

Après un rêve

Dans un sommeil que charmait ton image
In a slumber that charmed your image

Je rêvais le bonheur, ardent mirage;
I dreamed (of) the happiness ardent mirage

Tes yeux était plus doux, ta voix pure et sonore,
your eyes were more sweet your voice pure and rich,

Tu rayonnais comme un ciel éclairé par l'aurore.
you radiated like a sky lit up by the dawn

Tu m'appelais et je quittais la terre
You me were calling and I was leaving the earth

Pour m'enfuir avec toi vers la lumière;
to me flee with you towards the light

Les ciels pour nous entr'ouvriraient leurs nues,
the heavens for us parted their clouds

Splendeurs inconnues, lueurs divines entrevues...
splendours unknown glows divine glimpsed

Hélas! Hélas, triste réveil des songes!
Alas alas sad awakening from the dreams

Je t'appelle, ô nuit, rends-moi tes mensonges;
I you call o night return me your lies

Reviens, reviens radieuse,
come back come back radiant

Reviens, ô nuit mystérieuse!
come back o night mysterious

This, one of the most celebrated of art songs in any language, surely has one of the most ravishing and memorable melodies ever composed. A favourite with performers and audiences alike, it has also been transcribed as a solo piece on most instruments – most notably in Fauré’s own transcription for the ‘cello. However, whilst the music certainly is of a far greater quality than the text that inspired it, instrumentalists will inevitably indulge in the melodic beauty with rarely any understanding of the story told in the text and the pain “after the dream.” Beautiful though it is, this song is not a study in *bel canto* technique and the story is paramount.

The French text is a translation of a poem in Tuscan dialect. Indeed it was originally published with the Tuscan text included and can be sung in the dialect. The song is appropriately Italianate in conception with the melody floating on an uncomplicated piano accompaniment.

In the first two verses the singer recounts a dream where a beloved one is seen. In the first verse he tells of the loved one’s beauty. In the second verse the singer rises up to the skies and glimpses into the shining heavens, but the reality hits in the third verse as the singer narrates the awakening from the dream. Clearly the love affair is over – was it once real or only ever a dream?

The deceptively simple piano part of repeated chords creates a heartbeat with a rich progression of harmonies. The closeness of the succeeding chords adds a sense of movement, drive and

After a dream

In a sleep charmed by your likeness
I dreamed of happiness, ardent mirage;
your eyes were sweeter, your voice pure and ringing,
you shone like a sky lit up by the dawn.

You were calling me and I was leaving the earth
to flee with you towards the light;
the skies parted their clouds for us,
unknown splendours, divine half-espied glows...

Alas! Alas! Sad awakening from dreams!
I call on you, o night, give me back your deceits;
come back, come back resplendent,
come back, o mysterious night!

inevitability to an unhurried tempo. A speed of $\text{♩}=56$ works well, leaving space for the voice to shape the phrases.

Fauré disliked rubato in his songs, and certainly the triplets in the voice must be very evenly sung without disturbing the piano’s pulse, but perhaps there is more room here than in other songs for subtly placing a few entries and climaxes – indeed Fauré implies space with his harmonic progressions. Of course with a lyrical song such as this a beautiful tone is essential, and the articulation must be crisp and elegant to convey the text without disrupting an impeccable legato line.

The singer’s tone opens *dolce* but intense. The **p** dynamic should not be so quiet as to be fragile, but quiet enough to allow the gradual crescendo in the second verse to be dramatic. There is passion in the description of the beloved, and it is worth noting that the familiar *tu* form of *you* is used throughout. Above all the singer must not allow the first two verses to foreshadow and give away the truth of the heartbreak revealed in the third.

The opening of the second verse is not marked louder but nevertheless needs a fuller **mp** tone than the first verse. Restraint gives way to mounting ecstasy as the singer senses a rise to the gleaming light espied through the clouds. The lower notes of bars 26 to 28 invite an indulgently rich tone and a layered crescendo to a sudden climax in bar 31 where the **f** on *Hélas* should catch the audience by surprise – why the regret when the feeling to this point has been has been of elation? Unusually for French, the final “s” of *Hélas* is enunciated. We are quickly reminded that this is a dream and on a rising scale learn of the pain in awakening. The dynamic fluctuates around a passionate **mf** until another climax in bar 41, before quickly and ruefully dropping to **p** and then to **pp** on the final phrase. There is no *rit.* marked as the piano plays out.

The long breaths throughout the song can tax the singer, but the breathing on last page is particularly difficult and needs a little imagination. Musically a breath after *je t'appelle* in bar 35 would work, but the elided “e” forbids it. It is also most effective to finish on a long breath, but if needed an extra breath is possible after *nuit* in bar 44.

There is a video looking in detail at the phonetics of this song on the Mélodie Treasury website, and the score is available in several other keys for free.

Original key
C min

Après un rêve

apRE zœ REV(ə)

Romain Bussine
romē bysin

GABRIEL FAURÉ

Andantino

dolce

3

Dans un som - meil que char-mait ton i -
dā zœ cs mej kø far me tō ni

pp

4

ma - ge Je rê-vais le bon - heur, ar-dent mi - ra - -
ma 30 30 re ve lø bœ nœr ar dā mi ra

8

- ge; Tes yeux é-taient plus doux, ta voix pure et so - no - re,
30 tœ zjø ze tœ pœ du ta vwa py re sœ rœ

12

Tu ray - on - nais comme un ciel é-clai-re par l'a - ro - re.
ty rœ jœ nœ kœ mœ sjœ le kle re par lœ rœ rœ

16

Tu m'ap - pe - lais____ et je quit-tais la ter - - re
ty ma pø le e 3ø ki te la te re
re

20

(,)
Pour m'en-fuir a - vec toi vers la lu - miè - - re;
pur mā fui ra vøk twa ver la ly mje
rø

24

Les cieux_ pour_ nous_ entr' ouv-raient leurs nu - es, Splen - deurs_ in - con-
le sjø pur nu ā tru vre lœr ny ø splā dør zē kō

28

(,)
nu - es, lu - eurs di - vi - nes en - tre - vu - es... Hé - las! Hé -
ny ø ly œr di vi nø zā trø vy ø e las e

