

Marie Jaell

18 Pièces pour le Piano d'après la lecture de Dante

Marie Jaell was born on August 17th 1846 in Steinseltz, now French territory, but which in history has always been disputed between the French and German kingdoms, place that has nevertheless been a fertile territory musically speaking, having also given rise to the Molière family (Lauterbourg).

Born as Marie Trautmann, she was a child prodigy, having started her concert career at just nine, and receiving the Première Prix at the Paris Conservatory at just 16. She studied with César Franck, Camille Saint-Saëns and Franz Liszt, and was the dedicatee of numerous works by renowned musicians. She was well known for her technique and for her teaching which made her one of the most important researchers in the field of piano technique. She was one of the first female composers to be accepted as such in the music world.

In 1866 she married the pianist Alfred Jaell, born in Trieste of the Habsburgs, pianist and composer, and she moved with him permanently to Paris.

Her works on technique, rhythm, perception of finger movements and their connection with style and musical thought are a milestone of musical education.

In this paper we want to speak in particular of a not well-known work.

The French title is:

• *18 Pièces pour le Piano d'après la lecture de Dante* (1894)

- I. *Ce qu'on entend dans l'Enfer*
- II. *Ce qu'on entend dans le Purgatoire*
- III. *Ce qu'on entend dans le Paradis*

18 pieces for piano written after the reading of Dante Alighieri's Divine Comedy.

1: What we hear in Hell

2: What we hear in Purgatory

3: What we hear in Heaven

This work was published by Heugel in Paris in 1894.

The structure evidently reflects the 3 Books of the Divine Comedy.

Each book consists of 6 pieces.

The Hell:

Poursuite

Raillerie

Appel

Dans Les Flammes

Blasphèmes

Sabbat

The Purgatory:

Pressentiments

Désire Impuissant

Alanguissement

Remords

Maintenants et Jadis

Obsession

Heaven:

Apaisement
Voix Celestes
Hymne
Quietude
Souvenance
Contemplation

What we hear in the Hell

Dante's work was well known in the Romantic era, a time in which its reading was however more like a dramatic work than for its meaning and symbolism as in previous centuries. An emotional reading prevails here, passions and moods have a meaning never seen before. To signal the overwhelming beginning in Pursuite, where the virtuosity and the full sonority of the piano leaves no breath, as it must be when entering a Hell in which souls have no kind of respite in their pains. Fire, derision, blasphemy and the inexorability of the sentences, all the elements contribute to an devastating atmosphere of punishment without end and without any hope.

From the compositional point of view the voices follow each other without a breath, the tension is pulled to the spasm, there is no relaxation, there is no peace. This tight writing leaves no room for reflection, what has been has been. Now it's just crying and gnashing of teeth. And even in slow movements, resignation covers all other kinds of thinking. Typical of romantic writing, the lack of resolution for long periods, does nothing but extend these sufferings to infinity. This is the sound of Hell, this is what awaits you in the world where there is no relief, in perfect harmony with what Dante wrote at the entrance to Hell "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here ".

What we hear in the Purgatory

The sounds of Purgatory change radically, giving at first a presentiment that perhaps something good can happen. Thus Presentiments suggests a suspension of judgment. Almost without rhythmic and precise scanning, the first piece of Purgatorio is the realm of perhaps. Perhaps there is the possibility of redemption somewhere, perhaps a window can be opened, perhaps all is not lost. Perhaps we even hear a song of angels far away, perhaps we can do it, even if with some path of atonement and clarification. Yes, he was wrong, but the Light has given us a chance to glimpse a sign of hope. The lack of a real supporting structure in the bass, makes it clear that basically nothing here can make you fall down. Here you can see the light, here hope is still on, the world can change, here you can already feel the relief and lightness of tomorrow. This is perhaps the most important interpretation of Marie Jaell's particular romanticism, or rather the presence at the bottom of the dramaturgy of a possibility. The romantic and pessimistic world of many of her contemporaries, here instead gives a glimpse of an escape route. Perhaps it is here that the lucidity of Marie Jaell's production originates: the study of technique philosophically foresees in itself the nucleus of a possibility of progress. If understanding and study lead us to an improvement, then man can progress, that is, there is a possibility of going beyond human limitation.

CE QU'ON ENTEND DANS LE PARADIS

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APAISEMENT

Dans cette série de morceaux, non seulement l'auteur s'est abstenu de toute indication de *rall.* et d'*accel.* mais l'exécutant ne pourrait se permettre la moindre irrégularité dans la succession des temps de chaque mesure, sans détruire le caractère spécial de ces rythmes.

Calme ♩ = 120

pp

What we hear in the Heaven

Heaven is the realm of perfection. Jaell writes as a preamble to the book, that everything must be done with the greatest possible precision and stability. A perfect world, where human passions cannot scratch the flow of things, not even with a thought or an interpretation. This is a celestial chorus of voices, which is very reminiscent of the colors of Saint-Saens. This is the world of the Blessed, an image in strong contrast with the romantic tradition, which always saw a prevalence of passions, impulses and human limitations. Perhaps this book reflects Jaell's thinking in the most precise way. His precocious career, which in many cases would have destroyed the childhoods of many of his colleagues, has instead helped to create a serene and satisfied personality. The bass line returns to Hymne, when there is no longer any possibility of being dragged into the abyss. By now „alea iacta est“, the die is cast, you can build the new lows on solid certainties, and from this point only upwords. Harmonically the description is perfect, as well as the rhythm of the bars. Always indivisible prime numbers. The realm of mathematical certainty, unique and indestructible. In this sense, here there is no double vision of things, but always a single possibility in the flow of time, up to the final contemplation.

The first analysis of this work by Marie Jaell can only be limited.

This first edition of this work is kept in the Bibliotheque Nationale et Universitaire de Strasbourg.

Much of the information derives from the information collected by Marie-Laure Ingelaere on the site <https://mariejaell-alsace.net> which collects a huge amount of documents on the Alsatian musician.

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