

**The Wind Music Research Quarterly
Mitteilungsblatt der IGEB**

Jahrgang 2023 – Dezember / December



Internationale Gesellschaft zur Erforschung und Förderung der Blasmusik

International Society for Research and Promotion of Wind Music

Sociedad Internacional para la Investigación y Promoción de la Música de
Viento

Société internationale de la recherche et de la promotion de la musique à vent

Società Internazionale per lo Studio e la Promozione della Musica per Fiatti

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Ida Gotkovsky – 90th Anniversary. Her Compositions for Solo Instruments

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This essay originates from a recent conference held at the Paris Conservatoire to mark the 90th birthday of the composer Ida Gotkovsky. I am dividing it into two parts. The first part ends with a list of pedagogical and solo works for wind instruments. In the second part, I will take a closer look at individual works and discuss the aspect of intertextuality in Ida Gotkovsky's work.

In his article on the composer, clarinettist Guy Dangain sees Ida Gotkovsky as

[...] A 'Grande Dame' lady of French music, Ida Gotkovsky [who] has successfully tackled all musical genres. The character and form of her works have earned her numerous prizes and international renown. The creative force and rigour mark Ida Gotkovsky's entire oeuvre she devoted to the evolution of the musical heritage, both in the field of music for wind band and in the symphonic realm.¹

Ida Gotkovsky is not only known and respected as a composer for wind orchestras and other large ensembles, but she is also part of a long tradition of composers of competition pieces, of which the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Paris is the cradle. This tradition has also been adopted in subordinate music teaching establishments in France as well as in other French-speaking countries such as Belgium and, in particular, in my own country, the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, which, although not French-speaking, follows this tradition that originated in Paris and has been taken up by the Royal Conservatoire of Brussels for all its conservatoires and music schools.

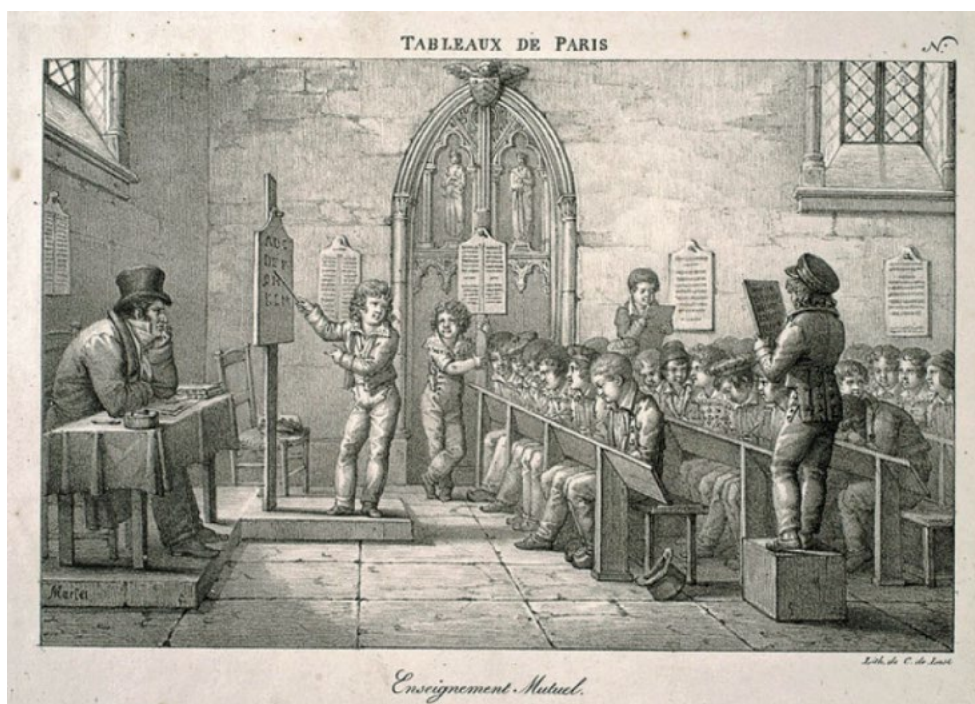
Before looking at Ida Gotkovsky's educational works, I'd like to shed some light on her educational career. During my visit to her home, she revealed little about her private life, apart from a few snippets. German soldiers heard Ida Gotkovsky making music. She identified human traits in these people. On the other hand, she described the situation as terrible and ambiguous.

Did Ida Gotkovsky teach at the CNSMDP? In any case, only sometimes! She told me that she left the school at 24, after 14 years there, with all the 1ers prizes in her pocket. At eleven, she was already giving piano lessons to pupils of the same age.

Allow me to dwell for a moment on this concept, which is called mutual education. This lithograph, produced around 1825, depicts a school scene in which pupils, supervised by a teacher, are taught according to the pedagogical approach known as mutual education. It is based on an idea by Alexandre-Étienne Choron (1771-1834) that initially goes back to Andrew Bell (1789) and Joseph Lancaster (1778-1838). Based on a hierarchical structure, advanced students teach less advanced students. This pedagogical approach was also applied to the first music school in the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. The school's founder, Henri-Joseph Cornély, had attended courses in Paris.² Could this principle have been applied only when IG was studying there?

¹ Guy Dangain, "Ida Gotkovsky", in: *Le journal de la cmf*, No. 532, October 2007, p. 4

² Damien Sagrillo, *Damien Sagrillo, Musikgeschichte Luxemburgs. Traditionen und Schnittstellen, Brüche und Wegmarken. Eine Studie in acht Stationen* (=Musik. Forschung und Wissenschaft, vol. 8), Berlin, Lit 2023, p. 229 sqq.



Jean-Henri Marlet, *Paintings of Paris*, 1825. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Prints department and photograph, RESERVE 4-ZF-122, view 157.

Ida Gotkovsky describes her teachers as 'hard', 'rigorous', even 'fierce'. They included such celebrities as Olivier Messiaen, who, according to her, played excerpts from "The Ring" and "Péléas" by heart on the piano, without speaking, as well as Nadia Boulanger, Noël Gallon, Georges Hogon, Tony Aubin and Alice Pelliot.

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Pedagogical works form the backbone of the assessment of music pupils and students and come at the end of a year of study or a school year. They provide composers with a welcome testing ground for larger-scale works, and are also sources of added value for the composer and publishing houses. Over the decades, works have been composed not only for school-leaving certificates but also for lower levels. Well-known publishing houses include, in alphabetical order, Gérard Billaudot, Durand-Eschig, Jobert, Alphonse Leduc, Robert Martin, Salabert and Transatlantiques. This list is far from exhaustive. In any case, this tradition of end-of-year competitions is typically French. Robert Martin and Billaudot, among others, published Ida Gotkovsky's pedagogical works.

The idea of end-of-year exams is older than the Paris Conservatoire. It can be traced back to the culture of music reading that has existed in Italy since the Middle Ages, or even the beginning of modern times, and which originates in solfeggio.³ Billaudot, Molenaar, Transatlantiques, Robert Martin und Salabert. It is challenging to classify Ida Gotkovsky's works solely based on their pedagogical value. Many of her works meet both pedagogical and artistic/concerting requirements.

In 2009, I published a list of Ida Gotkovsky's pedagogical works, which I drew up according to her own indications during my visits to her home in Perray. These works are also listed on the composer's website.⁴

1. Choral (wind instruments), 1970-1985, Robert Martin,
2. Mélodie (flute & piano), 1970-1985, Robert Martin,
3. Barcarolle (oboe & piano), 1970-1985, Robert Martin,
4. Chanson (clarinet & piano), 1970-1985, Robert Martin,
5. Allegro giocoso (bassoon & piano), 1970-1985, Robert Martin,
6. Ritournelle (trumpet & piano), 1970-1985, Robert Martin,
7. Romance (trombone & piano), 1970-1985, Robert Martin,
8. Baladins (tuba & piano), 1970-1985, Robert Martin,
9. Lied (trombone & piano), 1970-1985, Robert Martin,
10. Symphonie à la jeunesse (transcription for wind band), 1993.

To these ten works are added:

11. Dolcissimo for clarinet and piano, 1976, Billaudot
12. Incandescence for tenor saxophone, 2011, Résolutive

... as well as works which seem not to be listed in any catalogue, but in the BNF catalogue:

13. Concerto pour trompette et orchestre, 1973, Transatlantiques
14. Suite pour tuba et piano, 1959, Salabert, for the CNSMDP competition
15. Concerto pour clarinette et piano, 1968, Transatlantique, for the CNSMD competition.

This latter work must be different from the *lyric concerto for clarinet and wind orchestra* of 1979 with a piano reduction published in 1982.

(Incidentally: Ida Gotkovsky seems to prefer the term lyric because it is a much-appreciated addition to some of her works).

16. Concertino: for cornet or trumpet, 1961, Salabert, for the 1964 CNSMDP competition

... as well as works that are not in any catalogue but can be found on the Internet and on YouTube:

17. Variations concertantes pour basson et piano, Transatlantiques

³ Damien Sagrillo, "Solfège and Musical Sight Reading Skills in a European Context", in: Damien Sagrillo / Alain Nitschké / Friedhelm Brusniak (Eds.), *Leo Kestenberg und musikalische Bildung in Europa*. Weikersheim, Germany, Margraf 2016, 115-127p. 118 sqq.

⁴ Educational works: http://www.gotkovsky.com/textes_versionFR/txt_catalogue/oeuvres_pedagogiques.html

But what about other works written for the same period for similar formations, such as those that follow, or conceived for youth ensembles, such as the *Symphonie pour la jeunesse*, which is a large-scale work where only the title alludes to something pedagogical, as well as *Hommage à Jean de la Fontaine – Chantefables* for children's choir, mixed choir and large orchestra (1995)?

18. CHARACTERISTICS – Violin & Piano 1970, Chappel
19. RUSSIAN DANCE – Violin & Piano 1957, GI
20. SONATE – Violin & Piano 1976, GI
21. BRILLANCE – Saxophone & Piano 1974, Billaudot
22. SUITE FOR TEN INSTRUMENTS 1959, Billaudot
23. VARIATION POUR PIANO 1956, IG
24. DASVIDANIA (Accordions) 1962, Billaudot
25. EOLIENNE – Flute & Harp (or piano) -(Sax. and Clarinet poss.) 1970, Billaudot
26. PRELUDES POUR PIANO 1970, IG
27. CAPRICCIO POUR VIOLIN ET PIANO -Competition M.Long-Thibault 1981, Billaudot
28. QUATOR À CORDES 1955, IG
29. IMAGES DE NORVEGE – Clarinette & Piano 1977, Billaudot
30. TRIO D'ANCHES 1954, IG
31. TRIO POUR VIOLON, CLARINETTE & PIANO 1984, Billaudot
32. QUATUOR POUR SAXOPHONES 1983, Billaudot
33. INCANTATIONS LYRIQUES – Viola & Piano 1983, Billaudot
34. SONATE POUR CLARINETTE SOLO 1984, Molenaar
35. INVENTIONS – SAXOPHONE BARYTON 1970, IG
36. QUINTET TE DE CUIVRES 1993, IG
37. QUATUOR DE CLARINETTES 1998, IG
38. TRIO LYRIQUE – SAXOPHONE, PIANO, VIOLON 2004, Billaudot
39. QUINTETTE – PIANO, DEUX VIOLONS, ALTO, VIOLONCELLE 2005, IG

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