

GABRIEL FAURÉ (1845-1924)**Lydia**

Gabriel Fauré lived from 1845 until 1924, and composed more than a hundred songs, known as *Mémoires*, in sixty years. His style is not at all similar to that of his contemporaries, and the songs of his earlier period, including *Lydia*, have gentle melodic contours, with mostly flowing piano accompaniments. In this song the voice part and the accompaniment move in unison with each other.

The words are by the poet Leconte de Lisle, many of whose poems have exotic settings, and this is a love song, almost entirely quiet and calm. The lover describes his beloved's hair as "fluid gold" and calls her a goddess, and says that he is dying (but he doesn't mean physically dying - just as we today might say we are "carried away" by a feeling but not mean it literally). There is no sense of urgency or drama, and the piano part at the end floats away to nothing very smoothly.

The music contains several of Fauré's special compositional "fingerprints" (which characterise his songs throughout his career), including the use of triplets with tied notes, in which piano and voice move exactly together, and chromatic chords with augmented intervals, to heighten the emotional effect. Fauré's use of the Lydian mode, (all the white notes starting on F; a major scale with a raised 4th) which is often used for magical or dreamy music, is also a gentle musical pun on the subject of the song - *Lydia*.

So many love songs of today seem to make a lot of noise and turmoil, but this one is rather dreamy, with a conclusion (in the piano part) which might seem to suggest the feeling may go on for ever.

*Lydia sur tes roses joues
Et sur ton col frais et si blanc,
Que le lait, roule étincelant
L'or fluide que tu dénoues;*

*Le jour qui luit est le meilleur,
Oublions l'éternelle tombe.
Laisse tes baisers de colombe
Chanter sur ta lèvre en fleur.*

*Un lys caché répand sans cesse
Une odeur divine en ton sein;
Les délices comme un essaim
Sortent de toi, jeune déesse.*

*Je t'aime et meurs, ô mes amours.
Mon âme en baisers m'est ravie!
O Lydia, rends-moi la vie,
Que je puisse mourir toujours!*

Charles-Marie-René Leconte de Lisle (1818-1894)