

## Jacques Ibert. *Quatre chansons de Don Quichotte*

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**Abstract:** *Among the representative names of European composers of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there is the French composer Jacques François Antoine Marie Ibert (1890 – 1962). On the list of his countless creations, covering almost all musical genres, are found the four “Songs of Don Quixote” (Chansons de Don Quichotte): Song of departure (Chanson du départ), Song for Dulcinea (Chanson à Dulcinée), Song of the Duke (Chanson du Duc) and Song of the death of Don Quixote (Chanson de la mort de Don Quichotte). In the present paper the author aims to discuss the essential characteristics of the French composer's creation and to broadly present analytically the four novel works mentioned above, which are intended for the big screen.*

**Key-words:** *musical genres; architecture; style; ornamentation*

### 1. Jacques Ibert and his music

The composer Jacques François Antoine Marie Ibert (1890 - 1962) was one of the most valuable musicians of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and one of the most independent creators of his time, refusing to belong to a certain group and categorically rejecting the idea of enclosing his music within pre-established coordinates.

Ibert's creation, remarkable for its clarity, balance, zest and elegance typical of French music, includes a large number of works, of impressive variety: operas/opereettas, choreography works, symphonic works, instrumental concerts, a cantata, chamber music works, solo piano works, radiophonic works, theater music, and music for 28 films (not counting short films and films for which he only wrote one song). Also interesting are the often unusual instrumental combinations used in chamber music works. The styles of his creations range from Impressionism to Neoclassicism, and his writing demonstrates the influences that make him more akin to his Debussy heritage and to that of the Group of Six (Les Six). However, beyond all possible resemblances, his entire work is marked by the association with the characteristics generally related to French music.

Frequently accused of academism by his contemporaries, Ibert enjoyed Henri Dutilleux's support (a renowned French composer of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century), who publicly remarked upon his musical qualities: “Among all of our composers, Jacques Ibert is decisively French in the most authentic way. He is also the undisputed leader of our contemporary school... Jacques Ibert's art passes the test of time because he is, above all, essentially classical in form. But such imagination in order, such fantasy in equilibrium, such sensitivity in chastity...!” (Dutilleux, 1945). The multiplicity of stylistic facets in Ibert's creation helped him rise through the ranks to become an independent composer within the eclectic aesthetics of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and Dutilleux was particularly sensitive precisely to this type of spiritual openness.

The composer Jacques François Antoine Marie Ibert was the first holder of the Grand Prix of Rome (1919), director of the French Academy in Rome (1936 – 1940 and 1946 – 1960) and member of the Academy of Fine Arts (elected in 1956).

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## 2. Don Quixote (Quijote) of La Mancha as seen by Pabst

From the entire creation of Jacques Ibert we have chosen – for a general presentation – the music written in 1932 for the film *Don Quichotte* (the title of the French version) / *Don Quixote* (the title of the English version) directed by Georg Wilhelm Pabst (1885 – 1967) in 1933 in three versions: German, French and English. The four songs of Don Quixote were interpreted by the phenomenal Chaliapin.



Fig. 1. Chaliapin in *Don Quixote's* role in Pabst's film

For a good understanding of both the moments captured in the four songs, and of the way the music was created, a brief account of Pabst's vision regarding the central character is needed.



Fig. 2. Cover of the first edition of Cervantes' novel

La Mancha, where the action takes place, a semiarid region, is located on a plateau about 600 m high in central Spain, southeast of Madrid. This is the territory where a poor noble embarks on adventures after losing his sanity as a result of reading chivalric romances and, believing himself to be a medieval knight, lives and acts – under a name he chooses himself – in a completely imaginary world overlapping and intertwined with the real world.



Fig. 3. The geographical location of the La Mancha area

In his film, Pabst makes some changes to the action in relation to Cervantes' novel, which we will not comment, assuming they are known. The film significantly abridges the novel and overturns the order of some of the hero's adventures, who considers himself to be knighted not by a person with a rank which allows this gesture to be made, but by an itinerant actor who appears as a king in a play which Don Quixote, in his madness, believes to be real.

Of all the scenes, the final one is the most radically changed. Utterly defeated, brought home in a cage, the hero sees his niece, the village priest and Sanson Carasco burning his beloved chivalric romances; the shock is unbearable and he collapses and dies, whereas his fellow countrymen, who only a few moments before were laughing at him and taunting him for being in a cage, were deeply moved and knelt at this point as a sign of respect for the dead "knight."

Unlike the character in the book, Dulcinea from the film is portrayed as a not at all brilliant woman who, cruelly, is among those who laugh and taunt the most when Don Quixote is brought home in a cage.

In Pabst's version, the name Don Quixote is kept throughout the film; the character is never mentioned as Alonso Quixano (as he finally emerges in Cervantes).

### 3. The four songs of Don Quixote in Pabst's film

It must be mentioned that in the La Mancha area, music and dance are common in everyday life; *seguidillas manchegas*, for example, can be considered to be the purest expression of the life, activities, customs, ceremonies, games of those inhabitants, therefore being the most representative literary and musical pieces of the folklore in the area. They are also accompanied by *jota*, *malagueña*, *fandango* etc., accompanied by various instruments specific to the area, dominated by the Spanish guitar and castanets, whose typical usage modes are readily recognizable in Ibert's songs.

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Fig. 4. Score for songs specific to the area

Therefore, in the given context, it was obvious that the music created for the four Songs of Don Quixote had to appeal to the specifics of the folkloric context of La Mancha. The subsequent presentation of examples from the four songs in the film will make it possible – by comparison – to identify the extent to which Ibert was “influenced” by rhythmic-melodic elements specific to the area in which the action takes place.

For his film’s music, G.W. Pabst contacted five composers, individually: Jacques Ibert (who composed four songs), Maurice Ravel (the author of three songs), Marcel Delannoy, Manuel de Falla and Darius Milhaud, each one, believing he was the only one asked to do this. Two composers responded to the request and Ibert’s music was chosen by the filmmakers.

Given that the authors of the original lyrics of the songs were French and the studied scores correspond to the French version of the film, we considered necessary to present both the original lyrics and their English version.

### 3.1. *Chanson du départ* (Pierre de Ronsard, 1524 - 1585) / **Song of departure**

*Ce château neuf, ce nouvel édifice / Tout enrichi de marbre et de porphyre, / Qu'amour bâtit château de son empire, / Où tout le ciel a mis son artifice, / Est un rempart, un fort contre vice, / Où la vertueuse maîtresse se retire, / Que l'œil regarde, et que l'esprit admire, / Forçant les cœurs à lui faire service. / C'est un château, fait de telle sorte / Que nul ne peut approcher de la porte / Si des grands Rois il n'a sauvé sa race, / Victorieux, vaillant et amoureux. / Nul chevalier, tant soit aventureux, / Sans être tel ne peut gagner la place. III*

This new castle, this new edifice/ All adorned with marble and porphyry, / This castle, built by love from its empire, / Upon which all of heaven has used its skill, / is a rampart, a fortress against evil, / Where the virtuous mistress retires, / that the eye observes and the spirit admires, / bringing hearts to servitude. / It is a castle, built in such a way / that none can approach the portal / if he has not saved his lineage from the great Kings, / Victorious, brave

and amorous. / No knight, however adventurous he may be, / Without being such, can enter the place.

The initial tempo indication is  $\text{♩} = 116$  and above the second tempo of the fifth measure *rit* is provided. For reasons related to the original's writing, the two indications could not be taken along with the rest of the musical text.

The example below includes the introduction and the first phrase of the first soloistic section. As a whole, the song comprises five sections of the *abab var-a* type, where *a* represents the introductory section (11 measures) reprised partly (just the first 7 measures) after the first vocal exposition and then in the finale (9 measures, the last 2 marking the end of the play), after the second soloistic exposition; the two sections of the *b* (20, respectively 14 measures) are not identical, but they share the same construction idea from a melodic, metrical, rhythmic point of view. If *a* is metrically constant (3/8), with a cursive and richly ornamented melodics for smaller lengths and a constant accompaniment that almost always suggests two distinct sound planes, *b* is built on a non-uniform alternation of 2/4, 3/4 and 4/4 measures and a melodics ornamented only in some end phrases; the accompaniment is composed mostly of pedal notes, which the composer discards (replacing them with animated rhythmic-melodic formulas) only in some of the measures near the finale. Interestingly, it should also be noted that in Ibert's case the number of measures of the phrases – as a compositional coordinate – does not follow the classical patterns.

Fig 5. *Song of departure* (excerpt)

### 3.2. *Chanson à Dulcinée* (Alexandre Arnoux, 1884 - 1973) / *Song for Dulcinea*

*Un an me dure la journée / Si je ne vois ma Dulcinée. / Mais, Amour a peint son visage, / Afin d'adoucir ma langueur, / Dans la fontaine et le nuage, / Dans chaque aurore et chaque fleur. Un an me dure la journée / Si je ne vois ma Dulcinée. / Toujours proche et toujours lointaine, / Étoile de mes longs chemins. / Le vent m'apporte son haleine / Quand il*

*passé sur les jasmins. // A day lasts a whole year / if I do not see my Dulcinea. / But, so as to sweeten my languor, / Love has painted her face, / in the fountain and the sky, / in each dawn and each flower. / A day lasts a whole year / if I do not see my Dulcinea. / Ever close and ever far, / star of my long paths. / The wind carries her breath to me / when it blows across the jasmine.*

As the problem in following the example is the same as in the case of the previous one, it is necessary to specify that the tempo indication is *Allegro assai* (crotchet = 120).

The example below includes the introduction and the first section of the vocal exposition.

Broadly, the structure of the play has some resemblance to that of the *Song of departure*; the introduction also has a triple exposition, the first one of 12 measures, the next two – 7 measures each, but the register is the same for all of them, solemn. The first section of the introduction, as well as the full variants of its reprise, takes place in a uniform alternation of 2/4 and 3/8.

The musical score is presented in five systems. Each system includes a piano accompaniment (treble and bass staves) and a vocal line (treble staff). The piano part features a steady accompaniment in 2/4 and 3/8 time signatures. The vocal line is marked with dynamics such as *mf*, *f*, *p*, *pp*, and *dolce*. The lyrics are: "Un an, me du - re la jour - né - e Si je ne vois ma Dul - ci - né - e". The score includes tempo markings "rit." and "a Tempo".

Fig. 6. *Song for Dulcinea* (excerpt)

The rhythmic of the final section of the introduction determines the accompaniment pattern of the entire play: contretemps, with short syncopated sections, giving a lot of zest to the entire song. The metrics is alternative, uniform in the introduction and uneven in the rest. From a harmonic point of view, a feature of the four songs is the dissonances of chords with fioriturae. Melodically, the soloistic section presented in the selected example and reprised almost identically before the finale has a cursive deployment, while the *Moderato* section (crotchet = 66) is remarkable for the frequent use of the modulations – sometimes consecutive –, which creates tension in relation to the rest, along the ten deployment measures before the first partial reprise of the introductory section.

The formal structure of the song could be represented by the sequence abcaba.

### 3.3. *Chanson du Duc* (Alexandre Arnoux) / *Song of the Duke*

*Je veux chanter ici la Dame de mes songes / Qui m'exalte au dessus de ce siècle de boue / Son cœur de diamant est vierge de mensonges / La rose s'obscurcit au regard de sa joue / Pour Elle, j'ai tenté les hautes aventures / Mon bras a délivré la princesse en servage / J'ai vaincu l'Enchanteur, confondu les parjures / Et ployé l'univers à lui rendre hommage. / Dame par qui je vais, seul dessus cette terre, / Qui ne soit prisonnier de la fausse apparence / Je soutiens contre tout Chevalier téméraire / Votre éclat non pareil et votre précéllence. III* I want to sing here of the Lady of my dreams, / who raises me above this century of mud. / Her heart of diamond is untarnished by lies. / The rose pales at the sight of her cheek. / For Her, I have attempted lofty adventures. / My arm has delivered the princess in servitude. / I have conquered the Enchanter, confounded the perjuries / and bent the universe to offer her homage. / Lady for whom I, who alone is not a prisoner / of the false appearance, go over this earth, / I proclaim, against any rash Knight, / your unequalled splendour and your excellence.

The musical score for 'Song of the Duke' (excerpt) is presented in four systems. Each system consists of a vocal line (soprano clef) and a piano accompaniment (treble and bass clefs). The key signature is three flats (B-flat major/D-flat minor). The tempo and dynamics are indicated at the beginning of each system: 'Allegro energico' and 'f' for the first system; '3' and 'f' for the second; '6' and 'f' for the third; and '8', 'Più largo', and 'Rall.' with 'mf' for the fourth. The lyrics are written below the vocal line, with syllables aligned with the notes.

Fig. 7. *Song of the Duke* (excerpt)

The third song, that of the Duke, has a different construction compared to the first two. In the *Allegro Energico* tempo, the introduction is only one measure, followed consecutively by three almost identical expositions of the soloistic section shown in the example above; the “almost identical” specification refers to the modified metro-rhythmical debuts of the respective excerpts.

The metrics is uniform (4/4), except for the appearance of a single 2/4 measure at the beginning of the third reprise. Rhythmically, the composer only partially keeps the *contretemps* system.

The melodic, far from the classic lied style, is characterized by almost continuous undulating notes, usually as a result of sequences of modulations or unique modulations of the ninth, giving the ensemble a capricious melodic appearance.

The tempo is not uniform, with each section showing *Allegro – Più largo – Rall* indications, replacing *Rall*, in the end by *Allarg.*

From a sonorous point of view, the accompaniment style does not differ from that in the other plays, given the frequent dissonances and the preservation of the idea of the *contretemps*, but the continued movement and the long *legatos* give it a more balanced, more fluent character.

### 3.4. *Chanson de la mort* (Alexandre Arnoux) / **Song of death**

*Ne pleure pas Sancho, ne pleure pas, mon bon. / Ton maître n'est pas mort. / Il n'est pas loin de toi. / Il vit dans une île heureuse / Où tout est pur et sans mensonges. / Dans l'île enfin trouvée où tu viendras un jour. / Dans l'île désirée, O mon ami Sancho! / Les livres sont brûlés et font un tas de cendres. / Si tous les livres m'ont tué / Il suffit d'un pour que je vie / Fantôme dans la vie, et réel dans la mort. / Tel est l'étrange sort du pauvre Don Quichotte. ///*  
Do not cry Sancho, do not cry, good friend. / Your master is not dead. / He is not far from you. / He lives on a happy isle / where all is pure and free of lies. / On the isle at last discovered where you will come one day. / On the desired isle, o my good friend Sancho! / The books are burned and make a heap of ash. / If all the books have killed me / just one is enough for me to live on, / a ghost in life and real in death. / Such is the strange destiny of poor Don Quixote.

The last song (in *Andante molto*) is different from several essential points of view from the rest of the film's music, being linked to the dramatic moments of Don Quixote's agony and death.

The song does not have a proper introduction, but starts with a dramatic, dissonant chord that covers four octaves and creates the shattering atmosphere of the forthcoming ending.

The soloistic melodic line, the expression of the last deep feelings of the hero, confessed to his only trusted man and friend, Sancho, is carried out in soft musical notes and is built on two almost identical sections; the difference between them resides in the modulation to the acute, the octave, from the fourth to the fifth measure in the second section. The marked pauses on the acutes from the debut of the fifth, sixth and seventh measures seem to have a double meaning: on the one hand they underline the cause of his great suffering – the burning of the books – and, on the other hand, they represent the effort of making this confession. The sound of the hero's end is the same as the first one previously marked with a pause, however this time it appears in *pp* and lasts for four measures. Leaving aside the previous songs, the interpretation of the *Song of Death* by Chaliapin is shattering and the final sound in falsetto is equal to none.

The play's finale is done by Ibert by resuming the first eight measures of the soloist's melodic in minor, the finale being, surprisingly, in major chord, thus reviving the novelist's idea of the eternal survival of the hero created in his book.

Fig. 8. *Song of death (excerpt)*

The accompaniment, which largely preserves the melodic-rhythmic and harmonic characteristics also found in the other three songs, acquires an important dose of dramatism by the contretemps on quarter time alternating with a quick review in demi-semiquaver (from the debuts of some measures) followed by the syncope.

All in all, this fourth song of the cycle in Pabst's film is the only one that resembles the romantic lied.

#### 4. Conclusions

When watching Pabst's 1933 film, it is difficult, or rather impossible, to imagine a soundtrack more suited to those situations, more inspired and valued by its melodic and accompaniment, somehow outside the classic patterns, and so convincing in illustrating the area and the times in which Cervantes placed his hero.

Looking carefully at each of the musical sections extracted from the four songs (it would be ideal to see the full scores), one can easily notice similarities with the rhythmic, ornamentation and type of "accompaniment" specific to the Mancha songs given as example in Fig. 4.

Examples that are large in size – unusual for papers such as this one – have been motivated by the desire to make a presentation out of the usual pattern, based on detailed

structural analyses; the basic idea was to suggest the way in which the composer understood and succeeded through his music to convey the importance of a soundtrack in a film of a great author inspired by a famous literary work.

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