

Mine Doğantan

Mathis Lussy

A Pioneer in Studies
of Expressive Performance



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Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation is to introduce Mathis Lussy's theories of rhythm and expression and explore their implications for music theory and performance. The writings of Lussy, which had considerable influence on his contemporaries, are almost entirely unknown in the United States. The secondary literature essentially consists of individual chapters in several unpublished Ph.D. dissertations concerning the history of theories of rhythm. One possible reason for this neglect is the lack of systematic spirit in Lussy's writings, which often leave the impression of a spontaneous speech rather than carefully planned and edited publications. More than a mere style of presentation, however, this unsystematic approach also characterizes Lussy's thinking. Having made his discoveries about the nature of musical rhythm and expression, Lussy would often be content merely to state them without developing their implications, drawing all the conclusions. Yet, the strength of his musical intuitions, his fertile observations appear to have surpassed the disadvantages of a lack of system, for his theory of rhythm and expression directly addresses the theoretical and practical concerns of present-day musicians.

In this dissertation, I reconstruct Lussy's theories of rhythm and expressive performance through a systematic investigation of all his published works. Ideas and concepts from recent theoretical literature are employed whenever this is judged fruitful for exploring the full implications of Lussy's views. The two principles guiding this process have been to present Lussy's theories in the clearest manner possible, and to emphasize those aspects that are most susceptible to further development and research.

The plan of the dissertation is as follows: Chapter I establishes the historical background for Lussy's theories. The history of themes that form an integral part of his thinking is traced, and the psychological and aesthetic climate in which his theories are developed is presented. Although Lussy's knowledge of the history of music theory was extensive – the bibliography of his *Histoire de la notation musicale* (1882) includes works by such theorists as Zarlino, Mersenne, Heinichen, Mattheson, Rameau, Marpurg and Koch – in none of his publications does he acknowledge any direct or indirect influence of his predecessors on his thinking. Many of his ideas on musical rhythm, however, closely parallel

the teachings of Jérôme-Joseph de Momigny. Chapter I, therefore, is intended as a narrative of the currents of ideas that are directly behind Lussy's theories – albeit without his explicit recognition.

In Chapter II, Lussy's theory of expressive performance as the behavioral manifestation of the performer's affective response to music is introduced, and his conception of the interaction between the cognitive and affective faculties during musical experience is discussed. Although Lussy's *Traité de l'expression musicale* (1874) and his last publication "De la diction musicale et grammaticale" (1909) are separated by more than thirty years, the basic principles of his theory of rhythm and expression remained unchanged throughout his career. In this sense, it is not possible to speak of an "early" and "late" Lussy. Among the three middle chapters of the dissertation, which present Lussy's theories, it is Chapter II that most clearly reflects my interpretative activity. A reader who picks up either the *Traité* or *Le rythme* – or any other publication by Lussy – will search in vain for the counterpart of the coherent, methodological presentation of this chapter. Reading the primary sources after reading this chapter would, however, supply the perspective required in order to read between Lussy's lines and draw implications that would guide further research into the basic principles of a theory of expressive performance. Edmond Monod, whose *Mathis Lussy et le rythme musical* (1912) – commissioned by the "Comité de l'Association des Musiciens Suisses" after Lussy's death – is the only book-length work prior to this dissertation to be entirely devoted to Lussy's theories, writes that any attempt to analyze Lussy's ideas "becomes necessarily a personal interpretation. Your Lussy and my Lussy perhaps differ: what is essential in his works in my opinion may not be so in yours, and vice versa."¹ This chapter presents the Lussy reconstructed in accordance with my main interest – the establishment of a theory of expressive performance.

Chapter III is about the fundamental principles of Lussy's theory of rhythm and meter, which serves as the background for his grammar of expressive performance. The emphasis is on his conception of musical rhythm as successive phases of action and repose determined by the principle of tonal attractions. This chapter continues to employ the ideas of Lussy's predecessors and contemporaries for purposes of comparison and contrast.

¹ Monod, Edmond. *Mathis Lussy et le rythme musical*. Neuchâtel: Attinger Frères, 1912, p.8.

Chapter IV introduces the elements of expressive performance as formulated by Lussy in terms of intensity and tempo variations. Although writings in music pedagogy before Lussy do mention accentuation and dynamic nuance – and occasionally timing fluctuations – as essential components of a comprehensible and expressive performance, the first systematic and consistent explanation of these performance variables in terms of the structural features of music is found in Lussy's writings. Therefore, this chapter – unlike the previous ones – does not establish a dialogue between Lussy and his predecessors. Instead, Lussy is presented here as the historical origin of the rapidly developing branch of expressive performance in recent music psychology.

Chapter V goes on to display the connections between Lussy, his successors, and some recent theories of musical rhythm and expressive performance.

The bibliography is organized in several categories, and some entries are present in more than one category. The reader who is not familiar with the names of authors, particularly those of secondary sources, will find this organization useful.

In the Appendix, translations of passages from review articles are provided. All translations from French texts in this dissertation are mine.

Biography

Music theorist and piano pedagogue Mathis Lussy was born on April 28, 1828 into one of the oldest families in Stans, a town just outside of Luzern in the German-speaking part of Switzerland.² The Lussys had lived there since the twelfth century. There is not much information about Mathis's early childhood; a passing remark by Combe depicts him as growing up with his father's narrations of patriotism. Lussy received his first musical training from Alois Businger, who was the church organist in Stans. By the age of ten, he had already mastered the figured bass accompaniment on the organ. With the death of his father in 1840, Lussy's education was completely entrusted to Businger. Combe writes that "Businger opened the doors of music to Lussy, showed him the elements and guided him by the hand to the threshold of the sanctuary. Once in the temple, the

² The most extensive published source for Lussy's biography is Eduard Combe's article in *La semaine littéraire* 8 (1908): 397–400.

disciple, without the assistance of any one, would lose no time in exploring the mysteries.”

In 1842, Lussy entered the seminary of Saint-Urban to study organ and composition with Leopold Nägeli. At one point during his four-year stay there, he appears to have seriously considered an ecclesiastical career; his superiors would “discourage the mystical flights of the neophyte.” In 1846, Lussy, who hardly knew French, came to Paris to study medicine, but soon abandoned the subject to devote himself exclusively to music. While studying with Adolphe Adam (1803–1856), Antoine Elwart (1808–1877) and Emile Chevé (1804–1864), he started giving music lessons himself. Sometime around 1852, Lussy married the daughter of a high-ranking French officer. The same year he was offered the teaching position held by the celebrated pianist Jean Henri Ravina (1818–1906) in Kloster Pipeus. Lussy would teach there, without interruption, for the next forty years. In 1902, after the death of his two sons and of his wife, Lussy returned to Switzerland and spent his last years in Montreux, in the company of an adopted daughter. In 1908, he was made a Chevalier of the *Legion d'honneur* for his contributions to music theory and aesthetics. Lussy died on January 21, 1910, at the age of eighty-two.