony from the flute; then the enormously difficult finale, in

⁶⁹ Among the substantial works of this period are three dances for orchestra, *Bourrée, Pavante et Sarabande*; *Sonate pour flûte et piano*; *Sonate pour violoncelle*; *Suite pour flûte violon piano*; *Quatuor en si bémol*; *Soir et Matin pour piano, violon, et violoncelle*; *Suite pour harpe chromatique et deux instruments à vents*.

⁷⁰ Géliot, *Mel Bonis: femme et compositeur*, 173.

⁷¹ These changes were initiated by the advancements of the Boehm system flute, developed by flutist and inventor Theobald Boehm between 1831 and 1847. Boehm’s developments included creating a cylindrical bored instrument that could produce a larger volume of sound, with axle-mounted keys, and made of silver rather than wood.

⁷² Altès was flute professor of the Paris Conservatoire from 1869-1893, following Vincent-Joseph Louis Dorus.

which you are up in the air on one note, then drop with a bang, which nearly breaks you, onto low C, only to bounce up again, to hold onto a note, shake it [wring its neck in fact], scatter it in all directions and come sailing down triumphantly on a chromatic [legato] with a perfect whirlpool of foaming notes, only to be bumped and punched about until you are exhausted.⁷³

Notably, modern flutists do not frequently perform these works, although they do have great pedagogical value. Many of the French works in the standard flute canon today were written due to the influences of Paul Taffanel (professor of flute from 1894-1908) and of the Société des Instruments à Vent on the Parisian compositional community. Bonis's compositions date from this era, when the promotion of French wind works occurred. Ardal Powell writes that, "The efforts of Saint-Saëns [and the Société Nationale de Musique] and his colleagues to encourage French composers began in the 1890s to bear fruit in one of the richest, if not the most prolific, outpourings of music ever composed for the flute."⁷⁴

Nancy Toff argues that French music of the modern era (beginning c.1885) can be divided into four schools: the romanticism of Franck, the classicism of Saint-Saëns and Dubois, the impressionism of Debussy, and the iconoclastic aesthetic of Les Six. None of them, however, is neatly or firmly defined or mutually exclusive; more than one teacher or philosophy often influenced a given composer.⁷⁵ Géliot writes:

Mel Bonis wrote in the Post-Romanticism vein. One feels the influence of her contemporaries — Franck, Fauré, Saint-Saëns — and yet she stands out for her original sense of harmony and rhythm and the vitality and sensuality of her discourse.⁷⁶

⁷³ As quoted in H. Macaulay Fitzgibbon, *The Story of the Flute, Being a History of the Flute and Everything Connected with It* (London: W. Reeves, 1929), 110.

⁷⁴ Ardal Powell, *The Flute* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 217.

⁷⁵ Toff, *The Flute Book*, 258.

⁷⁶ Géliot, "Compositions for Voice by Mel Bonis," 50.

Bonis's music demonstrates that she was greatly influenced by all four schools (though the period in which Les Six were an entity was much later); however, her own words clearly indicate her belief that her music should be strongly rooted in traditional foundations and not be unduly influenced by the great leaps of modernism. Nevertheless, it would be incorrect to assume her music was not progressive or original. Fortunate to compose at her own pace, without financial pressure, she was not swayed by outside influences. Bonis wrote, in a sense, for herself and nobody else.

Her reaction to what she considered twentieth-century modernism was strongly negative. Géliot writes that César Franck and Charles Gounod, composers Bonis admired, were scorned by the public. Despite lukewarm popular reception of their music, however, Bonis refused to change her style to please the crowd. In her *Souvenirs et réflexions*, Bonis responded to the belief of some other composers that progress was more important than beauty. First, she quotes two composers:

Marinetti: 'A humming car is more beautiful than the victory of 'Samothrace'.

Debussy: 'Isn't our task to find the symphonic formula that outlines our age, that which we call progress, audacity, and modern victory? The century of airplanes has a right to its own music.'

Then she writes in response:

In our layman, positivist, fiercely egoist time, tenderness in music is banned, but we are forced to swallow train imitations, kicks, and humbug 'Boléros.' A back-to-basics musical critic declares that the word 'rule' shouldn't be used, but only that which pleases the listener should count. Which makes us bring back the fact that there is no objective truth. To introduce this nihilism in all aspects, firstly in morality...that'll be something to see!⁷⁷

⁷⁷ As quoted in Géliot, *Mel Bonis: femme et compositeur*, 204. Original source: 'Souvenirs et réflexions' de Mel Bonis. Ed. Du Nant d'enfer, 1974. "Écrit Marinetti.

In contrast, Bonis clearly had much respect for Franck, Fauré, and Gounod and regarded their music worthy of great respect. She wrote:

‘The stupid 19th century’ saw Franck and Fauré [she writes with irony]. In the 20th century the number of ‘clever’ people and even more dabblers in music who would be better off sawing wood, it’s too many.⁷⁸

Composer Cécile Chaminade expressed similar sentiments in a 1919 interview:

Effacement, complete effacement, of all melody and form, seems to be the watchword these days. Modern; oh, it is no longer a question of simple modernism, it seems to be a case of arch-modernism with music playing but a negligible role. Not all of those included among the present-day moderns can be so reproached, but still a very large number [can], and the public stands for it all and allows itself to be cajoled into the belief that we are only passing into a new, a superior era.⁷⁹

Géliot notes that, “Despite her facility, Mel Bonis wrote and rewrote, endlessly correcting, in her search for an ultimate satisfaction that consistently eluded her. All

‘Notre devoir n’est-il pas de trouver la formule symphonique qu’exige notre époque, celle qu’appellent les progrès, les audaces et les victoires modernes ? Le siècle des avions a droit à sa musique,’ écrit Debussy. Comme en réponse, Mel Bonis dit : ‘A notre époque laïque, positiviste, féroce égoïste, la tendresse est bannie en musique mais on nous fera avaler des imitations de locomotive, de coups de pieds et des ‘Boléros’ fumistes... Un simpliste critique musical déclare que le mot ‘règle’ ne doit pas être prononcé, le ‘plaisir’ de l’auditeur étant seul en question. Ce qui revient à dire qu’il n’y a pas de vérité objective. Introduisez ce nihilisme dans tous les domaines, en morale d’abord..., ce sera du joli!’

⁷⁸ As quoted in Géliot, *Mel Bonis: femme et compositeur*, 204. Original source: ‘Souvenirs et réflexions’ de Mel Bonis. Ed. Du Nant d’enfer, 1974. “‘Le stupide XIXe siècle’ a vu Franck et Fauré,’ ironise-t-elle. ‘Au XXe, des quantités de gens ‘calés’ et encore plus d’artisans en musique qui feraient mieux de scier du bois, c’est hygiénique.’”

⁷⁹ Oh, 11.

details of nuance and tempo are noted with precision. Some pieces are composed over long periods of time.”⁸⁰

Bonis’s choice of genre, form, and harmony undoubtedly aligns with the merger of Classical elements and the tradition of nineteenth-century Romanticism. Though her *Sonate pour Flûte et Piano* makes use of non-European influences, including whole-tone scales and ragtime, the form of the Sonata is deeply rooted in Classical and Romantic sonata elements. Her compositional style remained fundamentally the same her entire life and did not readily adapt to the modernism developing in twentieth-century French music. Géliot writes about her great-grandmother’s musical style:

Hers was a highly sensitive temperament combined with a studious though willful character and a sharp intelligence. Add to this the tragic and brilliant unfolding of her life and one grasps the impetus for this great body of work...The strength of her inspiration was the nourishment of a mystical and passionate soul. Hers is an original and knowledgeable palette colored by impressionism and orientalism.⁸¹

Bonis favored smaller forms for her works, and most have descriptive titles. Half of her pieces for flute and piano are short, single-movement works: *Une Flûte Soupire pour Flûte et Piano* (two minutes long), *Pièce pour Flûte et Piano* (four minutes long), and *Air Vaudois pour Flûte et Piano* (four minutes long). Her harmonic vocabulary emphasizes functional tonality, but with a substantial addition of extended tertian harmony, added color chords, and extensive unexpected modulations. For example, in *Une Flûte Soupire pour Flûte et Piano*, Bonis uses constantly shifting tonal centers and coloristic chord successions to create an ambiguous atmosphere in the opening of the work before progressively coming into clear tonal focus through the use of functional

⁸⁰ Géliot, “Compositions for Voice by Mel Bonis,” 50.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

tonality by the conclusion of the piece. In contrast, *Air Vaudois* begins and ends with clear, functional tonality in the bright key of E Major. Nancy Toff writes in *Monarch of the Flute*, “The music [of Bonis] was technically accessible to amateur performers and aesthetically pleasing to its upper-crust listeners: lyrical, bucolic, with modern tendencies that were interesting but not unduly challenging.”⁸²

Bonis emphasizes the upper-middle to lower register of the flute in the majority of her compositions, perhaps owing to the flute’s beauty and emotional depth in this register. The works are not overly difficult for flutists, but the technical challenge lies in her choice of keys, many of which are not easy to execute on the instrument. The performer must communicate the highly personal nature of Bonis’s music. Bonis absorbed many aspects of the changing musical world around her, and her works deserve a thorough examination and interpretation on their own artistic merit and not solely in comparison with works of her contemporaries. A performance guide discussing Bonis’s six works for flute and piano follows. The works, examined in chronological order, are *Sonate pour Flûte et Piano*, Op. 64; *Air Vaudois pour Flûte et Piano*, Op. 108; *Andante et Allegro pour Flûte et Piano*, Op. 133; *Une Flûte Soupire pour Flûte et Piano*, Op. 121; *Pièce pour Flûte et Piano*, Op. 189; and *Scherzo (Final) pour Flûte et Piano*, Op. Posth. 187.

⁸² Nancy Toff, *Monarch of the Flute: The Life of Georges Barrère* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 71.

CHAPTER 3

THE WORKS FOR FLUTE AND PIANO

Sonate pour Flûte et Piano, Op. 64

Performance Guide

Bonis's *Sonate pour flûte et piano*, Op. 64, is the most substantial of her works for this pairing. The lack of sonata repertoire from the Romantic period adds to the importance of this work. Although flutists regularly borrow works from the strings (most frequently the Fauré and Franck violin sonatas), the only major flute and piano sonata from the Romantic period is that of Carl Reinecke (1824-1910), "Undine," Op. 167, composed in 1882. For this reason the Bonis Sonata is often called the French equivalent to the Reinecke Sonata. Bonis's Sonata was composed in 1904 and first published by Demets the same year. In 1921 the work was re-released in a collection by the editor Eschig, and it sold until the stock ran out.⁸³ Edition Kossack published the current edition in 2005.⁸⁴ This substantial four-movement work has a formal structure that reflects both Classical elements and the Romantic stylistic tradition and is approximately twenty minutes long. The four movements consist of *Andantino con moto*, *Scherzo-Vivace*, *Adagio*, and *Finale-Moderato*.

Bonis's Sonata was written for Louis Fleury (1878-1926), the prominent French flutist and husband of Gabrielle Monchablon, the daughter of Bonis's close friend Jeanne

⁸³ Géliot, "Mel Bonis," *Traversiere Magazine*, 42. Géliot does not state the date the stock ran out.

⁸⁴ Mel Bonis, *Sonate pour flûte et piano* (Rheinfelden: Edition Kossack, 2005).

Monchablon. Their friendship was strong; Mel was the godmother to Fleury and Gabrielle's daughter Antoinette. According to Géliot, Louis Fleury performed the sonata "repeatedly."⁸⁵ The prominence of Fleury is well documented: in 1905 he succeeded Georges Barrère as director of the Société Moderne des Instruments à Vent, and in 1913 he premiered the celebrated *Syrinx* for solo flute by Claude Debussy, who dedicated the work to him. The artistry and influence of Fleury during the time are summed up in his obituary in *The Musical Times* and the *London Times*:

The early and sudden death of Louis Fleury is a loss which will be deeply felt by lovers of music who a generation ago would never have believed that the death of a flute-player would be of higher consequence than a change in the personnel of a first-rate orchestra. In the memories of all who heard him Fleury's art will have defined the status of his instrument as the art of Muhlfeld defined the status of the clarinet...⁸⁶

It seems fitting that the sonata was written for Fleury, because he was outspoken about the lack of flute music with substance. He wrote:

...but the moment flautists tried to compete with violinists, giving themselves over to fireworks and the expression of hectic sentiment, people of good taste would have no more to do with them. Except for a few orchestral pieces, there is not a page of flute music by Mendelssohn, Schumann or Brahms— to take only those three; and so it will remain, as long as flautists turn themselves into mechanical birds and fill their melodies with meaningless ornament... After all, there are only two ways of writing for the flute, as for anything else — well and ill: and it is everything to choose the right way.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ As quoted in Géliot, *Mel Bonis: femme et compositeur*, 180. "Elle [Sonate] est dédiée à Louis Fleury qui la jouera à maintes reprises."

⁸⁶ As quoted in Jessica Raposo, "The Second Golden Age," *The Flutist Quarterly* (Spring 2011), 27.

⁸⁷ Louis Fleury and A. H. F. S. "The Flute and Its Powers of Expression," *Music and Letters* Vol. 3, No. 4 (Oct. 1922), 384.

The 1984 performance of the Sonata by the flutist Marc Beaucoudray was the first time the piece had been performed in more than forty years. According to Géliot, it was perhaps Michel Debost, the former Professor of Flute at the Paris Conservatory and the Oberlin Conservatory, who brought the work to the United States.⁸⁸ Understanding the structure of each movement as a whole will aid in a rich interpretation of this work.

Movement One: *Andantino con moto*

The first movement, *Andantino con moto*, is in a loosely structured sonata form. Throughout this movement, the roles of both the pianist and flutist are equally virtuosic, and both musicians must collaborate to link and exchange motives as if they were one player. A consistent rolling rhythm in the piano provides forward movement while the flute sings passionately above.

Dynamics throughout the movement are carefully marked, and the performers must bring out the abundance of melodic sequences and climactic points. It is tempting to approach this sonata with a consistently *appassionato* sound between the flutist and pianist, but like any large-scale work, it is essential that the sonata be paced from start to finish to truly bring out the special moments. Although no metronome marking is given for the first movement, the author suggests a tempo of quarter note equals 100 beats per minute (bpm).

The exposition begins with a one-measure piano introduction, after which the flute enters with an eight-measure melody in C# Minor over a gently swaying,

⁸⁸ Géliot, "Mel Bonis," *Traversiere Magazine*, 31.

arpeggiated accompaniment in the piano (Example 1). Due to its placement in the middle to lower register of the flute, this melancholy tune should be played with a dark yet projecting sound and must be rhythmically precise; each triplet should be played as written, not turned into an eighth-note and two sixteenth-notes. The flute music of Bonis often contains short phrases that link to form a larger melody, and this sonata is no exception. While each performer has his or her own ideas regarding phrasing, the flutist must be sure to make the melody cohere and avoid large gaps for the rests; instead, think of the rests as slight lifts. In order to create a continuous phrase, the flutist must connect the airstream through the grace notes, and a small *crescendo* should be made emphasizing the half-note downbeats following each triplet.

The image shows a musical score for the first theme of the first movement of a sonata. The score is in 3/4 time and has a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). It consists of two systems. The first system shows the flute part and the piano accompaniment. The piano part has a steady arpeggiated accompaniment in the right hand and a simple bass line in the left hand. The flute part has a melodic line with grace notes and rests, marked with 'mp'. The second system shows the flute part and the piano accompaniment. The piano part has a steady arpeggiated accompaniment in the right hand and a simple bass line in the left hand. The flute part has a melodic line with grace notes and rests, marked with 'dim.' and 'simile'.

Example 1: *Sonate: Andantino con moto*, mm. 1-9, first theme.

Starting in m. 10, transitional sixteenth-note runs in combinations of major, minor, and chromatic patterns are passed between pianist and flutist. The flutist enters from a sixteenth-note rest that must connect with the pianist to create a seamless stream of ascending and descending sixteenth notes. Therefore, careful subdivision is essential so as not to create a gap with the piano. Not only are the sixteenth-note combinations awkward for the flutist, but Bonis also adds grace notes to the descending runs. Careful finger practice is essential so that the flutist can look past the technical difficulties and focus instead on creating a wash of color. As a goal, the runs should sound improvisatory and effortless.

The second theme, introduced by the piano in m. 18, consists of a rising syncopated line with an ostinato bass that is a variant of the opening accompaniment pattern (Example 2). As the hopeful, romantic melody in E Major ascends, the tonality begins to modulate to G Major. In combination with a *crescendo* and octave doubling in the piano, the music reaches a peak in m. 27, brightening the mood of the original melancholy theme as if the sun has appeared. The flutist and pianist must build in volume and intensity, with a feeling of urgency, to the downbeat of m. 27, which should be played by the flutist with a bright, exuberant tone color, highlighting the V⁹ of G Major reached there. There is no dynamic marking at this point, other than *poco crescendo*, but the author suggests a dynamic of *mezzo-forte* by the downbeat of m. 27.

Example 2: *Sonate: Andantino con moto*, mm. 16-27, second theme in piano.

Starting in m. 28, the ascending syncopated melody begins again, now up a third in G Major, and this time the flutist takes over and continues this melody (mm. 32-36). However, the upward movement suddenly and quickly digresses with a return in m. 36 of the opening melody of the movement, now in the subdominant, F# Minor, and entirely in the piano. The *diminuendo* in m. 34 should decrease to a *piano* dynamic in order to meet the dynamic of the piano in m. 36. Toward the end of this closing theme a new melodic idea is introduced in the flute in m. 42. The large, highly-expressive, ascending leap in the flute (from e#¹ to g#³) at the beginning of this new melody creates a dramatic surge of energy. This melody highlights a long C#-major harmony in mm. 43-50, yet with hints of C# Minor, closing the exposition.

The end of the exposition overlaps with the start of the development in m. 47, where a new melody, the developmental theme, is introduced (Example 3). This *cantando* theme contrasts sharply with the first melancholy theme, in that it sounds much more tender and promising. The flutist joins in to finish the melody in mm. 51-52 before the piano begins to develop the second theme (from m. 18) in m. 53. Finally, in m. 61, the flute receives the developmental theme while the piano plays in triplets below, in the shape of the syncopated second theme. The flutist should play this melody with a fluid legato and forward direction. Bonis does not indicate a dynamic; however, the theme should be played at a *mezzo-forte* in order to allow room for the *decrescendo* that occurs throughout the descending sequence in mm. 65-69.

Example 3: *Sonate: Andantino con moto*, mm. 46-50, developmental theme.

The next section of the development begins with a piano solo in mm. 71-76 that is based on the ascending, syncopated second theme. Contrary motion between the

ascending right hand and descending left hand creates the widest register spacing of the entire movement, which leads to the entrance of the flute in the upper register.

The start of the retransition (mm. 77-82) evokes an ethereal, impressionistic sound through the combination of rising chromatic triplets and descending held notes in the piano, with a *ben canto* melody in the flute (Example 4). This line should be played with a gorgeous warm tone and singing vibrato in the flute, but the character quickly changes to a darker, more mysterious quality as the line descends. There is no dynamic indication, but the flutist should play at a transparent, *mezzo-piano* dynamic.

The image displays a musical score for a flute and piano. The score is in F# Major and 3/4 time. It is divided into two systems. The first system covers measures 75 to 79, and the second system covers measures 80 to 84. The flute part is written in the upper register. In the first system, the flute part begins with a melodic line marked 'ben canto' at measure 77. The piano accompaniment consists of rising chromatic triplets in the right hand and descending held notes in the left hand. The second system includes markings for 'dim' and 'dolce' in the flute part.

Example 4: *Sonate: Andantino con moto*, mm. 75-84, second development section.

Drawing directly from the main theme of the exposition, mm. 83-92 of the retransition, marked *dolce* in the flute, are firmly in F# Major and transform the quality

of the melancholy C#-minor theme to a more promising and optimistic character. However, characteristically in the style of Bonis, the harmony takes a sharp detour in m. 90 to the dominant, in preparation for the recapitulation. The flutist should *diminuendo* to a *piano* dynamic in order to match the piano. The final section of retransition (mm. 93-96) consists of call-and-response sixteenth-note runs between the flute and piano, and serves strongly as dominant preparation for the recapitulation in m. 97.

The recapitulation begins conventionally, with a return of the opening melody in the tonic key of C# Minor, though the remainder of the recapitulation is largely restructured. While the piano plays both the main melody and arpeggiated accompaniment, the flute continues the ornamented sixteenth-note runs to add a new layer to the original main theme (Example 5).

The image displays a musical score for Example 5, consisting of two systems of music. Each system includes a flute part (top staff) and a piano accompaniment (bottom two staves). The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 3/4. The first system starts at measure 95. The piano part features triplet markings and dynamic markings like 'p'. The second system starts at measure 100. The flute part has various melodic lines, and the piano part provides harmonic support with chords and moving lines.

Example 5: *Sonate: Andantino con moto*, mm. 95-105, beginning of recapitulation.

Whereas the first theme ended in m. 9 on c#: V, Bonis inserts five measures (mm. 105-109) to create a new ending that emphasizes roots in falling thirds. The rising register of the flute and the *poco rallentando* emphasize this change.

Following the restatement of the main theme, now with a refreshed tonic key, the transitional sixteenth-note runs in exactly the same combinations of major, minor, and chromatic patterns recur (mm. 110-121). However, this time the transition is extended sequentially by five measures, creating a sense of ambiguity as to where the tonality will land. The flutist always links up with the piano in these runs, and though not marked, the flutist should make sure to match the dynamic marking of the pianist. The flute descends chromatically in m. 124 at the rate of quarter notes, while the piano ascends in chromatic

planing at the rate of eighth notes, ending with a suspenseful B dominant-seventh chord in m. 125 (Example 6). The stepwise lines and syncopation in the flute allude to the second theme, and the *fermata* of silence at the end of m. 125 creates a clear demarcation before the next section of the recapitulation.

The image shows a musical score for measures 122-126. It consists of three staves: a single treble clef staff at the top, and a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) below. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#). Measure 122 starts with a piano (*mf*) dynamic. The top staff has a melodic line with a *fermata* over the final note. The grand staff shows a piano accompaniment with chromatic planing in the right hand and a bass line. Performance markings include *dim. e poco rit.* and *crescendo* in the top staff, and *mf* and *dim. e poco rit.* in the grand staff. The section ends with a *fermata* and the tempo marking *a tempo*.

Example 6: *Sonate: Andantino con moto*, mm. 122-126, chromatic planing and pause.

After the sense of anticipation created by the B dominant-seventh chord, the developmental theme, with a variation of the second theme in triplets in the piano, commences in m. 126 in the relative major key of E Major. This demonstrates Bonis's loose adherence to the Classical sonata form structure, because at this point the listener would usually expect to hear the second theme in the tonic key of C# Minor, not the developmental theme. After a four-measure insert of the developmental theme (mm. 126-129), the second theme returns in m. 130, again in E Major and pulling to G Major as before. This time, however, the flute line is augmented rhythmically, and although there is no dynamic marking, the flutist should steadily *crescendo* beginning in m. 134 to a

gentle *forte* by m. 138. The piano lingers with anticipation for four measures on a G# dominant-seventh chord in mm. 141-144 with syncopated rising chromatic notes.

This highlighted dominant sonority resolves on the downbeat of m. 145 with a triumphant emphasis on C# Major. The pianist should steadily *crescendo* to this point and emphasize the C# in the bass with a slight relaxation of tempo before the flute enters. Sweeping tonic and augmented triads in the piano accompany a return in the flute of the closing theme from the exposition (m. 43), this time with much more exuberance and optimism, finally reaching the C#-major chord that has been taunting throughout the movement. After a brief pause and fragment of the opening theme, the piano ends the movement alone with full C#-major chords, sweetly emphasizing the brightness of the upper register of the piano.

Movement Two: *Scherzo-Vivace*

Taking quite a detour from the depth and substance of the first movement, the second movement, *Scherzo-Vivace*, is a playful, dancing, swift movement in 3/8 time. Lasting less than two minutes, *staccato* dance-like sections, reminiscent of the character of Mendelssohn's *Scherzo* from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, alternate with sections of sweeping, broken arpeggios in the piano, layered with a *cantando* singing line in the flute. Formally, this movement can be labeled as a ternary form with coda, or ABACoda, using the tonal scheme of the movement as the basis for the three large sections. True to the character of a traditional Scherzo movement, this movement should be performed in a

playful manner, and Bonis clearly specifies in the score a tempo of quarter equals 104 bpm.⁸⁹

The main dance-like melodic idea of this movement is a slightly irregular (9+3) phrase in A Minor that establishes the playful character. Both flute and piano play this first theme, with the piano doubling the flute at a third or sixth below (Example 7). The performers should place emphasis on beat one throughout the melody while still adhering to the marking of *leggiero* in the flute. No dynamic marking is indicated; the author suggests beginning the movement at a *mezzo-forte* in order to be heard above the piano line, while still contrasting with the alternating *cantando* passage that is forthcoming.



Example 7: *Sonate: Scherzo-Vivace*, mm.1-9, first theme.

A sweeping upward gesture in mm. 10-13 is abruptly followed by a *subito piano*. Both flutist and pianist should make sure to build in dynamic to *forte* in m. 13, in order to playfully bring out this *subito* change (Example 8). The opening melodic idea begins again in m. 13 (now 9+5 phrasing), up a major ninth, and closes on an A-major triad in

⁸⁹ It is assumed this indication should read dotted quarter equals 104 bpm, due to the time signature of 3/8.

m. 21, followed by five measures of the upward gesture in the piano, closing the first theme.



Example 8: *Sonate: Scherzo-Vivace*, mm. 10-13, sweeping upward gesture.

Without pause, the contrasting second theme commences in m. 27, with a *cantando* line in the flute and sweeping arpeggios in the piano. The syncopation and ties in the flute create the feeling of a tempo change; however, there is no indication of slowing, and instead a feeling of broadening four-bar phrasing should take place (Example 9). This section should be played at a *forte* dynamic in order to contrast with the lighthearted first theme. The close of the A section, mm. 39-45, combines figures from the opening with two measures of arpeggiation in the flute, reminiscent of the second theme, and ends with anticipation on a dominant-ninth chord.



Example 9: *Sonate: Scherzo-Vivace*, mm. 27-32, second theme.

Measures 45-108 comprise the B section of the large-scale ternary form. This section is developmental, consisting of short alternating sections of the dance-like first theme and the *cantando* second theme through a variety of ever-changing tonal centers. The flute has several sweeping passages of sixteenth notes, exchanging this gesture with the piano (Example 10). Both the flutist and pianist should pay attention to the architecture of each run and bring out the peak of each at a *forte* dynamic.



Example 10: *Sonate: Scherzo-Vivace*, mm. 80-89, sweeping gestures.

The brief retransition in mm. 97-108 manipulates the opening dance motive in preparation for the final A section of the large-scale ternary form. Both flute and piano emphasize E_b , which jokingly alternates with its upper and lower neighbor tones (F and D). After a *diminuendo* and *poco ritardando* at m. 109, the E_b surprisingly moves as the leading tone to E, the first note of the returning melody.

The return, starting at m. 109, is an exact duplication of the original A section, with absolutely no alterations, ending on the dominant-ninth chord as before, in m. 153 (same as m. 45). Highlighting the rising gesture of sixteenth notes, the Coda commences in m. 153, and flute and piano playfully alternate and link together. Bonis slightly alters the mode of each group of sixteenths, creating a whirlwind of harmonic color, ending

with four measures of a: V^7 (mm. 162-165). Surprisingly, as if embarking on another return, seven measures of the opening melody begin at m. 166, but this reminiscence disintegrates into a prolonged $F\sharp-A-C-E$ chord. In one last playful moment, the piano alters this chord to $D-F\sharp-A-C$ and ends the movement with a colorful version of a plagal cadence (Example 11). Though brief, this movement serves as a “palette cleanser,” a short and humorous detour before the depth and emotional high point of the next movement, *Adagio*.



Example 11: *Sonate: Scherzo-Vivace*, mm. 181-182, final cadence.

Movement Three: *Adagio*

The third movement, *Adagio*, is the climax of the entire sonata, in part for the lyricism and extreme depths of emotion it reaches. Bonis exploits the ability of the flute to express both melancholy and passionate ecstasy. The movement goes from a slow and melancholy section to a jazz-like faster section marked *Allegro ma non troppo*, before closing with a brief return to the *Adagio*. Within these three slow-fast-slow sections, the movement actually contains three themes that are alternately developed and manipulated, so the element of variation is prominent. Despite the seeming complexity of the alternations and endless layering of themes, in a sense the third movement can be interpreted as a journey from dark to light, despair to hope, longing to love.

The first section of the *Adagio* begins with slowly plodding chords in the piano, immediately setting a dark character, while an ornate melody unfolds in the flute. The appoggiaturas and the syncopated rhythm in the flute create a sense of sorrowful longing above the sparse quarter-note chords in the piano (Example 12). The six-measure flute melody builds in dynamic and register in the middle of the phrase before falling to the tonic C, and the stepwise motion in the bass line of the piano brings out this arc shape. The flutist must make sure to *crescendo* to a *forte* dynamic in m. 4, yet being careful to avoid sounding shrill.

The image displays a musical score for a piece in Adagio. The top system features a flute part with a melodic line marked *mf con espress.* and a piano accompaniment. The bottom system continues the melody, marked *con esp.* The key signature is two sharps (D major) and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo is Adagio.

Example 12: *Sonate: Adagio*, mm. 1-9, melancholy melody.

To achieve a sustained melodic line with forward direction, the flutist must keep the resonance through the appoggiaturas by making the mordents secondary to the main notes. The best practice method to achieve this is to play the opening phrase without the grace notes, making sure to place the first sixteenth note of each group directly on the beat. If the phrase cannot be performed in one breath, the best place to breathe is after the tied E in measure four, right before the C#.

Following brief transitional measures, which in the style of Bonis's music are sequential, the second theme of the movement is introduced in m. 16 (Example 13). The entrance of this theme creates a very special moment for both instruments, as it contrasts greatly with the first theme. Due to its initial rhythmic simplicity and key of D \flat Major

(the parallel key of C# Minor), this melody seems to float magically above the more active piano part.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a flute and piano. The first system, starting at measure 13, shows a flute melody in the upper staff and piano accompaniment in the lower staff. The second system, starting at measure 17, continues the flute melody and piano accompaniment. The key signature is C# minor, and the tempo is Adagio. The piano part is marked with a dynamic of *p* (piano).

Example 13: *Sonate: Adagio*, mm. 13-20, second theme.

No dynamic indication is given, but the flutist should strive for a warm *mezzo-forte* above the *piano* dynamic in the piano. The phrase in mm. 16-17 contains a highly expressive leap of a ninth, which will recur in various forms throughout the movement, and the flutist should play this interval as if creating a *portamento* between the two notes. To color this phrase expressively, the flutist should play as *legato* as possible and keep the vibrato moving as the notes and fingers change. The vibrato should be varied, but

should not be too fast or wide. The sixteenth-note pairs in the piano will serve as motivic material for development later in the movement. By grouping the beats into two larger beats, instead of four eighth notes, the performers can maintain the flow of the theme and adhere to the subtle simplicity that is implied by this melody.

As the music builds in intensity, the flute rises in register in a sequential sixteenth-note motive that interlocks with the sixteenths in the piano. At the same time, the piano intensifies the forward motion with sweeping thirty-second-note rising arpeggios until m. 27, which pauses with a *diminuendo* and *ritardando* (Example 14). At the *a tempo*, the tension is finally released in a virtuosic, Chopin-like, *appassionato* piano solo based upon the second theme (Example 14). This four-measure solo brings out the expressive ninth leap and explores the entire range of the keyboard, generating the climax of the entire sonata.

The image shows two systems of musical notation for a piano solo. The first system covers measures 27-31. The right-hand staff begins with a half note chord (F major) and then moves to a series of eighth notes, marked '8va m.g.' and 'a tempo'. The left-hand staff has a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. Performance markings include 'calmato', 'dim.', 'rit.', 'f', and 'appassionato'. The second system covers measures 30-31, showing the continuation of the right-hand melody and the left-hand accompaniment.

Example 14: *Sonate: Adagio*, mm. 27-31, piano solo.

Following this climax, a transition ensues in which extensive chromaticism is used to modulate to the return of the opening theme in mm. 44-51; however, the theme is now in D \flat Major (parallel of C \sharp Minor) as opposed to the original key of C \sharp Minor. After a pause on a dominant-seventh chord in m. 51, the new, jazz-like, *Allegro ma non troppo* section immediately commences with a piano solo (Example 15). The syncopated right hand against the quarter-note chords is clearly reminiscent of ragtime, a style of popular music originating in the United States between 1896 and 1918. This piano solo is a quiet ragtime, however, and is actually a variation on the main flute theme, now marked *dolce*.

The image displays a musical score for Example 15, consisting of two systems of staves. The first system covers measures 52 to 57. The top staff is in treble clef, and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The tempo is marked 'Allegro ma non troppo' and the mood is 'dolce'. The music features a rhythmic variation in measures 52-57. The second system shows measures 57 and 58, with a final double bar line at the end of measure 58.

Example 15: *Sonate: Adagio*, mm. 52-57, ragtime variation.

The flute introduces a third and final theme in m. 59, labeled *misterioso*, which consists of a two-measure figure that is repeated at varying pitch levels (Example 16).

Example 16: *Sonate: Adagio*, mm. 57-64, *misterioso* melody.

In m. 67 the flute is given the ragtime variation of the main theme, now one step higher than the original. Although there is no dynamic marking, the flutist should play at a *mezzo-piano* to adhere to the *dolce* marking. Following this return, the portion between m. 74 and m. 101 consists of alternations of the ragtime-like variation with the third theme at shifting pitch levels. Elements of imitation and dialogue occur throughout between the flute and piano, as the dotted rhythm of the third theme is echoed in the bass of the piano.

The passage continues to grow in intensity as the second theme is added above the dotted rhythm in the bass in m. 102. Contributing to the dramatic emphasis, the flute's

rhythm is augmented from eighth notes to quarter notes. The flutist should play at a full *forte* dynamic until the downbeat of m. 112, taking a breath before beat two of m. 106.

Marked *Poco più lento*, m. 118 is a return to the opening slow section and opening theme. However, there are several significant changes in this return that completely change the character from the dark melancholy of the original to a sense of optimism and brightness (Example 17). The theme now begins in A \flat Major as opposed to C \sharp Minor, and the rhythm is augmented to significantly elongate the melody and create a more tranquil character. In addition, Bonis changes the piano accompaniment from the strict vertical chordal motion to graceful, floating arpeggios.

The image displays three systems of musical notation for a piano sonata. The first system, starting at measure 117, features a treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#) and a bass clef with a key signature of two sharps. The tempo marking 'Poco più lento' is placed above the treble staff. Dynamic markings include *mf* and *m.g.*. The second system, starting at measure 121, shows a key signature change to two flats (Bb and Eb) and includes a *p* dynamic marking. The third system, starting at measure 126, continues in the two-flat key signature and features *dim.* and *poco rit.* markings. The notation includes various rhythmic patterns, slurs, and dynamic changes across the systems.

Example 17: *Sonate: Adagio*, mm. 117-129, first theme now in A \flat Major.

Following a brief transition, which serves as a reminiscence of the light, *allegretto* character of the third theme, and a brief moment of complete silence, the original version of the opening theme returns in C \sharp Minor before a final restatement of the second theme in D \flat Major. With a sense of tapering off, a descending variation of the sixteenth-note

motive in the flute leads to a final D \flat -major tonic chord in the upper range of the piano.

As the highlight of the entire sonata, the *Adagio* allows the flutist and pianist to showcase the widest range of expression and dynamic contrast.

Movement Four: *Finale-Moderato*

The fourth movement of Bonis's Sonata requires the utmost virtuosity and technical precision from both the flutist and the pianist. Roughly arranged as an alternating form, the movement begins with an exotic sounding melody, followed by a series of digressions, and concludes with a return of the opening. This movement brings back and embellishes thematic ideas that were introduced in earlier movements, unifying the sonata as a whole. Cyclicism, in which a theme is used in more than one movement, was popular with Bonis's teacher César Franck, so it is not unexpected that she uses this technique in her flute sonata.

The piano opens the movement with two measures of whirling arpeggios in C \sharp Minor, immediately setting a dark and enigmatic tone. Entering in the third measure, the flute introduces the "exotic" melody, which consists of an arc-shaped phrase, similar in shape to the piano arpeggios and with a modal touch arising from the subtonic C \sharp -B-C \sharp at the cadences (mm. 4-5, 8-9) (Example 18). The augmented second, F double-sharp to E, also contributes to the melody's character. Combined with the *forte* dynamic and hairpin *crescendo/decrescendo*, this sweeping theme is fervent and impassioned and directly resembles the third, *misterioso* theme that was first introduced in m. 59 of the third movement, though now with a gloomier temperament.

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled "Finale - Moderato". It is in G# minor (three sharps) and 2/4 time. The score consists of two systems. The first system shows the piano accompaniment in the lower voice, featuring a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and dotted eighth notes. The upper voice has a melody starting with a dotted eighth note followed by a sixteenth note, then continuing with eighth notes. The second system continues the piano accompaniment and the melody, with a dynamic marking of *f* (forte). The score is labeled "Finale - Moderato" and includes a dynamic marking of *f*.

Example 18: *Sonate: Finale-Moderato*, mm. 1-6, “exotic” melody.

The flute immediately repeats this melody, and after an interlude in mm. 11-14, the flute and then the piano re-state it in the dominant, G# Minor (mm. 15-18). When the flute has long notes, the piano fills in with interjections based upon the dotted rhythm of the main melody (Example 18 above, mm. 5-6). A different type of exchange between the instruments begins in m. 19, where a second melodic idea is added that greatly resembles the opening theme of the first movement, sharing the eighth-note rhythm and grace-note embellishment (Example 19). The instruments take turns being featured until this section ends at m. 33 after a restatement of the exotic melody, now in E Major. The eighth-note shape in mm. 19-20 is expanded into two-measure scales in the flute in mm.

21-22 and the piano in mm. 29-30. In turn, these eighth-note scales become a sixteenth-note run in mm. 33-34 that sets up a new, bright thematic idea based on this faster rhythm.



Example 19: *Sonate: Finale-Moderato*, mm. 17-20, second melodic idea.

The new idea introduced in m. 35 consists of a scherzo-like sixteenth-note figure, with the piano exactly doubling the flute melody a third below. Difficult ensemble-wise, the flutist must subdivide precisely during the descending sixteenth-note run in m. 34 in order to enter accurately on the downbeat of m. 35. In addition, both flutist and pianist must agree on the dynamic to be reached at the peak of each hairpin. The author suggests *ff* at the peak in mm. 35-36, and *mf* at the peak of mm. 37-38.

Following the capricious sixteenth notes, the piano in m. 45 returns to the opening triplet accompaniment figure, introducing another collage-like passage with interludes in the piano based on the sixteenths in running thirds. Beginning in m. 47 the flute has a new lyrical melody superimposed, this one based on the first and second themes of the

Adagio (Example 20). The first four measures of this theme (mm. 47-50) are directly reminiscent of the first theme of the *Adagio* movement, and the following two measures (mm. 51-52) are derived directly from the second theme of the *Adagio*. Both themes share a syncopated rhythm, grace-note-embellished downbeats, and an expressive ascending leap within the phrase.

Example 20: *Sonate: Finale-Moderato*, mm. 47-54, melody based upon *Adagio*.

Starting in m. 62, a retransition occurs with hints of the exotic opening melody in the piano and an obbligato passage in triplet eighths in the flute. The triplets pass to the piano in m. 70, which prepares the return of the opening with an outline of C#: V⁷. While the triplets should be articulated by the flutist, Bonis includes the marking of *legato*, so the flutist should be very careful to adhere to this marking and keep a connected, un-

accented triple tonguing. The return of the first theme in C# Minor occurs in mm. 74-95 and is identical to the first twenty-two measures of the movement.

Beginning in m. 96, earlier figures return in a fantasia-like fashion, including the running sixteenth-note thirds and the flute's triplet obbligato. One last recall of the exotic melody in mm. 118-121 is followed by another collage of the sixteenth-note and triplet figures. By m. 129, the triplets morph into closing scale flourishes in the flute. These three fragments unite in combination with sweeping scales up and down the range of the flute, ending triumphantly in C# Major (Example 21), an exhilarating conclusion to the four-movement tour-de-force of Bonis's *Sonata*.

The image displays a musical score for the conclusion of a movement, spanning measures 133 to 144. The score is written for a flute and piano. The key signature consists of three sharps (F#, C#, G#), and the time signature is 3/4. The flute part begins in measure 133 with a melodic line that continues through measure 137. The piano accompaniment provides harmonic support with chords and moving lines. Measure 133 is marked with the instruction 'poco a poco cresc.' and measure 137 is marked 'accel. al fine'. The piece concludes with a double bar line at measure 144.

Example 21: *Sonate: Finale-Moderato*, mm. 133-144, conclusion of the movement.

Because of its length and intensity, the *Sonate* runs the risk of sounding continuously loud and formidable. The performers should make a special effort to identify the numerous special moments where the intimate level of the work can be emphasized. The *Sonate* requires high-level endurance, concentration, and physical stamina from the flutist to sustain the musical intensity necessary for a brilliant performance of the work. For this reason, the *Sonate* is recommended for advanced

college students and professional flutists. Bonis's *Sonate* offers flutists an invaluable opportunity to participate in the extraordinary tradition of the string sonatas of Franck and Fauré, but with a composition truly intended for the unique sound and capabilities of the flute.

Air Vaudois pour Flûte et Piano, Op. 108

Performance Guide

Composed in 1916, *Air Vaudois* stands out among Bonis's works for flute and piano for its outwardly joyful sensibility. *Vaudois* most likely refers to the area of Vaud, the French-speaking western part of current-day Switzerland. The writing for the flute is especially idiomatic, and the music is equally virtuosic and interesting for both the flutist and the pianist. Géliot writes that this work was composed in the middle of World War I and was inspired by countryside pastures.⁹⁰ *Air Vaudois* thus represents a moment of happiness during a difficult period in Europe, and this is reflected by a harmonic scheme simpler than in many of Bonis's other works. The diatonic portions are lengthy and verge on being pentatonic. Structurally, *Air Vaudois* is organized based upon its melodic motives in a ternary structure with coda-like ending, ABACoda.

The piano exuberantly opens with descending eighth-note block chords in E Major, reminiscent of church bells or chimes (Example 22).



Example 22: *Air Vaudois*, mm. 1-4, bell-like piano introduction.

⁹⁰ Géliot, "Mel Bonis," *Traversiere Magazine*, 39.

In m. 9, the flute enters with a lilting melody in the upper register. Although the score indicates 2/4 meter, and the piano opens the piece with eighth notes, the flute part is actually in 6/8, creating a duple versus triple feel (Example 23). This metric mixture will continue to play a central role in *Air Vaudois*. Although a *piano* dynamic is marked in the piano in m. 16, the flutist should continue to maintain a *forte* dynamic for the duration of its sustained E. Unusual for Bonis, the music stays entirely diatonic for the first twenty-five measures before exploring other tonalities, an indication of joy and simplicity.

The image shows a musical score for measures 6-17 of 'Air Vaudois'. It consists of three systems of staves. The first system (measures 6-9) features a flute part in the upper register (marked 8va) with a melody starting in measure 9, and a piano accompaniment in the lower register. The second system (measures 10-13) continues the piano accompaniment. The third system (measures 14-17) features a flute part in the lower register (marked 16va) with a melody starting in measure 14, and a piano accompaniment. Dynamics include *mf*, *cresc.*, and *p*. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#).

Example 23: *Air Vaudois*, mm. 6-17, lilting opening melody.

Now an octave lower, the piano repeats its opening bell tones and the lilting melody begins anew in the flute in m. 24, also placed an octave lower. However, the

melody quickly diverts to G# Minor when (m. 26) the A in the E-major pitch collection is replaced with A# and the piano in mm. 29-36 offers a G#-minor version of its opening figures. While the piano pauses on a G#-minor chord (mm. 37-38), the flute re-enters and a developmental passage begins. This sequence grows in intensity to the downbeat of m. 51 (the peak of the sequence), before suddenly dissipating (Example 24). The *poco rubato* indication in m. 53 highlights Bonis's use of hemiola combined with descending chromatics to create an impressionistic color, and a slight slowing should take place prior to the downbeat of m. 57. The flutist should be aware that the C#'s in mm. 55-56 should not be played with exactly the same tone color, because they occur as members of different chord qualities. Specifically, the C# is the root of the major chord in m. 55 and then, accompanied by a change to a more transparent timbre, becomes the third of a dominant seventh chord in m. 56.

Example 24: *Air Vaudois*, mm. 51-56, meter mixture and chromatic parallel chords.

A key signature change and double bar lines indicate the start of the middle section of the work (m. 57), and Bonis introduces a new melody (Example 25). This

melody is based upon the whole-tone scale and is more conjunct and in smoother rhythm than the lilting melody. The flute and piano continue to work in dialogue, passing around and linking a triplet motive while gradually ascending in register.



Example 25: *Air Vaudois*, mm. 57-60, whole-tone melody.

This ascent, accompanied by a prominent *crescendo*, leads dramatically to a reiteration of the opening lilting melody, now in G \flat Major and accompanied by rising parallel chords (a variation of the opening bell-like introduction). Emphasizing this moment is a polyrhythm created by triplets in the flute and rising quadruplets of the piano (Example 26). A closer look at the tempo markings in this moment shows that although the marking *poco slargando* is given in mm. 69-70, there is no indication if or where the original tempo should return. The author suggests to initiate the slight slowing at the end of m. 69 and then return to the original *Allegro moderato* tempo at m. 73.



Example 26: *Air Vaudois*, mm. 68-72, rising parallel chords in the piano.

Measure 73 opens with a variation of the opening chime-like piano gesture, now in G \flat Major and also altered to a lilting triplet feel, as opposed to the steady eighth-note rhythm of the opening. A new melody is introduced in the flute in m. 76 above a five-measure ostinato of this piano figure (Example 27). Labeled *grazioso*, there is no dynamic indication in the flute part; however, this melody must be played at a dynamic that can be heard above the piano accompaniment.

The image shows a musical score for Example 27, 'Air Vaudois', measures 73-80. The score is written for flute and piano. The key signature is E-flat major (three flats) and the time signature is 3/4. The flute part begins with a 'grazioso' marking and a melodic line. The piano part has dynamics 'm.g.' and 'p'. The score continues with a 'dim' marking in the flute part.

Example 27: *Air Vaudois*, mm. 73-80, *grazioso* melody.

Throughout mm. 76-100 the flute and piano alternate motives from the lilting melody and the *grazioso* melody at various pitch levels. As the motivic fragments from the whole-tone melody ascend sequentially from m. 101 to m. 104, the music slows and builds in intensity (while lingering on the dominant), reaching the tonic of the home key of E Major on the downbeat of m. 105. Here there is a euphoric return to the large-scale A section. Bonis makes only slight changes, including switching the order of the entrances of the two instruments, changing the voicing of the chords in the piano, and altering mm. 125-126 to triple instead of duple rhythm. For example, in the very beginning of *Air Vaudois* the piano opened with the chime-like introduction, followed by the flute entrance with the melody; these two entrances are exchanged in this return.

The final coda-like section begins in m. 148 and consists of a sequential building of triplet material, starting with the *grazioso* melody in the flute. Dynamic indications are

vague, but the flutist should be sure to *crescendo* incrementally as the register ascends. A hairpin *crescendo-decrescendo* is indicated in mm. 162-163, and though not indicated, it should be assumed that the same dynamic should be observed in the following two measures. The author suggests that the *crescendo* in m. 166 should continue to the downbeat of m. 171 and then *decrescendo* naturally with the descent of the line. Despite the lack of clear dynamic indications, the most important notion to convey at the end of *Air Vaudois* is a relaxing of character and a sense of serenity, accomplished by a decrease in dynamic and tempo.

This work is extremely engaging for both flutist and pianist, and both advanced high school and college flutists will find the technical aspects of this piece to be challenging. The array of accidentals and whole-tone scales in the middle section provide important opportunities for pedagogical discussion. Overall, the jubilant character of *Air Vaudois pour Flûte et Piano* proves to be a wonderful addition to any recital program.

Andante et Allegro pour Flûte et Piano, Op. 133

Performance Guide

Dedicated to the flutist René Grisard, *Andante et Allegro pour flûte et piano* proves to be the most challenging of Bonis's six compositions for flute and piano. In two movements, the work resembles the structure of the famed Paris Conservatory test pieces, essential pedagogical works for every flutist, examples of which are found in the popular publication *Flute Music by French Composers*, edited by Louis Moyse.⁹¹ *Andante et Allegro* was written in 1929 and is one of Bonis's later works. The *Andante* unfolds in a fantasia-like manner at the tempo of quarter-note equals 63 bpm, while the *Allegro* is a frenzied scherzo at the tempo of dotted half-note equals 69 bpm.

There are several hefty challenges to the flutist in the first movement, *Andante*. First, the key of the *Andante*, D \flat Major, emphasizes arguably the worst note on the flute, D \flat .² This note is inherently out of tune, and the flutist must rely solely on his/her individual sense of pitch to play it well. Secondly, the flute lines are extremely long and tend to merge into subsequent phrases without resting (elisions). The phrasing is often irregular in length and Bonis does not mark where these phrase points are; it is up to the performers, perhaps with assistance from this performance guide, to decide how to create a clear structural architecture for the listener.

The guide for the *Andante* will focus on how to break down the movement into sensible phrases to form a cohesive unit and to create goal points for the flutist and

⁹¹ Louis Moyse, ed., *Flute Music by French Composers* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1967).

pianist in the performance of this work. A careful look at the piano score and the individual flute part together is essential, because the publisher consistently excludes many of the dynamic markings from the flute part on the piano score. To simplify the performance guide, the author has divided the work into three parts, based upon the melodic material. Part One consists of mm. 1-21, Part Two of mm. 22-35, and Part Three of mm. 36-54. The author highly recommends following along with a score while reading the following performance guide.

Starting with Part One of the *Andante*, it is important to keep in mind that the overall goal, and dynamic peak, of this large first section is the downbeat of m. 19, and all expressive ideas should aim to highlight this goal-point. The first large phrase of Part One consists of m. 1 to the downbeat of m. 9. This cadenza-like passage should not be played rigidly, but instead with a sense of freedom. Bonis does not indicate an opening dynamic; however, the author suggests a comfortable *mf* in order to create a *dolce cantabile* sound while leaving room to *crescendo*. This phrase can be divided into m. 1 to the downbeat of m. 5, and m. 5 to the downbeat of m. 9. Although the flutist may take a quick breath after the first beat of m. 4, he/she should be aware that the phrase goes all the way to the downbeat of m. 5.

Dynamic markings in the flute part are vague; however, in general the flutist should follow the architecture of the phrase: slight *crescendo* as the line ascends, and slight *decrescendo* as the line descends. The first dynamic goal should be the quarter-note B \flat in m. 3, followed by a slight *crescendo* to the true peak of the phrase, the D \flat in m. 4 (Example 28). The flutist should follow the piano's marking: *decrescendo*

in m. 4 for the descent and *poco crescendo* in m. 5. Though the author was unable to examine the manuscript, it appears that both the flute part and piano score in m. 4 lack a slur that should start with the C on beat two and extend through the final note of the measure.

The image shows a musical score for Example 28, titled "Andante" with a tempo marking of 63. The score is in 3/4 time and consists of two systems. The first system shows measures 1 through 3. The flute part (top staff) begins with a slur over measures 1 and 2, and another slur over measures 3 and 4. The piano accompaniment (bottom staff) starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a *molto legato* marking. The second system shows measures 4 and 5. The flute part continues with a slur over measures 4 and 5. The piano accompaniment includes a *poco cresc.* marking in measure 5. The key signature is three flats (B-flat major or D-flat minor).

Example 28: *Andante*, mm. 1-5, missing slur and vague dynamic markings in score.

The next large phrase begins after the tied A \flat in m. 9 and extends to the end of m. 12. The goal of this phrase is to build in intensity to the downbeat of m. 11, where there is a sudden move to a very bright-sounding E dominant-seventh chord. Often a confusing articulation for many flutists, the repeated G \sharp 's with both staccato and slurred marking in m. 11 should be articulated gently with a slight lift between each note. Most importantly,

the piano line should come through the texture in m. 11. Though the flutist should be careful not to inadvertently accent these notes, the intensity of the sound and the *crescendo* should increase with each repetition of G# all the way to the downbeat of m. 12. The rising sextuplets leading into the start of the new phrase in m. 13 should be played freely, as the flutist should take time while making a *crescendo* and connecting to the downbeat of the next measure. The final phrase of Part One consists of m. 13 to the downbeat of m. 22. Though there is no dynamic marking in m. 13, the author suggests the previous *crescendo* should lead to a *mf* on the downbeat of m. 13. The dynamic level should be sustained all the way to the G \flat on beat three of m. 14. In addition, the piano score is missing the four beat slur in m. 13.

Measure 15 begins the large build-up in register, dynamic, and density to the downbeat of m. 19. Though the flute part is marked *p* in m. 15, the marking of *cantando* (which has been omitted in the piano score in m. 15) should be taken to indicate a full sound, yet with room to grow. The *crescendo* markings in the flute part in mm. 16-17 (missing from the piano score) appear confusing; however, the author suggests to *crescendo* all the way to the downbeat of m. 19, which highlights the D-major chord (in which the flute G \flat is enharmonic with the third of the chord F#) and is the peak of the entire first section of the piece. The *decrescendo* in m. 20 in the flute line (also missing from the piano score) will bring out the half-step motion through a change in tone color. Though the piano score indicates a *diminuendo* in m. 19 for the piano, this *diminuendo* should not be fully realized until the end of m. 21 in order to indicate the start of the new section.

Part Two of the *Andante* opens with the same melody as the opening of the piece, but now in minor, and the phrase extends from m. 22 to m. 26. Bonis does not indicate a dynamic at the beginning of this phrase; however, the author suggests playing this version softer than the opening, with a tentative tone that becomes more tangible as the line unfolds. Similar to the pacing of the opening phrase, the first dynamic peak should be the downbeat of m. 24, followed by growth in the sound all the way to the downbeat of m. 26. Though making a *crescendo*, the flutist should be sure to keep a *dolce* sound throughout, in anticipation of the intensity that is yet to come. There is a discrepancy in the dynamic indications between the flute part and the piano score in m. 23; in comparison to the similar opening passage of the work, it appears the piano score is correct and the flute part should be corrected to match it (Example 29a and 29b).

The image shows a musical score for measures 22-23. The top staff is the flute part, starting at measure 22 with a 'dolce' marking. The bottom two staves are the piano accompaniment, starting at measure 23 with a 'p' marking. The key signature is two sharps (D major/C minor). The flute part features a melodic line with a triplet in measure 23. The piano accompaniment consists of chords and moving lines in both hands.

Example 29a: *Andante*, mm. 22-23, correct dynamic markings in score.

The image shows a musical score for measure 21. The top staff is the flute part, starting at measure 21 with a 'dolce' marking. The key signature is two sharps (D major/C minor). The flute part features a melodic line with a triplet in measure 21.

Example 29b: *Andante*, mm. 21-23, incorrect dynamic markings in flute part.

Measures 27-35 contain the second phrase of Part Two, and are similar to mm. 15-20. However, with the addition of penetrating octave eighth-notes in the bass of the piano, the character is much more menacing, and the flutist should maintain a *mf* dynamic for the first two measures of the phrase. An intense *crescendo* should occur into the downbeat of m. 29, which proves to be a dramatic moment, before the flutist continues with a steady *crescendo* and *appassionato* sound that peaks at the downbeat of m. 32. The author suggests taking a quick breath after the B# in m. 29 in order to maintain the volume of air needed to sustain the long *crescendo*.

The character should immediately shift to a lighter, more gentle tone with the arrival of the downbeat of m. 34, and the flute line should be played with agility and buoyancy, as if improvised. Another publishing discrepancy occurs in m. 35: the flute part lacks the *decrescendo* following the marking of *cédez* that is found in the piano score (Example 30a and 30b). Both a *decrescendo* and a slight slowing in tempo should be observed into the downbeat of m. 36, which serves as both the close of the current phrase as well as the beginning of the next phrase.

The image shows a musical score for measures 35 and 36. It consists of three staves: a flute staff (top), a piano right-hand staff (middle), and a piano left-hand staff (bottom). The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 4/4. Measure 35 features a flute line with a triplet of eighth notes marked 'cédez' and a piano accompaniment with a 'suivez' marking. Measure 36 continues the piano accompaniment. The score is in a minor key, indicated by the three flats.

Example 30a: *Andante*, m. 35, publishing discrepancy in score.



Example 30b: *Andante*, m. 35, publishing discrepancy in flute part.

The final section of the work, Part Three, resumes the original opening tempo beginning at m. 36 and continues to the end of the *Andante*. This final section creates an arc-like shape, first increasing in intensity to *forte* at the peak in m. 49, and then dissipating to *piano* at the end of the movement. Beginning similarly to the opening of the piece, the first phrase quickly reaches a peak at the downbeat of m. 40. The flutist should make sure to *crescendo* all the way across the bar line and fully to *mezzo-forte* on the downbeat of m. 39 in order to match the piano's to the new A dominant-seventh chord that occurs on the downbeat. The intensity of the sound should remain throughout the hairpin *crescendo/decrescendo* in the following measure (emphasizing the appoggiatura on the downbeat of m. 40) before the next phrase begins, again at a *piano* dynamic.

The second phrase of Part Three consists of the pick-up to m. 41 through the downbeat of m. 45 and is congruent to the phrase that began in m. 15. Though a *crescendo* is not indicated until m. 44, the flutist should make a steady growth in dynamic in order to bring out the groupings of rising eighth notes that occur in a mostly stepwise fashion. The peak of this phrase on the high A \flat in m. 44 should only reach a *mezzo-forte*, because the true dynamic peak of the section must wait until m. 49. Measure 45 begins

the final elongated phrase of the movement. Starting again with the stepwise-patterned ascent, the *crescendo* indicated in both the flute and piano parts in mm. 47-48 should maintain direction and intensity all the way to the downbeat of m. 49, where a strong dominant chord in the tonic key of D \flat Major is emphasized.

Measures 49 and 50 serve as a prolongation of the dominant, and the sound in the flute should remain full until the final beat of m. 50, increasing the tension and desire for the tonic chord to be reached. Although not indicated, a slight slowing into the downbeat of m. 51 will help make the arrival of the tonic even more fulfilling. The final four measures of the movement serve as a relaxation of the tension and energy built up in the final section. The flutist should play with a warm, amorous sound, fading into the piano color in the final measure.

The *Allegro* is a wild, virtuosic *scherzo*, and the emphasis on the extreme low register of the piano combined with swirling flute lines gives this movement a dark and ominous character. In A Minor, the movement is organized in a ternary structure, ABA'. The A sections feature chords in a steady, staccato rhythm, mainly on beats two and three, over which the flute plays highly syncopated, sweeping passages that extend to the lowest range of the flute. These sections in the minor mode are juxtaposed with a shorter middle section in E Major that features longer, singing phrases. A large variety of articulations are required by both the pianist and the flutist in order to bring out the shifting characters throughout the movement. Bonis marks the tempo dotted half-note equals 69 bpm, and the performers must avoid the tendency to drag due to the numerous syncopated and tied rhythms.

The first A section of the *Allegro* extends from m. 1 to m. 50, and the peak of this section is the build-up to m. 36. After a four-measure introduction in the piano, the flute enters with a swooping descending line that twists within the middle register. Bonis marks the dynamic level of the flute entrance *mezzo-forte*; however, due to the thickness of the bass sound and the frequent ninth-chords in the piano, the flute entrance should be played more at a *forte* level in order to sound robust and electrifying (Example 31). Due to the emphasis on the low register of the flute in this movement, the dynamic level of the piano should be restrained so as not to cover the flute sound.

Example 31: *Allegro*, mm. 1-5, flute entrance.

The flutist should not hold back on the soaring line in m. 16; indeed, the line should be played with gusto and extend to a *forte* at the peak. A color change to a more mysterious sound in the flute should accompany the change in piano texture in m. 20. Bonis does not indicate a dynamic level at this point in either the flute or piano score, but the author suggests starting at a *mezzo-piano* dynamic and extending each *crescendo* to *mezzo-forte*. At this point there are several discrepancies in dynamic markings between

the flute part and piano score. The author suggests following the markings in the individual flute part, making each *crescendo* in m. 20, m. 23, and m. 26 gradually louder until reaching a peak at a *forte* dynamic in m. 29. Immediately the flutist should adhere to a *subito mp* in m. 30 (note that the piano score indicates a marking of *mf* for the flute in m. 30). The highly chromatic lines between m. 30 and m. 35 should *crescendo* to a *forte* peak on the high G# in the flute of m. 35 in order to match the intensity of the impending piano entrance in m. 36.

Following four measures of piano interlude (mm. 36-39) reminiscent of the opening piano line with added ornamentation, the flutist enters with swirling eighth notes in the lower register of the flute. Again there is a discrepancy between the flute part and piano score regarding the articulation marking in the flute in mm. 40-43. The author suggests following the indications in the piano score (all slurred) because this aligns more closely with the abundance of slurred passages in the flute part as a whole. Measures 44-50, the conclusion of the opening large-scale A section, should serve to build in intensity and dynamic to m. 51, the beginning of the middle section of the work.

In the contrasting key of E Major, the middle section of the *Allegro* (mm. 51-66) provides contrast in both rhythmic energy and melodic content. After four measures of lightly articulated eighth notes, the flute line develops into a simple eight-measure melody with the indications of *dolce* and *cantando*. This melody is repeated at a higher pitch level in mm. 63-66 before immediately digressing to material from the large-scale A section of the work.

Though the marking in the flute is a delicate *mp* in m. 67, this measure brings an abrupt return to the ominous mood of the opening. The spinning eighth notes in the flute

in mm. 74-78 (marked *mf*) should be played at a *forte* dynamic in order to project above the disjunct, articulated bass line. Following a slight slowing in m. 78 (note that *cédez un peu* is omitted from the flute part), the flute enters in m. 79 with the swooping, descending figure that opened the work, but now at a mysterious *p* dynamic. The high E that begins this passage can be slightly lengthened in order to bring out the abrupt change in character. In the final measures of the work, the flutist should maintain a *f* dynamic and lead with great intensity through the last ascending line so that the bass notes in the piano demarcate a thunderous conclusion.

Une Flûte Soupire pour Flûte et Piano, Op. 121

Performance Guide

The shortest of the works for flute and piano, at only two minutes, *Une Flûte Soupire pour Flûte et Piano* compresses a large breadth of lyricism and color into a small, sentimental gem of music. Originally composed in 1925 as one of five short pieces for piano published by Éditions Maurice Sénart, Bonis transcribed the piece for flute and piano in 1936, only a year before her death. Remarkably, the same editor was used for the version for flute and piano as for the original piano edition. The reason Bonis decided to make the transcription eleven years later is unknown, especially considering that her dear friend and dedicatee of the *Sonate pour Flûte et Piano*, Louis Fleury, died ten years earlier.

The title translates into “A Sighing Flute,” and this work is an excellent example of Bonis’s use of extended tertian harmony, coloristic chord successions, and flowing, improvisatory melodies to create a hazy and dreamy sound world reminiscent of the Impressionistic style. The flute wanders above the piano’s ambiguous chords in a predominantly triplet rhythm. Although the composer indicates a tempo of *Moderato* and quarter note equals 76 bpm at the opening, the performers should allow some freedom for rubato, most notably at cadential points, to help solidify tonal benchmarks. The most striking characteristics of *Une flûte soupire* are its constantly shifting tonal centers and its lingering on chords that are more coloristic than functional.

This work is organized roughly into an *abc* design. Although the key signature implies B \flat Major, and the final cadence is in this key, the first section immediately shifts

to various areas of tonal focus and does not give the listener a sense of grounding. Instead, it seems to float ambiguously without end. For example, the piece opens with a pure, sustained F-major chord, layered with *dolce* descending triplets in the flute (Example 32). After one measure, the piano unexpectedly takes an immediate detour by sustaining a C# dominant-seventh chord in m. 2 and m. 3, while the flutist meanders through whole-tone triplets to land on a sustained G#. The piano in m. 4 moves to an E dominant-seventh chord and an Ab-major chord on the downbeat of m. 5. Overall, the first phrase begins and ends on major triads with roots a third apart and with non-functional seventh chords in between. Every root motion is by some form of a third.

The image displays a musical score for the first five measures of 'Une Flûte Soupire'. The score is written for flute and piano. The flute part begins with a *dolce* marking and features descending triplets. The piano accompaniment is marked *Moderato* with a tempo of 76 bpm and *sans rigueur*. The piano part shows a sequence of chords: F major (m. 1), C#7 (m. 2-3), E7 (m. 4), and Ab major (m. 5). The score is in 3/4 time and key of B-flat major.

Example 32: *Une Flûte Soupire*, mm.1- 5, succession of third-related chords.

Bonis does not indicate a dynamic for either the flutist or pianist in the first measure, and no marking exists until m. 6 in the piano (*piano*). However, by combining

the indication of *sans rigueur* (without rigidity) in m. 3 with the marking of *dolce* in m. 1 of the flute part, it can be inferred that the performers should play at a comfortable *mp* or *mf* dynamic. More importantly, the opening should be performed with a gentle sense of ease. The flutist should be careful not to accent the first note, entering as though the piece has already begun, and there should not be any emphasis or inflection on the start of each triplet in the descending line. Achieving a serene mood is more important than adhering to a specific dynamic marking in the opening.

A variation of mm. 1-5 appears in mm. 5-8. Again, the piano begins and ends with major triads a third apart (here A \flat Major and E Major), with more complex sonorities between them. The flute plays a variant of the opening phrase, beginning on the same note but descending only one octave. Measure 9 introduces much more motion in the piano line, as rising parallel chords in the treble combine with a descending bass to land on a firm B \flat -major chord.

The middle section of the work focuses on a more stable tonality, F Major, but now at a slower tempo, *poco più lento* and quarter note equals 60 bpm. Though there is no dynamic marking at this new section (which is also designated by a double bar line), the flutist should play out with stronger presence in keeping with the tonal stability of this section. As the register ascends, the flutist should *crescendo* with a bright, momentarily joyful tone to the downbeat of m. 18. This *crescendo* is missing from the piano score in m. 18, but is marked in the individual flute part.

Special consideration should be given to mm. 17-19 (Example 33). Throughout the work, careful attention should be given to the rhythm in the flute and piano parts, because there are often places of three-against-two between the two instruments. Bonis

complicates matters further in mm. 17-19, because the indications of *rit.* occur in different places in each instrumental part, and it is not sensible to have the flutist and pianist slow at different rates in different places. Alternatively, it is recommended that a slight slowing of time occur on the first two beats of m. 18 in order to bring out the *largement* ascent and peak on the high F in the flute, followed by a return to the original tempo in m. 19, and concluding with a slight slowing in m. 20.

The image shows a musical score for three staves. The top staff is the flute part, the middle staff is the piano right hand, and the bottom staff is the piano left hand. The key signature has two flats (B-flat major), and the time signature is 3/4. Measure 16 is marked with a '16'. In measure 17, the piano part has a triplet of eighth notes. In measure 18, the flute part has a high F, and the piano part has the word 'cèdez' written below it. Dynamic markings include *pp* in the piano part, *f* in the flute part, and *rit.* in both parts. The word 'cèdez' is also written in the piano part in measure 19.

Example 33: *Une Flûte Soupire*, mm. 16-19, pacing between flute and piano.

The *a tempo* in m. 21 heralds a more confirmed tonality, that of B \flat Major, and the flute plays a triplet melody similar to the opening melody of the middle section over the dominant-seventh chord. Bonis indicates an increase in dynamic and tempo from m. 26 to m. 28, and the rising line in the flute along with the half-step “sigh” motion help build intensity to what will be the climactic point of the work (Example 34). Bonis does not indicate where the *animato* should end; however, a slight suspension of time should occur in m. 30 to bring out the enchanting sound of this measure.

The image shows a musical score for 'Une Flûte Soupire' (Example 34), measures 26-31. The score is in B-flat major and 3/4 time. It features a flute and piano. The flute part starts with a melodic line marked 'animato e cresc.' and continues with a triplet figure marked 'léger' and 'sans rigueur'. The piano accompaniment provides harmonic support with chords and textures marked 'animato e cresc.', 'espress.', and 'mp'. The piece concludes with a final note in the flute and a final chord in the piano.

Example 34: *Une Flûte Soupire*, mm. 26-31, harmonic detour in flute and piano.

Four measures from the end (m. 34) the B \flat -major tonality comes fully into focus. For two measures the flute reiterates a triplet figure over the dominant-seventh chord in the piano. The contrary motion between the flute and piano and the passing tones and suspensions that delay the movement from dominant to tonic infuse a sense of uncertainty as to where the final resolution will occur. The piece ends sweetly with the flute reaching its final note F alone, before the piano's final tonic chord is sounded, quietly, in the upper register (Example 35).



Example 35: *Une Flûte Soupire*, mm. 35-37, changing register at end.

From a performance standpoint, this work is accessible for both advanced high school and college students. However, any accomplished flutist will find the endless possibilities of this work to be engaging. The work is not technically difficult; the challenge lies in expressing the musicality intended by the composer. *Une flûte soupire* requires the flutist to use a controlled, *dolce* tone throughout long phrases, and varied tone colors. Bonis creates a jazz-like fantasia atmosphere with an out-of-focus sound world that becomes increasingly centered and focused tonally as the work progresses.

Pièce pour Flûte et Piano, Op. 189

Performance Guide

Pièce pour Flûte et Piano, Op. 189, was discovered in manuscript in 1998 without a composition date, and therefore the exact details about its conception are unknown. Géliot writes that the manuscript was found in the depths of the cellar, and had never been edited during the lifetime of the composer.⁹² There is no indication that this piece is anything other than a freestanding work. The author was unable to examine the manuscript located in Paris, and has instead relied on the only available edition, published by Edition Kossack in 2000.

Pièce is a short work, totaling approximately four-and-a-half minutes, and with Bonis's marking of *Lento* at the beginning, it should be performed no faster than quarter note equals 52 bpm. Throughout the work is a consistent eighth-note chordal pulse in the piano, which creates a framework upon which the flutist plays long, elaborate, florid lines. Despite these repeated notes in the piano, the work should not be played rigidly, but instead with a flexibility and lightness in the piano to cushion the ever flowing and highly expressive flute line.

The work unfolds in a fantasia-like fashion; its structure is based upon its tonal scheme and modulations. Overall the tonal center is F Major, but Bonis uses a series of digressions to distant keys to build the work to its climax two-thirds of the way through, before returning to the original tonal center and opening melody. A coda-like ending reinforces the F-major tonality and creates a sense of closure.

⁹² Christine Géliot, "Mel Bonis," *Traversiere Magazine*, 39.

In the three-measure introduction, repeated eighth notes in the piano reiterate the pitch E while the bass descends by step (Example 36). The right hand plays a more melodic role, with a capricious dotted figure emphasizing octave E's. The key signature implies the key of F Major; however, the uncertainty of the opening, which suggests an E pitch focus, immediately sets the questioning tone of the overall work. Leading up to the entrance of the flute, the stepwise descent in the bass arrives on a C-natural, which is harmonized as a dominant-seventh chord in F Major. Although the flute enters on an E, its opening line is entirely diatonic in F Major. The harmony of mm. 4-11 solidifies F Major after the tentative introduction, and the long initial phrase firmly closes at m. 11 with a perfect authentic cadence in that key.



Example 36: *Pièce*, mm. 1-4, reiteration of the pitch E.

The flutist must make sure to create a full eight-bar phrase concluding in m. 11, with only a quick breath between the two A's in m. 7. Although Bonis indicates a *crescendo* in m. 5 and a *decrescendo* in m. 10, and other than the *mf* in m. 4, there are no other dynamic indications to specify how loudly the flutist should take the *crescendo*. The flutist should follow the natural rise of the phrase up to the B \flat and keep the intensity

in the sound throughout the duration of the tie before accompanying the descent of the phrase with a slight *decrescendo* or easing of the sound. By starting at a *p* dynamic after the quick breath in m. 7, the flutist can *crescendo* slightly to bring out the large expressive leap to the F in mm. 8 and 9. Most importantly, the flutist must bring out the F in m. 9 with a full sound, building from the intensity created by the rest, before the descent in register and dynamic to the lower octave. The *decrescendo* in m. 11 should be carefully observed to prepare for the new material to come, but the final F should receive its full value to create the closure needed for this long phrase.

The piano prolongs the tonic harmony for four measures after m. 11 while the flute offers a new melody, marked *dolce cantando*, which is entirely diatonic in F Major and rounds off this initial section by recalling the dotted figure from the piano introduction (Example 37). The piano score incorrectly states the rhythm of beat two in m. 12; however, the individual flute part is correct (Example 37 includes this correction). The flutist should strive for a gentle *legato* sound, and after a brief lift in m. 13, the indication *souple* should be interpreted so that the triplet pattern in the flute is played freely and with a lighter tone, as if impulsively ornamenting the underlying structure, which can be seen as an eighth-note descent of E-D-A.

The image shows a musical score for Example 37, consisting of two staves. The top staff is a single treble clef line representing a flute melody. It begins with a whole rest, followed by a series of eighth notes and quarter notes. A slur covers the first four measures, with the instruction "dolce cantando" above it. In the fifth measure, there is a triplet of eighth notes, followed by a sextuplet of eighth notes, and then another slur covering the final two measures. The instruction "souple" is placed below the sextuplet. The bottom staff is a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) representing piano accompaniment. It starts with a piano dynamic marking "p". The right hand plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment, while the left hand plays a simple bass line with quarter notes.

Example 37: *Pièce*, mm. 11-14, *dolce cantando* melody.

In the middle section of the work, mm. 15-43, the piano progresses in rhythmic intensity as the flute rises in register. The F- and D-rooted chords in m. 15 serve as pivots to C Major, which is initiated by the introduction of its dominant seventh in mm. 16-18. The flutist should build in dynamic and intensity to the G \sharp -A syncopation in m. 18, creating a dissonance with the G-natural in the bass, before quickly changing to a more transparent color leading to the downbeat of m. 19. The flutist should carefully taper the unresolved leading-tone B \flat at the end of m. 18 in order to allow the piano to take over the melody and bring out the stepwise descent to the tonic pitch C on the downbeat of m. 19 (Example 38).

The image shows a musical score for two staves. The top staff is for the flute, and the bottom staff is for the piano. The flute part begins with a melodic line in 2/4 time, marked 'cédez', followed by a series of triplet sixteenth notes in 3/4 time, marked 'legg.'. The piano part features a bass line with a 'cédez' marking and a treble line with a 'legg.' marking. The piano part includes a dotted figure in the treble and a stepwise descent in the bass.

Example 38: *Pièce*, mm. 18-19, stepwise descent in the piano.

Now on a C-major tonic, the piano re-introduces the opening measures, complete with repeated C's, stepwise descent in the bass, and dotted figure in the treble, while the flute adds an obbligato. The triplet sixteenths should be played with the utmost delicacy and direction, despite the frequency of rests. Though there is no dynamic marking in m. 20, the flutist should play the triplet figures at *piano* with only a slight *crescendo* in each measure due to the register and direction of the phrase. The second note of each triplet group should be kept softer in dynamic and shorter in length than the first note of the group in order to keep a playful character in the line.

The second part of the middle section, beginning with the pick-ups to m. 24, consists of the flute and piano alternating a new, *espressivo* melody with buoyant triplet sixteenth-notes, which are now arranged into both ascending and descending lines. The addition of an E \flat in the piano immediately translates into C Minor, and the flutist should play its melody with a full *appassionato* tone while the piano provides the background,

now with thicker repeated chords that emphasize the dominant and supertonic harmonies (Example 39). The intensity of the work quickly begins to build as rapid thirty-second-note runs in the treble swirl above the stepwise bass line.

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The image shows a musical score for two staves. The top staff is in treble clef, 3/4 time, and contains a melody marked *espress.* (expressive). The melody consists of eighth and sixteenth notes, with a triplet of eighth notes in the final measure of the excerpt. The bottom staff is in bass clef, 3/4 time, and contains piano accompaniment. It features a steady bass line of eighth notes and several triplet markings over groups of eighth notes. The tempo/mood marking *leggiero* (light) is placed below the second measure of the piano part.

Example 39: *Pièce*, mm. 24-25, *espressivo* melody.

The use of imitation and dialogue between the flutist and pianist is especially important in this section, but can create ensemble issues between the two instruments, resulting in a “muddy,” unclear sound. A useful rehearsal technique for mm. 24-26 is to play without the *espressivo* melody (m. 24 in the flute and m. 26 in the piano); in doing so, the performers can concentrate on seamlessly aligning the playful triplets (played delicately) as they transfer from the piano to the flute in m. 25. The tendency is for the flutist to be late with the sixteenth-note entrance at the end of m. 25. After the exchange becomes comfortable, the *espressivo* melody can be added back in, but both performers should realize that *rubato* cannot be used with it.

The elaborate thirty-second-note flourishes in the piano turn completely diatonic in G Major by m. 29, and the flutist plays a variation of the *espressivo* melody while the bass descends to a D pedal in m. 32. The flutist should play this variation with a brighter, happier sound than the first version, which was in C Minor, a much darker-sounding key. The pianist should be careful to keep the quick thirty-second-note flourishes at a *piano* dynamic and completely in tempo in order to line up with the flute melody. Bonis marks a *crescendo* in the flute in m. 30, and the flutist should consistently play at a *forte* level in order to project the sound of the low notes in mm. 31-32. As the register again descends in m. 33, the written *decrescendo* should be observed, and a slight relaxation of the tempo should take place into the following downbeat in order to mark the G-major authentic cadence.

Following this cadence, the flutist enters with the *dolce cantando* melody from m. 12, identical to the original entrance but now in G Major and with a more elaborate accompaniment in the piano. At this point Bonis layers motives from the *dolce cantando* melody, the dotted rhythm from the introduction, and motives from the *espressivo* melody, all along with the repeated eighth-note ostinato, to build the piece to a peak in m. 42, on a *forte* E-major chord with a high E in the flute (Example 40).



Example 40: *Pièce*, mm. 41-42, E Major peak.

A surprising climax to the ear considering the start of the piece in F Major and the variety of keys already visited, this point could be interpreted as a reminiscence of the repeated emphasis on E in the introduction. Once again the ambiguity of the dynamic markings in the flute part requires careful consideration by the performers. The piano score indicates *forte* in m. 42, and the flutist should play at *forte* as well. However, the performers should note that this is not yet the loudest point in the work. Although Bonis writes a *decrescendo* for the flute during the high E in m. 42, she does not mark an ending dynamic. It seems appropriate that the flutist treat this *decrescendo* as more of a color change to a transparent sound at the end of the note, rather than a dramatic change in volume.

Following this climax, the E in the flute is immediately re-interpreted as the leading tone to F Major in a brief, shortened return of the flute's opening melody in m. 44, now an octave higher and with a fuller accompaniment in the piano (yet still in the original key of F Major). The flutist must not play these two E's with exactly the same sound. If the flutist and pianist were to play the E in m. 42 over a sustained E dominant-seventh chord, and then compare this sound to the E in m. 44 over a sustained C

dominant-seventh chord, the performers would understand that the second version sounds much more hesitant and questioning and should be played accordingly. This shortened version of the melody in the flute starts to be completed by the piano before abruptly taking a detour and accelerating while rising sequentially to m. 50, where both flutist and pianist build to *fortissimo*, the loudest marking in the entire work, and land on a greatly emphasized and surprising A-major chord (Example 41). Octave E's in the bass emphasize the dominant of A, but also serve as a reminiscence of the previous emphasis on E.



Example 41: *Pièce*, mm. 49-51, A Major modulation.

This dramatic moment slowly dissolves through a succession of non-functional seventh chords, eventually reaching a gentle perfect authentic cadence (m. 57) in the home key of F Major. While the piano descends to reach the tonic, the flute ascends with wandering sixteenth notes colored by non-harmonic tones, eventually ending on the F-major tonic with F's spanning four octaves between the flute and piano.

The work closes with a short coda-like ending that confirms the F-major tonality and is also reminiscent of the beginning. While the pianist plays repeated eighth-note chords, the flutist takes the original melodic role of the piano from mm. 1-3, but now the capricious dotted rhythm is reinterpreted as octave C's ornamented by trills instead of octave E's. A slight relaxation in the tempo should be taken into the downbeat of m. 61, where the flutist plays a short unaccompanied ascending line leading into the final three measures of the piece. A second authentic cadence in F Major, this one in m. 61, closes the work. This cadence is particularly colorful, as the fifth of V is raised, creating an augmented triad. In the last three measures the tonic is plagally inflected, $ii^{\circ 6/5}$ -I, for a relaxed finish that evokes popular music (Example 42). Although there are no dynamic markings at the end, the flutist should be careful not to *decrescendo*, but instead put a very slight taper at the end of the sustained A in m. 63 in order to blend into the piano sound.

Example 42: *Pièce*, mm. 62-64, plagally inflected ending.

Though a performance of this piece would be possible for an advanced high school flutist, it requires a deep understanding of the variations of tone color possible

with the flute in order to adjust the sound appropriately for the frequently abrupt modulations. The flutist should slowly play diatonic scales in F Major, C Minor, G Major, and A Major, while considering how to make the tone sound characteristic of each key. Careful collaboration between flutist and pianist is especially important due to the constantly changing metric divisions. *Pièce pour Flûte et Piano* is extremely idiomatic for the flute, as it offers the flutist ample opportunity for expression and exploration of sound.

Scherzo (Final) pour Flûte et Piano, Op. Posth. 187

Performance Guide

Many unresolved questions remain regarding the conception of *Scherzo (Final) pour Flûte et Piano*. The original title of the work was *Final*, most likely referring to a “final” movement. There is no date of composition, and Géliot indicates in the preface to the 2008 edition, published by *Edition Kossack*, that the manuscript surprisingly begins on page twenty-five. According to Géliot, she is vainly searching for the first twenty-four pages of the manuscript, which indicates that this could be only one part of a multi-movement work.⁹³ Due to the nature of the piece, Géliot believes this work to be the last movement of a suite, rather than a final movement of a sonata.⁹⁴ Géliot and the publisher made the decision to publish the *Final* instead as *Scherzo (Final) pour flûte et piano*.

Overall the work unfolds in a fantasia-like fashion, and it maintains a light and pleasant character, similar to Bonis’s *Air Vaudois*; lilting bucolic sections alternate with singing melodic lines and bouncy articulated passages, closing with a virtuosic triplet episode in the flute. *Scherzo* requires exceptional virtuosity from both flutist and pianist, but indeed the greater burden lies on the pianist to facilitate a large number of notes at a quick tempo. Though the only tempo indication is *Allegro*, the author suggests a tempo of quarter note equals 152 bpm, verging on a cut-time feel.

The piano opens with a six-measure introduction presenting the first melodic material; lilting triplet arpeggiations provide forward motion and lightness. Though the

⁹³ Géliot, “Mel Bonis,” *Traversiere Magazine*, 39.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

key signature implies E Major, Bonis ambiguously highlights the pitches F# and C#, inflecting the opening with the C# Aeolian mode. The flute enters in m. 7 with the joyful triplet melody first introduced by the piano. The flutist should be careful with the intonation of the C#'s. The numerous leaps up to the high C#'s should be played with energy and caprice; this character is indicated in the piano score with the marking *legg* (*leggiere*), but the marking is missing from the flute part (Example 43). Though dynamic markings are vague, the peak of the phrase, and therefore the loudest dynamic, should occur in m. 11, followed by the indicated *diminuendo* as the line descends.

Example 43: *Scherzo*, mm. 7-9, joyful triplet melody.

Following a two-measure piano interlude, the flute introduces a passionate singing melody in m. 17, above the lilting triplet accompaniment in the piano, which will return at various points in the *Scherzo*. Labeled *cantando* (though missing from the flute part), this melody proceeds for six measures but abruptly dissipates before its conclusion to a descending, bouncing articulated passage in mm. 24-28. The articulated passage descends chromatically, as if winding down in intensity in order to re-start again, and the

combination of eighth notes in the flute with triplets in the piano creates a shimmering color.

Next, a twelve-measure interlude (mm. 28-39) develops the singing melodic material and the bouncing articulated eighth-notes. The staccato flute line is now ascending chromatically and reaches the highest note Bonis writes for the instrument (high C) (Example 44). Though no dynamic is indicated, the *crescendo* in m. 35 should reach a *forte* peak in the flute to bring out the sparkling sound of the high C's in unison with the piano on the downbeat of m. 36.

The image displays a musical score for Example 44, consisting of two systems of staves. The first system covers measures 34 and 35. The top staff is the flute part, showing a melodic line that ascends chromatically. The middle staff is the piano part, featuring a triplet of eighth notes. The bottom staff is the bass line. The second system covers measures 36 and 37. The top staff is the flute part, starting with a high C note marked with an '8va' (octave up) and a dashed line. The middle staff is the piano part, starting with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The bottom staff is the bass line.

Example 44: *Scherzo*, mm. 34-37, extended flute range.

The singing flute melody re-starts in m. 40, now in its entirety and suggesting G Major before modulating to C Major in m. 46. Though not consistently marked, the

dynamic level of the flute should follow the outline of the rising and falling lines; *crescendo* as the line ascends and slightly *decrescendo* as the line descends. Overall, this full-length version of the singing melody should peak in the flute and piano at a *forte* on beat four of m. 48 before receding to the end of the phrase in m. 52. Once again, the beautiful melody dissipates with the descending articulated eighth notes (following a five-measure rumbling piano interlude).

Measures 61-72 introduce another repetition of the shortened singing flute melody, this time suggesting D \flat Major. Here the piano plays the role of initiating the leaping articulated eighth notes, peaking at m. 70 before descending to m. 72. The flute and piano then interchange the opening triplet motive in mm. 72-74. This dialogue should remain light and playful. Both flutist and pianist should be careful to connect the triplets in mm. 74-75 in order to create a seamless transition to the next large section of the *Scherzo* (Example 45).

The image shows a musical score for three staves, likely representing flute, piano, and a lower instrument (possibly bassoon or cello). The key signature is D major (two sharps). The score is divided into three measures. In the first measure (m. 73), the flute has a triplet of eighth notes (D, E, F) marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The piano has a triplet of eighth notes (G, A, B) marked with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. In the second measure (m. 74), the piano has a triplet of eighth notes (C, B, A) marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic, and the flute has a triplet of eighth notes (G, F, E) marked with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. In the third measure (m. 75), the piano has a triplet of eighth notes (D, C, B) marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic, and the flute has a triplet of eighth notes (A, G, F) marked with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Example 45: *Scherzo*, mm. 73-75, triplet exchange between flute and piano.

Beginning in m. 75 with a full measure of unaccompanied flute, Bonis creates a clearly defined recapitulation of the opening material. This return is identical to the

opening four bars of the work, but it immediately changes with a return of the *cantando* flute melody, now in E \flat Major. In comparison to the full-length version of the melody, this one is lengthened by two additional measures (mm. 89-90) before giving way to the rumbling triplets of the piano interlude in mm. 97-101.

Once again, the flutist and pianist exchange segments of the lilting triplet motive in dialogue (mm. 102-106). This time the key center is a third lower than the original, in E \flat Major. Similar to the extension of the *cantando* flute melody by two measures, this version of the triplet dialogue is extended and leads not to the lilting triplet melody but rather to the fifth entrance of the singing flute melody, now shortened and suggesting E Major. This final recall of the melody lands on a B in the flute in m. 114, signaling the dominant of E Major, and is followed by another brief interlude consisting of cascading descending triplets passed between both instruments. The triplets should be played with lightness, and because this short interlude introduces the final coda-like material, flutist and pianist should use a slight amount of *rubato*. The flutist should allow a small amount of *ritenuto* in the final ascending solo measure (m. 122) that is paced accordingly to bring in the half notes in the piano, also with a small amount of slowing (Example 46).



Example 46: *Scherzo*, mm. 120-123, flute interlude.

Concluding the *Scherzo* is a coda-like virtuosic section that recalls earlier motives and upholds the capricious character of the work. Following a small amount of *rubato* in m. 124, the entrance of the flute in m. 125 should occur immediately *a tempo*. Care should be taken to keep the *leggiero* quality throughout the articulated eighth notes in the flute, as well as to highlight the two peaks of the phrase, mm. 129 and 134; these high points should be indicated by a louder dynamic, not by accent or lengthening of the articulation. Finally, an extensive passage of triplets occurs in the flute in mm. 138-148. As opposed to the lilting, capricious quality of the opening of the *Scherzo*, these final measures should be played with the utmost lightness and sweetness. Characteristic of the concluding measures in other of Bonis's flute and piano works, the flutist and pianist exchange ascending arpeggiations, resulting in the flutist's concluding on the third of the tonic chord (in this case a G# of E Major), and closing with a final E-major chord in the piano.

CONCLUSION

Each of Bonis's six works for flute and piano is extremely idiomatic for the flute and gives the flutist diverse opportunities to showcase the technical and musical capabilities of the instrument, while also offering much appeal to the listener. In particular, the *Sonate pour Flûte et Piano* is a significant work that uniquely utilizes elements from Impressionism, Romanticism, and Classicism. The emotional depth and the richness of its harmonic elements make this piece an important addition to the sonata repertoire of any advanced flutist.

Pièce pour Flûte et Piano and *Une Flûte Soupire pour Flûte et Piano*, however brief, challenge the flutist to find the most varied tonal palette and musicality. The extensive chromaticism, the long, extended phrases, and the technical requirements demanded of the flutist in *Andante et Allegro pour Flûte et Piano* make this work not only the most challenging but also the most complex of Bonis's works for flute and piano. Though less complex than Bonis's other works, *Air Vaudois pour Flûte et Piano* and *Scherzo (Final) pour Flûte et Piano* offer an opportunity for less-advanced flutists to engage in similar challenges and are important additions to the repertoire.

These works for flute and piano constitute only a fraction of what Bonis has to offer. Future research and analysis should focus on Bonis's chamber music incorporating the flute, including the *Suite en trio*, Op. 59 (for flute, violin, and piano), *Suite dans le style ancien*, Op. 127 (for piano, flute, violin, viola or clarinet), and *Scènes de la forêt*, Op. 123 (for piano, flute, and horn), among others. Though Bonis was criticized for seemingly maintaining a conservative musical style and avoiding the influence of early

twentieth-century French advancements, her significant contribution to the Post-Romantic repertoire of the flute and unique compositional style should be a gateway to the further discovery of overlooked repertoire. The flute and piano works of Mel Bonis offer a distinctive and important contribution at the time the flute was re-emerging as a significant musical voice for composers.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

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