



# Jean Cras, Polymath of Music and Letters

Paul-André Bempéchat, Harvard University's Center for European Studies, USA



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Jean Cras (1879-1932) was a remarkable man by anyone's measure. Twice a decorated hero of the Great War, this Rear-Admiral of the French navy, scientist, inventor and moral philosopher, was also a highly esteemed composer during his lifetime, enjoying the same stature and celebrity as Fauré, Debussy and Ravel.

Since his death, however, both Cras and his music have been almost completely overlooked. In this, the first critical biography of Cras, Paul-André Bempéchat, an Affiliate at Harvard University's Center for European Studies, situates Henri Duparc's protégé as a missing link between the French post-Romantic generation of composers and the Impressionists. The book explores, both historically and analytically, the methodology by which Cras evolved his eclectic brand of Impressionism, striking the delicate balance between Celtic folk idioms and exoticisms inspired by his travels.

Cras' creative legacy extends beyond the world of music to the world of science. His five patented inventions include the navigational gyrocompass, which bears his name, still in use to this day by the French navy, coast guard and boating aficionados. Bempéchat draws special attention to the humanist Jean Cras and his distinguished military career - he is credited with saving the Serbian army from extinction - drawing on primary source material such as family correspondence and wartime diaries to reaffirm this composer as a true Renaissance man of the twentieth century.

## Contents

Introduction to an introduction; Part I The Life of Jean Cras: Background; Foreground; Dualities, pluralities, synthesis; Surviving Adoré Floupette: faith, art, character; Currents - countercurrents; Opus posthumous... Part II The Works: Struggle and Evolution: Feuille de route; Franckian engagement and disengagement: the early works (1899-1910); Individuation: Polyphème and the war years (1910-1922); The laboratory; A nod at the old sod...; Conclusion to an introduction...; Appendices; Bibliography; Index.

## About the Author

Paul-André Bempéchat studied at the Manhattan and Juilliard Schools of Music and the Sorbonne, where his mentors in piano and chamber music were Artur Balsam, Felix Galimir and Nadia Reisenberg; in musicology and comparative literature, Marie-Claire Beltrando-Patier, Pierre Brunel and Isabelle Cazeaux. A contributor to *The Revised New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, and to numerous academic and performing arts journals, Dr Bempéchat has enjoyed research and lecturing appointments at Harvard University, where he remains an Affiliate at its Center for European Studies, and at the Westminster College of the Arts of Rider University. Based in Boston and Paris, Paul-André Bempéchat sustains the career that has brought him to the Wiener Festwochen, the Caramoor Festival, Boston's Jordan Hall, and Berlin's Konzerthaus.

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