

“*Imiter est d’un sot.*” The Symphonies of Bizet

Sára Aksza Grosz

ABSTRACT – After the composer’s first English biographer, D. C. Parker found the *Symphony in C major* at the Conservatoire’s library and following its world premiere in 1935, this youthful work conquered the ballet stage as well, due to the choreography (1947) of George Balanchine. Since then, researchers aim to reveal its possible models. They generally connect and compare Bizet’s *First Symphony* to that of Gounod’s, both dating from 1855. The Baia-Mare born conductor, musicologist and Bizet’s biographer, Amadé Németh (1922-2001) strongly suggests Mozart echoes. On the one hand, I follow his footsteps. On the other hand, considering the analogies in Bizet’s writings between composers and artists, I challenge if non-musical sources could have also served as models for his symphonies, in particular for the second. In the 1860s, during his stay in Italy as a Prix-winner, the idea of depicting four Italian cities (Venice, Rome, Florence, and Naples) came into Bizet’s mind. What music does resemble and point forward to the so-called “*Roma*” *Symphony* (1860-1868)? This paper aims to commemorate 185 years since the birth of Georges Bizet through challenging his own words, quoted in the title: “is imitation a fool’s job”?

Keywords: Bizet, symphony, ballet stage, Prix de Rome, similarities.

1. Introduction

“I am not made for the symphony. I need the theatre. Without it I don’t exist.”¹ – confessed Bizet to Saint-Saëns. Not just he himself, but music history as well does not exist without *Carmen*. However, during his life, Bizet never held any position at theatres, operas or at the Paris Conservatoire, but did opera reductions and transcriptions for a living and gave particular piano and composition lessons. He advised his pupil Paul Lacombe (1837-1927) not to conceive for stage unless fully aware of the task, instead to

S. A. Grosz
The National Academy of Music “Gheorghe Dima” / HUN-REN RCH Institute for Musicology
Cluj-Napoca, Romania / Budapest, Hungary
email: groszsara@yahoo.com

¹ Curtiss, *Bizet and His World*, 130. Original text: “*Je ne suis pas fait pour la symphonie; il me faut le théâtre, je ne puis rien sans lui.*” (Saint-Saëns, *Portraits et souvenirs*).

write symphonies.² Bizet, as a Prix de Rome winner, at 1858 New Years' Eve revealed to Hector Gruyer (tenor, title role of Gounod's *Faust*) that: "my third year will be spent on a symphony. My taste draws me definitively to the theatre, and I feel the vibrations of a certain dramatic element that I had been unaware of until this day. So, I am hopeful."³

Both of the symphonies of Bizet are in C major and were performed entirely only posthumously, in 1880 and 1935, respectively. This might be due to self-criticism – for example in Rome he started then burned two symphonies⁴ – as well as to the requirements of the Parisian public.

Year of composition	Title	Comments
c. 1855	<i>Overture in A minor-major</i>	Manuscript at the Paris Conservatoire
1855	<i>Symphony in C major</i>	Posthumously published in 1935
1860-1861	<i>Scherzo and Marche funèbre</i> (F minor)	<i>Scherzo</i> used in "Roma" <i>Symphony</i> , <i>Marche</i> in manuscript at the Paris Conservatoire
1860-1868 rev. 1871	<i>Symphony in C major</i> "Roma"	Posthumously published by Choudens in 1880 as <i>Suite d'orchestre no. 3</i>
1861	<i>Overture "La Chasse d'Ossian"</i>	Lost
1868	<i>Marche funèbre</i> (B minor)	Posthumously published by Choudens in 1881
1871	<i>Petite Suite</i>	Arrangement of 5 pieces from piano four-hands <i>Jeux d'enfants</i> , posthumously published by Durand in 1882
1872	<i>Suite "L'Arlésienne"</i>	Arrangement of 4 pieces from <i>L'Arlésienne</i> ; the 2 nd suite arranged by Guiraud, posthumously published by Choudens in 1876 (?)
1873	<i>Overture "Patrie"</i>	Posthumously published by Choudens in 1874

Table 1. The Orchestral Oeuvre of Bizet.

2. The Concert Stages and Societies of mid-19th Century Paris

With its four major institutions – the Opéra, Opéra Comique, Théâtre-Italien, Théâtre Lyrique – and patronage of King Louis-Philippe, stage music flourished in Paris. Since its first heyday (17th century), French opera and/or theatre music have been strongly related to ballet. Romantic opera composers like Auber, Gounod, Halévy, Meyerbeer

² Dean, *Bizet*, 242.

³ The letter of Georges Bizet to Hector Gruyer, New Year's Eve, 1858. Quoted by Curtiss, *Bizet and His World*, 79. Original text: "et ma troisième année sera employée à une symphonie. Mon goût se prononce définitivement pour le théâtre, et je sens vibrer certaines fibres dramatiques que j'ignorais jusqu'à ce jour. Enfin, j'ai bon espoir." (Georges Bizet, *Lettres*, 81).

⁴ Curtiss, *Bizet and His World*, 92.

have kept this tradition, too. The teaching of the Paris Conservatoire also focused on operatic and dramatic music composing. Even the Prix de Rome could be won with a cantata, and those who succeeded were "sequestered for four or five weeks to compose an operatic scene."⁵ This and not the symphonic world promised careers for aspiring young composers. If anyone wanted to hear his orchestral works, he must have hired the players and rent a hall – a solution not at all favorable.⁶ And this alone did not guarantee success.

The upper bourgeoisie and nobility-formed audience of the subscription-based Société des Concerts du Conservatoire demanded rather Beethoven, than new French symphonies. The series founded in 1828 by François-Antoine Habeneck set off with the *Eroica* and ushered the symphonies of Beethoven in public knowledge.⁷ Besides it, their repertoire consisted mostly of works by Haydn, Mozart, and Weber.⁸ Later on, after the 1868 performance of works by Louis Théodore Gouvy (1819-1898) – regarded for two decades France's most promising symphonist,⁹ – Berlioz and Saint-Saëns could be heard occasionally.¹⁰

Even though short-lived, the Société Saint-Cécile, established in 1848 by Reber and violinist Seghers, introduced Mendelssohn's "*Italian*" *Symphony* and some of Gounod's early symphonic works.¹¹ Moreover, Mendelssohn's *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Walpurgis Night* were played at every concert season of this society or of the Conservatoire, the composer being a favorite of the Parisian audience. The influence of Mendelssohn was hardened by Gounod, who got acquainted with German music through Felix and Fanny.¹²

Gounod's *Symphony in D major* (1855) was dedicated to and premiered by the Société des Jeunes Artistes (1852-1861).¹³ This orchestra assembled by Jules-Étienne Padeloup (1819-1887, conductor and dedicatee of *Carmen*) helped consolidate the Viennese symphonic literature alongside the oeuvre of Mendelssohn and Schumann; but also performed recent compositions. Even though financially deficit, Padeloup continued to promote this repertoire from 1861 as Concerts Populaires de Musique Classique. These were held in the over 4000 capacity Cirque Napoléon (now Cirque d'Hiver) with lower ticket prices thus reaching a more vast and diverse society. Even though mainly devoted

⁵ Trezise, "Renaissance and Change, 1848 to the Death of Debussy", 134-136.

⁶ Dean, *Bizet*, 36.

⁷ McClellan and Trezise, "The Revolution and Romanticism to 1848", 118-119.

⁸ Trezise, "Renaissance and Change, 1848 to the Death of Debussy", 136.

⁹ Dean, *Bizet*, 36.

¹⁰ Trezise, "Renaissance and Change, 1848 to the Death of Debussy", 136.

¹¹ Dean, *Bizet*, 36.

¹² Shanet, "Bizet's Suppressed Symphony", 471-472.

¹³ Shanet, "Bizet's Suppressed Symphony", 470.

to Beethoven and the German canon, it also premiered works by native composers,¹⁴ including Bizet's "*Roma*" *Symphony*. Meanwhile, the rivalry of other societies assaulted these Sunday concerts leading in 1884 to Padeloup's bankruptcy.¹⁵

The decision of Camille Saint-Saëns and Romain Bussine to commission works by French composers was a kind of reaction both to the Franco-Prussian War and to the foreign emphasis of the musical institutions. However, the original prospectus of the Société Nationale de Musique (1871-1939) also included the idea to promote all musical works and experiments of superior artistic aspirations.¹⁶ The society counted among its members Paul Lacombe, a pupil of Bizet. This focus on contemporary national music is in a way continued by the Concert National (from 1873) of Édouard Colonne¹⁷ and Georges Hartmann, whose series launched with Bizet's *Petite Suite* (orchestral version of five pieces from the piano four-hands *Jeux d'enfants*). Shortly after, without a partner, Colonne reassembled the organization as Associations Artistique (later Concerts Colonne),¹⁸ and moved from the Théâtre de l'Odéon to the Théâtre du Châtelet. This orchestra popularized the oeuvre of Berlioz and played works by Saint-Saëns, Massenet, Fauré, d'Indy, Charpentier, Debussy, Ravel, Widor, Dukas and Chabrier.¹⁹ In opposition, Colonne's former chamber music partner, Charles Lamoureux²⁰ with his Nouveaux Concerts (est. 1881) besides French premieres (e. g. Debussy's *La mer* in 1905), stood up in favor of Wagner.²¹

3. *Symphony in C*

A friend of Bizet's son, Jacques (1872-1922), and Marcel Proust (1871-1922), the Venezuela-born composer, Reynaldo Hahn (1874-1947) owned the manuscript and gave it to the Conservatoire's library in 1933.²² A first description of the score was offered by Jean Chantavoine in the article "Quelques inédits de Georges Bizet" (*Le Ménestrel*, 4 August 1933).²³ However, it was due to the research and initiative of D. C. Parker, the first English biographer of Bizet (1951), that Felix Weingartner premiered the symphony

¹⁴ Trezise, "Renaissance and Change, 1848 to the Death of Debussy", 136-137.

¹⁵ Curtiss, *Bizet and His World*, 127.

¹⁶ Trezise, "Renaissance and Change, 1848 to the Death of Debussy", 137.

¹⁷ Édouard Colonne (1838-1910), violinist and conductor, who premiered also works by George Enescu (1881-1955), including the op. 1 in 1898.

¹⁸ Wright, *Georges Bizet Letters in the Nydahl Collection*, 48.

¹⁹ Trezise, "Renaissance and Change, 1848 to the Death of Debussy", 137.

²⁰ Wright, *Georges Bizet Letters in the Nydahl Collection*, 48.

²¹ Trezise, "Renaissance and Change, 1848 to the Death of Debussy", 137.

²² Curtiss, *Bizet and His World*, 471.

²³ Shanet, "Bizet's Suppressed Symphony", 461.

in Basel on 26 February 1935.²⁴ The conductor also edited the score (Universal, 1935). Since then, many attempted to decode this work, about which Bizet never talked, instead regarded his *Roma* his very first symphony.²⁵

The 17 years old student begun it on “October 29, 1855; finished November [?] 1855”. From the same year dates his master’s, Gounod’s *Symphony in D major* premiere (spring), its published full score (autumn) and piano transcription (done by Bizet).²⁶ Based on these arguments, scholars usually explain Bizet’s unwillingness to publish this symphony, and compare his work to Gounod’s within the borders of a stylistic/composition lesson acquired through imitation.²⁷

Year of composition	Composer	Title	Comments
c. 1850	Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921)	<i>Symphony in A</i>	Mozart echoes, ex. “do-re-fa-mi” from <i>Jupiter</i>
1852-1854	Charles Gounod (1818-1893)	<i>La Nonne sanglante</i>	Opera; piano and voice transcription made by Bizet in 1855
1853	Camille Saint-Saëns	<i>Symphony no. 1 in E flat major</i>	Published in 1855
1855	Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)	<i>Les vêpres siciliennes</i>	First of the 2 operas composed for Paris
1855	Charles Gounod	<i>Symphony no. 1 in D major</i>	Transcription for four-hands by Bizet in 1855
1855	Georges Bizet (1838-1875)	<i>Symphony no. 1 in C major</i>	Posthumous world premiere in 1935
1855	Jacques Offenbach (1819-1880)	<i>Ba-ta-clan</i>	Operetta
1855-1856	Georges Bizet	<i>Le Docteur Miracle</i>	Operetta; Text: Léon Battu and Ludovic Halévy, manuscript at the Conservatoire

Table 2. The “Musical Neighborhood” of Bizet’s *Symphony in C*.

3.1. Gounod vs Bizet on the Ballet Stage

George Balanchine mentions in his *Complete Stories of Great Ballets* (1968) Howard Shanet’s opinion of Gounod’s *Symphony in D major* as source of inspiration for Bizet’s *Symphony in C*. However, when adapting them to stage, the choreographer underlines

²⁴ Curtiss, *Bizet and His World*, 471.

²⁵ Curtiss, *Bizet and His World*, 38.

²⁶ Shanet, “Bizet’s Suppressed Symphony”, 470.

²⁷ See the studies of Michel Poupet, Mina Curtiss, Dean Winton, Howard Shanet, the latter offers analytical examples.

that "the ballets are as different as their music."²⁸ Not just these two differ, but at least the two Bizet ballet versions that exist. Balanchine conceived his version in a fortnight in gratitude for the guest choreographer position (1947) at the Paris Opéra, and as a tribute to its principal dancers.²⁹ A year earlier, in 1946 Andrée Howard already staged her Assembly Ball in London, which emphasizes the overall dance and serenade character of music.³⁰

The following table offers a brief overview of these ballets in the chronology of the symphonies, thus placing Gounod in front, even though it was the latest adapted to stage.³¹

Title	<i>Gounod Symphony</i>	<i>Assembly Ball</i>	<i>Symphony in C</i> (originally <i>Le Palais du Cristal</i>)
Music	Charles Gounod: <i>Symphony in D major</i> (1855)	Georges Bizet: <i>Symphony in C major</i> (1855)	Georges Bizet: <i>Symphony in C major</i> (1855)
Choreographer	George Balanchine (1904-1983)	Andrée [Louise Andréa Enriqueta] Howard (1910-1968)	George Balanchine
World premiere	1958 New York	1946 London	1947 Paris
US premiere	1958 New York	1951 San Francisco	1948 New York
Ballet type	non-narrative, poème chorégraphique	non-narrative, poème chorégraphique	non-narrative, poème chorégraphique
Movements	<i>Allegro molto</i> <i>Allegretto moderato</i> <i>Scherzo. Non troppo</i> <i>presto</i> <i>Finale. Adagio –</i> <i>Allegro vivace</i>	<i>Allegro vivo</i> <i>Adagio</i> <i>Allegro vivace</i> <i>Allegro vivace</i>	<i>Allegro vivo</i> <i>Adagio</i> <i>Allegro vivace</i> <i>Allegro vivace</i>
Setting	elegant garden	ballroom	blue background
Scenery	Horace Armistead	Léonor Fini	?
Costumes	Karinska	Léonor Fini	?

Table 3. Gounod vs Bizet on the Ballet Stage.

Nevertheless, Balanchine aims to illustrate the inner structure of Bizet's score. For instance, in the first movement the ballerina appears together with the secondary subject, while in the fugue section of the second movement one can literally see each thematic entrance. Moreover, each movement has its own characteristic ensemble, *premier danseur* and *corps de ballet*, while towards the end all of these groups combine for a

²⁸ Balanchine, *Balanchine's New Complete Stories of the Great Ballets*, 191.

²⁹ Balanchine, *Balanchine's New Complete Stories of the Great Ballets*, 431.

³⁰ Balanchine, *Balanchine's New Complete Stories of the Great Ballets*, 25-27.

³¹ Balanchine, *Balanchine's New Complete Stories of the Great Ballets*, 25-27, 161, 430-432.

dance summing up.³² This approach is due to Balanchine’s background (musical family, he himself playing the piano from age 5) and devotion to understand the score proposed for ballet, even making its piano transcription if so. Even though he is always full of ideas on which music to arrange dances, he waits for the right time to reveal them, as in the case of the *Symphony in C* by Bizet or Mozart’s *Symphonie Concertante*. According to him, “the greatest music is never far from dancing”, especially Bach and Mozart are very close to.³³ Indeed, the latter’s music is “the most danceable”. As proof stand Balanchine’s own Mozart choreographies, the *Symphonie Concertante* (based on K. 364; premiered in 1947), and *Caracole* (based on K. 287; premiered in 1952, reworked in 1956 as *Divertimento No. 15*).³⁴

3.2. Analytical aspects: Bizet vs Mozart

Some scholars also aimed to reveal echoes of the Viennese classics in Bizet’s *Symphony in C* (1855).

Chantavoine heard Beethoven in the second, Haydn in the fourth movement. Likewise, Martin Cooper detected Haydn in the finale, but Rossini in the second, while Mozart and Beethoven in the first movement.³⁵ However, Claude Glayman compared more generally the biography of the prodigies Mozart and Bizet, and their similarly short life (35/36 ages). Both of them lost their mothers in their 20s, and both their musician-composer fathers – Leopold and Adolphe – became their first impresarios. Like Mozart, Bizet was an exceptional pianist whose virtuosity and extraordinary memory impressed even Liszt.³⁶ The French composer was an accomplished Mozart performer as well and could play all the piano sonatas “with taste and without affection” – according to his teacher, Antoine François Marmontel.³⁷ Bizet transcribed for piano *Don Giovanni* (Huegel, 1866) and *L’Oie du Caire* (Huegel, 1867), several overtures and excerpts for two and four hands (Huegel, 1867?).³⁸ Besides these, Bizet owned in his personal library 6 Mozart operas, 12 symphonies, 5 string quartets, 9 piano trios, 18 violin-piano sonatas – scores which he studied frequently and also wrote comments on them.³⁹ He admired

³² Balanchine, *Balanchine’s New Complete Stories of the Great Ballets*, 430.

³³ Balanchine, *Balanchine’s New Complete Stories of the Great Ballets*, 515-554.

³⁴ Balanchine, *Balanchine’s New Complete Stories of the Great Ballets*, 428-430.

³⁵ Shanet, “Bizet’s Suppressed Symphony”, 462.

³⁶ Glayman, “Présentation”, 8-10.

³⁷ Curtiss, *Bizet and His World*, 18. Antoine François Marmontel (1816-1898) was also the piano professor of Claude Debussy (1862-1918).

³⁸ Curtiss, *Bizet and His World*, 469.

³⁹ Németh, *Georges Bizet élete és művei*, 322.

Mozart's *Requiem*, too.⁴⁰ Moreover, Bizet advised his student Edmond Galabert (1845-1912) to "Consider Mozart. [...] Long live the sun, the love!"⁴¹ and urged him to study the operas of Mozart and Weber.⁴²

150

Ob. *p espr.*

VI. I *pp legato*

VI. II *pp*

Vla. *pp*

Vc. *molto pp*

Cb. *pp*

157

Ob. *cresc.*

VI. I *cresc.*

VI. II *cresc.*

Vla. *cresc.*

Vc. *cresc.*

Cb. *cresc.*

"cf. Editorial comment / Vgl. „Zum Notentext“ / Voir plus haut, “Sur le Texte”

165

Ob. *dim.* *p*

Cor. III (G) *pp*

VI. I *dim.* *p*

VI. II *dim.* *p*

Vla. *dim.* *p*

Vc. *dim.* *p*

Cb. *dim.* *p*

Ex. 1. Bizet, *Symphony in C*, 1st movement, secondary theme, mm. 150-171.

⁴⁰ Curtiss, *Bizet and His World*, 71.

⁴¹ The letter of Georges Bizet to Edmond Galabert, July or August 1865. Original text: "Songez à Mozart et lisez-le sans cesse. Munissez-vous de Don Juan, des Noces, de la Flûte, de Così fan tutte. Lisez Weber aussi. Vive le soleil, l'amour..." (Bizet, *Lettres*, 139-140).

⁴² Dean, *Bizet*, 59.

Amadé Németh⁴³ labels Bizet a born melodist with French elegance, Italian gentleness, and Mozart-like form. He even enlists specific works as possible models for his *Symphony in C*, especially for its triad-made themes, which one might find in the *G major Violin-Piano Sonata K. 9*, *D major Symphony K. 81*, and *F major Symphony K. 112*. Indeed, the secondary themes of Bizet’s first and last movements remind of serenade music, if not are quotes from the *Eine kleine Nachtmusik K. 525*.⁴⁴



Ex. 2. Bizet, *Symphony in C*, 4th movement, secondary theme, mm. 88-92.

The opening themes made up of triads is a Mozartian preference (see for example *Symphonies K. 200* or *K. 385*) which originates from the Mannheim Rakte. The sonata form with a concluding theme deriving from the first theme, applying sonata form in the outer movements (1 and 4) are as well part of the Classical Viennese tradition. In the case of Bizet, one might rather talk about integrating and adopting these stylistic features.

Howard Shanet mentions that Bizet uses a small part of one of the *Symphony*’s movements in his *Don Procopio*.⁴⁵ Even though the scholar does not indicate it precisely, the *Marcia* theme of the finale of the *Symphony* appears transposed in the opera buffa’s Act I, No. 3, *Marcia et Scène*.

⁴³ Amadé Németh (1922-2001), Baia-Mare born conductor and musicologist, scholar of Hungarian opera; made research also at the Music History Department of the Institute for Musicology, Budapest.

⁴⁴ Németh, *Georges Bizet élete és művei*, 323.

⁴⁵ Shanet, “Bizet’s Suppressed Symphony”, 474.

The image displays two systems of a musical score for Bizet's Symphony in C, 4th movement, Marcia theme. The first system covers measures 36 to 41, and the second system covers measures 42 to 44. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with the following parts from top to bottom: Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet in C (Cl. (C)), Bassoon (Fg.), Horn I in C (I. II (C)), Horn II in C (II. III (C)), Trumpet in C (Tr. (C)), Timpani (Timp.), Violin I (VI. I), Violin II (VI. II), Viola (Via.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Double Bass (Cb.). The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, dynamics (e.g., *ff*, *f*, *p*, *pp*), articulation (e.g., *pizz.*), and performance instructions. Measure numbers 36, 38, 40, 42, and 44 are clearly marked at the beginning of their respective staves.

Ex. 3. Bizet, *Symphony in C*, 4th movement, *Marcia* theme, mm. 36-44.

The image shows a musical score for Bizet's *Don Procopio*, Act I, No. 3 *Marcia et Scène*, measures 1-8. The score is in 3/4 time and features piano accompaniment and vocal parts for Eufemia and Andronico. The piano part is marked *Moderato* and *pp*. The vocal parts are for EUFEMIA and ANDRONICO, with the lyrics "Quel bruit!.. Quel soun!..".

Ex. 4. Bizet, *Don Procopio*, Act I, No. 3 *Marcia et Scène*, mm. 1-8.

Written between 1858-1859 on the libretto by Carlo Cambaggio (1798-1880), the vocal score of *Don Procopio* was published by Choudens in 1905. The premiere of the opera dates from 1906 (Monte Carlo), however in the revision of Charles Malherbe, while the original Bizet version was performed only in 1958 at Strasbourg.⁴⁶ The plot reveals a young girl (Bettina) forced by his uncle (Don Andronico) to marry an old miser man (Don Procopio) instead of her true love (the officer Odoardo); but by tricks and comedy tools, the courtesan gets discouraged and the young couple can finally marry. Maybe the most famous miser figure is the one outlined by Molière. However, romantic comedies with social dilemmas have not lost their popularity in the 18th and early 19th century operas either. We might recall another French playwright, Pierre de Beaumarchais and immediately the figure of Figaro, made famous by Mozart and Rossini. Indeed, Odoardo's serenade with guitar accompaniment from the second act of Bizet's *Don Procopio* might resemble the atmosphere of *Don Giovanni* (at Mozart likewise placed in Act 2).

⁴⁶ Curtiss, *Bizet and His World*, 465 and 470.

4. Ways to Strengthen the Artistic Taste

In the case of any artist, one might distinguish an early, middle and mature period of creation. Likewise, Amadé Németh divides three such periods in Bizet's creative output: student years (1849-1859, influence of Mozart, Rossini, Weber, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Gounod, and David), decade in search of a unique voice (1860-1870, echoes of Beethoven and Berlioz) and culmination (1871-1875, own language, masterworks).⁴⁷

4.1. Imitation

Bizet was conscious of and did not neglect the influence of Gounod, as expressed in the letter to his mother dated Saturday, 19 February 1859: "David was very surprised to see me completely disentangled from the influence of Gounod. As for me, I'm delighted. Gounod is primarily an original composer, but by mere imitation, one remains on the level of a pupil. His *Faust* must be splendid. When will it be performed?";⁴⁸ or in the letter (c. 1872/1873) quoted by Michel Poupet: "You were the beginning of my life as an artist. I result from you. You are the cause and I am the consequence. I was afraid of being absorbed, I can confess it to you now, and you may have noticed the effects of this worry. I think today I control better my hands and only feel the benefits of your salutary and decisive influence".⁴⁹

By the end of his life, the aspects of imitation seem to clarify for Bizet. In a letter to his mother-in-law dated 29 May 1871 he states: "P. S. – Of course, if I thought I was imitating Wagner, despite my admiration, I would not write a single note in my life. Imitation is a fool's job. It is much better to write bad music of one's own than other people's. And besides, the finer the model, the more ridiculous the imitation. We imitated Michelangelo, Shakespeare and Beethoven! God knows the horrors that this rage to imitate has cost us!"⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Németh, *Georges Bizet élete és művei*, 321.

⁴⁸ The letter of Georges Bizet to his mother, 19 February, 1859. Original text: "David a été très étonné de me voir complètement dépêtré de l'influence de Gounod. Moi, j'en suis ravi. Gounod est un compositeur essentiellement original, et en l'imitation on reste à l'état d'élève. Son *Faust* doit être splendide. *Quand cela passe-t-il ?*" (Bizet, *Lettres*, 92).

⁴⁹ Translated by Sára Aksza Grosz. Original text: "Vous avez été le commencement de ma vie d'artiste. Je résulte de vous. Vous êtes la cause et je suis la conséquence. J'ai craint d'être absorbé, je puis vous l'avouer maintenant et vous avez pu remarquer les effets de cette inquiétude. Je crois être aujourd'hui plus maître de ma main et ne sens plus que les bienfaits de votre salutaire et décisive influence." (Glaxman, "Présentation", 16).

⁵⁰ The letter of Georges Bizet to Madame Halévy, 29 May 1871. Quoted by Dean, *Bizet*, 90. Translation revised by Sára Aksza Grosz. Original text: "P. S. – Il est bien entendu que, si je croyais imiter Wagner, malgré mon admiration, je n'écrirais plus une note de ma vie. Imiter est d'un sot. Il vaut mieux faire mauvais d'après soi

In the period between these letters, Bizet faced many personal events including his mother's death (1861), marriage with Geneviève Halévy (1869), and birth of their son, Jacques (1872). In June 1865, Edmond Galabert became Bizet's pupil up to 1872 (with interruption in 1871 during the events of the Commune);⁵¹ he later edited and published separately the music lessons received by correspondence. Convinced that a musician has to know a "great deal", before accepting him as a disciple, Bizet examined Galabert in literature (books read in French and foreign languages) and music.⁵² For Bizet only the person able to talk with about literature, arts and life in general was worthy of the composer label.⁵³

4.2. Broadening Horizons

In childhood, Bizet was more attracted to literature than to music; his parents had to hide the books or he would not sit down at the piano. He never lost his appetite for reading, but owned a varied library, and had a sensibility for fine arts, too.⁵⁴

After winning in 1857 the Premier Grand Prix de Rome with his *Clovis et Clotilde* cantata, Bizet spent three years (1858-1860) in Italy. He headed towards the cradle of art by 21 December 1857 with fellow winners Heim (architect), Charles Colin (oboist) and Sellier (painter, whose unfinished portrait of Bizet hangs in the Villa Medici).⁵⁵ Once arrived in Rome (27 January 1858), with accommodation in the Villa Medici directed by painter Victor Schnetz,⁵⁶ Bizet had perfect conditions to absorb culture. Besides literature, he read in the library of the Villa almost every accessible work about the history and art of Italy.⁵⁷ He took Italian lessons and visited libraries and antiquities.⁵⁸ Together with and due to journalist, art critic, novelist, and playwright Edmond About (1828-1885, whom

qui d'après les autres. Et, d'ailleurs, plus le modèle est beau, plus l'imitation est ridicule. On a imité Michel-Ange, Shakespeare et Beethoven ! Dieu sait les horreurs que nous a values cette rage d'imiter !" (Bizet, *Lettres*, 209).

⁵¹ Glayman, "Présentation", 22; see Galabert, *Georges Bizet: Souvenirs et correspondance*; Galabert, *Lettres à un ami: 1865-1872*.

⁵² Dean, *Bizet*, 59.

⁵³ Németh, *Georges Bizet élete és művei*, 68-69.

⁵⁴ Dean, *Bizet*, 4.

⁵⁵ Curtiss, *Bizet and His World*, 58.

⁵⁶ Delacroix praised Victor Schnetz (1787-1870)'s *Brigand's Wife* painting and sent pupils to meet Schnetz in Rome. Schnetz himself asked the Prix de Rome students at the Villa Medici which painting to send in to the Salon (Curtiss, *Bizet and His World*, 51-55).

⁵⁷ Németh, *Georges Bizet élete és művei*, 38-39.

⁵⁸ Németh, *Georges Bizet élete és művei*, 33.

he met at Offenbach's parties), he explored the museums and art galleries of Rome and refined his artistic knowledge and taste.⁵⁹

Bizet's unpublished *Notes de voyage* diary consists of 15 sheets of papers of 8 ½ x 10 ½ inches dimension with small-sized handwriting in ink, often in an unprintable language. According to Mina Curtiss (1896-1985), it is rather a guidebook, the entries give brief insight into the great Italian Renaissance art and to the composer's nocturnal adventures. Bizet wrote letters to his parents (76 at number, published as *Lettres de Rome*) and friends.⁶⁰ Even though he rarely dated his correspondence,⁶¹ they still outline his travels across Italy. Thus, he reached among others the towns of Vatican, Florence, Bologna, Parma, Modena, Pavia, Milano, Venice, Padua, Verona, Ravenna, Sicily, Naples, Pisa, Lucca, Sienna, Volterra, Amalfi, Salernes, Paestum, Terracine, Pompeii, Assisi. He explored the countryside as well, Albano, Tivoli, Gensano, Frascati, Norma, the Sabine hills, the mountains behind Rivoli (Vicovaro, Subiaco).⁶² He went to Naples and on other excursions with fellow pensioners and sculptor Paul Dubois (1829-1905, made the bust for Bizet's tomb).⁶³

Back in Paris, Bizet lived above the apartment of his father-in-law, Ludovic Halévy on rue de Douai 22, in Montmartre having as street neighbors Edmond About, Ernest Guiraud, Pauline Viardot-García, Gustave Doré and Francisque Sarcey; Gounod and Edgar Degas (family friend of Emile Straus, Geneviève Bizet's second husband) stayed nearby.⁶⁴ Bizet was also friend with painter Eugène Isabey.⁶⁵

4.3. Classification

All these artistic acquaintances and museum visits convinced early Bizet that "Comparisons between painters and sculptors and musicians are useful. All the arts are related, or rather there is only one art. Whether one expresses one's thought on canvas, in marble, or on the stage matters little; the thinking is always the same."⁶⁶

⁵⁹ Curtiss, *Bizet and His World*, 62-63.

⁶⁰ Curtiss, *Bizet and His World*, 51-63.

⁶¹ Németh, *Georges Bizet élete és művei*, 29.

⁶² Curtiss, *Bizet and His World*, 69-70.

⁶³ Curtiss, *Bizet and His World*, 87-88.

⁶⁴ Curtiss, *Bizet and His World*, 254 and 439; Németh, *Georges Bizet élete és művei*, 110.

⁶⁵ Dean, *Bizet*, 4.

⁶⁶ The letter of Georges Bizet to his mother, Rome, 8 October 1858. Quoted by Curtiss, *Bizet and His World*, 72. Original text: "La comparaison des peintres et des sculpteurs avec le musiciens y est pour quelque chose. Tous les arts se touchent ou plutôt il n'y a qu'un art. Qu'on rendes sa pensée sur la toile, sur le marbre ou sur le théâtre, peu importe : la pensée est toujours la même." (Bizet, *Lettres*, 73).

At first, Bizet was "floating between Mozart and Beethoven, Rossini and Meyerbeer."⁶⁷ His dilemmas, followed by confessions – "I admire Beethoven and Meyerbeer mightily, but I feel that my nature tends to make me like the pure and spontaneous art more than the passionately dramatic" – have led him to the belief that "Mozart and Rossini are the two greatest musicians". Thus, he made analogies: "in painting Raphael is the same man as Mozart, Meyerbeer feels as Michelangelo felt" (letter to his mother, Rome, 8 October 1858);⁶⁸ Raphael, Mozart, Correggio, Rossini possess "the artistic gift in all its purity and perfection", while Michelangelo and Beethoven can "discover through their reason and genius the last word in greatness and beauty" (letter to painter Emile Diaz, 1858).⁶⁹ Furthermore, "having the courage to prefer Raphael to Michelangelo, Mozart to Beethoven, and Rossini to Meyerbeer", Bizet even linked the masterworks: *The Last Judgement – Eroica – Les Huguenots* (fourth act); *The School of Athens, The Dispute of the Holy Sacrament, The Virgin of Foligno – Le Nozze di Figaro – Guillaume Tell* (second act).⁷⁰ In short, Bizet's view might be summed up as Michelangelo ~ Beethoven / Meyerbeer, and Raphael ~ Mozart/Rossini. During the hunger in Paris caused by the Franco-Prussian War, Bizet seeks refuge in a utopia: "we were all at Naples, installed in a charming villa; we were living under a purely artistic government. The senate consisted of Beethoven, Michelangelo, Shakespeare, Giorgione, and people like that. The National Guard was replaced by an immense orchestra under the command of Litolff. The vote was denied idiots, spongers, intriguers, and ignoramuses. I need not to tell you it was thus the most limited suffrage imaginable. Geneviève was a little too friendly with Goethe, but despite this annoyance, waking up was a cruelly bitter business."⁷¹

⁶⁷ The letter of Georges Bizet to Hector Gruyer, Rome, 31 December, 1858. Quoted by Curtiss, *Bizet and His World*, 79. Original text: "*Encore une bonne chose: jusqu'à ce moment, je flottais entre Mozart et Beethoven, Rossini et Meyerbeer.*" (Bizet, *Lettres*, 81).

⁶⁸ The letter of Georges Bizet to his mother, Roma, 8 October 1858. Quoted by Curtiss, *Bizet and His World*, 72. Original text: "*Je suis plus que jamais convaincu que Mozart et Rossini sont les deux grands musiciens. Tout en admirant de toutes les facultés Beethoven et Meyerbeer, je sens que ma nature me porte plus à aimer l'art pur art facile que la passion dramatique. De même, en peinture, Raphaël est le même homme que Mozart; Meyerbeer sent comme sentait Michel-Ange.*" (Bizet, *Lettres*, 73).

⁶⁹ Dean, *Bizet*, 239-240.

⁷⁰ The letter of Georges Bizet to Hector Gruyer, New Year's Eve 1858. Quoted by Curtiss, *Bizet and His World*, 79. Original text: "*Quand je vois le Jugement dernier, quand j'entends la Symphonie héroïque ou le quatrième acte des Huguenots, je suis ému, surpris, et je n'ai pas assez d'yeux, d'oreilles, d'intelligence pour admirer. Mais quand je vois l'École d'Athènes, la Dispute du Saint-Sacrament, la Vierge de Foligno, quand j'entends les Noces de Figaro ou le second acte de Guillaume Tell, je suis complètement heureux, j'éprouve un bien-être, une satisfaction complète, j'oublie tout : ah ! qu'on est heureux d'être doué ainsi ! Enfin tâchons de n'être pas trop crétin, ce sera déjà quelque chose.*" (Bizet, *Lettres*, 81-82).

⁷¹ [The letter of?] Georges Bizet to Ernest Guiraud. Quoted by Curtiss, *Bizet and His World*, 266-267; after Dean, *Bizet*, 86. Neither of the authors mention the French source. The original text has not yet been found.

The ignorance of public might as well cause this "cruel bitter business". The public has no opinion of its own, but accepts any judgement, does not understand "the idea, until later". The artist cannot "find his true level until a hundred years after his death", – which "is merely stupid". Thus, "in art (music, painting, sculpture in particular) as in literature, it is the talent and not the idea that makes success". If so, what is the solution? The "artist's talent must, by means of an attractive form" ease the way for and not discourage reception (all quoted from an unpublished letter to Madame Halévy, 1871).⁷² That is why Bizet warns Galabert that "without form, no style; without style, no art".⁷³ What is the recipe of the beautiful then? "The union of matter and form, is always beautiful" (from the same letter to Bizet's mother-in-law)⁷⁴ – a definition which echoes the aesthetics of Hegel.

5. "Roma" Symphony

Bizet was so fond of Italy, that against the rule, which obliged Prix de Rome winners to spend the third year in Germany, he managed to gain permission from the Minister of Beaux-Arts to remain in the capital for his last year of scholarship. Probably, the love affair with a girl identified as "Zeph" might have also been reason to stay.⁷⁵ However, only after leaving the Eternal City did the idea of a musical souvenir occur to him. From Rimini, 17 August 1860 Bizet wrote the following lines to his mother: "I have in mind a symphony which I plan to call *Rome, Venice, Florence, and Naples*. It works out wonderfully. Venice would be my andante, Rome my first movement, Florence my

⁷² Unpublished letter of Georges Bizet to Madame Halévy, 1871. Quoted by Curtiss, *Bizet and His World*, 312-314. Original text, italic characters from the editor of the correspondence volume: "En art (*musique, peinture, sculpture surtout*), *comme dans les lettres, ce qui fait le succès, c'est le talent, et non l'idée. Le public (et je parle des gens intelligents, le reste n'existe pas : voilà, ma démocratie, à moi), le public ne comprend l'idée que plus tard. Pour arriver à ce plus tard, il faut que le talent de l'artiste, par une forme amiable, lui fasse la route facile et ne le rebute pas dès le premier jour. [...] Jamais un livre, quelque remarquable qu'il soit par l'idée, ne sera supportés s'il est mal écrit, tandis qu'un rien, une bagatelle, ira aux nues si la forme en est claire, limpide. [...] Quant au public proprement dit, il n'a pas d'opinion. [...] L'artiste n'est à son plan que cent ans après sa mort ! Est-ce triste ? non. Ce n'est que bête.*" (Bizet, *Lettres*, 215-217).

⁷³ Dean, *Bizet*, 251.

⁷⁴ Unpublished letter of Georges Bizet to Madame Halévy, 1871. Quoted by Curtiss, *Bizet and His World*, 312-314. Original text: "*Le beau, c'est-à-dire la réunion de l'idée et de la forme, est toujours beau.*" (Bizet, *Lettres*, 216).

⁷⁵ Curtiss, *Bizet and His World*, 92.

scherzo, and Naples my finale. It is a new idea, I think.”⁷⁶ The composition took eight years.⁷⁷

5.1. In Beethoven’s Grasp

First, the *Scherzo* was completed between 1860 and 1861. Without doubt, one might recall Beethoven when talking of *Scherzo*. Bizet might have had his models in perspective. Bizet, likewise Beethoven, places the *Scherzo* as a second movement and combines the scherzo character with fugue writing (e. g. 7th Symphony) into a *perpetuum mobile*.

The image displays a musical score for Bizet's "Roma" Symphony, 2nd movement, measures 1-35. The score is arranged in four systems. The first system includes Violino I, Violino II, Viola, and Violoncelli e Contrabasso. The second system includes Violino I and Violino II. The third system includes Violino I and Violino II. The fourth system includes Violino I and Viola. The score is in E-flat major/C minor, 3/4 time, and is marked Allegretto vivace. Dynamics include *f*, *p*, and *sf*. The key signature is three flats.

Ex. 5. Bizet, “Roma” Symphony, 2nd movement *Allegretto vivace*, mm. 1-35.

⁷⁶ The letter of Georges Bizet to his mother, Rimini, 17 August 1860. Quoted by Curtiss, *Bizet and His World*, 101. Original text: “ J’ai en tête une symphonie que je coudrais intituler Rome, Venise, Florence et Naples. Cela s’arrange à merveille : Venise sera mon andante ; Rome, mon premier morceau ; Florence, mon scherzo, et Naples, mon finale. C’est une idée neuve, je crois. ” (Bizet, *Lettres*, 134).

⁷⁷ Curtiss, *Bizet and His World*, 101.

In his other, earlier symphonic *Scherzo*, he recalls the master (ex. *Eroica*) by the dance-like (folk) melody and its fragmentary approach as well repetitiveness.

The image shows a musical score for Bizet's Symphony in C, 3rd movement, measures 18-22. The score is for woodwinds and strings. The woodwinds (Flute, Oboe, Cor I II) and strings (Violins I & II, Viola, Violoncello, Contrabasso) are all playing a repetitive melody. The dynamics are marked as *pp* (pianissimo) and *poco a poco cresc.* (poco a poco crescendo). The flute part has a *tr* (trill) marking. The cor part has a *1* marking. The string parts have a *p* marking at the end of the excerpt.

Ex. 6. Bizet, *Symphony in C*, 3rd movement, mm. 18-22.

The atmosphere of the third movement of Bizet's *Symphony* is akin to the *Adagio* of Beethoven's 9th. Bizet regarded the "symphony with chorus the culmination of art", and besides Beethoven no one can "contend for the crown of the Titan, the Prometheus of Music."⁷⁸

The image shows a musical score for Bizet's Symphony in C, 3rd movement, measures 18-22. The score is for Violino I, Violino II, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabasso. The Violino I part has a *p* marking and the instruction *largo espressivo*. The Violino II, Viola, and Violoncello parts have a *p* marking and the instruction *ff* (fortissimo). The Contrabasso part has a *pp* marking. The score shows a repetitive melody for all instruments.

⁷⁸ The letter of Georges Bizet to Paul Lacombe, 11 March 1867. Quoted by Curtiss, *Bizet and His World*, 189. Original text: "Comme vous, je mets Beethoven au-dessus des plus fameux. La symphonie avec chœurs est pour moi le point culminant de notre art. Dante, Michel-Ange, Shakespeare, Homère, Beethoven, Moïse ! ...Ni Mozart, avec sa forme divine, ni Weber, avec sa puissante, sa colossale originalité, ni Meyerbeer avec son foudroyant génie dramatique, ne peuvent, selon moi, disputer le palme au Titan, au Prométhée de la musique." (Bizet, *Lettres*, 226-227).

Ex. 7. Bizet, "Roma" *Symphony*, 3rd movement *Adagio*, mm. 1-9.

5.2. *Baptism Provoked by Reception and Criticism*

The premiere of the *Scherzo* – second movement of the later "Roma" *Symphony* – took place as a private performance at the *Institut* in October 1861, followed in 1862 by the likewise private gathering held at the *Cercle de l'Union Artistique* with conductor Deloffre. The public performance was led by Padeloup at the *Concerts Populaires* on 11 January 1863.⁷⁹ It was repeated at the following week at the *Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts*. Critics, among them Paul Bernard from *Le Ménestrel* held the opinion that: "M. Bizet's *Scherzo* is the work of a consummate musician. But in it we looked in vain for the melodic inspiration necessary for this kind of piece, and of which there are so many examples in Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and Mendelssohn. The first measures, though imitative, were promising. Unfortunately, the rest of the work becomes a little heavy and seemed to us prolix above all."⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Wright, *Georges Bizet Letters in the Nydahl Collection*, 7 (footnote).

⁸⁰ Curtiss, *Bizet and His World*, 128. Curtiss does not mention the press source, neither the author of this study found it.

Might the program of the premiere – featuring Mozart's *E flat Symphony K. 543*, Beethoven's "*Egmont*" Overture and Haydn's *Adagio* from the *String Quartet No. 6* – have provoked such judgement? On 25 January 1863, Bizet conducted his own work at the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts. In the opinion of the *La Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris*, he did not succeed at conducting, while the work was "remarkable for a wholly French clarity and grace."⁸¹

Anyway, the *Scherzo* apparently so angered Padeloup's audience in 1863 that in order to avoid déjà vu, this movement was omitted at the *Symphony's* 1869 premiere. Moreover, according to Felix Aprahamian, Bizet renamed his work *Fantaisie symphonique: "Souvenirs de Rome"* and its movements *Une chasse dans la Forêt d'Ostie*, *Une Procession*, and *Carnaval à Rome*.⁸² In opposition, Mina Curtiss insists that Padeloup affixed these titles just before the concert, without asking the composer. Critics from the *La Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris* appraised the "skill, talent and lively feeling for orchestration", but questioned the originality of the musical ideas, as those "reminded the masters too well."⁸³ What is for sure, Bizet considered the premiere a success: "My symphony went very well. First movement: a round of applause, a second round of hisses, third round, a catcall. Andante: a round of applause. Finale: great effect, applause three times repeated, hisses, three or four catcalls. In short, a success."⁸⁴

Even though Bizet revised *Roma* in 1871 and consequently always called it a symphony, it was published in 1880 by Choudens as *Troisième Suite de Concert* (following the two "*Arlésienne*" Suites). From the same year (31 October 1880) dates the first complete, yet posthumous Parisian performance of Bizet's four-movement "*Roma*" Symphony.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Botte: "Auditions musicales", 27. "M. Bizet, à son tour, a voulu conduire un scherzo de sa composition, mais il n'a pas mieux réussi. Sa musique n'est point tourmentée, cherchée comme l'est, en général, celle de M. St-Saëns ; on y a remarqué, au contraire, une clarté, une grâce toute française bien préférable à toutes les combinaisons avec lesquelles on espère dissimuler l'absence de mélodie." Quoted by Curtiss, *Bizet and His World*, 127-128.

⁸² Aprahamian, "Foreword", iii.

⁸³ Curtiss, *Bizet and His World*, 232-233.

⁸⁴ The letter of Georges Bizet to Edmond Galabert, March 1869. Quoted by Curtiss, *Bizet and His World*, 232. Original text: "Ma symphonie a très bien marché. – Premier morceau : une salve d'applaudissements, quelques chuts, seconde salve, un sifflet, troisième salve. Andante : une salve. Finale : beaucoup d'effet, applaudissements à trois reprises, chuts, trois ou quatre coups de sifflet. En somme, succès". (Bizet, *Lettres*, 182).

⁸⁵ Aprahamian, "Foreword", iii.

5.3. Through Self-Analysis to Distant Echoes

The slow introduction of brass choral puts us in a *Midsummer Night's Dream*:

A musical score for four brass instruments: Horn I in G, Horn II in F, Horn III in C, and Horn IV in C. The score is written in a single system with four staves. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The music is marked 'p sonoro' (piano, sonorous) and features a slow, melodic line with some chromaticism and a steady rhythmic pulse.

Ex. 8. Bizet, "Roma" *Symphony*, 1st movement, mm. 1-8.

A musical score for a full orchestra, titled "Nº 7. Con moto tranquillo." The score is written in a single system with ten staves. The instruments listed are Flauti, Oboi, Clarinetti in A, Fagotti, Corno I in E, Corno II in E, Violino I, Violino II, Viola, and Violoncello e Basso. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The music is marked 'p dol.' (piano, dolce) and features a slow, melodic line with some chromaticism and a steady rhythmic pulse.

Ex. 9. Mendelssohn, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, No. 7 *Notturmo*, mm. 1-8.

The second section of the slow introduction resembles the atmosphere and orchestration of the 1st movement of Mahler's 4th *Symphony*, composed between 1899-1900.

The image shows a page of a musical score for Mahler's Symphony no. 4, 1st movement, secondary theme, measures 37-49. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with multiple staves. The instruments listed on the left are: 1. 2. Ob., Engl. Horn, Horn, 1. Clarinet in A, 2. Clarinet in A, 1. 2. Bassoon, 1. 2. Horn in F, 1. 2. Violin, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabass. The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (pp, p, f, sfz), articulation (acc), and performance instructions (molto espress., p. espress., p. marcato, G-Salto, espress.). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The score is written in a clear, professional font with standard musical notation.

Ex. 11. Mahler, *Symphony no. 4*, 1st movement, secondary theme, mm. 37-49.

Mahler loved Bizet's "*Roma*".⁸⁶ He conducted its first Vienna performance on 18 December 1898.⁸⁷ It was also Mahler, who presented the work for the citizens of New York at the subscription concerts held on 31 January and 3 February 1911.⁸⁸ He also conducted Bizet's operas, *Djamileh* (in Hamburg and Vienna)⁸⁹ and *Carmen* (presented in 1900 at Vienna).⁹⁰

Might it resemble Mendelssohn or point forward to Mahler, the slow introduction of Bizet is followed by the proper first movement of the "*Roma*" *Symphony*. Quoting the composer himself:

I have finished my symphony. I eliminated the variations. I think the first movement will be good. The old theme

⁸⁶ Curtiss, *Bizet and His World*, 471.

⁸⁷ La Grange, *Gustav Mahler*, vol. 2, 126.

⁸⁸ La Grange, *Gustav Mahler*, vol. 4, 1137.

⁸⁹ Németh, *Georges Bizet élete és művei*, 6 and 126.

⁹⁰ Glayman, "Présentation", 35.



is now preceded by an important quiet introduction, which recurs in agitation and ends the piece in complete tranquility. It is no longer at all like any known first movements – it is new and I count on its being effective . . . It's funny to have looked for this for two years! The middle of the andante is the second motif of the finale, which fits marvelously into this broad movement! – Curious! Devilish music! One understands nothing about it.⁹¹

A transitional passage leads towards the aforementioned ancient theme:

Ex. 12. Bizet, "Roma" Symphony, 1st movement, transition towards 1st theme, mm. 47-49.

⁹¹ The letter of Georges Bizet to Edmond Galabert, June 1868. Quoted by Curtiss, *Bizet and His World*, 221-222. Original text: "J'ai terminé la symphonie. J'ai renoncé aux variations. Je crois que le premier morceau sera bon ! C'est l'ancien thème précédé d'une importante introduction calme qui revient au milieu dans l'agitation et termine le morceau dans une tranquillité complète. Ça ne ressemble plus du tout aux premiers morceaux connus... c'est nouveau, et je compte sur un bon effet. – Ce que vous connaissez n'est plus qu'au deuxième plan ! – C'est drôle d'avoir cherché ça deux ans ! Le milieu de l'andante est le deuxième motif du final qui s'arrange à merveille dans ce mouvement large... Curieux !... Satanée musique ! ...on n'y comprend rien !" (Bizet, *Lettres*, 167).

It might recall Liszt’s “Dante” *Symphony* (similar passage from mark D). Bizet owned a copy of the score.

Bizet expressed his anger, grief and dissatisfaction with the Finale in letters to Mme Trélat (1837-1914), a mezzosoprano whose salons he visited during 1868-1869.⁹² He did not reveal his reason for this creative crisis. We might only presume that this last movement, aimed to depict Naples, might have something to do with Mendelssohn’s “Italian” *Symphony*, as both evoke the character and rhythm of tarantella and saltarello. Nevertheless, the “Roma” *Symphony* fits in the list of works evoking travel impressions in Italy (Mendelssohn, Liszt), Renaissance art and literature (Berlioz, Liszt, Respighi, Tchaikovsky), historical figures (Schumann) or the general overview of Latin-Italian culture (Respighi).

Year of composition	Composer	Title	Comments
1817	Franz Schubert (1797-1828)	<i>Overture in C in Italian Style</i> D 591 (Op. 170)	
1830-1833	Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (1809-1847)	“Italian” <i>Symphony</i> Op. 90	Published 1851
1834	Hector Berlioz	<i>Harold in Italy</i>	Lord Byron
1834-1838	(1803-1869)	<i>Benvenuto Cellini</i>	Opera, autobiography of the artist
1844		<i>Le carnaval romain</i> H. 95	
1846-1849	Franz Liszt (1811-1886)	<i>Années de Pèlerinage</i> Deuxième Année: <i>Italie</i> S. 161	<i>Raphael: Sposalizio, Michelangelo: Il penseroso;</i> first publication 1858
1851	Robert Schumann (1810-1856)	“Julius Caesar” <i>Overture</i> Op. 128	Shakespeare
1855-1856	Franz Liszt	“Dante” <i>Symphony</i> S. 109	Dante Alighieri: <i>Divina commedia</i>
1860-1868	Georges Bizet (1838-1875)	<i>Symphony no. 2 in C major</i> “Roma”	
1876	Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)	<i>Francesca da Rimini</i> Op. 32	Dante Alighieri: <i>Divina commedia</i>
1916-1928 1927	Ottorino Respighi (1879-1936)	“Rome” <i>Trilogy</i> <i>Trittico Botticelliano</i>	<i>La Primavera, L’Adorazione dei Magi, La nascita di Venere</i>

Table 4. Musical Longings for Italy.

⁹² Wright, *Georges Bizet Letters in the Nydahl Collection*, 56.

Conclusions

- 1) The several echoes in Bizet's two symphonies are neither exact imitations, nor quotations but rather similarities. They reflect the composer's up-to-date knowledge. In a purely practical sense, they can be understood as stylistic exercises and homages, as well.
- 2) Due to the Parisian opera and theatre fashion, and natural for a primordially opera composer, Bizet quotes the marching theme from the finale of his youthful *Symphony in C* in his likewise youthful opera buffa, *Don Procopio*. Due to the French operas' emphasis on dances and ballet, even the symphonies resemble the divertimento and dance music. Thus, choreographer George Balanchine adapted to ballet both of Bizet's symphonies, in 1947 the *Symphony in C*, while in 1955 the *Roma*.⁹³
- 3) There are still more layers left to peel off from Bizet, the prodigy born as Alexandre César Léopold, the Conservatoire student nicknamed "Potin" (Gossip),⁹⁴ the contest applicant Gaston de Betsi, or the composer known as Georges (forename given by his godfather). He is also Gaston de Betzi,⁹⁵ the music critic stating the bittersweet truth: "composers are the pariahs and the martyrs of modern society. Like the gladiators of old, they cry as they fall: Music! What a splendid art, but a dreary profession! Still, let us wait in patience, and above all let us hope! (*La Revue Nationale et Étrangère*, 3rd August, 1867 – *Causerie musicale*)."⁹⁶

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⁹³ *New York City Ballet, Georges Bizet*, <https://www.nycballet.com/discover/ballet-repertory/roma/>.

⁹⁴ Dean, *Bizet*, 1.

⁹⁵ Németh, *Georges Bizet élete és művei*, 86-87.

⁹⁶ Dean, *Bizet*, 287. Title of the critique: "Causerie musicale". Original text: "les compositeurs sont les parias, les martyrs de la société moderne. Comme les gladiateurs antiques, ils tombent en s'écriant : Salve popule! morituri te salutant! Oh ! la musique ! quel art splendide ! mais quel triste métier ! enfin... attendons ! ... attendons, et surtout espérons !" (Robert, *Bizet. L'homme et son œuvre*, 16).

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