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Expressive interpretation and sound aesthetics in Gaubert’s Sonatine quasi fantasia

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Abstract

This article explores interpretive approaches to tone production and musical expressivity in Philippe Gaubert’s *Sonatine quasi fantasia*. This work embodies the aesthetic ideals of the French flute school through its refined lyricism, tonal nuance, and flexible formal character. Composed by a flutist–composer deeply associated with the Paris Conservatoire tradition, the piece demands a continuous integration of sound control and expressive imagination, requiring the performer to balance technical precision with spontaneity and freedom of expression.

Through analytical and performance-based observations, the study examines issues central to interpretation, including breath-shaped phrasing, tonal continuity across registers, vibrato flexibility, articulation in French style, and the controlled rubato suggested by the quasi-fantasia character. Selected passages are discussed as examples of how harmonic movement, melodic contour, and texture influence decisions related to tone color, pacing, and expressive timing. Particular attention is given to the relationship between timbre and musical structure, as well as to the performer’s role in shaping long melodic lines within Gaubert’s fluid and improvisatory writing style.

By situating *Sonatine quasi fantasia* within the broader aesthetic tradition of the French flute school, this article proposes a performance-oriented framework for approaching the work, emphasizing stylistic sensitivity, tonal refinement, and interpretive flexibility as essential elements of an effective performance.

Keywords: Philippe Gaubert, flute performance, musical interpretation, tone color, French flute school, expressivity, rubato, flute repertoire

Annotatsiya

Ushbu maqolada Filipp Gaubertning *Sonatine quasi fantasia* asarida tovush hosil qilish va musiqiy ifodaviylikka oid talqin yondashuvlari tadqiq etiladi. Mazkur

asar o‘zining nafis lirizmi, tovush ranglarining nozikligi va shakliy jihatdan erkinligi orqali fransuz fleyta maktabining estetik tamoyillarini yorqin namoyon etadi. Parij konservatoriyasi an’analari bilan chambarchas bog‘liq bo‘lgan sozanda va kompozitor tomonidan yaratilgan ushbu asar ijrochidan tovushni boshqarish mahorati bilan badiiy tasavvurni uzviy uyg‘unlashtirishni, texnik aniqlikni musiqiy spontanlik va ifoda erkinligi bilan muvozanatlashtirishni talab etadi.

Tahliliy va ijrochilik amaliyotiga asoslangan kuzatishlar orqali tadqiqot talqin uchun muhim bo‘lgan masalalarni, jumladan, nafas bilan shakllantiriladigan frazirovka, turli registrlar o‘rtasidagi tovush uzviyligi, vibratoning moslashuvchanligi, fransuz ijrochilik uslubiga xos artikulyatsiya hamda *quasi-fantasia* xarakteridan kelib chiqadigan nazoratli rubatoni o‘rganadi. Ayrim musiqiy parchalar garmonik rivojlanish, melodik yo‘nalish va fakturaning tovush tembri, ijro sur’ati va ifodaviy vaqtni belgilash bilan bog‘liq ijrochilik qarorlariga qanday ta’sir ko‘rsatishini namoyish etuvchi misollar sifatida tahlil qilinadi. Shuningdek, tembr va musiqiy tuzilma o‘rtasidagi munosabatga, shuningdek, Gaubertning erkin va improvizatsion xususiyatga ega musiqiy bayonida uzun melodik chiziqlarni shakllantirishda ijrochining roliga alohida e’tibor qaratiladi.

Sonatine quasi fantasia asarini fransuz fleyta maktabining kengroq estetik an’analari doirasida ko‘rib chiqish asosida maqolada ushbu asarni ijro etishga yo‘naltirilgan yondashuv taklif etiladi. Unda uslubiy sezgirlik, tovushning nafisligi va talqindagi moslashuvchanlik samarali ijroning muhim tarkibiy qismlari sifatida ta’kidlanadi.

Kalit so‘zlar: Filipp Gober, fleyta ijrochiligi, musiqiy talqin, tovush tembri, fransuz fleyta maktabi, ifodaviylik, rubato, fleyta repertuari.

Аннотация

В статье рассматриваются интерпретационные подходы к формированию звука и музыкальной выразительности в *Sonatine quasi fantasia* Филиппа Гобера. Данное произведение воплощает эстетические принципы французской флейтовой школы, проявляющиеся в утонченной лирике, многообразии тембровых оттенков и гибкости музыкальной формы. Созданное флейтистом-композитором, тесно связанным с традициями Парижской консерватории, произведение требует от исполнителя органичного сочетания контроля над качеством звука и художественного воображения, а также умения находить баланс между технической точностью, непосредственностью и свободой музыкального высказывания.

На основе аналитических наблюдений и исполнительского опыта в исследовании рассматриваются ключевые аспекты интерпретации, включая фразировку, формируемую дыханием, тембровую и интонационную целостность между различными регистрами, гибкость вибрато, артикуляцию

в традициях французской исполнительской школы, а также контролируемое рубато, обусловленное характером *quasi-fantasia*. Отдельные фрагменты произведения анализируются с целью показать, каким образом гармоническое развитие, мелодический рисунок и фактура влияют на выбор тембровых решений, темпового движения и выразительной организации времени. Особое внимание уделяется взаимосвязи тембра и музыкальной структуры, а также роли исполнителя в формировании протяженных мелодических линий в текучем и импровизационном по характеру музыкальном языке Гобера.

Рассматривая *Sonatine quasi fantasia* в контексте более широкой эстетической традиции французской флейтовой школы, статья предлагает исполнительски ориентированный подход к интерпретации произведения, подчеркивая, что стилистическая чуткость, тембровая утонченность и интерпретационная гибкость являются важнейшими составляющими убедительного художественного исполнения.

Ключевые слова:Филипп Гобер, флейтовое исполнительство, музыкальная интерпретация, тембр, французская флейтовая школа, выразительность, рубато, флейтовый репертуар.

Tone production and musical expressivity occupy a central position in flute performance, particularly within the aesthetic tradition of the French flute school, where sound is treated as a flexible and coloristic medium rather than a purely technical construct [2, pp. 24–26]. In this tradition, tone emerges from the continuous interplay of breath, phrasing, articulation, vibrato, and harmonic awareness, allowing the performer to shape musical discourse through subtle variations in timbre and expressive intensity [3, pp. 6–8]. Technical control, therefore, functions not as an isolated objective but as the foundation for interpretive freedom and stylistic nuance.

Philippe Gaubert’s Sonatine quasi fantasia represents a distinctive example of these artistic ideals. Written by a composer who was simultaneously a celebrated flutist, conductor, and representative of the Paris Conservatoire tradition, the work reflects many of the defining characteristics of the Taffanel–Gaubert aesthetic: a

singing, tonal approach, refined dynamic shading, supple articulation, and fluid phrasing shaped by harmonic direction [1, pp. 212–215]. At the same time, the quasi-fantasia character of the composition introduces a degree of rhythmic and formal flexibility, inviting the performer to move beyond strict metrical regularity and approach the work with a sense of spontaneity and improvisatory freedom [6, pp. 101–103].

Although Sonatine quasi fantasia frequently appears in the advanced flute repertoire, discussions of the work often emphasize stylistic description or technical execution without fully addressing the relationship between tonal design and interpretive expression. Yet the composition offers rich possibilities for examining how tone color, vibrato variation, breath pacing, and temporal flexibility contribute to musical structure and expressive continuity [4, pp. 248–250]. The work requires the performer to sustain a continuous balance between clarity and freedom, precision and elasticity, while maintaining the refined sound aesthetic characteristic of early twentieth-century French flute performance.

This article explores selected passages from Sonatine quasi fantasia through a performance-oriented analytical perspective, focusing on how musical character is shaped through tonal flexibility, phrasing architecture, articulation, and rubato. Particular attention is given to the interaction between harmonic movement and timbral variation, as well as to the role of breath in shaping long melodic trajectories. By situating these interpretive considerations within the broader context of French flute aesthetics, the study proposes a performance framework that highlights tonal refinement, expressive continuity, and stylistic sensitivity as essential components of an effective interpretation of Gaubert's work [5, pp. 4–6].

The musical language of Sonatine quasi fantasia is deeply connected to the vocal aesthetics that shaped the French flute tradition. Gaubert's melodic writing unfolds with an almost improvisatory lyricism, often spanning wide intervals and

long phrases that require the performer to sustain both tonal continuity and expressive direction over extended breath spans [3, pp. 10–12]. Rather than functioning as isolated gestures, melodic lines evolve as fluid vocal trajectories in which phrasing, harmonic motion, and tone color remain inseparable. This vocal quality becomes particularly evident in passages where the melodic contour moves across contrasting registers, demanding not only technical stability but also the ability to maintain a unified, resonant sound throughout the instrument.

The expressive character of these lines depends greatly on the performer’s capacity to shape sound as a living, flexible entity. Changes in register are rarely neutral; ascending phrases frequently intensify harmonic tension, while descending contours often release it through softer tonal shading and relaxation of vibrato intensity [7, pp. 5–7]. In this context, breath functions as a structural and expressive force, guiding the pacing of phrases and influencing the natural elasticity of tempo associated with the quasi-fantasia character. Musical continuity emerges not through strict rhythmic regularity, but through the performer’s ability to sustain an uninterrupted sense of direction and vocal flow [5, pp. 8–10].

Gaubert’s harmonic language further reinforces this relationship between melodic design and tonal flexibility. Although grounded within a tonal framework, the work frequently incorporates chromatic inflections, modal coloration, and shifting harmonic centers that subtly transform the expressive atmosphere of a phrase [4, pp. 251–253]. These harmonic nuances invite constant adjustments of timbre, air speed, and vibrato color, encouraging the performer to respond to harmonic movement with corresponding changes in sound. Moments of increased dissonance or harmonic ambiguity often benefit from a denser, more concentrated tone, while passages of resolution may call for greater transparency and warmth [2, pp. 42–45]. In this way, tone color becomes closely linked to harmonic function,

allowing the performer to project structural direction through sound itself rather than through dynamics alone.

The interaction between flute and piano contributes significantly to this expressive environment. Gaubert frequently alternates between transparent accompanimental textures and denser harmonic writing, requiring continual refinement of projection, articulation, and tonal focus [1, pp. 220–223]. In more delicate passages, the flute line may appear to emerge from the piano texture with chamber-like intimacy. In contrast, climactic moments demand greater brilliance and breadth of sound without sacrificing tonal elegance. Such contrasts become especially significant in transitions between registers, where expressive intensity often coincides with registral expansion. Rather than treating these passages as purely technical challenges, the performer may approach them as opportunities for color transformation, using shifts in resonance and vibrato character to enhance the dramatic contour of the musical line.

Throughout the work, expressive freedom remains closely balanced with stylistic restraint. The quasi-fantasia designation suggests flexibility and spontaneity, yet Gaubert's writing retains a refined structural coherence characteristic of the French aesthetic tradition [6, pp. 104–106]. Rubato, therefore, functions not as an exaggerated temporal distortion but as a subtle elasticity shaped by breath, harmonic arrival points, and melodic tension. The effectiveness of interpretation lies in the performer's ability to integrate these elements into a continuous expressive narrative in which phrasing, tone color, harmonic awareness, and temporal flexibility operate as interdependent dimensions of musical expression [3, pp. 14–16].

In Sonatine quasi fantasia, Philippe Gaubert presents a conception of flute playing in which tone, phrasing, harmonic sensitivity, and expressive freedom operate as inseparable dimensions of musical interpretation. The work reflects the

aesthetic ideals of the French flute tradition, in which tonal beauty is not understood as a fixed or uniform sound but as a flexible, constantly evolving expressive medium shaped by breath, color, articulation, and harmonic direction [2, pp. 30–33]. Throughout the piece, the performer is required to respond continuously to subtle changes of texture, register, and harmonic atmosphere, transforming tone itself into a primary vehicle of musical expression.

Gaubert’s melodic writing reveals a strong vocal influence characteristic of the French school. Long lyrical phrases unfold with an improvisatory fluidity that often transcends regular metric structure, requiring the performer to sustain continuity across wide intervals, shifting registers, and evolving harmonic landscapes [3, pp. 18–20]. These melodic lines demand more than technical control alone; they require the ability to shape sound as a living, breathing entity that can expand and contract naturally with the phrase. Ascending passages frequently coincide with increasing harmonic tension, calling for a gradual concentration of tone and resonance rather than sheer increase of volume. In such moments, expressive intensity emerges through the refinement of timbre, vibrato density, and breath pacing rather than through overt force or exaggerated dynamic contrast.

This relationship between breath and phrasing lies at the center of the work’s expressive character. Gaubert’s phrases often resist obvious points of interruption, encouraging the performer to think beyond bar lines and approach musical structure through large vocal arcs [5, pp. 12–14]. Breath, therefore, becomes not merely a technical necessity but a shaping force that influences pacing, rubato, and tonal continuity. The quasi fantasia designation reinforces this sense of elasticity, suggesting freedom of motion guided by expressive direction rather than rigid rhythmic regularity. Rubato within the work functions most effectively when it arises organically from melodic contour and harmonic tension: phrases expand toward moments of arrival and relax naturally through release of resonance and

motion. Excessive tempo distortion can easily disrupt the restrained elegance central to the French style, whereas subtle temporal flexibility preserves both spontaneity and structural coherence.

The harmonic language of the Sonatine further intensifies the need for tonal adaptability. Although grounded within an extended tonal framework, Gaubert frequently introduces chromatic coloration, modal inflections, and shifting harmonic centers that transform the expressive atmosphere with remarkable subtlety [4, pp. 251–253]. These harmonic changes invite corresponding modifications of sound color and vibrato character. Sustained notes over unstable harmony may acquire greater expressive weight through a denser and more focused sonority, while moments of resolution often benefit from increased transparency and warmth. In this way, harmonic awareness directly shapes tonal imagination, allowing the performer to project tension and release through coloristic nuance rather than through dynamics alone.

Particularly revealing are passages in which Gaubert moves rapidly between registers within a single expressive gesture. The low register often carries a darker, veiled sonority suggestive of intimacy or suspension, while the upper register introduces brilliance and heightened emotional intensity. Effective interpretation depends on integrating these contrasting colors into a unified melodic trajectory rather than allowing registral shifts to sound mechanically separated [7, pp. 9–11]. Climactic ascents into the upper register require increased resonance and focus without sacrificing tonal depth, while descending lines often invite a relaxation of vibrato and a softer articulation, creating the impression of withdrawal or reflection. These transitions become expressive transformations of character rather than mere technical adjustments.

Articulation in the Sonatine contributes equally to this refined expressive world. Gaubert's writing reflects the clarity and suppleness associated with French

flute playing, where attacks remain closely integrated into the flow of the phrase and rarely become aggressively percussive [2, pp. 56–58]. Rapid figures demand articulation that preserves transparency and elegance without interrupting legato continuity. At the same time, lyrical passages often benefit from softer, speech-like consonantal shaping that enhances the vocal quality of the line. Small variations of articulation can significantly alter character: brighter attacks may illuminate moments of harmonic tension or brilliance, whereas gentler articulation can create intimacy within more introspective passages. Throughout the work, articulation functions less as a mechanism of separation than as a subtle inflection of the direction and color of the phrase.

Gaubert’s treatment of vibrato further demonstrates the integration of technical means into expressive purpose. Vibrato in Sonatine quasi fantasia operates not as a continuous decorative layer, but as an extension of tonal and harmonic expression [7, pp. 14–16]. Certain lyrical passages invite a broad, warm vibrato that intensifies the melodic line's vocal character. At the same time, harmonically ambiguous or suspended moments may require a narrower oscillation—or occasionally an almost pure, vibrato-less sound—to preserve clarity and tension. The gradual expansion or restraint of vibrato across a phrase can profoundly shape its expressive trajectory, particularly in passages where harmonic tension accumulates beneath sustained melodic writing.

The interaction between flute and piano also plays a crucial role in shaping interpretation. Transparent accompanimental textures often require the flute to blend with chamber-like delicacy, producing an intimate and restrained sonority that emerges naturally from the harmonic fabric. Elsewhere, denser piano writing demands greater projection and concentration of sound while maintaining flexibility and tonal elegance [4, pp. 225–257]. The performer must therefore adapt continuously to changing textures, balancing brilliance with warmth and projection

with transparency. Climactic moments gain expressive power not through heaviness of sound, but through increased resonance, harmonic focus, and expansion of tonal space.

Across the broader structure of the work, expressive continuity arises through gradual transformation rather than abrupt contrast. Changes of register, harmony, articulation, and texture continuously reshape the emotional atmosphere, creating the impression of an evolving narrative that unfolds with both freedom and coherence [6, pp. 110–112]. The performer's task is to sustain this fluid continuity while preserving the stylistic restraint characteristic of the French flute tradition. In this respect, Sonatine quasi fantasia demands not only technical refinement but also a highly developed sensitivity to tonal imagination, harmonic color, and expressive pacing. Gaubert's writing ultimately reveals flute sound as a dynamic expressive language—one in which breath, resonance, color, and timing merge into a single, continuously evolving musical discourse.

Philippe Gaubert's Sonatine quasi fantasia occupies a distinctive place within the flute repertoire not only because of its technical and stylistic sophistication, but also because of the interpretive demands it places upon the performer. Rooted in the aesthetic principles of the French flute tradition, the work reveals a conception of performance in which tone, phrasing, harmonic sensitivity, articulation, vibrato, and temporal flexibility function as interconnected elements of a unified expressive language [3, pp. 22–24]. Rather than treating sound as a static technical ideal, Gaubert's writing requires the performer to approach tone as a constantly evolving medium shaped by musical context and expressive intention.

Throughout the work, melodic design, harmonic coloration, and textural variation continuously influence decisions related to timbre, breath pacing, and rubato. Long vocal lines demand sustained tonal continuity across shifting registers, while chromatic harmonic movement invites subtle modifications of resonance and

vibrato character. Similarly, the quasi-fantasia nature of the composition encourages freedom of pacing that remains closely tied to breath and phrase direction rather than to external tempo manipulation. In this sense, expressive interpretation emerges through refinement and flexibility rather than through overt contrast or exaggerated gesture.

The interaction between flute and piano further reinforces the importance of tonal adaptability and stylistic sensitivity. Changes in texture and harmonic density require continual adjustment of projection, articulation, and sound color, allowing the performer to shape an expressive narrative through gradual transformation rather than abrupt opposition [4, pp. 255–257]. Gaubert’s writing, therefore, exemplifies the broader French aesthetic ideal in which musical expression is achieved through nuance, balance, and coloristic imagination.

From a performance perspective, *Sonatine quasi fantasia* reveals itself as more than a representative work of the French flute repertoire; it becomes a study of expressive sound itself. The composition challenges performers to integrate technical control with interpretive freedom, sustaining clarity and elegance while responding sensitively to harmonic and melodic evolution. Ultimately, the work demonstrates how tonal refinement and expressive continuity can serve not merely as stylistic characteristics but as fundamental principles of musical communication within the French flute tradition.

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