

## BOOK REVIEW

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**Federico Lazzaro. *Écoles de Paris en Musique 1920–1950 : Identités, Nationalisme, Cosmopolitisme* [Parisian Schools in Music 1920–1950: Identities, Nationalism, Cosmopolitanism]**  
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**Reviewed by Thalia Laughlin**

The idea of a ‘Parisian school’<sup>1</sup> in music during the interwar years of the 1920s and ‘30s is problematic: this polysemic label has long held multiple, divergent definitions throughout the literature. Although the composers of this so-called school are almost always given as Conrad Beck (1901–1989), Tibor Harsányi (1898–1954), Bohuslav Martinů (1890–1959), Marcel Mihalovici (1898–1985), Alexandre Tansman (1897–1986) and Alexander Tcherepnin (1899–1977), the list of members has fluctuated throughout time in both primary and secondary source material. Federico Lazzaro’s *Écoles de Paris en Musique 1920–1950* dissects the cultural, social and political contexts around the idea of a Parisian school. Lazzaro’s study emerges, as the author states himself, in a field of musicology that is increasingly transforming from ‘the history of French music,’ into ‘the history of music in France’ (p. 12). Through a methodical analysis of multiple primary and secondary sources, Lazzaro aims to investigate the blurry entity of the Parisian school: who were the composers belonging to this group? What was the public discourse around immigrant composers in Parisian society during the war? Were they considered a threat to or a resource for French music? How did a composer’s nationality influence the public perception of their music? What were the advantages for composers categorised as part of a group?

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<sup>1</sup> The French « École de Paris » is translated in this review as the Parisian school.

There are still many discrepancies in contemporary literature about the Parisian school because much of it is based on sources from the interwar years, which are themselves contradictory. In order to combat the inaccurate, continuous usage of the term, Lazzaro establishes his multifaceted approach in the introduction: he deliberately examines the inconsistencies on the Parisian school in modern literature first, in order to better trace the way that these inconsistencies stemmed from the historical body of literature from the interwar years. This anti-chronological approach is also layered with case studies that further strengthen Lazzaro's argument.

The book is divided into three sections. The first provides an in-depth analysis of all major sources in which the Parisian school has made an appearance. The first chapter examines its most recent appearances in important secondary sources, including *Grove*, *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, and the *Dizionario enciclopedico universale della musica e dei musicisti*. Many of these sources include the Parisian school in several entries, but make no attempt at defining it, resulting in incoherent representation of the term. This is a phenomenon that also occurs in radio programmes, in which the Parisian school is discussed but without precise definition. The second chapter examines the interwar tendency to place musicians into groups, creating labels such as 'Les Six', 'Les Quatres', and 'Groupe de Deux'.

The term 'Les Quatres' was sometimes used to designate some of the musicians from the Parisian school, although not always consistently. In this chapter, Lazzaro also undertakes a sociolinguistic analysis of the word *école* [school], and outlines four semantic categories in which composers have been grouped: common nationality; common teacher; common artistic aesthetics; and academic technique. Lazzaro's 'school' analysis strengthens his argument about the complexity of defining a Parisian school, and the impossibility of placing the composers of this so-called school in a single category. In the third chapter, Lazzaro examines primary sources of the interwar years, in order to understand whether the term Parisian school was frequently used at the time. Here, the author discovers that with so few occurrences of the term in the musical press and biographical documents of the interwar years, the idea of a Parisian school primarily emerged through French scholars in the 1950s and '60s. Furthermore, Lazzaro finds that these scholars mostly grouped the composers in two distinct ways: the 'broad' definition of the Parisian school which encompassed all foreign composers working in Paris during the interwar years, as opposed to the 'specific' definition of the term, which comprised a smaller, yet inconsistent, group of composers. Once again, Lazzaro shows that a lack of precision has been continuous throughout the labelling of the Parisian school.

The second section of the book explores the ways in which the idea of a Parisian school existed in the minds of the composers most often associated with the group. This includes an examination of the concerts they played, the texts they wrote, and correspondence between members of the group. In the fourth chapter, Lazzaro explores the use of the Parisian school label in the visual arts, noting the way in which musicians and visual artists closely coexisted at the time, and the ways in which the idea of a Parisian school transcended the borders of artistic discipline. In the fifth chapter, Lazzaro analyses interwar concert programmes by immigrant composers. He finds that, although five concerts between 1932 and 1936 were played by Beck, Harsányi, Martinů and Mihalovici (likely where the term 'Groupe des Quatre' emerged), the term Parisian school was not used in any concerts during the interwar years. The examination of so many programmes, furthermore, tells of these immigrant composers'

activity and the close ties that existed between them. It also demonstrates the ways in which some of these composers' compositions were pitted against the ephemeral idea of a 'French' musical identity. The sixth chapter provides an extensive overview of texts written by some of the constant members of the school. José Bruyr's series of interviews in the 1930s with foreign composers in Paris, *L'écran des musiciens*, shows that composers such as Martinů, for example, explicitly wished not to be grouped with other composers as part of a school. Lazzaro also examines correspondence between Beck, Harsányi, Martinů and Mihalovici, as well as some of these composers' biographies and Harsányi's six radio series on the École de Paris in the 1940s.

These primary historical sources are significant because they demonstrate intimate friendships between these composers, as well as their attempts at finding their place in the Parisian musical milieu and a strong desire for stylistic independence. The use of the term Parisian school was sometimes suggested, other times energetically contested, often exploited for promotional purposes, and overall, used by the composers in a multitude of contradictory ways. In the final section, Lazzaro examines the political and social issues associated with the idea of a Parisian school, including three case studies. The seventh chapter examines the discourse on the emergence of a unique 'French' musical identity during the twentieth century and how it affected the place occupied by foreign composers living and working in Paris during the interwar years. Amidst xenophobic texts that were directed at immigrants in France, such as the ones written by critic Louis Vuillemin in the 1920s, Lazzaro examines a range of contemporary discourses of the time on race and ethnicity, as well as the discourses on French nationalism, and the varying links that emerged between a composer's nationality and music. He highlights the complexities of associating some of the aesthetic and technical elements of music with a specific nationality or national tradition.

Lastly, Chapter Eight examines three publications from the interwar years which could be categorised as belonging to the Parisian school. The scores are: *Treize Dances* published by Les Sirènes in 1929, which could be considered a core output of the Parisian school; the album *Parc d'attractions Expo 1937*; and the editor Heugel's (unfinished) plan to publish an album of music written by composers of the Parisian school. Lazzaro's musical, iconographical and contextual analysis of these three publications further demonstrates that no homogeneous musical style can be associated with the Parisian school. He concludes that the Parisian school was an 'opportunity' rather than a style: a fusion of diverse styles from these foreign composers' own countries combined with the wide array of styles emerging from Paris in the interwar years where elements—both academic and popular—were paired with aspects of the composers' individual modernism.

According to Lazzaro, the idea of a Parisian school is more a linguistic expression than a fact. The polysemic nature of the Parisian school, therefore, strongly encourages future scholars to embrace the label's plurality of meaning. Lazzaro himself acknowledges that his research has perhaps left the reader with more open-ended questions than definite answers: a result that he expected from the beginning of his research. His study presents a well-documented and well-researched image of the Parisian school's plurality of meaning. His valuable contribution is a turning point in the literature, and all future scholars in the field will want to consider the unsteady ground on which the Parisian school has stood for more than fifty years. As of 2020, this book is available only in French, but a translation would be a useful addition to the anglophone literature.

**About the Author**

Thalia Laughlin is a doctoral student in musicology at the University of Melbourne, researching the work of Louise Hanson-Dyer and her *Éditions de l'Oiseau-Lyre*.