

## Response Page

The following responses were posted on the H-France discussion list in response to Sylvia Kahan's review of Paul-André Bempéchat, *Jean Cras, Polymath of Music and Letters*.

*H-France Review* Vol. 11 (June 2011), No. 130

The original review may be found on the H-France web page at:  
<http://www.h-france.net/vol11reviews/vol11no131Kahan.pdf>

---

To the Editor:

I am most grateful for Professor Sylvia Kahan's earnest attention to and lengthy review of my biography of Jean Cras, which only recently came to my attention.

I wish, however, to respond to several issues she addresses:

Professor Kahan flatters me too much by claiming me as the founder of the Lyrica Society for Word-Music Relations ([www.lyricasociety.org](http://www.lyricasociety.org)). In fact, the Society was founded in 1981 by our esteemed colleague, Emeritus Professor Louis Auld of Central Connecticut State University. I have served as Lyrica's President only since 2004.

Here are my comments, following Professor Kahan's review:

First, it would have been wise to inform the reader that the correspondence provided to me by Jean Cras' daughter was edited by her. Many sentences, even paragraphs were excised, and there are at times serious time lapses between letters, leaving one to conclude that the composer's descendants had determined what the public should know about Cras. Hence my need to inform the readers about the edited and not original, complete letters, to which I had been given access. This, I mentioned in my Introduction.

Second, the lack of information on what Professor Kahan correctly calls the "crucial networking and behind-the-scenes advocacy," necessary to sustaining any French composer's career, was simply not available. After many prodding conversations with members of the family, I concluded that this vital information was among the material withheld.

Third, I find odd the juxtaposition of the deceased Verlaine with the very-much-alive Loti, whom Cras had, in fact, met: Verlaine was never the subject of comparison with Cras, whereas Loti, to Cras' horror, was, on a number of occasions.

Fourth, Ralph Locke's book on musical exoticism was in press at the same time as mine; consequently, I had no chance to examine it. Moreover, my bibliography cites a number of

French-authored, French-language works on this topic, which proved more germane and therefore useful for the purposes of this study.

Fifth, on Vanni-Marcoux: this figure, as Professor Kahan correctly points out, was one of the Pavarottis of his generation. Indicating this to the educated and cultured public for whom my book was intended would, in my opinion, have appeared condescending, even insulting to some, if not many readers. Ditto for the untranslated words and phrases mentioned by Professor Kahan.

Sixth, regarding reception history: Many sections of my 1,451-page dissertation were excluded in the book, simply due to space considerations and available funding. A decision had to be made as to the number (200) of vital music examples included – Cras' works are completely unknown to the general public – as opposed to including an additional (at least) 50 pages on the reception history of each of his compositions. I decided that visualizing Cras' scores was more important. I am truly humbled by Professor Kahan's assessment that my analyses invite one to listen to Jean Cras' glorious creations: this, after all, has been my goal.

Finally, to Olivier Messiaen: With all due respect, he was anything but humble, as many have recounted. In fact, even the sincerity of his piety has come under scrutiny: the distinguished Messiaen scholar Sander van Maas devoted his talk on the very subject of Messiaen's religious posturing at the 2011 Lyrica Dialogues at Harvard, "France the Lewd—France the Prude?"

Once again, I wish to reiterate my heartfelt gratitude to Professor Kahan for the time and serious attention she has afforded the fruit of my many years of research on this wonderful composer, and to H-France for releasing it.

Respectfully submitted,

Paul-André Bempéchat  
Center for European Studies  
Harvard University

[pabempec@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:pabempec@fas.harvard.edu)