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A Study on the Compositional Style of the Flute Chamber Works of Mel Bonis

Geraldine Margaret Padilla
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A Study on the Compositional Style of the Flute Chamber Works of
Mel Bonis

by

Geraldine Margaret Padilla

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School,
the College of Arts and Letters
and the School of Music
at The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

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ABSTRACT

Mélanie Hélène Bonis (1858-1937) was a female French composer born at a time when musical trends started shifting away from Romanticism. Amidst the various styles that emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century, Bonis remained faithful to the practices of the Late-Romantic period. Her style, characterized by its adherence to tonality and classical forms, was considered outdated by the Parisian public and proved to be detrimental in her career. This document focuses on the four chamber works originally written for flute. Bonis' chamber works demonstrated a composer who was willing to experiment with the modern techniques of the twentieth century but was deeply rooted in tonality and structure.

This document determines the socio-political factors that influenced Bonis' reliance on tonality and classical forms. Some notable composers such as Saint-Saëns, Franck, and D'Indy continued to write in a tonally driven manner and achieved success in their works. However, female composers such as Bonis and Chaminade were not as fortunate. The numerous restrictions imposed on women limited their chances for success and affected the posterity of their works. The gravity and effect of these restrictions in Mel Bonis' music are examined in this dissertation.

The style changes in the flute chamber works provides an excellent summary of the choices that Bonis made in her music: The traditional form of the *Suite en Trio*, the late-romantic style of the *Fantaisie Septuor*, the programmatic language of the *Scenes de la Forêt*, and the Baroque practices of the *Suite dans le style ancien*. The research focuses on the consistencies as well as stylistic changes that materialized in the four chamber

works. Theoretical analysis is limited to large-scale sections, thematic materials, transition sections, and cadences.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation would not have been possible without the support of my family and friends, for that I am eternally grateful. I want to express my thanks to my family for their patience and support during this process. Your support has been my strength. To my dear friends, for all the late night stimulating talks, assistance in translating, and various favors that you have done for me, I genuinely appreciate all of it.

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CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

The nineteenth century was a period of cultural and political reformation in France. The rise of the Third Republic (1870-1940) fostered the ideologies of Patriarchy and Nationalism. Women's rights were at the core of a national debate as they continued to be under the authority of their fathers and husbands. Philosophers and politicians promoted the idea of women as nurturers whose primary responsibility was the education of their children. This male-dominated philosophy had a more significant effect on the arts, particularly on aspiring musicians. Prejudice on female composers prevailed in France and created restrictions that impeded their creativity. The weight of these social constructs had broader implications in the musical style of Mel Bonis.

Mélanie Hélène Bonis was born in Paris on the 21st of January 1858. She was raised by her lower middle-class family in a strict religious environment. Her musical inclinations came as a surprise since neither of her parents played any musical instruments. She did not receive support from her parents and was forced to teach herself how to play the piano. By the age of twelve, a family friend recognized her potential and persuaded her parents to provide proper musical education to Bonis. César Franck would pave the way for her admission to the Conservatoire de Paris in 1876, where she would finally blossom into the composer she was destined to be.

Mel Bonis (1858-1937) found her musical identity around the same time when musical trends started shifting away from Romanticism into Modernism. Amidst the various styles that emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century, Bonis' music remained faithful to the practices of the Late-Romantic period. Modernism rejected the idea of tonality and harmonic function while Mel Bonis continued to observe tonality and

classical forms. This conservative style was considered outdated by the Parisian public and proved to be detrimental in her career. Bonis' music, even with its conventional language, demonstrated the composer's successful experimentation with the modern techniques of the twentieth century. This document aims to highlight the consistencies and stylistic changes that occurred in the four flute chamber works.

The establishment of the Third Republic after the fall of the Second Empire (1852-1870) triggered a dramatic shift in the French music scene. The operas of Bellini, Rossini, and Donizetti dominated the concert halls in Paris at the beginning of the century, while Germanic influence, particularly Wagnerian, was prominent in the midcentury. However, after the Franco-Prussian war, there was a strong reaction against the Austro-German traditions that prevailed for the majority of the nineteenth century. The Republic propagated the nationalistic idea to promote French music and rejected foreign influences. Camille Saint-Saëns and Romain Bussine emulated this through the establishment of the Société Nationale de Musique in 1871. Its motto, *Ars Gallica*, aimed to promote the composition and performance of French symphonic and chamber music.¹

The rise of nationalism initiated a movement among French composers to find their own identity in music. Various trends emerged such as Impressionism, Expressionism, Neoclassicism, Minimalism, and Electronic music. Claude Debussy was the catalyst of Impressionism in France. This style, characterized primarily by obscure harmonies, delicate nuances of timbre, and freedom of form and structure, was a reaction against the extreme chromaticism and overtly emotional aspects of Romanticism.

¹ Nancy Toff, *The Flute Book: A Complete Guide for Students and Performers*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 251.

Composers favored coloristic harmonies over functional harmonies while whole-tone and pentatonic scales replaced Germanic chromaticism. Compositional structures were freed from the rigor of classical forms. The departure from tonality to modality or atonality is the critical reform of Modernism. In Paris, we hear Impressionism by Debussy and Ravel, Surrealism by the Les Six, and Electronic music by Varese. The advancement of recording and the radio allowed the public easier access to a broader variety of music such as Jazz and Ragtime that were popular in the early twentieth century.²

Amidst the diverse styles in Paris, some composers persisted in the conventions of Romanticism. Mel Bonis belongs to this group of artists who elected to preserve the tonality and structure of the previous century. According to Nancy Toff, the French music of the modern era, exclusive of the avant-garde, divides into four schools: the romanticism of Franck, the classicism of Saint-Saëns and Dubois, the impressionism of Debussy, and the deviant aesthetic of Les Six. None of them, however, is precisely or firmly defined nor restricted from the others; more than one teacher or philosophy often influenced a composer.³

Bonis' music is an amalgamation of the styles of Franck, Saint-Saëns, and Debussy, with a strong inclination in the tradition of tonality and form. Bonis' music did not remain stagnant in the traditions of the 19th century. The flute chamber works provided an excellent example of the style development, through the use of impressionistic ideas, jazz elements, baroque techniques, and programmatic content. The consistency in her music, amidst the various style explorations we encountered, is her

² Christine Géliot, *Mel Bonis: Femme et Compositeur (1858-1937)*, 2nd ed. (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007), 258-259.

³ Toff, *The Flute Book*, 251.

compliance to tonality and form. These elements, both her stylistic changes and regularities, are discussed in chapter three.

Bonis wrote a wide variety of music, most of which unfortunately fell into oblivion upon the death of the composer in 1937. At the end of the German occupation in France during the Second World War, her oldest children, Pierre Domange and Jeanne Brochet, endeavored to promote Mel Bonis' legacy. They compiled and categorized all the unpublished works and submitted them to the Société des auteurs, compositeurs et éditeurs de musique. Despite the success they gained in publishing all of her organ works, the demand for her style of music was scarce in the 20th century. The lack of interest from publishers forced them to reclaim legal copyrights to majority of her works. Bernard Gavoty, a famous music critic at that time, wrote a letter to Jeanne Brochet expressing such sentiments:

I've had plenty of time to read the music that you sent me. In truth, I found it excellent. But, as you ask me to be completely frank, I must tell you that given the disastrous "progress" that has struck the arts in general and music in particular, I find it difficult to see how you could expose this very pleasant, often moving music, which our young Turks would surely find "outmoded."⁴

The renewed interest in Mel Bonis' music was initiated by the German cellist Eberhard Mayer in the late 20th-century. Mayer found the name of Mel Bonis in his favorite book, a manual of chamber music by Wilhelm Altman published in 1937. He was charmed by the composer's Quartour en si bemol, Op. 69 and was eager to uncover more hidden gem works by Bonis. The journey to discovering her works proved to be an arduous task since there was virtually nothing written about the composer. He was able to

⁴ As quoted in Christine Géliot, "Compositions for Voice by Mel Bonis, French Woman Composer, 1858-1937," *Journal of Singing* 64 no. 1 (September 2007): 51, accessed November 29, 2016.

find limited scores in the Bibliotheque Nationale Musique in Paris. Finally in 1997, Mayer tracked down Yvette Domange, a descendant of Bonis. This became the catalyst for the revival of the compositions of Mel Bonis. While some of her compositions were maintained and preserved by the Bibliothèque Nationale in France, a few unpublished scores were found hidden in the family basement.⁵ The family, having retained the legal copyrights to majority of her works, began promoting and finding publishers. All of her flute works, with the exception of the Suite en Trio that was published by Demets in 1903, were published by the Kossack edition.

The journey to the discovery of Bonis' music proved to be rewarding for her descendants as well. Christine Géliot, great-granddaughter of Bonis, wrote about her delight during the process of reviving Bonis' music:

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. Everyone remembers with great feeling what a wonderful harpist my sister, the late Martine Géliot was. We were all surrounded by music, but none of us was interested in the compositions of our ancestors. 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

Christine Géliot, great-granddaughter of Bonis, wrote the only comprehensive biography of the composer. Géliot's clarification of her resources imparts a sense of caution to the reader:

⁵ Jenna Daum, "Mel Bonis: Six Works for Flute and Piano" (DMA diss., Arizona State University, 2013): 3, accessed November 29, 2016. Original from Christine Géliot, "Mel Bonis," *Traversiere Magazine*, No. 78 (First Trimester 2004): 32.

⁶ Ibid., "Compositions for Voice by Mel Bonis, French Woman Composer, 1858-1937," *Journal of Singing* 64 no. 1 (September 2007): 47, accessed November 29, 2016.

I wrote Mel Bonis' biography using various sources. First, the testimony of those who knew Bonis, mainly family members; then, the family archives and newspaper from the period; and finally, the work itself, especially the songs, which are revealing of mood and events. I must admit that my personal 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 the stage.⁷

Thus, the probable bias of the biography should be taken into consideration.

However, the use of first-hand accounts such as letters and newspapers provide a substantial basis for the information received from the text. Understanding the significant influences in Mel Bonis' personal life and professional career offer additional insight on her musical decisions.

Gélot divided Bonis' chamber music into three periods mainly based on personal events: The first period, 1892-1900, dominated by 'charming' works that were easily accessible to the amateur market; the second period, 1900-1914, composed mostly of 'scholarly' works that required a higher level of skill compared to the previous period; and the third period, 1922-1937, dominated by 'spiritual' music mainly for the organ and religious choral works. The style changes in the four flute chamber works provides an excellent overview of the choices that Bonis made in her music: The traditional form of the *Suite en Trio*, the late romantic style of the *Fantaisie Septuor*, the programmatic language of the *Scenes de la Forêt*, and the Baroque practices of the *Suite dans le style ancien*. These chamber works provide a unique perspective on the progress that occurred in her style as well as the conventional models that were retained in her music.

The research focuses on the stylistic changes that materialized in the four chamber works while highlighting the musical ideas that allowed her music to be structured and

⁷ Ibid., 48-49.

remain faithful to the Romantic style of the 19th century. The author arranged Bonis' chamber music chronologically to help identify the common practices in each period. Upon determining the composer's musical tendencies in each period, I referred to the flute chamber works to determine if the same practices occurred. Since the nature of the research aimed to determine the style of Mel Bonis' flute chamber works, theoretical analysis was limited to large-scale sections, thematic materials, transition sections, and cadences.

Mel Bonis' conservative nature was a natural reaction to the restrictions imposed in her musical career. As a woman composer, her prospects were limited by the prejudice that came with her gender. Despite all the difficulties she encountered, she was determined to find her niche in this male-dominated world. The romantic style that is clearly dominant in her music also hindered further recognition from the public as it is considered outdated at that time. However, Bonis showed growth and willingness to experiment with the newer styles of the 20th century. The irony of her music is in the fact that we see a composer who was willing to indulge the modern style of the 20th century but was held back by the numerous constraints given to women musicians. The public limited her chances for success in experimenting with modern techniques and penalized her for retaining the traditions of the 19th century. It is important to understand the sociopolitical factor faced by women musicians at that time to be able to fully grasp Bonis' situation. These circumstances helped shaped the direction that her music took in each period.

CHAPTER II - BIOGRAPHY

The Young Mélanie

Mélanie Hélène Bonis was born in Paris on the 21st of January 1858. Her father, Pierre Bonis, was a manager for the Breguet watches, while her mother, Anne Clémence Mangin, was a housewife. Religion was a core belief of the Bonis family. The importance of the teachings of the Catholic church was instilled in the young girl early in her life. Madame Bonis required her children to confess weekly, pray regularly, read devotion daily, and attend mass dutifully.⁸ Mélanie was taught to respect and obey her parents for they are God's representative in her life. Obedience to her parents is obedience to God whereas any sign of disrespect is answerable to God.⁹ She embraced the teachings of the Catholic church, and her enthusiasm was disclosed in this letter she wrote about her first communion: "I was very imbued by the mystery that was to be fulfilled in me."¹⁰ Her devotion to the church deepened as she matured, and it became a guiding light in her principles and ideals.

It was customary for French households to own a piano as a sign of their accession to bourgeois status and also as a means for entertaining guests. The Bonis family owned a piano even though no one knew how to play. Mélanie showed interest and talent in music at a very young age. However, music was never considered as a career in the Bonis family and her parents did not support her endeavor. The young girl

⁸ Géliot, *Mel Bonis*, 28.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁰ As quoted in Géliot, 29. Original Source: "Souvenirs et Réflexions de Mel Bonis," recueil des écrits de Mel Bonis par ses enfants, éd. Du Nant d'Enfer, 1974. "J'étais très pénétrée du mystère qui allait s'accomplir en moi."

was forced to teach herself how to play the piano and received no formal musical training until the age of twelve. Mélanie's education was primarily focused on household skills which were intended to improve her marriage prospects.¹¹ Ironically, it was this very idea that changed her parents' mind about her music education considering that learning music was perceived as an advantage in finding a suitable partner for young women.¹²

Madame Bonis allowed Mélanie to take piano lessons and solfège classes. By the age of eighteen, she had already developed exceptional piano technique. Her musical skills were highlighted by her assertive yet sensitive playing, her excellent sight reading, and her musical improvisations. Other than the piano, the instrument that piqued her interest was the organ. She appreciated the creativity the organ inspired by the variety of timbre it produced and the improvisatory nature of its repertoire. The religious connotation of the organ as the instrument of the church also reinforced its value to Mélanie. She was in awe of the organ's ability to create an atmosphere of prayer and worship in reverence to God.¹³ Henri Maury, cornet professor at the Conservatoire de Paris (1873-1880) and a friend of the Bonis family, followed Mélanie's progress closely and proposed to introduce her to his colleague Cèsar Franck. Franck, organ professor (1872-1890), recognized the potential in the young girl and decided to become her piano mentor. He later endorsed her as a student at the Conservatoire de Paris where she was accepted to Ernest Guiraud's piano accompaniment and harmony class in December 1876.¹⁴

¹¹ Ibid., 31.

¹² Nancy Reich, "Women as Musicians: A Question of Class," *Musicology in Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Ruth Solie (Los Angeles, University of California Press), 132.

¹³ Géliot, *Mel Bonis*, 31.

¹⁴ Ibid., 33.

Mélanie received the finest education from her professors including Auguste Bazille (1828-1891), Napoléon Alkan (1862-1906), Alexandre Lavignac (1846-1916), Antoine Marmontel (1816-1898), Adolphe Danhauser (1835-1896), Jules Massenet (1842-1912), and César Franck (1822-1890). She gained the respect and admiration of her comrades in the conservatory. She felt comfortable in this environment surrounded by fellow musicians including Alfred Bruneau (1857-1934), Gabriel Pierné (1863-1937), Ernest Chausson (1855-1899), Claude Debussy (1862-1918), and Isidore Philipp (1863-1958).¹⁵

In 1877, Mélanie received the premiere accessit d'harmonie et accompagnement in Ernest Guiraud's class. The following year she switched to Auguste Bazille's accompaniment class and stayed with Guiraud for the harmony class.¹⁶ Melanie failed to obtain the premiere prix in 1879 due to episodes of stage fright, and she had to settle for the second prix d'accompagnement. Despite this debilitating fear, she was able to bounce back and achieved the premiere prix d'harmonie in June 1880, the sole first prize given to all harmony classes that year.¹⁷ Upon receiving the premiere prix d'harmonie, she was promoted to the composition class.¹⁸ Fortuitously, Ernest Guiraud took over the composition class that was vacated by Victor Massé, and Mélanie remained under his tutelage.¹⁹

¹⁵ Ibid., 36.

¹⁶ Ibid., 36.

¹⁷ Ibid., 38.

¹⁸ According to Jann Pasler for a student to be accepted to a composition class, they are required to achieve first prize in another field such as piano or organ. Jann Pasler, "Classe Sociale, Genre et Formation Musicale: Préparer le Prix de Rome au Conservatoire de Paris entre 1871 et 1900," *Romantisme* 153 (2011): 93, accessed November 29, 2016.

¹⁹ Géliot, *Mel Bonis*, 40.

Mélanie received positive reviews from her professors at the conservatory. These reports were documented in the National Archives of Paris. On the June 1880 examination, Auguste Bazille wrote about Bonis, "Very skilled, good musician, lovely harmonies. Reads well with the orchestra. Sadly, she is too afraid. I am pleased with this student."²⁰ Another professor wrote in January 1881, "Excellent student. The strongest of the class but fear paralyzes her."²¹

Mélanie was given the opportunity to participate in Franck's organ class when he opened it to the public.²² Franck was highly regarded for his improvisation lessons. Massenet and Guiraud understood its benefits in preparing the students for the fugue examination. Mélanie received favorable reviews in Franck's organ class as we see from this report, "...She accompanied the plainchant so well that he (Franck) has shown her as an example to outsiders who visited the class sometimes."²³ This proved to be a valuable learning experience as she continued to receive good evaluations. Theodore Dubois assessed her composition saying, "good fugue, clear, musical, well-written."²⁴

1881 would be a pivotal year for the composer; she conceived of the name 'Mel Bonis.' The young girl had blossomed into the composer she was destined to be. She started writing with confidence, supplemented by all the techniques she learned and

²⁰ As quoted in Géliot, *Mel Bonis*, 38. Original source: Archives du CNSM et collections Dunant aux Archives Nationales. "Très douée, bonne musicienne, jolie harmonie. Lit bien l'orchestre. Malheureusement, a trop peur. Je suis très content de cette élève."

²¹ As quoted in Géliot, *Mel Bonis*, 38. "Excellente élève. La plus forte de la classe mais la peur la paralyse."

²² Franck restricted the number of students in his class to just five each year. Mélanie was able to participate in the class despite not being on the roster.

²³ As quoted in Géliot, *Mel Bonis*, 40. Original source: 1947 Biographical note by the children and grandchildren of Mel Bonis. "...elle accompagnait si bien le plain-chant qu'il la montrait en exemple aux étrangers qui venaient quelquefois visiter la class."

²⁴ As quoted in Géliot, *Mel Bonis*, 41. Original source: Archives du CNSM et collections Dunant aux Archives Nationales, cite dans "les compositrices en France," Florence Launay, Fayard 2006. "Bonne fugue – claire, musicale, bien écrite."

produced music that was uniquely her own. However, she understood that as a woman she would never be taken seriously as a composer and she elected to sign her works with a pseudonym devoid of any feminine connotation. This change was welcomed by her colleagues in the conservatory who understood the difficulties faced by women composers. The first work she signed under the name Mel Bonis was a solo piece for piano. On the cover page, the composer wrote, 'Impromptu, mon premier morceau, Mel Bonis 1881.'²⁵

Among all the relationships she established during her time in the conservatory, the most significant of all was with a singer named Amedée Landely Hettich (1856-1937). They met in 1879 as part of a collaboration between the voice class of Nicolas Masset and the accompaniment class of Auguste Bazille. Hettich had a rich cultural background from his French mother and Italian-German father. He was able to speak and write beautifully in French, Italian, and German. At the age of 23, he was already a writer for the journal *L'art musical* where he wrote concert reviews and weekly articles entitled "Causerie musicale: Schubert, Schumann, Mendelssohn." This provided necessary connections to musicians in the Parisian concert circle during the early stages of his career.²⁶

Bonis and Hettich spent a significant amount of time together and eventually their friendship blossomed into a romantic relationship. However, Bonis was instructed by her parents to come straight home after school, so they spent their limited hours together in school honing their craft. The love they shared translated on the pages of music she

²⁵ Ibid., 42-43.

²⁶ Ibid., 37.

composed and the poetry he wrote. The two collaborated on mélodies based on Hettich's poems. These songs disclosed the intimate feelings shared by the young lovers. The two that stood out in their collaborations in the conservatory were based on two poems written by Hettich entitled *Villanelle* and *Sur la Plage*. These mélodies expressed the depth of their love and the uncertainty of their future. The *Villanelle* proclaimed their happiness and also shared the pain that came with the thought that their love was temporary:

“...Love, love, you are beautiful”
“And knowing how to love will end”

“...Aimez, aimez, vous êtes belle”
“Et l’on ne sait aimer qu’un temps”

The second mélodie, *Sur la Plage*, was a poetic metaphor for their love as a place where the land and sea meet. The love that they shared enriched their art. The romantic inspirations flowed from their text and music:

“Do you want, I told her, darling,”
“Do you want to love until we die?”

“Veux-tu, lui disais-je, mignonne,”
“Veux-tu jusqu’à mourir aimer ici?...”²⁷

Hettich mustered up the courage to ask Mélanie’s parents for her hand in marriage at the beginning of the school year of 1881. For young woman under the age of twenty-five, it was customary for men to receive the blessing of the family before marriage.²⁸ Unfortunately, Mélanie’s parents never considered music as a practical career and

²⁷ Ibid., 44.

²⁸ David Pomfret, “A Muse for the Masses: Gender, Age, and Nation in France, Fin de Siecle.” *The American Historical Review* 109.5 (December 2004): 1453, accessed September 2, 2016.

declined the proposal. Madame Bonis demanded that Mélanie dropped out of the conservatory to prevent any further connection with Hettich. In November 1881, Mel Bonis left the conservatory and parted ways with her beloved.²⁹

Life after the Conservatory

Mélanie's parents actively searched for a marriage proposition for their daughter after rejecting the proposal made by Hettich. The tension was palpable in the Bonis household; Mélanie resented the fact that she couldn't marry her beloved while her parents were adamant about finding her a suitable partner. Mélanie decided to liberate herself from the anxiety at home and started a job as a seamstress. The family rejected numerous proposals before finally approving of the forty-seven-year-old gentleman named Albert Domange. Albert was twice divorced and the father of five children. He was a self-made businessman and was well-respected in the community.³⁰ Mélanie was not attracted to Albert, but she understood her duties as a daughter and tried to accept her fate. She declared one day, “Since love was forbidden to me, I will take the money.”³¹ They were married on the 15th of September 15 1883 and had three children of their own.³²

Bonis accepted her new responsibilities as Madame Domange. She tried to find a balance between her household responsibilities and her passion for writing. She confided to her friend Jeanne Monchablon about her desire to write sonatas, woodwind quintets,

²⁹ Géliot, *Mel Bonis*, 46.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 47-48.

³¹ As quoted in Géliot, *Mel Bonis*, 48. Original source: testimony of Marie-Anne Quinet. “Puisqu’on m’interdit l’amour, j’aurai l’argent.”

³² Géliot, *Mel Bonis*, 48.

symphonies, and chorales.³³ Her desire to compose did not diminish, and her peers continued to support her endeavor. Guiraud expressed his encouragement in writing, "I hope that marriage will not make you forget your good work ethic."³⁴

Bonis actively sought to improve her career as a composer. She participated in competitions and joined organizations that helped expose her works and promote her music. Various musical journals organized competitions for aspiring composers. The journal *Piano Soleil* hosted a valse competition in 1891, where Bonis competed with a valse inspired from her recent travel to Spain. Among the thirty-two finalists, *Les Gitanos* valse espagnole Op. 15 no. 1 for solo piano won the first prize and was published in several musical journals.³⁵ This success ignited a fire in the young composer and reaffirmed her passion for music. She won two other competitions organized by the Société des Compositeurs de Musique: first prize in 1899 for *Suite pour harpe chromatique, hautbois, cor et violoncello* and an honorable mention in 1904 for *Suite pour harpe chromatique et deux instruments à vent*. These competitions were stepping-stones for the winners who got the privilege of performing their works in public concerts. Bonis understood the importance of having connections with musicians in the Parisian circle and decided to join the Société Nationale de Musique from 1899 to 1911. She held the office of the secretary in 1910 which kept her in close contact with some of the best musicians of her time.³⁶

³³ Ibid., 65.

³⁴ As quoted in Géliot, *Mel Bonis*, 55. "J'espère que le mariage ne vous fera pas oublier vos bonnes intentions de travail."

³⁵ *Les Gitanos* also exists in a version for four hands as well as a version for orchestra. Géliot, *Mel Bonis*, 74.

³⁶ Ibid., 194-195.

In her quest to disseminate her compositions, Bonis established contacts with numerous publishers. The two *mélodies*, *Villanelle* and *Sur la Plage*, written in collaboration with Hettich, were her first published works printed by Leon Grus in 1884. She signed with several publishers throughout her career including the publishing houses of Hamelle, Baudoux, Bretonneau, Durdilly, Poulalion, Durand, Sénart, and Simrock. The three editors she principally worked with for her vocal and instrumental works were Leduc, Demets, and Eschig. The organ works were distributed separately at Schola Cantorum in Paris, La Musique Sacree in Toulouse, and Carrara in Italy.³⁷

The choices she made in determining her three main publishers directly correlated with her compositional inclinations at the time of their partnership: Leduc published mainly piano works and *mélodies*, Demets released the majority of her chamber works, and Eschig published primarily pedagogical piano works. These choices were prompted by personal circumstances that shaped not only the course of her production but also her style preferences which will be discussed in the next chapter.

The success of *Les Gitanos* inspired the artist in Bonis. Alphonse Leduc recognized the young composer's potential and encouraged her to write more. He established a reputable publishing house in Paris that specialized in pedagogical works and concert pieces for solo instruments. Bonis' relationship with Leduc cannot be discussed without mentioning Hettich. The Leduc publishing house owned the musical journal *L'art musical* where he worked. Bonis and Hettich encountered each other frequently at work and eventually resumed their collaborations. One winter night, at the end of a concert, Hettich gave Mélanie his newly written poem *Noël Pastorale* and asked

³⁷ Ibid., 142.

her to write music for it. A few weeks later, Mélanie gave him the poem back along with the music she had written. This became her first published work by Leduc; a Christmas song entitled *Noël Pastoral*. In her ten years of working with Leduc, he published the majority of her piano works. However, Leduc only published mélodies whose texts were written by Hettich.³⁸

These increased meetings reawakened the passion between the former lovers. Mélanie was tormented between her physical attraction towards Hettich and her moral conscience. However, they could not deny their temptation any longer, and they succumbed to their feelings and started an affair. At the age of forty-two, Mélanie realized she was pregnant with Hettich's baby. The guilt and shame she experienced consumed her. Mélanie expressed her remorse in this letter about her children:

They are kind, honest, sincere, innocent, courteous, incapable of doing wrong. They do not know envy nor jealousy or resentment. They know how to hold their tongue, keep a secret: they do not like to gossip. Nothing troubles them, nothing petty. They have self-control that their mother does not have. Who is this mother?³⁹

Mélanie isolated herself in Sarcelles during the early stage of her pregnancy. Her family believed that she was ill and respected her desire for privacy. She realized that the child she carried deserved to live a normal life, away from the horror of public scrutiny. She reached out to Hettich for help in arranging a place for her to give birth in seclusion. Mélanie explained to her family that she was leaving for Sweden to seek medical

³⁸ Ibid., 81.

³⁹ As quoted in Géliot, *Mel Bonis*, 127. 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?"

attention. She spent the rest of her pregnancy in an unknown area and gave birth in Paris on the 7th of September 1899. On the birth certificate, the child was named Madeleine Verger 'born of unknown parents.' Since Mélanie was married to Monsieur Domange, she could only declare for his children. Hettich was married as well and could only recognize a child born out of wedlock with the consent of his wife. The birth of their child, Madeleine ultimately ended their affair, but they remained an active part of the child's life.⁴⁰

This incident became a turning point for Mel Bonis as she redirected all her energy into her music. She composed mainly chamber music and religious music which was intended for a different clientele. In 1901, Bonis switched to the recently established publishing house by Eugène Demets. The company letterhead read, "To help promote musical works and make it accessible to the public, house Demets offers composers printing, publishing, and disseminating their works at exceptionally cheap conditions and quick executions while reserving their exclusive rights if they desire."⁴¹

Between 1901 and 1905, Demets published numerous compositions by Bonis: the chamber works *Suite en Trio* and *Quatuor en Si bemol*, Op. 69; the orchestral transcriptions of *Bourrée*, *Pavane*, and *Sarabande*; the melodrama *A Suzanne* and *Sorrente*; the melodies *Ave Maria* and *Noël de la Vierge Marie*; and the piano pieces *Barcarolle* and *Le Moustique*.⁴² The composer invested her time in perfecting her craft,

⁴⁰ Ibid., 120-121.

⁴¹ As quoted in Géliot, *Mel Bonis*, 136. Dans le but d'aider à la vulgarization des oeuvres Musicales, la Maison E. DEMETS offer à MM. Les Compositeurs de musique d'imprimer, d'editer et de lancer à ses conditions exceptionnelles de bon marché, de rapidité et d'exécution, leurs ouvrages musicaux, tout en leur réservant, s'ils le désirent la propriété exclusive.

⁴² Géliot, *Mel Bonis*, 137.

revising and rewriting, before submitting it to her publishers. This period would be recognized as her creative period; a period when most of her notable and essential works would come to life.

Bonis continued writing religious music, pieces for organ, acapella choir, and instrumental chamber works until the break of the first world war. She was forced to cease composing during the war, a hiatus that would last until 1922. According to Eberhard Mayer, the deployment of her sons to the war and her duty to the prisoners and orphans exhausted her physically and psychologically. These circumstances caused a period of depression which was aggravated by the death of her husband, Albert Domange, in 1918.⁴³

Hettich lost his wife in 1906 which opened the door for him to adopt Madeleine. Bonis confided to the seven-year-old girl about the Vergers being her adoptive parents and that her biological parents died in a train accident. She claimed that Madeleine's mother asked Bonis to look after her. The little girl was moved to a boarding school at Neuilly. During her vacations, she stayed with her godfather Hettich. Mélanie visited frequently and formed a strong bond with Madeleine, unbeknownst to the young girl that she was her mother.⁴⁴ After the death of Albert in 1918, Bonis began inviting Madeleine to the family's summer home. Edouard and Madeleine formed a unique bond that posed a problem for the family. The two, unaware that they were half-siblings, had fallen in love, and Edouard was on the verge of asking Madeleine to marry him. Bonis was forced to

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

⁴⁴ Géliot, *Mel Bonis*, 174-176.

reveal to Madeleine her true parentage which created a friction in their relationship. This intensified the depression that Bonis struggled with in the later part of her life.

Bonis spent most of her time in the solitude of her studio. By 1922, the desire to compose reemerged. Despite the restrictions of her weaker body, she was determined to publicize her works and resumed contact with her publishers. In the final fifteen years of her life, Bonis wrote mainly religious music dominated by organ and choral works. Apart from her publishers for sacred music, her principal partner was Max Eschig. The Eschig publishing house merged with the Demets publishing house in 1923 and retained the rights to Bonis' compositions. He agreed to publish her latest compositions; although their partnership involved only the publication of her piano works. The success of her piano collection *Scenes Infantines*, published by Demets in 1912, enamored Eschig as he requested for more pedagogical piano works from the composer.⁴⁵

She continued writing chamber works during this time; however, the aggregated health issues restricted her from going out and promoting her music. Publishers were hesitant to print her chamber works due to the perception that her style was not in accordance with the public demand.⁴⁶ The chamber works written in her last years would not be published during the composer's lifetime except for the *Sonate pour Violon et piano* released by Sénart in 1922.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Géliot, *Mel Bonis*, 257.

⁴⁶ The Parisian public demanded more contemporary works during the twentieth century. We hear impressionism from Debussy and Ravel, Jazz and Ragtime in the streets of Paris, and electronic music by Varese. The variety of musical styles left little room for composers who still adhere to the romantic style of the previous century.

⁴⁷ Géliot, *Mel Bonis*, 258.

The various trends in her musical output would also be reflected in the stylistic changes of her compositions. Her journey as a composer can be summarized in three stages: first, a tentative girl who was still trying to find her musical identity; second, an inspired woman who was determined to promote her works and earn the recognition she deserved; and lastly, an old woman who, despite her debilitating health, lived through her music with vigor and purpose. The next two chapters examine the stylistic changes that occurred in her compositions through her flute chamber works as well as the circumstances that shaped her preferences in music and reliance on structure.

CHAPTER III – MUSICAL LANGUAGE

The Conservative Nature of Mel Bonis

The compositional style of Mel Bonis has always been rooted in romanticism. In the fast-changing Parisian music scene at the beginning of the twentieth century, one wonders why Bonis never fully embraced modernism and persisted in her ‘conservative’ nature. This chapter studies the changing musical trends in Paris and identify the styles that Bonis explored in her compositions. It identifies the changes in the composer’s compositional style as well as the underlying factors to her preference for tonality and classical forms.

For the majority of the nineteenth century, France, much like the rest of Europe, was dominated by German music. The opportunities for the performance of French music in Parisian concert halls was scarce considering that Austro-German works dominated the programs.⁴⁸ It wasn’t until 1866 that there was a concert exclusively of French composers.⁴⁹ On 25 February 1871, Camille Saint-Saëns and Romain Bussine founded The Société Nationale de Musique. Its motto, *Ars Gallica*, envisioned it as a platform for French composers to promote and perform their works. The minutes of the initial assembly included the names of César Franck, Ernest Guiraud, Camille Saint-Saëns, Jules Massenet, Jules Garcin, Gabriel Fauré, Henri Duparc, Théodore Dubois, Paul Taffanel and Romain Bussine.⁵⁰ The French government supported this nationalistic

⁴⁸ Programs from the 1869-70 and 1871-72 season showed the popularity of German music. The program included works by Weber, Beethoven, Wagner, and Mendelssohn.

⁴⁹ Katharine Ellis, “Paris, 1866: In search of French Music,” *Music and Letters* 91, no. 4 (November 2010): 546, accessed December 5, 2017.

⁵⁰ Edward Blakeman, *Taffanel: Genius of the Flute* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 39.

sentiment through the funding of public concerts and competitions for aspiring composers. In 1876, the Republic banned Wagner's music in concert halls.⁵¹ French and Italian music replaced the traditional Austro-German works that were so popular at the beginning of the century.⁵²

Paul Taffanel, flute professor at the Conservatoire de Paris from 1894 – 1908, founded the Société de musique de chambre pour instruments à vents in 1879. It was established as a vehicle for musicians to improve their skills and increase the repertoire for wind chamber music. As Blakeman said in his book, “Taffanel understood the advantages in honing the skills of wind players if they perform works commissioned for them without strings.”⁵³ Taffanel’s programming was contrary to the nationalistic ideology of the Société Nationale de Musique of performing exclusively French works. His repertoire always included a classical ensemble work, a serious solo piece, a contemporary foreign work, and a commissioned French piece.⁵⁴ The Société de musique de chambre pour instruments à vents increased the demand for wind music at the turn of the century. Taffanel created a place for wind chamber music to be appreciated and performed when trends started focusing more on orchestral music, string quartets, and piano works.

As concerts in Paris became more accessible to the public, the demand for performances of newly written works increased. Consequently, organizations that

⁵¹ Jann Pasler, *Composing the Citizen: Music as Public Utility in Third Republic France* (California: University of California Press, 2009), 520.

⁵² Jess Tyre, “Music in Paris during Franco-Prussian War,” *The Journal of Musicology* 22 no. 2 (Spring 2005): 197, accessed February 5, 2018.

⁵³ Blakeman, 44.

⁵⁴ Danielle Gaudry, “L’Age d’or of the Chamber Wind Ensemble” DMA diss., University of Cincinnati, 2013), 26, accessed March 7, 2018, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

promoted contemporary music and organized competitions for composers flourished: these included La Société des grandes auditions musicales de France, La Fédération des Sociétés musicales de France, and La Société des Compositeurs.⁵⁵ Concerts were given in various venues across Paris featuring contemporary composers like Debussy, Saint-Saëns, Fauré and only works by Mozart, Beethoven, and Handel remained from the traditional repertoire.⁵⁶

As we moved towards the turn of the century, musical trends departed from the Romantic style of the nineteenth century and leaned more towards impressionism and modernism. Composers freed themselves from the formal structures of the previous century and abandoned the concept of tonality. Functional harmonies were replaced by coloristic harmonies that attracted composers like Debussy not just by the pleasant sounds created but also the freedom it inspired in his compositions.⁵⁷ The early twentieth-century music was a reaction against the refined structure of the romantic style. Non-Western practices provided the inspiration as composers explored the oriental scales of Asia, the folk music of Russia, and the rhythmic patterns of Africa.

Despite the changing trends in music, some composers rejected modernity and remained in the traditional romantic style. Camille Saint-Saëns, César Franck, Cécile Chaminade, Vincent D'Indy, and Mel Bonis chose not to adapt to modernism and stayed compliant with tonality and formal structures. However, Bonis was not given the same recognition as the other composers mentioned; Saint-Saëns, Franck, and D'Indy all received credit despite writing in the 'outdated' style of the post-romantic period. The

⁵⁵ Géliot, *Mel Bonis*, 72.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁵⁷ Pasler, *Composing the Citizen*, 535.

male composers were not penalized for failing to embrace the innovations of the twentieth century. However, female composers like Bonis and Chaminade were not given the same recognition as their male colleagues.⁵⁸ Géliot wrote her impression of her great-grandmother's style: "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."⁵⁹

There were several underlying factors, other than individual taste, which compelled Bonis to continue writing in a conventional manner. This chapter examines the sociopolitical aspects that motivated her to compose in the romantic vein well into the twentieth century.

The socio-political aspect lies mostly with the question of women's rights in France. This issue was a major debate throughout the nineteenth century awakened by the 1804 Napoleonic Code up to the depopulation problem at the turn of the century. This Civil Code restricted women to their sole role as the republican mother - educating the future French soldiers, workers, and citizens in the best possible way. It also reasserted the legal authority of men as husbands and fathers and stipulated wifely subordination and obedience.⁶⁰ The discussion on women's rights intensified during the depopulation

⁵⁸ Cécile Chaminade fell into the same narrative of prejudice on women composers as Mel Bonis. For a more detailed analysis on her conservative style, refer to Sun-Young Oh's *The Piano Works of Cécile Chaminade (1857-1944)*.

⁵⁹ Christine Géliot, "Compositions for Voice by Mel Bonis, French Woman Composer, 1858-1937," *Journal of Singing* 64 no. 1 (September 2007): 50, accessed November 29, 2016.

⁶⁰ Annegret Fauser, "La Guerre en Dentelles: Women and the Prix de Rome in French Cultural Politics," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 51 no. 1 (Spring 1998): 88, accessed September 2, 2016.

crisis of France at the end of the nineteenth century.⁶¹ The consensus among scientists and philosophers was that women were accountable to the republic and motherhood was their principal purpose, implying that professionally driven women went against their role in society.⁶² Women were portrayed as ‘too tender’ or ‘too emotional’ and intellectually inferior to men further affirming the notion that being the ‘republican mother’ was their sole commitment in society.⁶³ The delicate position of women in France reflected a nation driven by strong patriarchal ideologies.

The surge of feminism in France towards the end of the nineteenth century was an adverse effect of the limited rights and opportunities for women. A broad spectrum of approaches to help resolve the issues regarding women's rights surfaced in France. Two philosophies stood out as most important according to Karen Offen: "familial" feminism was centered on the idea of complementary division of labor while "integral" or "individual" feminism sought to provide equal opportunities for everyone, regardless of sex or status.⁶⁴ The philosophy of the more popular familial feminism had no desire to overthrow the existing patriarchal system but instead restructure the law to improve the legal status of women. They reiterated the responsibility of women as wives and mothers

⁶¹ In 1895, France's births of 834,000 were surpassed by 852,000 deaths. Some movements advocated for women's rights on topics of childbirth and child-rearing. The writer of *Journal des Femmes* Maria Martin proposed legal reforms intended to protect children born out of wedlock as well as improve the legal status of married women. Karen Offen, "Depopulation, Nationalism, and Feminism in Fin-de Siècle France," *The American Historical Review* 89 no. 3 (June 1984): 649, accessed September 2, 2017.

⁶² The anthropologist Henri Thulié and scholar Adolphe Pinard publicly opposed work outside the home by mothers of small children. In 1892, a new law was passed restricting the hours of work for women and also prohibited night employment. Offen, "Depopulation," 653.

⁶³ Christopher Forth, "Intellectual Anarchy and Imaginary Otherness: Gender, Class, and Pathology in French Intellectual Discourse, 1890-1900," *The Sociological Quarterly* 37 no. 4 (Autumn 1996): 651, accessed September 2, 2016.

⁶⁴ Karen Offen, "Depopulation," 654.

while advocating for their rights at home and in society.⁶⁵ The authority of patriarchal ideas was strongly reflected in Bonis' life. She never questioned her role as the republican mother and always remained faithful to her responsibilities at home as Madame Domange. She assumed her daily obligations at home and handled family events such as weddings, baptisms, and gatherings.⁶⁶

Despite the movement for women's rights, the prejudice against female musicians was still prominent in France well into the twentieth century. The choice of repertoire at the Conservatoire de Paris propagated the idea of intellectual inferiority. The music from the Baroque period, as well as that of Haydn and Mozart, represented the feminine side of music due to its elegance and sensitivity in comparison with the extreme contrasts of Beethoven and the virtuosity of Liszt that fitted the masculine aspects of performance.⁶⁷ Therefore the works of Beethoven were never assigned to the female students; it was deemed beyond their comprehension and performing it would only devalue the music and expose their lack of understanding.⁶⁸ Certain etiquette was expected of women when they perform. They were to dress appropriately as well as maintain and highlight their

⁶⁵ This idea was popularized by Ernest Wilfred Legouvé as 'equality in difference' in his 1848 lecture. He stresses a thorough reform of the Napoleonic Code of 1804 to allow the full participation of women in society by improving their legal rights and education. The reforms he suggested included the right of young engaged women to provide feedback in the drafting of their marriage contracts; the creation of a family council that would help balance the power at home as well as provide counsel for troubled married couples; the right to manage their personal property; and equal legal power as her husband over their children. Karen Offen, "Ernest Legouvé and the Doctrine of 'Equality in Difference' for Women: A Case Study of Male Feminism in Nineteenth-Century French Thought," *The Journal of Modern History* 58 no. 2 (June 1986): 467-469, accessed September 2, 2016.

⁶⁶ Géliot, *Mel Bonis*, 196

⁶⁷ Katharine Ellis, "Female Pianists and their Male Critics in Nineteenth-Century Paris," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 50 no. 2 (Autumn 1997): 364, accessed November 16, 2017.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 370.

femininity in the performance.⁶⁹ Gustave Choquet's 1860 review of Louise Mattmann's performance of Hummel's *Septet in D minor* demonstrates what critics deemed acceptable:

What pleases me in Mme Mattmann's playing is that she does not seek to draw more sound from the instrument than her physical capabilities allow; her playing could be fuller, but it is sweet, even limpid and feminine; to play like a woman is a grace – it is an attraction that too many women pianists now disdain. I congratulate Mme Mattmann for remaining true to her womanhood and for showing herself faithful to the fine traditions of the *jeu lié* and of Hummel's great school.⁷⁰

Mel Bonis complied with these restrictions by rejecting anything that related to seduction. She refrained from using corsets and only wore a pearl necklace as an embodiment of her position as Madame Domange.⁷¹

It was a challenge to break through the male-dominated music circle especially with the scrutiny that came with their gender. The romanticized idea of women as muse to the creator complicated the path for any aspiring composer. The muse only inspires and does not take part in the conception of the art. Consequently, any creative work was deemed 'unwomanly' and a defiance to the norms.⁷²

The determined women composers were not fazed by the public scrutiny as the number of composition students increased during the 1880s.⁷³ The prejudice on women

⁶⁹ Marie Pleyel was a female concert pianist that enjoyed success in the nineteenth Century. She was praised by critics Blanchard and Choquet as an embodiment of a remarkable artist – finding the balance of a 'masculine' stage presence while still staying true to her femininity. According to Blanchard, her 'manly' qualities on stage is shown in her balance of emotion and refined coquetry. She also displayed an excellent understanding of the music she performed and expressed it without exaggeration but instead always highly sophisticated.

⁷⁰ Ellis, "Female Pianist," 369. Original Source: FM 24 no. 9 (February 1860):102.

⁷¹ Géliot, Mel Bonis, 131.

⁷² Nancy Reich, "Women as Musicians," 133-134.

⁷³ Pasler, "Prix de Rome," 89.

composers manifested on their exclusion from the Prix de Rome.⁷⁴ It would be years after Mel Bonis left the Conservatoire before women were allowed to participate. In 1903, H el ene Fleury would be the first woman to compete in the Prix de Rome.⁷⁵ The coveted grand prix would remain elusive for the women competitors for the first decade until Lili Boulanger won it in 1913.⁷⁶

Women composers were forced to use pseudonyms that are gender-neutral to receive the respect of the public and music critics. These pennames eliminated the bias that came with a female name. Bonis understood that she would not be taken seriously as a composer if she used her given name M elanie and opted to sign her works with the gender-neutral name Mel. In the premiere of her *Quatuor en Si bemol* Op 69 at their residence, Camille Saint-Sa ens was among the audience, and he expressed his surprise to Jean Gounod saying, ‘I would have never believed that a woman could write that. She knows all the tricks of the trade.’⁷⁷

The Catholic church also played a part in propagating the patriarchal ideologies in France. As mentioned before, religion was a significant part of the Bonis household: she was raised by her mother to be God-fearing, submissive to divine wisdom, and committed to respecting and serving her husband.⁷⁸ The purpose of a woman then was

⁷⁴ The very first woman to ask for permission to participate the Prix de Rome was Marie Isambert in 1874. The academie rejected her request stating that they need to keep women out of the public events of art. They believed that allowing women the freedom to participate in such activities would incline her to abandon her role as ‘republican mother.’ Fauser, 91.

⁷⁵ Pasler, “Prix de Rome,” 90.

⁷⁶ For a more in-depth discussion of the history and mechanics of the Prix de Rome refer the Annegret Fauser’s “La Guerre en Dentelles:” Women and the Prix de Rome in French Cultural Politics.

⁷⁷ As quoted in G eliot: *Mel Bonis: Femme et Compositeur*, 202. “Je n’aurais jamais cru qu’une femme f ut capable d’ crire cela. Elle conna t toutes les rogueries du m tier.”

⁷⁸ G eliot, Mel Bonis, 49.

centered primarily on the household; shaping her children to become morally responsible adults. She tried to embrace her role as a mother to the full extent and expectation of society.⁷⁹ This emphasis on domesticity limited the prospects for women musicians given that the public scrutinized mothers who elected to leave their homes and children for long periods of time during tours abroad.⁸⁰ In the *Rerum Novarum* of 1891, we can see the stand of the Catholic church on the role of women:

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 proper bringing up of children and the well-being of the family.⁸¹

Mel Bonis took her role as the Christian mother seriously. She disciplined her children when necessary and instilled in them a high sense of morality and responsibility. Even during her years of actively performing and promoting her works, Mel Bonis limited her travels to Paris, in order to address to her duties as Madame Domange.⁸²

The importance of music for Mel Bonis is manifested in this excerpt she wrote: “Music, this divine language, translates all beauty, all truth, all passion. The object of our eternal vows takes form...”⁸³ Her abundant output of religious vocal works and organ works, an instrument she claimed allowed one to be closest to God, reflected the significance of religion in her life.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Offen, “Depopulation,” 666.

⁸⁰ Reich, “Women as Musicians,” 130.

⁸¹ Jenna Daum, “Mel Bonis: Six Works for Flute and Piano” (DMA diss., Arizona State University, 2013): 19, accessed November 29, 2016. Original from The Vatican, “Rerum Novarum Encyclical of Pope Leo XII On Capital and Labor.”

⁸² Géliot, *Mel Bonis*, 68

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 45. Original from “Souvenirs et réflexions” de Mel Bonis. “La Musique, ce langage divin, traduit toute beauté, toute vérité, toute ardeur. L’objet de nos vœux éternels prend une forme...”

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

There is no denying that the traditional position of society on the role of women affected Bonis' choice to remain conservative. The numerous restrictions imposed on women made structure an essential part of their lives. Furthermore, the limited opportunities offered very little chance for success in experimenting with the newer styles of the twentieth century. All these factors, whether great or small, are variables in her choice to compose in the romantic style.

The Compositional Style of Mel Bonis' Chamber Works

Mel Bonis wrote over 300 works of various genres including solo and chamber works, vocal and choral works, piano and organ works, and orchestral works.⁸⁵ Although the majority of her music was written for piano, organ, and voice, the composer showed a fondness for the flute, violin, and cello. She wrote ten pieces for flute including six works for flute and piano and four chamber works: *Suite en Trio, Op. 59* (1899), *Fantaisie Septuor, Op. 72* (1906), *Scenes de la Forêt, Op. 123* (1927), *Suite dans le Style Ancien, Op. 127* (1928). This extensive list is a result of her friendship with renowned flutist Louis Fleury. The style of her flute music, particularly of her solo works, imitates the singing quality of Fleury's playing.⁸⁶ Her flute chamber works provide a glimpse of the progression in her compositional writing and the dominant styles in each period.

Géliot divided Mel Bonis' chamber works into three periods primarily based on personal events. The first period, 1892-1900, dominated by 'charming' works that were easily accessible to the amateur market; the second period, 1900-1914, composed mostly of 'scholarly' works that required a higher level of skill compared to the previous period;

⁸⁵ Géliot, "Compositions for Voice by Mel Bonis," 49.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, *Mel Bonis*, 113.

and the third period, 1922-1937, dominated by ‘spiritual’ music mainly for the organ and religious choral works.⁸⁷ Even though Géliot divided it principally on personal events, there were distinctive characteristics that were evident in each period. A style progression from traditional to experimental emerged in her composition, particularly in her chamber works.

We see a tentative composer trying to find her sound in chamber music during the first period. The chamber works written before 1900 catered primarily to the amateur market. The music is simple and easy to understand with charming and pleasant melodies. Mel Bonis wrote very few chamber works during this period; her main focus was her piano and vocal works. The *Nocturne pour trio à cordes avec harpe* (1892) is the oldest known chamber piece. The composer wrote on the manuscript ‘a time when she does not take herself seriously. Do not publish.’⁸⁸ The uncertain composer was still trying to find her identity in chamber music. She would later revise the nocturne and adapt it for oboe, french horn, cello, and harp as an entry piece for the 1899 competition organized by the Société des Compositeurs de Musique. The *Suite pour harp chromatique, hautbois, cor et violoncello* won first prize; however, the manuscript for this piece has not been found.⁸⁹ The same year, Mel Bonis wrote three other chamber works: *Sérénade en Re Majeur, Op. 46* for cello or violin and piano, and two trios the *Suite Orientale, Op. 48* for violin, cello, and piano and the *Suite en Trio, Op. 59* for flute, violin, and piano. The

⁸⁷ Ibid., 141. “Première période, 1892-1900, dominante musique ‘de genre’; Seconde période, 1900-1914, dominante musique ‘savante’; Troisième période, 1922-1937, dominante musique ‘spirituelle.’

⁸⁸ Ibid., 190. “au temps où elle ne se prenait pas au sérieux. Ne pas publier.”

⁸⁹ Ibid., 190.

increase in production during this final year shows that the composer was gaining confidence in her chamber music.⁹⁰

The simplicity of the music from this period does not devalue its artistic qualities. Bonis wrote in a very structured way, following the rules of tonality through the relationship of the tonic and dominant chords; sections were clearly marked by cadences and contrasted by key or tempo. The piano part was mostly used as an accompaniment for the upper instruments that carry the melody.

The second period produced some of Mel Bonis' most inspired works in chamber music. This period of creative genius was sparked by a significant event that happened in her life in 1899. Her affair with Amedée Hettich in the final decade of the nineteenth century resulted in the birth of their child, Madeleine, on September 7, 1899.⁹¹ Since both were married at the time of Madeleine's birth neither could claim the child. They were forced to leave her under the care of the Vergels. Bonis was overcome with guilt: "I am going to be compelled to lie all my life! Lying, she wrote, is to deny oneself. It implicitly recognizes that there is something hidden that nobody can see."⁹² She lied about having health problems in order to leave the city and be far away from the family during her pregnancy. Upon her return from the trip, her children noticed that her health has not improved. Bonis, riddled with guilt, continued to isolate herself. This greatly concerned her family until finally, Albert came up with a compromise: "My dear, why don't you

⁹⁰ Ibid., 191.

⁹¹ Ibid., 121.

⁹² Ibid., 127. Original from "Souvenirs et réflexions" de Mel Bonis. "Je vais être obligée de mentir toute ma vie! Mentir, écrira-t-elle, c'est se renier soi-même, c'est reconnaître implicitement que l'on est quelque chose de ténébreux en qui personne ne peut voir clair."

write some music?”⁹³ She obliged and channeled all her energy into her music, igniting her most active period of composition and producing some of her most magnificent works.

Bonis’ passion for chamber music blossomed during this period. She actively promoted her music and chose to switch to a publishing house who advocated chamber works. She also joined competitions by the Société des Compositeurs de Musique for an opportunity to participate in public concerts organized by the Société Nationale de Musique.⁹⁴ She took great care in perfecting her music through numerous revisions and corrections before publishing: “Her chamber music was endless work. Almost all her trios and quartets, were written after approving revisions, then printed and corrected, and edited again. Very few of the works reach final revisions.”⁹⁵

During the first five years, from 1900-1905, she wrote four piano works, four mélodies, an orchestral work, two musical adaptations based on poetry, and seven chamber works including a trio, a quartet and two sonatas.⁹⁶ The *Trio pour harpe chromatique et deux instruments à vent* won the 1905 competition organized by the Société des Compositeurs de Musique. It was also during this period that she wrote her *Sonate pour flûte et piano, Op. 64*, which she dedicated to Louis Fleury. According to Eberhard Mayer, the flute sonata incorporates jazz-like variation in the scherzo section of

⁹³ Ibid., 133. “Ma chère, pourquoi n’écrivez vous pas un peu de musique?”

⁹⁴ Ibid., 195.

⁹⁵ As quoted in Géliot, 198. “Sa musique de chambre était travaillée inlassablement. Presque tous ses trios ou quatuors, calligraphiés après mise au net étaient retouchés. Puis imprimés et corrigés, rectifiés à nouveau. Très peu d’œuvres portent de sa main: corrections définitives.”

⁹⁶ Ibid., 198.

the sonata.⁹⁷ Contrary to the first period, Bonis started experimenting with the modern styles that prevailed Paris in the twentieth century.⁹⁸ The most treasured work by Bonis in this period was the *Quatour en Si bemol, Op. 69* for piano and string trio which took five years to finish. This piece uses progressive harmonies, the duality of thematic ideas, and complex syncopations. Her contemporaries admired this quartet and it remained well-regarded as proven by this review:

“We do not know what is most admired in this work, wrote the German musicologist Eberhard Mayer, the beautiful melodies, the originality of harmonic inventions or the art of the composition, and that of the first movement. Like a rhapsody, we find the most complex modulations while obscuring tonalities, and only a second hearing will allow the discovery of the underlying construction.”⁹⁹

The role of the piano became central in the ensemble works of this period, reminiscent of the late-romantic style. The individual parts were more technically demanding and required a higher level of musicianship. The music in this period was no longer meant for the amateur musician to play at home or the salons but instead was aimed to be performed in concert halls by professional musicians. Distinct sections were still clear and were mostly contrasted by themes, key, or tempo, but with transitions that were more fluid and less strict than the previous period. This allowed for more flexibility in tempo or the rubato style which was distinctive in the piano works of Chopin and

⁹⁷ Eberhard Mayer, translation Geneviève Debuysscher, preface to *Sonate pour flûte et piano* by Mel Bonis (Rheinfelden: Edition Kossack, 1999). Eberhard Mayer was a German cellist who started the promotion of Mel Bonis' works. He also founded the Mel Bonis Ensemble of Cologne.

⁹⁸ The *Sonate pour violoncello et piano* uses harmonies reminiscent of the impressionism we hear in Debussy's works while the *Quatour en Si bemol* explores the use of pentatonic scales. The 1907 piece *Soir et Matin* for violin, cello, and piano also uses borrowed harmonies, unusual chromaticism with a touch of Orientalism.

⁹⁹ As quoted in Géliot, 200. “On ne sait ce qui est le plus admirable dans cette oeuvre, écrit le musicologue allemande Eberhard Mayer, la beauté des melodies, l'originalité des inventions harmoniques ou l'art de la composition, et cela dès le premier mouvement. Comme dans une rhapsodie, on y retrouve les modulations les plus complexes jusque dans les tonalités les plus éloi-sous-jacente.”

Liszt. The rich harmonies and varied rhythms resonated the music of the late romantic period. All these changes coincided with the artist taking a more conscious effort to improve her art and to find her place in the concert community.

The final period of her chamber works started after a brief hiatus brought about by the first world war. Bonis went through a series of unfortunate events that set the course of her musical style in this period.¹⁰⁰ The difficulties she faced during the war caused depression and took a toll on her health. She found refuge in her music and at the age of sixty-five had a renewed interest in composition. Religion would be the central focus of her final years which would be apparent from her numerous organ works and religious vocal works that constitute the main body of her output in this period. Her weaker body posed restrictions in promoting and performing her works nonetheless, Bonis continued writing primarily religious music as well as pedagogical works for piano which she dedicated to her grandchildren.

Despite her limited mobility, she continued contact with her primary publishers: Max Eschig, Maurice Sénart, along with several publishers for her organ works namely the Schola Cantorum in Paris, La musique Sacrée in Toulouse, and Musica Educativa e Sacra in Italy.¹⁰¹

Mel Bonis produced six new works for flute in this period: *Une Flute Soupire*, *Op. 121*, *Scenes de la Forêt*, *Op 123*, *Suite dans le Style Ancien*, *Op. 127*, *Andante et Allegro*, *Op. 133*, *Scherzo*, *Op. 187*, and *Piece pour flute et piano*, *Op. 189*, thus

¹⁰⁰ The pain and suffering she endured during the war proved to be devastating for Bonis. She agonized over the death of her husband Albert Domange in 1918 and her beloved son Edouard Domange in 1932 causing her severe depression.

¹⁰¹ Géliot, 142.

cementing the fondness of the composer to the instrument. Two other notable chamber works that came out of this period were the *Sonate pour violon et piano, Op. 112* and the *Quatuor en Re, Op. 124*.¹⁰² These two works represent the vitality of the aging composer. The *Sonate pour violon et piano* embodied the late romantic style that remained dominant in this period while the *Quatuor en Re* gave a glimpse of the music Mel Bonis would have produced if she embraced the modern styles of jazz and impressionism. This quartet was one of her most treasured works as seen from this letter she wrote to Madeleine: “My quartet is getting done little by little. I consider it as my musical testament even though I still dwell here on earth.”¹⁰³ The orchestration of this quartet was a confirmation of the enduring artistry of Mel Bonis as proven by this letter written by Joseph-Ermond Bonnal:

I have read and heard your second quartet, and I had great pleasure because of the elegance and also of the intimate style. Its music is delightful, commendable, and well-made. True courage is necessary to write such music these days. But I know that you are a true artist, chère Madame, I will not disrespect you by congratulating you on your musical honesty. Nevertheless, what rare virtue these days.¹⁰⁴

Mel Bonis was more willing to experiment during this period. The popularity of jazz music in France left an impression on the composer as she incorporated it in the *Boston Valse* and the scherzo of the *Quatuor en Re*.¹⁰⁵ She also experimented with using the earlier styles of programmatic music in the *Scenes de la Forêt* and Baroque music in

¹⁰² Ibid., 261.

¹⁰³ As quoted in Géliot, 262. “Mon quatuor est à peu près terminé; je le considère comme mon testament musical, même si je m’attarde encore ici-bas.”

¹⁰⁴ As quoted in Géliot, 262. “J’ai lu et entendu votre second quatuor et j’y ai pris un vif plaisir à cause de l’élégance et aussi de l’intimité de son style. C’est de la musique fort plaisante et joliment bien faite et pensée. Il faut aujourd’hui un véritable courage pour écrire une telle musique. Mais comme je sais que vous êtes une artiste véritable, chère Madame, je ne commettrai pas l’impertinence de vous féliciter de votre honnêteté musicale. Pourtant, quelle vertu rare de nos jours!”

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 259.

the *Suite dans le Style Ancien*. Despite the use of modern techniques, her compliance with tonality and form was well pronounced.

The piano part remained central in the ensemble even though the focus on her solo piano works became pedagogical and catered for children's music. Tonality was still embedded in her music even when the chromaticism was extreme; there will always be the sense of a home key at the end of the piece. The solo works for flute remind us of the music for the *morceau de concours*, where one shows the virtuosity of the player along with the delicate expression of luscious melodies. The structure of the sonata form was prevalent in this period with the emphasis on thematic developments and recapitulations that helped establish the tonic. Bonis' music reflected a strong inclination to tonality and classical forms. The changes in her style became more apparent in her final period where she experimented on jazz rhythms, impressionism, Baroque techniques, and programmatic music. The next chapter analyzes the stylistic changes and consistencies that occurred in her flute chamber works.

CHAPTER IV – CHAMBER WORKS

Suite en Trio, Op. 59

The *Suite en Trio*, Op. 59 is one of the earliest surviving chamber work by the composer. It was written in 1899 along with four other works namely *Suite pour harpe chromatique, hautbois, cor et violoncello, Suite Oriental, Op 48 pour violon, violoncello et piano, Serenade en Re Majeur Op 46 pour violon ou violoncello et piano*, and the *Priere de Noel Op 44*.¹⁰⁶ This increased output can be attributed to Bonis' increased interest in chamber music and foreshadowed the creative period that followed.

This suite was performed primarily from the manuscript until its publication in 1903 by Demets and was her first successful chamber work as evident from this 1904 letter from Louis Fleury to Mel Bonis: '(last night in Étretat) We successfully played the '*Trio flute violin piano*' of Mel Bonis before an enthusiastic audience.... It seems to me that Madame Domange is on to something here!'¹⁰⁷ Other notable performances of this piece include concert artists Joseph Daene and Philippe Gaubert at Bordeaux, and also Jan Merri, Duttenhoffer, and Monchablon on a concert tour.¹⁰⁸

The trio was written at a time when the composer was still finding her niche in the world of chamber music. This particular work, fondly called by the composer as 'Mon Petit Trio,' is a great example exhibiting the importance of form and structure to Mel Bonis' compositions. We shall observe in the three movements her use of thematic ideas,

¹⁰⁶ Géliot, Mel Bonis, 192.

¹⁰⁷ As quoted in Géliot, *Mel Bonis: femme et compositeur*, 195. "(Hier soir à Étretat), nous avons joué avec succès le '*Trio flûte violon piano*' de Mel Bonis devant une assemblée choisie et enthousiaste ... Il me semble que Madame Domange y soit pour quelque chose!"

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 196.

her tendencies on the recapitulation, as well as her practices on cadences and transitions while highlighting the conventional way of Bonis' compliance to form and tonality.

The first movement, *Sérénade*, was based on a musical form intended for honoring a particular person and performed outdoors in the evening. In the traditional sense of the word, a serenade is a vocal composition meant to woo someone while she watches through her window.¹⁰⁹ Bonis created this picture of a suitor serenading his beloved through the thematic ideas presented in the music. The piano imitates the guitar, the typical instrument of choice for serenading, through its rising chordal patterns supporting the melody.

The first theme is introduced by the flute in the first eight measures in the tonic key of E minor (Example 1). The overlap of the end of the first phrase and the beginning of the second phrase in the piano in m. 5 becomes a common occurrence in this movement. This theme represents the man serenading his beloved and expressing his adoration. The piano introduces the second theme in m. 16 (Example 2). This rhythmic pattern on the two-bar phrase in G major is the basis of the development section that follows as it takes us to B major eight bars later. The landmark keys that we get from this movement is all based on the third relation from E minor to G major and then B major. This theme represents the response of the lady through its sigh motifs in a series of descending lines. After establishing B major in m. 24, the second theme goes through several modulations as if conveying the uncertainty of the lady. The music never settles into a tonal center until the recapitulation of the first theme in m. 43.

¹⁰⁹ "Serenade." Oxfordmusiconline.com. 2001. Accessed February 24, 2018.

Musical Example 1 *Suite en Trio: Sérénade*, mm. 1-8, first theme¹¹⁰

Musical Example 2 *Suite en Trio: Sérénade*, mm. 16-17, second theme

The way she modulates from one key to the next is in a textbook usage of the dominant chord of the new key as a cadential chord of the preceding phrase. She used this in the introduction of the second theme by ending m. 20 in a dominant seventh chord to establish the key of G. The same thing happens in m 23 as she modulates the second theme to B major through the F# major chord in the previous measure. This dominant chord preparation was a standard practice in her transitions for the first period.

¹¹⁰ A request has been submitted to edition kossack to print a copyrighted extract.

The recapitulation on m. 43 reestablished the key of e minor. The violin carries the melody this time, switching parts with the flute while the piano plays the same progression as the first eight measures. Bonis recaptures the essence of the man wooing his beloved and trying to capture her attention, and we finally get a response in mm. 61-63 when both themes are played simultaneously. The coda appears in the final seven measures of the movement, a decisive pleading from the first theme, this time in the piano in the key of E minor, and a resolute response in E major for the final appearance of the second theme (Example 3).

Musical Example 3 *Suite en Trio: Sérénade, mm. 66-72, codetta.*

The second movement, *Pastorale*, is a musical representation of nature and pastures. The term portrays the characteristics and scenarios of rural life.¹¹¹ *Pastorale* is

¹¹¹ "Pastoral." Oxfordmusiconline.com. 2001. Accessed February 24, 2018.

typically written in triple meter with a drone bass accompanying the melody usually played by wind instruments like oboe, flute, or bagpipes. Mel Bonis would not stray away from the traditional setting of a pastorale. The second movement was written in the conventional 12/8 meter and binary form ABA.

The A section introduces two thematic ideas while the B section acts as the development. The first theme is a soaring melody played by the flute while the piano plays the drone bass line exquisitely depicting the vastness of the landscapes of pastures (Example 4). The use of the G major key is also in compliance with the traditional structure of the pastorale which uses the key of F major or G major believed to evoke a positive mood. The use of long notes in the bass lines gives more rhythmic freedom to the flute and allows for a calmer atmosphere typical of a pastoral setting. The e minor chord in m. 5 helps set up the circle of fifths in the following measure by using the common tones of E, G, and B as part of the C major seventh chord making the travel back to G major at the cadence more interesting.

The musical score for the first theme of the Pastorale, measures 1-8, is presented in three staves. The tempo is marked 'Andantino con comodo' with a quarter note equal to 66 beats per minute. The first staff begins with the instruction 'dolce cantabile'. The second staff includes 'poco rubato' and 'dim.'. The third staff includes 'dim.' and 'p'.

Musical Example 4 *Suite en Trio: Pastorale, mm. 1-8, first theme.*

The second theme moves spontaneously between the violin and the flute (Example 5). The melody freely switches between B \sharp and B \flat , thus obscuring any sense of tonality as it evades settling on a major or minor mode. In this two measures, the

composer also explores different treatments of the diminished seventh chord. The first is used as a simple common-tone diminished seventh chord. However, the next measure uses the same exact notes of the A# diminished seventh but instead uses it to move to F# major seventh by using the common tones A#, C#, and E, while sliding the G a half-step lower to spell out the F# dominant seventh chord.

The image displays two systems of musical notation for the second theme of the Suite en Trio: Pastorale, measures 8-14. The score is written for Flute (Fl.), Violin (VI.), and Piano (P.). The time signature is 12/8. The first system shows the flute playing a melodic line with triplets and a common-tone diminished seventh chord. The violin plays a 'dolce cantabile' line. The piano accompaniment features a common-tone diminished seventh chord. The second system shows the flute playing a melodic line with a common-tone diminished seventh chord. The violin plays a melodic line with triplets and a common-tone diminished seventh chord. The piano accompaniment features a common-tone diminished seventh chord.

Musical Example 5 *Suite en Trio: Pastorale, mm. 8-14, second theme.*

The B section (mm. 15-29) develops the thematic materials introduced in the A section. It begins with the statement of the second theme in A \flat major that was set up by the cadence of D# major or enharmonically E \flat major in m. 14 as seen in example 5. The first theme is restated in the violin in E \flat major in m. 19. A trend in Bonis' recapitulation begins to emerge as the parts switch between the flute and violin in this movement,

similar to the exchange in the recapitulation of the first movement. To break any sense of monotony, the recap of this movement includes a canon between the upper instruments (Example 6) back in the key of G major.

The image shows a musical score for two instruments in G major, 12/8 time. The score is divided into two systems. The first system consists of two staves. The top staff begins with a rest followed by a series of notes, marked with *p ben canto*. The bottom staff begins with a rest followed by a series of notes, marked with *p*. Both staves have slurs and accents over the notes. The second system also consists of two staves. The top staff has a triplet of eighth notes marked with a '3' and a slur, followed by a series of notes. The bottom staff has a triplet of eighth notes marked with a '3' and a slur, followed by a series of notes. The top staff ends with *dim. e poco rit.* and the bottom staff ends with *poco rubato dim. e poco rit.*

Musical Example 6 *Suite en Trio: Pastorale*, mm. 30-42, *recapitulation in canon*.

The final movement, *Scherzo*, is also written in ternary form ABA. This movement is more challenging technically with the fast moving lines passed between the ensemble. The first A section is the most extended section. The themes are introduced three times, separately by each instrument, with each statement longer than the previous one. The flute announces the first theme played from mm. 1-8 (Example 7) followed by the second theme on the piano from mm. 8-16 (Example 8). The second appearance is in the violin from mm. 16-54. The addition of a transition section in between the two themes allows this restatement to be longer. The piano plays the final and prolonged restatement in mm. 55-122. This particular section can be considered a transition to the B section. Bonis uses the thematic materials in various keys and develops the transitional

material used in mm. 24 – 34 of rising quarter note figures.

Allegro con moto
dolce grazioso poco rubato

Allegro con moto
p
détaché

Musical Example 7 *Suite en Trio: Scherzo, mm. 1-8, first theme.*

Fl.

P.

poco cresc.

Fl.

P.

meno p
dim.

Musical Example 8 *Suite en Trio: Scherzo, mm. 8-16, second theme.*

The B section introduces a new material based on the first theme of the second movement (Example 9). This B section is set up by a seven-bar piano cadenza. The violin plays the thematic material before the flute takes over with ascending quarter notes. Symmetrically, a seven-bar piano cadenza leads us to the recapitulation of the A section.

The image shows a musical score for two staves. The top staff is for Flute (Fl.) and the bottom staff is for Violin (Vl.). Both are in 3/4 time and have a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The Flute part begins with a whole rest, then enters with a melodic line. The Violin part begins with a quarter note and is marked 'con espress'. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and slurs.

Musical Example 9 *Suite en Trio: Scherzo, mm. 123-130.*

This chamber work gives us an idea of the compositional tendencies of Mel Bonis such as parts switching roles during repetition for a more balanced ensemble, the use of the dominant to establish the new tonality, the use of common tones as a medium to move to a distant key, and the use of piano cadenzas as transitions to new sections. These practices were carried over in the next period, particularly her methods for transitions and her reliance on themes for structure.

Fantaisie Septuor, *Op. 72*

The *Fantaisie Septuor* for two flutes, two violins, viola, cello, and piano, was written in 1906 during an intense period of musical creativity which produced some of her most beloved chamber works. Although there have been some uncertainties about the origin of this piece, the letter sent by pianist Camille Decreus in 1906 helped establish that year as a point of origin. Decreus wrote to the composer asking for more time to learn the piece due to the difficulty of the piano part and wrote about his adoration for the music: “This fantasy has everything, the charm, the simplicity, the pleasing harmonies, and everything is wonderful. It is music, beautiful music.”¹¹²

¹¹² As quoted in Géliot, *Mel Bonis*, 206. “Il y a tout dans cette fantaisie, du charme, de la simplicité, des harmonies délicieuses et le tout se tient à merveille. C’est de la musique, de la belle musique.”

In the 1910 Colonne concert in Paris, Mel Bonis' work entitled '*Fantaisie pour piano et orchestre*' was premiered under the direction of Gabrielle Pierné at the Théâtre du Châtelet. Whether the *Fantaisie septuor* was a later adaptation or the original version is difficult to know.¹¹³ The program notes of the concert included a description of the *fantaisie*:

“This concert piece, from the new compositions, is designed in the form of a fantasy whose three movements are tangled, superimposed and go one after the other with carefree movement explaining the subtitle. In addition to the first notes of the first phrase reappearing several times, more to maintain a unifying idea than a cyclical effect, the instrumentation, elegant and achieve the desired simplicity, avoid unnecessary roughness and untimely burst, as is appropriate for a work where the part of the soloist must be reserved. It is about obtaining a balanced ensemble: The obvious effort of the composer aims to realize here a kind of polyphonic fusion, where the piano takes the shape of an orchestra except on passages where he must come out of the texture. It is not reduced to the mediocre role of accompaniment. Both intertwine intimately to give the instrument its value and its brilliance.”¹¹⁴

The *Fantaisie pour piano et orchestre* got positive reviews during the premiere although Bonis was not pleased by the result of the performance perhaps because the compositions of her peers overshadowed it at the time. It did not help that her music was placed between two of the three nocturnes (*nuages* and *fetes*) by Debussy that night.

Bonis' mentor Charles Koechlin said, “Yes, he wrote, what an orchestra massacre it was

¹¹³ Eberhard Mayer, translation Geneviève Debuyscher, preface to *Fantaisie Septuor en Re Bemol Majeur* by Mel Bonis (Rheinfelden: Edition Kossack, 2003).

¹¹⁴ As quoted in Geliot, *Mel Bonis*, 206. “Ce concertstuck, de composition récente, est conçu dans la forme d'une Fantaisie dont les trois mouvements se succèdent, s'enchevêtrent, se superposent avec une liberté d'allure expliquant le sous-titre du morceau. En outre les premières notes de la phrase initiale reparaissent plusieurs fois, moins d'ailleurs pour réaliser une intention cyclique que pour maintenir le principe de l'unité générale. L'instrumentation, très soignée en son apparence et voulue simplicité, se garde de violences inutiles et d'éclats intempestifs, comme il convient dans une oeuvre où la part du soliste doit être réservée. Il s'agit d'obtenir l'équilibre de l'ensemble; donc l'effort manifeste de l'auteur tend à réaliser ici une sorte de fusion polyphonique où le piano, sauf dans les passages où il doit se montrer à découvert, fasse vraiment corps avec l'orchestre, et ne réduise pas ce dernier au rôle médiocre mais utile d'accompagnateur. L'un et l'autre se pénètrent intimement pour donner à la pâte instrumentale sa valeur et son éclat.”

for you at the Colonne concert.”¹¹⁵ The Fantaisie was not played again in concert and did not get published during the composer's lifetime.¹¹⁶ The first publication of the piece was in 2003 by Kossack based off the septuor manuscript dated 1927.

The Fantaisie is the French adaptation of the Renaissance instrumental genre ‘Fantasia,’ whose style creates improvisatory freedom of rhythm and tempo accentuating the virtuosity of the performer. The improvisatory nature of the fantaisie allows composers to develop thematic materials and provides a unifying idea for the distinct sections in the music.¹¹⁷ The *Fantaisie Septuor* includes four movements: *Très modéré, molto espressivo, Scherzando, Très Lent, and Très Vif*. Due to the large form of this piece, we won't go through all the minute details of each movement but instead talk about the musical ideas that define the style tendencies of the composer during this period: basic form, thematic ideas, the restatement of themes and alliterations, and the transition sections.

Table 1

Fantaisie Form

TRÈS MODÉRÉ, MOLTO ESPRESSIVO				SCHERZANDO	
Modéré (mm. 1-50)		Un peu plus vite (mm. 51-59)	Tempo I (mm. 60-89)	Vif (mm. 1-64)	Moins Vite (mm. 64-86)
Theme I (mm. 1-5)	Theme II (mm. 10-14)	Piano cadenza (mm. 56-59)	Piano cadenza (mm. 78-89)		

¹¹⁵ As quoted in Géliot, *Mel Bonis: femme et compositeur*, 208. “Oui, écrit-il à propos du concert, ‘quelle execution’ (massacre) d’orchestre ce fût pour vous aux concerts Colonne.” Origin from “Mel Bonis, Correspondances choices.” Edited by Ludovic Florin.

¹¹⁶ Géliot: *Bonis*, 208 – 209.

¹¹⁷ “Fantasia.” *Oxfordmusiconline.com*. 2001. Accessed February 20, 2018.

Table 1 (Continued)

TRÈS LENT			TRÈS VIF		
Très Lent (mm. 1-57)	Reprise Modéré (mm. 58-70)	Reprise Scherzando (mm. 71-96)	Reprise Modéré (mm. 97-112)	Très Vif (mm. 1-133)	Coda (mm. 134-178)
Slow theme (mm. 19-29)			Piano cadenza (mm.106-112)		

The table above shows the large-scale sections of each movement along with the first statements of the main thematic ideas and transition cadenzas by the piano (table 1).

The first movement, *Très Modéré*, introduces the two main thematic ideas: the piano introduces the opening theme (Example 10) followed by the second theme in the strings (Example 11). The first theme is clearly a departure from the diatonic melodies of the previous period. Its highly chromatic lines create ambiguity in the tonal center. The

chromatic lines permeate the theme as the opening line goes from D \flat down to a G in m.

3. A transition material of ascending lines passed across the ensemble bridges the two themes(Example 12). Each entrance of the ascending pattern is a third below the previous appearance: piano begins on F, cello on D, violins on B \flat , cello on G \flat , and violins on E \flat .

This sequence of descending thirds allow the music to move to E major for the second theme, aided by the descending chromatic bass line on m. 9 moving from D \flat to B while the ascending line on the violins move from E \flat to G \sharp .



Musical Example 10 *Fantaisie Septuor: Très Modéré, mm. 1 -5, first theme.*

Musical Example 11 *Fantaisie Septuor: Très Modéré, mm. 10-14, second theme.*

Musical Example 12 *Fantaisie Septuor: Très Modéré, mm. 5-10, transition.*

The second theme is a soaring melody first heard in the violins accompanied by the running sixteenth-notes played by the piano. Two measures later the roles are switched, a typical thing Bonis does when repeating phrases, giving the melody to the piano, doubled by the flute, while the strings play the pattern of minor second sixteenth-notes. The same transition material in example 12 is used at the end of the second theme

from mm. 14-17. The sequence now begins and ends on the same note, similar to a turn, from B♯ – D – A♯ – C.

The second movement, *scherzando*, is divided into two sections: *vif* and the *moins vite*. There are no breaks in between the movements of the fantasia. Bonis uses a piano cadenza to set up the new sections. However, the sudden change of tempo still comes in as a surprise to the listener. The *vif* section is a thrilling battle between the descending quarter note staccato and the legato lines (Example 13). The excitement remains in the *moins vite* section despite its slower tempo. The repeated minor second patterns create musical tension as it never fully resolves nor establish a key (Example 14).

Musical Example 13 *Fantaisie Septuor: Scherzando, mm. 1-6, vif.*

The image shows a musical score for the third movement of Fantaisie Septuor. The score is in 3/4 time and F# minor. It features parts for Flute, Violin I and II, Viola, Violoncello, and Piano. The tempo is marked 'Moins vite' and the dynamics are 'p' (piano). The score shows a descending melodic line in the strings and a more active piano accompaniment.

Musical Example 14 *Fantaisie Septuor: Scherzando, mm. 65-69, moins vite.*

The third movement, *très lent*, introduces the slow theme. A compositional technique that Bonis frequently uses to present new themes is by foreshadowing the melody by using fragments of the theme as recurring ideas. A pattern of descending quarter notes taken from the opening measure of the melody dominates the first nine measures of the third movement. The slow theme is played by the strings alone, which gives us a glimpse of how Bonis' string quartet would have sounded if she wrote for the genre. This theme reminds us of the late-romantic aspects of this *Fantaisie*: the highly chromatic melody on the first violin, overlapping phrases, contrary moving lines between the melody and the inner voices, the echo of the cello to the violin 'sigh' on m. 23, and the complexity of harmony while remaining grounded in the key of F# minor (Example 15).

Musical Example 15 *Fantaisie Septuor: Très Lent, mm. 19-28, slow theme.*

The second half of the *très lent* reprises the previous two movements. Bonis reminds the listener of the first theme on the reprise of the first movement and also the battling staccato and legato sections of the vif as well as the descending minor second patterns on the reprise of the second movement. Bonis reprises the first movement one more time, but instead of using the thematic materials, she uses the transition section as a recurring material acting as a bridge to the piano cadenza that eventually leads us to our final movement.

The final movement, *Très vif*, is based on motifs from the scherzando. The recurring idea is from the descending staccato lines of the vif section introduced by the piano in mm. 11-12, this time more urgent, adding eighth-note patterns that anticipate the next note. Bonis also reminds us of the minor second patterns of the moins vite section in mm. 60-66 in a quick tempo conforming to the exhilarating mood of the finale. The piece ends on a prolonged coda based on the descending staccato lines of the vif section.

Bonis reuses the thematic ideas heard in the first and third movements of the *Fantaisie*. These themes appear throughout the piece and dissecting each recurrence would be impractical; thus only those that exemplify Bonis' tendencies on recurring thematic materials is presented. There are two crucial reappearance of the first theme, and

both happen in the first movement. The first example appears after the transition section following the second theme. What sets this apart is the use of a two-bar countermelody that flows seamlessly in each entrance (Example 16). In this example, the countermelody is passed effortlessly, even mid-phrase, between the violins in mm. 26-27 to the viola in mm. 28-29 and finally to the flute in mm. 30-31 interwoven into the underlying melody that is also beautifully shared across the ensemble. Another interesting element in the countermelody is the final three eighth-notes act as pick-up notes to the theme. All the while, the piano continues to play chromatic ascending lines of sixteenth-note patterns that never detracts but instead complements the music.

This musical score shows the first four staves of Example 16. The top two staves are for Violin I and Violin II, the third is Viola, and the fourth is Violoncello. The bottom two staves are for Piano. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 4/4. The music begins with a rest in the strings, followed by a melodic phrase starting in mm. 26-27 in the Violin II part, which then moves to the Viola in mm. 28-29. The Piano part features a continuous, chromatic ascending sixteenth-note pattern. Dynamics include *p* (piano), *cresc.* (crescendo), and *pp legato* (pianissimo, legato).

This musical score shows the continuation of Example 16, staves 5 through 10. The top two staves are for Flute I and Flute II, the next three are Violin I, Violin II, and Viola, and the bottom two are for Piano. The key signature remains three flats and the time signature is 4/4. The melodic phrase continues from the previous staves, with the Flute I part entering in mm. 30-31. The Piano part continues its chromatic sixteenth-note pattern. Dynamics include *mf* (mezzo-forte) and *cresc.* (crescendo).

Musical Example 16 *Fantaisie Septuor: Très modéré*, mm. 26-31, first theme restatement.

The second notable recurrence of the first theme also appears in the first movement just a few measures after the example above. It is played by the cello and first violin while the flutes play a descending chromatic line (Example 17). Bonis uses the theme as a transition material leading to the next section *un peu plus vite*.

The image shows a musical score for five instruments: Fl. I/II, VI. 1, VI. 2, Al., and Vc. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 4/4. The first three measures of the first theme are circled in red. The dynamics are marked as *mf* (mezzo-forte) and *p* (piano).

Musical Example 17 *Fantaisie Septuor: Très modéré, mm. 45-49, first theme restatement.*

The tempo primo in the first movement creates an entirely different scenery through a change in meter from 4/4 to 12/8. This change to a triple meter transforms the music into a calmer setting for the reappearance of the second theme. A standard technique that Bonis uses is anticipating the melody by playing repeated patterns taken from the tune. In this particular example, only the first three-notes is presented by the piano and echoed by the flute seven measures before the entrance of the theme in the cello (Example 18). The three-note fragment continues to be the unifying idea in this section until the piano cadenza in m. 78.

Musical Example 18 *Fantaisie Septuor: Très modéré, mm.67-68, second theme restatement.*

Similar to the first two themes, the slow theme becomes a transition material in the third movement, which moves us into the reprise of the first movement. Fragments of the slow theme are heard in a canon effect in m. 46, each entrance just a measure apart (Example 19). The ascending chromatic scale on the end of the slow theme is the pattern that Bonis used as a recurring theme that moves us towards the reprise of the first movement.

Musical Example 19 *Fantaisie Septuor: Très Lent, mm. 46-51, slow theme restatement.*

Other fascinating style tendencies are frequently heard in the transition sections. There are four common ways Bonis goes through her transitions. The first is the traditional route of using a transition material like what we saw from example 12 bridging the first theme to the second theme. The second way that Bonis employs

transition sections is through motivic repetitions usually based on a fragment of the theme. The third is through the use of piano cadenzas to link two distinct parts together. The first two cadenzas occur in the first movement: the first one takes us back to the tempo I in mm. 56-57 and the second one takes us to the scherzando in mm. 78-89. The final piano cadenza in mm. 106-112 of the third movement acts as a bridge to the finale. All these cadenzas demand a high level of skill from the pianist. They are reminiscent of the complex rhythms of a Chopin etude with duple against triple and sextuplets and even a decuplet (Example 20).

The image shows a musical score for a piano cadenza, labeled 'le chant en dehors' and 'cresc.'. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features a complex rhythmic pattern with triplets, sextuplets, and an 8-measure decuplet. The piece is marked 'le chant en dehors' and 'cresc.'. The score is in G major and 3/4 time. It features a complex rhythmic pattern with triplets, sextuplets, and an 8-measure decuplet. The piece is marked 'le chant en dehors' and 'cresc.'.

Musical Example 20 *Fantaisie Septuor: Très modéré*, mm. 79-81, piano cadenza.

The first three styles of transitioning are standard practice in Mel Bonis' works, but she adds an interesting transition between the second and third movement. The fourth transition style is done via metric modulation (Example 21). The eighth-note pattern on mm. 86 of the previous movement becomes the basis of the bass line in the piano becoming a sixteenth-note pattern. Bonis foreshadows the slow theme of the third movement through the melodic line played by the strings (Example 21).

Musical Example 21 *Fantaisie Septuor: Scherzando-Très lent, mm. 1-2, metric modulation.*

The *Fantaisie septuor* is an excellent representation of the musical language of Bonis during her second period. Bonis' execution of the transitions exemplifies her commitment to improving her art through the creative use of thematic ideas, and balance of ensemble playing. Some style tendencies carried over from the first period. She still prefers to switch the roles of the instrument, from melody to accompaniment, during repetitions. The transitions sections are still approached by reusing fragments of the theme or by a piano cadenza. She expanded on the method for transitions in this *Fantaisie* by using recurring transition materials and also through metric modulation. One of the biggest difference between the two pieces is the level of difficulty of the *Fantaisie*. This piece is not meant for the amateur musician and requires a higher level of musicianship to perform, given its highly chromatic passages and complex rhythms. The piano also takes on a central role and inspires a more colorful and virtuosic style. The progression of the composer's style is evident in the first two chamber works as she moved closer to the late-romantic style. The final period is a testament to the creative endeavor of Bonis as

she explores various forms of composition. The last two chamber works in the chapter explores these style choices.

Scenes de la Forêt, *Op. 123*

Scenes de la forêt is a trio for flute, horn, and piano reworked from an earlier composition. In 1905, Mel Bonis won the honorable mention at the Société des Compositeurs for the piece *Trio pour harp chromatique et deux instruments à vent*, unfortunately, the manuscript was lost for this trio. A reworked version, however, appeared in concert at the Salle Pleyel in 1907. The piece, entitled *Suite pour cor, flûte et piano*, was written for Louis Fleury (flute), Jacques Capdeville (horn), and J. Morcain (piano). This suite was composed of three movements: Prelude, Nocturne, and La Source. The critic Sérieyx wrote a review of this suite for the *Courier Musical* saying: "Who does not have a little whole tone scale? The peddlers could have exclaimed at the exit. This exotic form served as an introduction to the pleasant suite of Madame Bonis, fairly played by gentlemen..."¹¹⁸

There is a theory that these two works were the foundation of what we now know as the *Scenes de la Forêt*. The first published edition under Kossack, based on a 1928 manuscript written for flute, horn, and piano, would not appear until 2001. Kossack also released a version for flute, horn, and harp, transcribed by Markus Schmitt, that helped recreate the original intention the composer.¹¹⁹ This suite is in four movements: *Nocturne, A l'aube, Invocation, and Pour Artemis*.

¹¹⁸ As quoted in Géliot: *Mel Bonis*, 205. "Qui n'a pas sa petite gamme par ton? Auraient pu s'exclamer les camelots à la sortie. Cette formule exotique servait d'introduction à l'agréable suite minuscule de madame Mel Bonis, honnêtement jouée par messieurs..."

¹¹⁹ Christine Géliot, preface to *Scenes de la Forêt* by Mel Bonis (Rheinfelden: Edition Kossack, 2001).

The final two works of this chapter were both written during the last period when the composer was more open to experimenting with modern techniques. The influence of impressionism and orientalism is more noticeable in this particular work but what is most striking about this suite is its reference to the early nineteenth-century practice of programmatic music. Liszt coined this term for instrumental works that provide extra-musical content or descriptive narration.¹²⁰ The programmatic nature of this piece makes it noteworthy among her flute chamber works. It shows the knowledge of the composer in orchestration by the way she captures the sounds of nature through the instruments. Each movement tells a narrative that transports the listener to various scenarios one encounters in the forest. Form is still an integral part of this piece, but the complex harmonies elude any sense of tonality in several sections until the final cadence. This document identifies the distinct structure of each movement as well as the programmatic ideas expressed in the music and reflect on which trends continued in the final period.

The first movement, *Nocturne*, transports us into this calming atmosphere experienced at nighttime. It is in a rounded binary form ABA'. A two-note motif played by the horn in m. 3 ties the A and B sections. This recurring motif of E \flat to D \flat creates a relaxing ambiance reinforced by the octave leaps played by the piano (Example 22). Other than its function as a unifying motif, it also alludes to the key of E \flat and D \flat for the A and B section respectively, even though the tonic is never fully established until the final cadence.

¹²⁰ "Programme music." *Oxfordmusiconline.com*. 2001. Accessed February 21, 2018.

Musical Example 22 *Scenes de la Forêt: Nocturne*, mm. 3-4, two-note motif.¹²¹

The A section introduces two musical ideas played by the flute. This is also in rounded binary form; the first idea is restated at the end of the A section. The flute plays the first idea over the repetitive pattern of the piano and horn (Example 23). The two-note motif obscures the tonality augmented by the harmonies that are not closely related. For example, in m. 7 the chord moves from E \flat major to an A major which is a tritone apart. Bonis begins to move away from functional harmony and use the coloristic harmonies prevalent in impressionism. The augmented chords in the piano accompany the flute playing the second idea (Example 24).

Musical Example 23 *Scenes de la Forêt: Nocturne*, mm. 5- 8, first idea.

¹²¹ It should be noted that the horn is missing a key signature in the piano score and should be written in B \flat major.

Musical Example 24 *Scenes de la Forêt: Nocturne, mm. 11-14, second idea.*

The B section introduces the lyrical theme played by the flute (Example 25). The two-note motif is the underlying accompaniment this time played by the piano. Similar to the previous section, Bonis avoids establishing a tonal center as she uses mainly augmented chords that do not offer any resolution. Perhaps the tonality or lack thereof in this movement is another way for the composer to depict the darkness of the night that blankets any sense of tonality.

Musical Example 25 *Scenes de la Forêt: Nocturne, mm. 27-31, B section theme.*

The second movement, *A l'aube*, takes us in the early hours of the morning at dawn. Two distinct sections evoke sceneries at dawn: the start of a new day and the peacefulness of the early morning. The form of this movement is ABABA. The music

uses characteristic scales heard in impressionism such as pentatonic and whole tone scales.

The A section begins with the piano playing sextuplets in a spinning manner with bell-like entrances from the top note. This spinning motif act as a unifying idea of the movement. The horn comes in at m. 7 playing minor thirds that resemble a wake-up call (Example 26).



Musical Example 26 *Scenes de la Forêt: A l'aube*, mm. 7-8, wake-up calls.

The B section introduces a lyrical theme in the horn in m.18 with the flute playing soaring chromatic runs (Example 27). The spinning piano part proceeds in a series of descending lines which creates a nice contrast against the legato lines played by the horn. Bonis often repeats short motifs in her music usually as an exact restatement, but in the B section, the horn echoes the piano line in m. 23 in a hemiola effect changing it from duple to triple (Example 28).



Musical Example 27 *Scenes de la Forêt: A l'aube*, mm. 18-22, horn theme.



Musical Example 28 *Scenes de la Forêt: A l'aube*, mm. 23-24, hemiola.

The two sections are heard again from mm. 37-63 before the final reiteration of the A section with the tonic remaining elusive. It would not be until the concluding measure that Bonis establishes B \flat as the key. In the last two bars, a whole tone scale appears on the flute and horn moving in contrasting motion. The final cadence is not the traditional V-I cadence that we usually hear from Bonis. She uses a dominant seventh chord with a flatted fifth that leads us to the tonic key of B \flat (Example 29). This is a peculiar cadence given that she elected to use an altered dominant instead of the conventional dominant seventh chord.



Musical Example 29 *Scenes de la Forêt: A l'aube*, mm. 73-74, final cadence.

The third movement, *Invocation*, is the only slow movement in the entire suite. It portrays a prayer to the goddess Artemis, who is the subject of the final movement. It is

in binary form ABA coda where key and themes separate the two sections. The A section is in d minor with the first theme played by the horn and flute (Example 30). It is a conversation between the two instruments where the horn asks the question and the flute responds. The piano part plays the chords in mm. 3-6 in a 'rolled' manner imitating a harp which reinforces the theory that the piece was originally written for harp. The piano also does a technique commonly done in impressionism called planing where one moves a chord up or down the scale. The second theme evokes a stronger desire and a sense of urgency on the horn part by the sudden change in dynamic from piano to forte (Example 31).

Musical Example 30 *Scenes de la Forêt: Invocation, mm. 1-7, first theme.*

Musical Example 31 *Scenes de la Forêt: Invocation, mm. 14-20, second theme.*

The B section is a brief section written in F major. The theme spans only six bars and immediately goes to transition back to the A section. The horn plays a calmer melody below a triplet figure flute part and chorale-like piano accompaniment (Example 32). The

piano line on m. 30 is repeated three times as a transition material that takes us back to the A section.



Musical Example 32 *Scenes de la Forêt: Invocation, mm. 25-30, horn theme.*

The final A section revisits a compositional tendency of Bonis to switch parts during the repetition. The flute and horn switch roles for the first theme before moving back to their original lines for the second theme. Bonis asks the question one last time to the listener, almost as a reflection, played by the horn in the final seven measures of the coda (Example 33). The music ends in F major with the dominant C major chord established five bars before the end, and the tonic sustained for the final four measures.

Musical Example 33 *Scenes de la Forêt: Invocation, mm. 52-58, coda.*

The transitions of this piece are more rudimentary than the highly chromatic lines from the previous movements. The C major dominant seventh chord prepared the F major in the B section. Similarly, the A major dominant chord orchestrated the move back to D

minor. Bonis' treatment of thematic materials also reminds us of her conventional style of switching parts in repetition or recapitulation. The use of third relation chords of d minor and F major is also reminiscent of her typical key relations. Perhaps the religious aspect of the narrative demanded a sense of structure and form from the composer.

The final movement, *Pour Artemis*, shows the understanding of the composer of the sounds of nature and which instrument are capable of producing these effects. It is based on the Greek goddess of hunt and nature, Artemis. She is portrayed in her two distinct characteristics: one is the goddess who loves the wild and enjoys hunting, and the other is the gentle spirit who cares for the young of all living things.¹²² There are three sections in this movement that represents the goddess Artemis: the hunting goddess, the calm and tender goddess, and the sounds of nature.

The A section portrays the hunting goddess. The driving dotted rhythm played by the piano (Example 34) paints the background for the hunting calls in the horn in m. 8 (Example 35). This piano pattern in example 34 becomes a recurring rhythm in the piece as a subtle reminder of the goddess of hunting. The flute imitates bird sounds in m. 25 (Example 36).

The image shows a musical score for the piano part of 'Scenes de la Forêt: Pour Artemis', measures 1 through 7. The score is written in 3/8 time and the key of D minor. The tempo is marked 'Allegro comodo'. The right hand features a driving dotted rhythm, starting with a half note followed by a dotted quarter note. The left hand has a more melodic line with eighth notes and rests. Dynamics include 'mf' (mezzo-forte) and 'cresc.' (crescendo). The score is marked 'Animé' with a tempo of ♩ = 72. A dashed line indicates the continuation of the piece.

Musical Example 34 *Scenes de la Forêt: Pour Artemis*, mm. 1 – 7, dotted rhythm.¹²³

¹²² Robin Hard and H. J. Rose, *The Routledge Handbook of Greek Mythology: Based on H.J. Rose's Handbook of Greek Mythology* (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2004), 186, Accessed February 21, 2018.

¹²³ This edition counts the pickup measure as the first measure making the first full bar m. 2.



Musical Example 35 *Scenes de la Forêt: Pour Artemis*, mm. 8- 12, hunting calls.



Musical Example 36 *Scenes de la Forêt: Pour Artemis*, mm. 25-34, birds.

The B section represents the gentler side of the goddess. This section moves to D \flat major by a common-tone modulation in m. 76-77, using A \flat and C \sharp or enharmonically D \flat for a smooth transition to the new key (Example 37). The flute plays the beautiful legato melody while being accompanied by the horn and piano.



Musical Example 37 *Scenes de la Forêt: Pour Artemis*, mm. 76-77, common-tone modulation.

The final section is a development section that utilizes the sounds of nature in the music. Bonis transports us to the start of a new day after the calm night of the B section.

The beginning is in C major, which was approached by an altered dominant chord in m. 131 (Example 38). This section includes a stormy passage which acts as a transition section back to A in m. 165 however, the composer deceives the listener to think it is the recapitulation of A when it is merely reusing the thematic materials from the hunting calls to the driving rhythms as part of the development section before the actual recapitulation of the piece in m. 226. Bonis recapitulates the B section first in Eb Major, instead of the A section, before the final restatement of the hunting theme in m. 263.

Musical Example 38 *Scenes de la Forêt: Pour Artemis, mm. 131-132, transition.*

The transitions in this chamber work are not similar to the method we have seen from the previous periods except the third movement. There is almost a sense of abandonment of tonality and functional harmony in the music. Mel Bonis uses chords primarily for color and effect to strengthen the programmatic nature of this work. However, one cannot say that Bonis has completely turned away from tonality since we always end in a tonal manner though often abruptly and without preparation but with a sense of finality and conclusion. This work is primarily dominated by the influence of impressionism, from the use of coloristic harmonies to the use of oriental scales, Bonis

captures the essence of modernism without completely turning away from the form of the romantic period.

Suite dans le style ancien, Op. 127

The *Suite dans le style ancien*, Op. 127, was discovered in manuscript in 1928. It exists in two versions, the first is a quartet for flute, violin, viola or clarinet, and piano, and the second a wind septet for two flutes, oboe, clarinet, horn, and two bassoons. A partial transcription for piano for four-hands also exists. The composer may have intended this suite for organ. In her old notebooks, excerpts of an organ piece entitled *Quatre piece pour orgue à pedale* dated 1913-1914 was found. Unfortunately, of the four movements, only the Prelude and Fuguettes were found.¹²⁴ This suite was dedicated to organist Ermend Bonnal which attests that the piece was originally intended for the organ.¹²⁵ Kossack published the quartet version in 2006 and the transcription for septet in 2010.¹²⁶ This suite was written in four movements: *Prelude, Fuguettes, Choral*, and *Divertissement*. Each movement highlights a particular baroque practice or genre while incorporating compositional techniques standard in the twentieth century.

If the *Scenes de la Forêt* took us back to compositional practices from the nineteenth century, the *Suite dans le style ancien* moves further back and reuses baroque traditions from the 18th century. Bonis adequately features different facets of baroque music while producing the timbres of the twentieth century. This idea of using baroque

¹²⁴ Just before the war started, Mel Bonis was in contact with a priest named Joubert who recently published a collection of organ works in his anthology *Les Maitres Contemporains de L'orgue*. The correspondence between the two resulted in a project to include Bonis' organ works for his collection entitled *Histoire de l'orgue et des Organistes du vingtieme siècle*. The collection included four works by Bonis namely *Prelude, Fuguettes, Choral, and Communion*. However, the war interrupted the project, and it never got published. Géliot, 170.

¹²⁵ Géliot, *Mel Bonis*, (chap 15)

¹²⁶ For continuity in instrumentation, I am referring to the quartet version of the suite.

forms strengthens the case that the composer was more open to trying new styles in this last period. The rigor of the classical form is still fundamental in this work although the harmonies are less chromatic than the previous period and more in line with the coloristic harmonies that are distinctive of impressionism. The coloristic harmonies are reflected by the increased use of diminished and augmented triads. There are still several compositional practices that Bonis retained in this suite, and I explore those in each movement.

The first movement, *Prelude*, is the traditional opening movement of Baroque suites. The primary function of a prelude is to catch the listener's attention. This movement complies with the freedom of form that is necessary for the improvisatory nature of the prelude¹²⁷. Themes are loosely constructed but act as unifying ideas throughout the movement. There are two thematic ideas in this movement: the first played by the violin in a step-wise motion of modal quality, and the second is a short four-note theme played by the flute. The opening seven measures introduce the theme and imply the influences of Impressionism. The theme evades the major or minor tonality and instead uses a modal scale accompanied by the open fifths in the piano that avoids establishing a tonality of major or minor (Example 39). The flute plays the theme in mm. 9-13 over diminished seventh chords in the piano. Bonis would effortlessly avoid establishing any tonal center in the movement until the final cadence by using overlapping phrases to prevent the listener from hearing cadences and also using open fifths and diminished chords that never fully resolves. The flute carries the next thematic

¹²⁷ "Prelude." *The Harvard Dictionary of Music*. 2003. Accessed February 23, 2018.

idea with a countermelody played by the viola resembling the counterpoint practices of the baroque period (Example 40).

The image shows a musical score for Musical Example 39. It consists of two staves: Violin (VI.) and Piano (P.). The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 3/4. The Violin part starts with a melodic line marked *p* (piano) and *Moderato*. It features a triplet of eighth notes marked *mf* (mezzo-forte). The Piano part provides a rhythmic accompaniment with chords and single notes, also marked *Moderato*.

Musical Example 39 *Suite dans le style ancien: Prelude, mm. 1-7, first theme.*

The image shows a musical score for Musical Example 40. It consists of three staves: Flute (Fl.), Viola (VI.), and Alto (Al.). The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 3/4. The Flute part has a melodic line marked *mp* (mezzo-piano) and *pizz.* (pizzicato). The Viola part has a rhythmic accompaniment with chords and single notes, also marked *mp*. The Alto part has a melodic line marked *mp*.

Musical Example 40 *Suite dans le style ancien: Prelude, mm. 19-22, second theme.*

Bonis harmoniously uses baroque and modern practices in this movement. The variation in each recurring thematic material determines the improvisatory aspect of the music. The change in harmony from open fifths in the violin entrance to the diminished seventh chords in the flute entrance is one example. Bonis juxtaposes the two thematic ideas in mm. 32-34 the first theme on the violin and the second theme on the piano and flute (Example 41). Another borrowed baroque technique is the echo effect that we see in mm. 45-46, where the flute enters with the same line as what the violin played a measure before. The same idea happens in m. 50 but this time is just a beat apart between the flute and violin. The modern practices Bonis uses in the music includes complex rhythms of

duple versus triple as well as the borrowed harmonies of impressionism. Evaded cadences observe the French prelude practice of evading cadences to avoid establishing any tonal center, which is also a principle of impressionism. Much like the rest of Bonis' works, tonality is indicated in the final cadence of the movement establishing the key of C minor.

The image shows a musical score for the Prelude of Suite dans le style ancien, measures 33-34. The score is in 3/4 time and E-flat major. It features four staves: Flute (Fl.), Violin (VI.), Alto (Al.), and Piano (P.). The piano part includes a 'cresc.' marking and an '8' with a dashed line indicating an octave shift in the bass line.

Musical Example 41 *Suite dans le style ancien: Prelude, mm. 33-34, juxtaposition.*

The second movement, *Fuguette*, follows the traditional form of a fugue. The fugue is divided into three sections: exposition, episodes, and recapitulation. In this movement, Bonis remains compliant with the conventional format of a baroque fugue. The exposition occurs in the first sixteen measures, followed by fragments of the subject in the episodes before leading to the recapitulation in m. 47. This four-part fugue begins with the piano stating the eight-bar subject in the tonic key of E \flat . The piano bass line in m. 5 plays a tonal answer in the dominant key of B \flat major. This transposition to the dominant requires the original subject altered to avoid a modulation to the dominant. The next entry of the subject is back in the tonic in the flute in m. 9 and finally another tonal answer in the dominant by the violin in m. 13 (Example 42). The fugue subject contains

two four-bar phrases: the first phrase is the rhythmic part and the second phrase is the lyrical part. This idea of contrast using active, rhythmic lines and lyrical legato lines is common in Bonis' music.

The first system of the musical score consists of two four-bar phrases. The first phrase (measures 1-4) is marked *mf* and features a rhythmic, active line in the right hand with a series of eighth notes and a trill-like figure, while the left hand is mostly silent. The second phrase (measures 5-8) is more lyrical, with a legato line in the right hand and a more active line in the left hand, including a trill in the right hand.

The second system of the musical score continues the exposition. It features four systems of staves. The first system (measures 9-12) shows a rhythmic part in the right hand and a lyrical part in the left hand. The second system (measures 13-16) continues the contrast, with a trill in the right hand. The third system (measures 17-20) includes the instruction *en dehors* in the right hand. The fourth system (measures 21-24) concludes the exposition with a trill in the right hand.

Musical Example 42 *Suite dans le style ancien: Fuguettes, mm. 1-16, exposition.*

The episodes section includes fragments of the fugue subject and even an introduction of a countersubject. A full restatement of the fugue subject is typically avoided in the episodes; instead, Bonis uses the rhythmic and lyrical part of the subject as separate entities in this section. The countersubject appears in m. 23 by the bass line of the piano which gets passed to the flute halfway through in m. 25 while the viola plays the rhythmic subject (Example 43). The lyrical subject is used in a sequence in m. 29-30 in the upper instruments (Example 44). A prolonged B \flat dominant seventh chord leads us back to the tonic key of E \flat in the recapitulation in m. 47.

Musical Example 43 *Suite dans le style ancien: Fugette, mm. 23-26, countersubject.*

Musical Example 44 *Suite dans le style ancien: Fugette, mm. 29-30, sequence.*

Bonis uses another familiar baroque practice called the stretto where the second statement of the subject enters before the end of the first statement, in this case, each

entry is just a dotted quarter note apart compared to the four measures of the exposition (Example 45). This movement revisits the rule-abiding compositional style of Bonis.

The image shows a musical score for three staves. The top two staves are in treble clef, and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The music is in 3/4 time. The score is divided into three measures. The first measure shows a piano (p) dynamic. The second measure shows a piano (p) dynamic. The third measure shows a piano (p) dynamic. The score is marked '49' and 'stretto'.

Musical Example 45 *Suite dans le style ancien: Fuguettes, m. 47-49, stretto.*

The third movement, *Choral*, is based on the traditional congregational singing in Lutheran church. This singing style is characterized by short phrases, stepwise motion and limited range, simple rhythms, and clear cadences. The movement is a reflection of the spiritual nature of the composer which is the central focus of her final period. The symbol of the Trinity has always been an essential subject in the composition of sacred works. Composers tend to repeat patterns three times in reverence to the holy trinity. Bonis adapts the same practice in the melody of the choral. There are three phrases in the choral theme; the first two are three-bar phrase, and the final one is a four-bar phrase. The melody occurs five times, and each repetition plays the tune in full with varying accompaniment. The ensemble introduces the theme in unison pitches (Example 46). The second appearance is on the viola and piano with a contrapuntal line on the flute followed by the melody hidden in the bass of the piano. The fourth statement is a canon between the flute, piano, and violin, with each entrance just two beats apart. The viola and flute

play the final recurrence of the choral melody. This time Bonis uses the contrapuntal device called augmentation. By doubling the value of the notes, Bonis creates a reverent and solemn mood. The final cadence is the traditional plagal cadence or amen cadence (Example 47).



Musical Example 46 *Suite dans le style ancien: Choral, mm. 1-10, melody.*



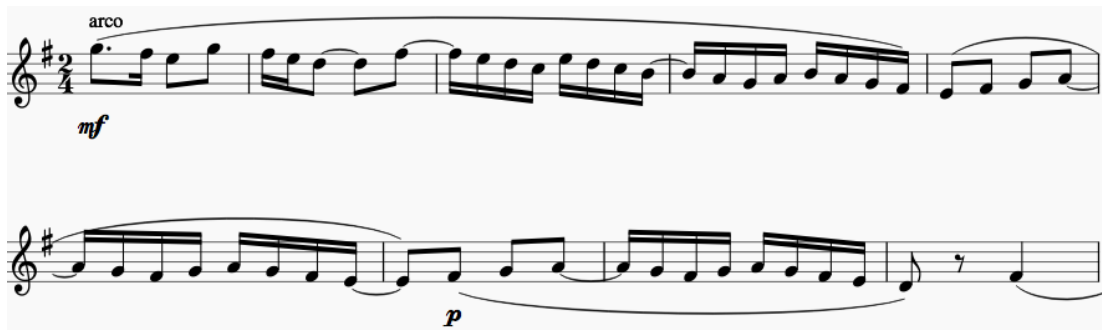
Musical Example 47 *Suite dans le style ancien: Choral, mm. 67-68, amen cadence.*

The final movement, *Divertissement*, reveals the humorous side of Bonis. The term *divertissement* is an equivalent of the Italian *divertimento* pertaining to lively music

intended for entertainment.¹²⁸ This movement is in free form with two distinct thematic materials: the first theme in C minor is played by the flute (Example 48) while the second theme in G major is given to the violin (Example 49). The rhythmic pattern and melodic contour of the two themes becomes a recurring idea throughout the music. The first theme is restated similar to a fugal subject in m. 47, where the second entry is played by the flute a fifth above the initial entrance (Example 49).



Musical Example 48 *Suite dans le style ancien: Divertissement, mm. 5-12, first theme.*



Musical Example 49 *Suite dans le style ancien: Divertissement, mm. 33-41, second theme.*

¹²⁸ "Divertissement." *Oxfordmusiconline.com*. 2001. Accessed February 23, 2018.

Musical Example 50 *Suite dans le style ancien: Divertissement, mm. 47-51, first theme restatement.*

Bonis uses transitional techniques similar to what we have seen from the previous chamber works such as common-tone modulation and modally borrowed parallel major chords. The common-tone D takes us from G major to E \flat Major in m. 74. Bonis tricks the listener into thinking that we are about to modulate to D major when she instead uses the note D as common-tone to establish B \flat that acts as the dominant to the E \flat major chord in m. 83. The restatement of the first theme in m. 107 reestablishes the key of C minor which sets up the modulation to C major in m. 118 for the final statement of the second theme. Bonis uses the fundamental ways of modulating from key to key in this movement, taking us to various keys that are closely related to one another through common-tone modulations and third relations.

The two chamber works written in her final period solidifies the fact that Bonis experimented more with various styles, from the early forms of the Baroque period to the modern techniques of impressionism. The influence of impressionism is unmistakable in her choice of harmonies, the use of oriental scales, evading cadences, and obscuring any

sense of tonal center until the final cadence. However, the structure of classical forms is still an essential aspect of her compositions. The compliance to the form, as we saw in the fugue and choral, and her use of thematic ideas as unifying themes are ingrained in the compositional style of the composer and are a direct reflection of her deference to the tonality and structure of romanticism.

CHAPTER V –CONCLUSION

The flute chamber works composed by Mel Bonis unveils the path of her style trends throughout her career. The compositional style changes transpired from this collection of chamber works, starting from the traditional form in the *Suite en Trio*, the late-romantic style of the *Fantaisie Septuor*, the programmatic design of the *Scenes de la Forêt*, and the baroque techniques of the *Suite dans le Style Ancien*. Across these varying styles of music, Bonis still retained some compositional predispositions: the use of themes as unifying ideas in each movement, the significance of having a home key despite the complex harmonies in the music, the use of musical forms to provide structure, and the importance of the piano as the central part of the ensemble.

It would be inaccurate to say that her preference to romanticism in any way made her style of composition stagnant. She belonged to a group of composers who, despite their affinity to the structure and tonality of romanticism, was able to make modernism and romanticism unite in an idiosyncratic musical form. The influence of impressionism was exhibited through her use of coloristic harmonies, oriental scales, and free form. Such style was not solely characteristic of Bonis; we heard composers like Saint-Saëns, Franck, and D'Indy continued to write in a tonally driven manner. However, male composers achieved success in their endeavors while female composers were denied of any recognition for their work. The restrictions posed on women by the patriarchal nature of France limited the prospects for Bonis. Her style was inherently drawn to tonality and structure even with the 20th century practices she explored in her final period.

Whether her taste for the romantic style was a conscious decision by the composer or was unconsciously an effect of the restrictions in her life is difficult to


ascertain. However, the gravity of these circumstances in shaping the musical style of Bonis cannot be denied. It would be interesting to see if any other the female composer in France wrote in a similar manner as Bonis and was able to gain the respect and success that was enjoyed by the male composers.

APPENDIX A – Copyright Permission



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