Emmanuel Chabrier
An Annotated Bibliography

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 April 2020
Introduction

Emmanuel Chabrier, the obscure yet notable composer, is a subject of common interest for musicologists. Efforts have been made by many to capture his musical essence and personality. Many resources were searched to obtain a general idea of what research has been done, and what areas are still in need of being addressed.

Of the methodologies represented, historical research constitutes a large portion of the works listed. Comprehensive biographies, biographical articles, or articles focused on specific areas of Chabrier’s life are all present in the body of research. These biographies span a century of musicological scholarship.

Among the most accomplished scholars on Chabrier is Roger Delage. Much of his life was spent researching and writing about Chabrier. Drawing upon letters, documents, and other sources, Delage examined Chabrier’s personality, musical style, and context. Various topics represented in the gathered sources are Chabrier’s songwriting, relationships with Impressionist painters, influences on future composers, and his travels to Spain. His 1999 capstone work *Emmanuel Chabrier* accounts for one of the most exhaustive biographies in musicological research on Chabrier. The various aspects of his life (childhood, family life, career, professional relationships, health, etc.) are well understood and represented in this research. Musical reception to his works is also well documented.

While these biographies usually contain some kind of musical analysis, they typically seek to convey an understanding of their historical context, such as the influence of Impressionist artists on Chabrier’s music. However, that is beginning to shift as musicologists are recognizing the analysis that is left to be done.
Musical analysis constitutes another prominent methodology in the present research. Many of these works are dissertations and theses of graduate music theory students. His piano works are the most common subject in these analyses, and usually are examined for harmony, melody, root movement, form, and texture. Among the most prominent piano works researched are his *Dix pièces pittoresques* and *Bourrée fantasque*. His songs or *mélodies* are also given light analyses in various articles included. These analyses show the uniqueness of Chabrier’s compositional style, and the seeds of impressionism that blossom in future composers.

One large lacuna in musicological research on Chabrier is analysis of his orchestral works. This may seem surprising as his *España*, rhapsody for orchestra, is one of the few pieces that endures in modern orchestral programming. An article by Jean-Jacques Velly constitutes the present analysis of *España*, but is not comprehensive by any means.

Exhaustive analysis in general is missing from the body of the research. This may uncover more characteristics of Chabrier that were points of departure from the norm. There are also extremely few reference sources or research guides. Reference sources on Chabrier are fairly limited to list of articles and primary sources on Musicologie.org, and catalogs of works contained in biographies.

While there is more research to do, the present body of knowledge on Emmanuel Chabrier is fairly significant, and gives some insight as to the influences that helped shape twentieth-century French music. While the works of Chabrier remain obscure compared to those of other French composers such as Debussy or Ravel, recognition of his importance in music history has gained traction over the last century and allowed us to know more about him as a musician, composer, and innovator.
Bibliography


Focuses on the aspects of Chabrier’s piano writing that suggests orchestral qualities. Discusses his largely self-taught background, and gives an overview of his orchestral and piano works. Reviews the instrumental characteristics of melodic lines, textures and ideas suggestive of certain instruments or instrument groups, and techniques for tone colors. Musical examples are included.


A comprehensive list of Chabrier’s operatic works. Librettists, libretto source, history of the composition, and plot summaries are included. Includes images of an original advertisement and an artist’s rendition from a scene in Gwendoline.


A chronological listing of events in Chabrier’s life that are separated by year. Pictures and drawings of Chabrier and others he worked with are included. The timeline is comprehensive and includes events from his childhood.


A detailed listening guide with excerpts from the score, and basic analyses of various numbers within the opera L’étoile. In an introduction to the article, a brief history of its premiere and reception is included. Also included is the instrumentation of the orchestra, vocal ranges of the characters, and description of Chabrier’s musical style.


Discusses Chabrier’s innovative contributions that planted seeds for future composers. His use of modality to depart from the common practice tonality that preceded him is discussed. His progression from comical to serious is also mentioned.


Discusses the uniqueness of Chabrier’s compositional style. Describes L’étoile as an opera that preserves the sound of the classic opera-bouffe, but has unique characteristics akin to Berlioz, Gounod and Bizet. His music is compared to the art of impressionist painters (described in terms such as “pastel,” and “fuzzy”).

A look at Chabrier’s personality, Wagnerian influence, and operas. His humor, lightness, and wit are examined with accounts of his appearance, jokes, art collection, and music. Chabrier’s operas are recounted with a basic plot summary, and history. Librettos and librettists are mentioned as well.


Recounts Wagnerian influence in Paris and its effect on Chabrier. Details Wagner’s influence on his works and Chabrier’s departure from Wagnerian style. Quotes letters from Chabrier and those he knew regarding his admiration of Wagner’s music. Lists musical excerpts demonstrating similarities between the music of Wagner and Chabrier.


Focuses on the history behind Chabrier’s *mélodies*. Quotes letters revealing Chabrier’s philosophy regarding their composition in that he wanted to compose them different than the average salon song. The poets who wrote the texts for the *mélodies* are discussed, and Chabrier’s relationship with them. Discusses his various *mélodies* in terms of harmony and other basic characteristics.


Examines the composers’ similarities, differences, and influences. Many quotations from recorded statements of composers highlight the points made. Quotes Debussy’s praise for Chabrier.


A comprehensive and detailed biography, the capstone of Delage’s lifework of researching Chabrier. Recounts various life stages of the composer, and relies on letters to construct the narrative. Includes letters from Chabrier to his wife, and lists his relationships with other people in his life, especially librettists. As a historical work, it does not contain extensive musical analysis.


Recounts his various travels in Germany, ranging from his first experience seeing a Wagner opera to the production of *Gwendoline*. Letters are referenced mentioning the specific happenings of those trips. The history and performances of *Gwendoline* are explained as well.

Recounts Chabrier’s relationship with Impressionist painter Edouard Manet. Their similarities as people are discussed. Letters from Manet, Chabrier, and others are referenced in the comparison.


Tells of Ravel’s admiration for Chabrier, and the influences the latter had on the former. Quotes Ravel saying that Chabrier was “the most profoundly personal and the most French of our composers.” Details Ravel’s pastiche *A la manière de Chabrier*, and lists Chabrier’s musical influences of harmony, rhythm, and accentuation.


Recounts Chabrier’s relationships with literary and other music figures. Figures mentioned include Paul Verlaine, Lucien Viotti, Stéphane Mallarmé, Auguste Villiers de L’Isle-Adam, and Paul-Armand Silvestre. Many of the writers mentioned wrote poems on which Chabrier based his songs.


A brief history of Chabrier’s travels to Spain, and a collection of thirteen letters he sent while there. Includes excerpts of his Spanish musical discoveries. These discoveries served as the inspiration for his orchestral work, *España*.


A brief history, analysis, and summary of Chabrier’s *Gwendoline*. The analysis and summary are intertwined, switching between elements of the plot and comments on various aspects of the music. Lists motifs as excerpts from the scores and describes what is happening in the orchestra throughout the opera.


A concise analytical and historical overview of Chabrier’s *España*. Letters from Chabrier detailing his observations of Spanish dance are included. Its premiere history and instrumentation are followed by a brief and light analysis on the piece. Concludes by expounding on the Spanish dances upon which the piece is based.

A concise summary of his works, compositional style, and influence on other composers, namely Ravel. Asserts his place as a transitional figure toward the music of Satie and Ravel. An example given is the influence of Chabrier’s *Idylle* from *Dix pièces pittoresques* to Ravel’s *Pavane pour une infante défunte*.


Contains an entry entitled, “Chabrier’s Piano Works.” Briefly discusses pedagogical value and takeaways from learning his various piano pieces. Also gives a brief summary of his career, personality, and health problems.


Recounts the discovery of an unpublished waltz by the composer. The piece was written in a hotel while Chabrier was travelling. A letter from the composer written during his stay is referenced, and excerpts from the piece are displayed.


Delves into the comedic style employed by Chabrier in his opera, *L’étoile*. Explains some of the musical aspects, such as its odd instrumentation that mocks Italian opera. Cites Henri Bergson’s work on comedy and applies it to *L’étoile*.

Examines the similarities between the lives of Chabrier and Mussorgsky. Such similarities include their delayed musical careers and musical innovations. Asserts that both composers are the “originators of the anti-romantic movement.”


A light analysis on his piano works. Includes a brief biography, a survey of his piano works, and an essay on his influences and forward-looking traits. Musical examples are included to demonstrate innovative traits (rhythm, meter, texture, humor, etc.).


Gives a brief history of the composer and states his impact as a forerunner of modern French music. Mentions the reception of Wagner in France, and its essential influence on Chabrier. His importance and uniqueness as French composer is emphasized.

Examines the libretto of Chabrier’s *Briséis* in the context of music and literature at the time, namely anticlericalism. Letters are quoted showing Chabrier’s desire to adapt an opera from *Les noces Corinthienne* by Anatole France. Lists similar ideas in Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde* to the Christian and pagan elements in the libretto.


A chronological biography with plentiful information on Chabrier’s family, travels, and career. In addition to his wife and children, his parents and parents-in-law are discussed. His works and their reception are also documented. Contains many photographs of Chabrier, his family, musicians, locations, and facsimiles of scores, maps, letters, and documents.


An analysis on several piano works of Chabrier. The piano works are divided into two categories (1873-1881, 1885-1891), and include *Dix pièces pittoresques*, *Impromptu*, *Habanera*, *Pièces posthumes*, and *Bourrée fantasque*. A separate chapter discusses style, melody, harmony, form, texture, etc.


A short yet detailed biography. His musical career is explained comprehensively. Recounts details from Chabrier’s personal life, namely his friends. Some light analysis is done some of his piano works, orchestral works, and operas.


Recounts the reception of various works by Chabrier. His light and comedic pieces were better received by critics than his serious works. Includes quotations from critics, and even composer Paul Dukas.


Examines *La danse villageoise* from *Dix pièces pittoresques* and states possible baroque influence on the piece. Gives an analysis of tonal structure, form, rhythm, and harmony that subtly suggest baroque characteristics. Compared with Bach’s *Invention in A minor* and *English Suite no. 3*. 

A summary of Gwendoline involving the story and music. Includes a brief history, but is mostly centered on following the music and plot through the course of the opera. Musical examples from the score are included to demonstrate ideas explained.


Recounts Wagnerian influence on France in the late nineteenth century. Chabrier’s “conversion” to Wagnerisme in Munich and subsequent operas are a principal element discussed. Included is Chabrier’s arrangement with Felix Mottl to produce Gwendoline in Germany.


A detailed analysis of the Menuet pompeux in Dix pièces pittoresques. Charts of a formal and thematic analysis are included. Its unconventional stylistic choices are recounted. Compositional influences on future composers, while perhaps not intended by Chabrier, are explained as well.


An address given by Indy at a conference in which he briefly summarizes the life of Chabrier, and recounts his own interactions with the composer. He tells of when Chabrier selected him as a pianist to perform Valses romantiques. A letter to him from Chabrier is recited.


A brief overview of the term “Mauresque” as describing works from Hispano-Arab culture. Some music excerpts from other composers are introduced to demonstrate these mauresque characteristics. An analysis is then done Chabrier’s Mauresque from Dix pièces pittoresques to demonstrate said characteristics. The piece is said to be rooted in the technique and practice of sixteenth century Iberian vihuelists and lutenists.


An analysis of Chabrier and various piano works. Explains his musical background the history of his compositions, his aesthetics, and an analysis on form, compositional devices, tonal structure, and rhythmic structure. His influence on Ravel, Satie, and other composers is discussed.

An analysis of Chabrier’s writing for piano. Compares excerpts from his piano works (such as Bourrée fantasque) with musical examples from other composers, especially French composers (adapted from RILM abstracts).


A short yet broad biography on the composer. Gives a concise and detailed summary of his entire life covering major events. An account is given of his childhood including his piano studies with Spanish refugee Manuel Zaporta and various places he lived.


A study of comedy in L’étoile and the thoughts of notable persons on the subject. Chabrier is praised by Debussy, Ravel, and others. He is compared to artist Edouard Manet in his compositional style.


A comprehensive biography of the composer. Goes into great historical detail about his life and works and includes facsimiles of music scores, concert programs, and other documents (such as his birth and death certificate. Photographs of Chabrier are included as well.


Expounds on the influence of art on music, most notably the Impressionists. Considers Chabrier an Impressionist composer, quoting his desire to for colors to be present in his harmonies. Briefly summarizes the history of the term Impressionism and compares Impressionist pieces to their artistic counterparts.


A detailed analysis of Chabrier’s Bourrée fantasque. Includes diagrams of thematic material, form, and tonal structure. Walks through the piece discussing harmonic progressions and sonorities. Focuses on his unique form of development.

A biography on Chabrier beginning with his life, relationships, nonmusical career, and talent as a pianist. His operas, piano works, and orchestral works are discussed as well. His decline, passing, and posthumous works conclude the biography.


A light study on *Le prélude pastoral* including its history and musical characteristics. *Le Prélude Pastoral* is lesser known piece than *España* or *Joyeuse Marche*, which was Masson’s motivation for research. Examples are contained from the original score to demonstrate musical aspects.


A light analysis on various movements from *Dix pièces pittoresques*. A brief biographical summary of the composer is followed by an analysis of cadence, melody, form, etc. Musical examples are included as well.


A light analysis of several piano works of Chabrier, namely movements from *Dix pièces pittoresques*. This work seeks to identify Chabrier’s place in the piano repertoire. Musical examples from the score are used to demonstrate characterics of Chabrier’s music.


Contains a biography, listening examples, a catalog of works, a list of sources (letters, reviews, articles, etc.). All of the sources listed are in French, and many are older articles. Includes photographs and illustrations, notably Manet’s portrait of Chabrier.


A biography detailing Chabrier’s life from birth to death. Important events covered include his viewing of *Tristan und Isolde* in Munich (which inspired his admiration for Wagner, and to compose music full-time), the composition and premier of *España*, the writing and reception of *Gwendoline*, and his failing health and death. His impressionistic musical characteristics are touched on, as well as his art collection.

Examines Chabrier’s comic operas in the historical context preceding opera (such as that of Offenbach). Aspects of the plot, humor and libretto are discussed and followed by a light musical analysis of the operas. Musical examples are used to demonstrate musical concepts.


A short biography that discusses Chabrier’s lasting impact on French music. Lists his literary and artistic influences, relationships with others, and various events in his career (requesting “emergency personal leave” from the ministry to see *Tristan und Isolde*, leaving the ministry, working as a full-time composer, etc.). Provides insights into his vivacious personality and steady home life.


Describes Chabrier’s ventures into opera. Tells of Wagnerian influence and other musical aspects of his operatic works. Gives some insight into Chabrier’s humorous personality from letters and lists comical examples from his operas. Also gives some details as to the reception of said operas.


A biography of his life and works. From mostly a historical perspective, but some light analysis (with score excerpts included) is conducted. Includes events from his childhood to his death, and his relationships with others are discussed. Poulenc cites letters for many of the details of Chabrier’s life. Included are unpublished letters and tributes in memoriam of Chabrier.


Examines several letters relating to Chabrier and expounds on corresponding events. Subject matter of the letters includes his travels and musical discoveries in Spain, the request for “emergency personal” leave during which he went to see *Tristan und Isolde*, and social events and performances. Highlights aspects of his personality, such as his sensitivity and humor.


A biography that discusses his life and works in separate parts. His works are expounded on by genre rather than chronological order. Each section discusses the state of the genre before Chabrier’s compositions, abandoned projects of his, and then describes his works in the respective genre. It is capped with a pros and cons section and catalogue of works.
Discusses the reception of Chabrier’s works. Explains the period following 1870 when Parisian tastes demanded more concert music and less opera. As a result, Chabrier’s orchestral and piano works far exceeded his operas in success. Emphasizes his obscurity and the infrequent programming of his pieces in today’s world.


Examines various numbers from the opera Le roi malgre lui and lists its interesting features. Robert also argues that the music of Chabrier is far superior to the libretto. Excerpts from the score are used to demonstrate the superiority of the music.


A light analysis of Dix pièces pittoresques with supporting musical examples. Focuses on greatly on stylistic aspects rather than a detailed harmonic analysis. Asserts the importance of Chabrier’s piano works on future composers Debussy and Ravel.


An analysis of the overture to Gwendoline. Examines Wagnerian influence on its writing, and gives demonstrations with excerpts from the score. Also discusses the scoring and timbres of the piece. A detailed chart displays the form with associated themes, keys, and measure numbers.


Recounts the composition, posthumous completion, premier, and influences on Briséïs. Approaches Briséïs through a Wagnerian perspective, noting the latter’s influence on Chabrier. Recounts reception of Wagner in France (adapted from RILM abstracts).


A biography focusing on his musical career, with some details of his childhood, and last years. A history and analysis is given of his major works including España, Joyeuse marche, Gwendoline, L’étoile, and Le roi malgre lui. A catalog of his works is also included.

A short biography summarizing Chabrier’s life. Letters and records from other composers such as Vincent d’Indy are used to support the events listed. His birth, musical training, non-musical and musical career, relationships with others, and Wagnerianism is discussed. Includes photographs of Chabrier, and a facsimile of one of his scores.


Examines Chabrier’s opera L’étoile, and two operas that borrowed heavily from it: The Lucky Star (American production), and The Merry Monarch (British production). Included are biographies for the composers and librettists, plot summaries, and analyses that compare the operas to the original L’étoile. Musical examples and diagrams are used to illustrate the comparisons.


Analyzes the ten songs that Chabrier composed: Credo d’amour, Tes yeux bleus, Chanson pour Jeanne, Villanelle des petits canards, Ballade des gros dindons, L’isle heureuse, Les cigales, Pastorale des cochons rose, Toutes les fleurs, and Lied. Each analysis lists the lyrics, vocal range, number of verses and lines, and observations on melody, harmony, rhythm, and other musical characteristics. Musical examples are included as well.


An analysis and comparison between Chabrier’s Mélancolie and Ravel’s À la manière de Chabrier. Details the similarities between the pieces, thus showing the inspiration for Ravel’s piece. Discusses the shared melodic lines and binary form.


A detailed analysis of the following movements of Dix pièces pittoresques: Sous bois, Idylle, Improvisation, and Menuet pompeux. Structure, tonality relationships, sonority-types, root movements, representative harmonic progressions, modulation-types, and cadence-types are outlined for each piece. Charts, tables, musical examples, and appendices containing full scores are included.


A brief history of the composition and reception of Chabrier’s España. Includes a recorded account of Antoine Banes, who witnessed Chabrier performing his España on the piano. Cites an article that gives a positive review, and recounts some negative comments on the piece. Seeks to defend España as quality orchestral piece.

Recounts a brief history of the composition and premier of España, and then delves into light analysis of its orchestration. This analysis is put into context of French music at the time, and mentions orchestrational influences from Berlioz (namely the use of two harps in *Symphonie fantastique*).


A brief article on Chabrier as a fantasist. Asserts his tendency toward humorous and fantastic compositions rather than serious works. Includes several photographs of Chabrier, his home town of Ambert, a medallion with his profile, etc.


A piece focusing on Chabrier’s songs or mélodies. To provide context, his personality, works and style, Impressionist tendencies, and relationship with Manet are discussed. His influence on other composers, such as Ravel, is also briefly examined.


Examines the relationship between Impressionist painters and composers. Recounts the relationship between Manet and Chabrier, including when the former died in the latter’s arms. Describes Impressionist influence on Satie, and Poulenc.


Recounts the admiration and respect for Chabrier held by French composers, notably Maurice Ravel. Claude Debussy, Darius Milhaud, and Vincent d’Indy are also mentioned. An account is given of Ravel’s meeting with Chabrier, and the performance of the latter’s *Trois valses romantiques*. Details Chabrier’s influence on Ravel’s pieces (*Pavane pour une infante défunte*) and makes known Ravel’s orchestration of *Habanera*.


An analysis of four piano works by Chabrier: *Idylle* from *Dix pièces pittoresques*, Chabrier’s piano arrangement of his *España*, *Habanera*, and *Bourrée fantastique*. Each analysis contains a short essay on the piece’s history and context, musical examples, and examines harmony, melody, rhythm, form, cadences, root movement, and other musical details. The analyses are preceded by a short biography on Chabrier, and a chapter of the beginning of the French National School after the Franco-Prussian War. Includes a list of Chabrier’s works.