

## JEAN FRANÇAIX : *CINQ DANSES EXOTIQUES*. A REFINED DIALOGUE BETWEEN SAXOPHONE AND PIANO

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**SUMMARY.** *Cinq danses exotiques* by Jean Françaix is a work of reference for the chamber music repertoire, underlining the value of the dialogue between saxophone and piano. The research aims to provide an in-depth analysis of this suite, with a special focus on piano accompaniment. Taking as a starting point the exploration of the French saxophone interpretation style and the detailed analysis of every dance (structure, melody, rhythm), the study enlarges the perspective by investigating the role of the piano. The piano transcends the main accompaniment function, becoming an equal partner in the musical dialogue. The technical and interpretative particularities of the piano sheet are analyzed through specific musical examples, to underline how the piano contributes to the atmosphere and the rendition of the melodic texture. Providing a balanced perspective on both the instruments, the research reveals the complexity and refinement of the composition *Cinq danses exotiques*, adding a new layer of meaning to the understanding of this French chamber music.

**Keywords:** French music, saxophone-piano dialogue, piano accompaniment, sound equilibrium.

### 1. Introduction

*Cinq danses exotiques* (*Five Exotic Dances*) by Jean Françaix is seen as a landmark work in the realm of French chamber music, a veritable tour de force that celebrates the virtuosity and expressive potential of both the saxophone and piano. Although the saxophone is usually perceived as a solo

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instrument, captivating the scene due to its unique timbre, *Cinq danses exotiques* reveals a much more nuanced relationship<sup>3</sup>. The piano accompaniment transcends the traditional role of harmonic support, proclaiming itself as an equal partner in the musical dialogue. Ingenuous textures, inciting rhythms, and a subtle harmonic palette are elements that confer the piano the status of a constituent of the exotic atmosphere enveloping the whole suite, while sustaining the melodic line of the saxophone and enriching the melodic discourse with distinct profundity.

### 1.1. French Style of Interpretation

It is sufficient to study French saxophone music sheets to understand that the musical aesthetics in France equals miniaturism. Let us observe the abounding articulations and the delicate legato in Jacques Ibert's *Concertino da camera*, the stance of the melody in Claude Debussy's *Rhapsody*, the finesse of expression in Marius Constant's *Concerto*, the phrasing and retained dynamic of the series of Betsy Jolas, the retained humor and slightly rough rhythms in *Danses exotiques* of Jean Françaix, or the timid romantic expression of Alfred Desenclos' *Prelude* to understand that the interpreter cannot display ostentatious virtuosity or exuberant expression.

This approach to interpretation comes naturally to the French, as they are guided by instincts in close connection with their musical education and rich cultural background. Thus, one can better understand why Japanese saxophonists apply ample, generous, and open sonority to their interpretation of Yoshimatu or Noda, Americans often adopt strong, ample, and exaggerated interpretation to play Maslanka, Dahl, or Husa, and the Spanish infuse elegant, classy, and sensual interpretation to play De Falla or Albeniz<sup>4</sup>.

The French saxophonist plays with a certain coyness and may be distinguished due to the use of a vast palette of dynamics, and discrete and nuanced interpretation, accompanied by a complete clarity of articulation and absolute respect for the text, a round and sustained sonority, and style and interpretation balanced by a discrete humor<sup>5</sup>. Many other typical national parameters can be added to this description, as shown further on. The French musician's demeanor is often an introverted presence, resulting in a relationship with the scene that seems loaded with modesty, even pudic, meandering to an austere concerto attitude, anyhow, one less colorful than the presence of their Nordic neighbors or of the Americans.

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<sup>3</sup> Potter, Caroline. *French Music Since 1900*, Ashgate Publishing, 2000, pp 56.

<sup>4</sup> Delage, Jean-Louis, *Adolphe Sax et le saxophone : 150 ans d'histoire*, Josette, Lyon, Paris, 1992, pp. 103.

<sup>5</sup> Ingham, Richard. *The Cambridge Companion to the Saxophone*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 34.

## 1.2. Vibrato and Sound

It was common among instrumentalists in 1845 that saxophonists' playing sounded something like "waa-waa", an onomatopoeia evoking a sound similar to a *vibrato* of the first musicians. Regardless, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the saxophone was played with a linear sound, like the clarinet, until Marcel Mule invented his classical *vibrato*, integrated it into the concerto, and then taught it to his numerous pupils and students. He was completely preoccupied with the vibrating sound. Let us remember that, as they were also violinists, Mule and his successor, Daniel Deffayet, were placed in the appropriate place to use the chord instruments as a model (for sonority and *vibrato*).

The use of vibrato would not have left Adolphe Sax, who invented a vocal and warm instrument (the alto saxophone in C went down to the lowest A and went up to the highest G to double the viola in the orchestra), indifferent.

The vibrato obsession has been part of the French school for decades, starting from the moment musicality became intertwined with vibration. If natural expression is the goal, reflection becomes, instead, a means to refine interpretation<sup>6</sup>.

*Vibrato* is precisely as "slap" or playing in the high register. Mule insisted on mechanical practice of vibration, metronomic, even, while controlling the amplitude. Today, discussions are underway about its use in the musical context and various techniques, including pitch vibrato achieved through jaw movement, intensity vibrato achieved through breath, and a combination of the two. There is also a *vibrato* involving movement of the tongue near the lip, as well as another produced in the throat, which is quite difficult to explain.

It is a genuine concern for students, and sometimes even for professionals, who are trying to find the right *vibrato* and the appropriate expression. In other places, saxophonists tend to ask themselves fewer questions, which simplifies the playing practice, but this approach does not offer many alternatives for musical choice.

*Vibrato* certainly is beautiful, but it is also, very often, systematic. Other orchestra musicians have long criticized the "French saxophonist": "he vibrates like a saxophonist" or "the vibrato didn't bother me: it's just a saxophone."

The "French" sound characterizes the warmth and homogeneity Marcel Mule conferred to interpretation; "beau chant" (beautiful song) is the expression for it – a sonority that would influence Fred Hemke and Eugene Rousseau (USA), Yvan Roth (Switzerland), Jules de Vries (Sweden), Arata Sakagushi (Japan), etc.

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<sup>6</sup> Londeix, J. Marie, Ronkin, Bruce, *Comprehensive Guide to Saxophone*, Northeastern Music, 2003, pp. 75.

For a long time, the sonority was referred to as a monotimbral sound “in the French style” - neat, round, and clear, at the same time, and particularly well-suited for orchestral performance (due to the musicians of the Republican Guard Orchestra who were invited to play with the great symphonic orchestras). The National Conservatory of Paris, with Mule, Deffayet, and their students, will become the leading proponents of this sound technique: “the French touch”. The distinct French sound can be identified when listening to a CD, because it is characterized by a balanced interpretation that avoids emphasis. The recording itself is quite matte, with great definition. This reflects a refinement of the French-style expression, a “mirror” of the French spirit, already evoked by composers such as Rameau or Ravel.

Starting with the twenty-first century, it appears that a standardized type of French vibrato sound is gradually being left behind. Serge Bichon, an honorary professor at the National Conservatory of the Region of Lyon, launched a new type of sonority which is very centered, with strong air pressure and rich in harmonics, bringing a balanced and seductive color to the classical instrument. This new mindset has extended to many of his students, including Claude Delangle, shaping the new generation emerging from the benches of the National Conservatory.

In a concert performance, “fine” sounds often get lost amidst the orchestral mass due to their reduced decibel amplitude. Let us recall, for example, the struggles of the French finalists, who found themselves disadvantaged by their sound qualities in Franck Martin’s *Ballade* at the Dinant competition or in *Scaranouche* in Geneva. Conversely, artists like Daniel Kientzy propose a new approach to sound, since perfect mastery of phrasing, intervals, and vibrato is no longer enough to produce a compelling interpretation of works such as Berio’s *Sequenza* or Lauba’s *Studies*.

The aesthetic intentions of the composer must, indeed, be considered, as the sound is no longer placed at the center of the creative process. The current ideal of the French school is still defined by a full and rich sound, that is homogeneous in all registers and all nuances, balanced in the *détaché* or *legato* interpretation. This sound, historically linked to the timbre of the Selmer Mark VI saxophone, requires a fairly closed mouthpiece/beak, with a medium chamber, as well as the use of hard reeds. This conception on sound, which only suits a part of the contemporary French performers, hardly finds a repertoire that lives up to its hopes and quality. The “glorious” French saxophone school is sometimes illustrated by a more careful than committed interpretation, due to a troubling tendency towards an “egocentrism of sound” and an artistic approach that disappoints because it is reductive, a tendency that reverberates in Asia, where, erroneously, beautiful sound is too systematically associated with musicality.

### 1.3. French Saxophone Music (1920-1975)

French music is crossing an extremely animated period. The saxophone will be deeply involved in all the artistic upheaval.

On the one hand, there are the followers of the Debussy spirit: Charles Koechlin, Florent Schmitt, and others, like Jean Cras, who are indifferent to the attractions of success and fashion. There is also the spirit of the Roaring Twenties, with the frivolity of the "Group of Six", which breaks up with romanticism and impressionism. Among them, Darius Milhaud and Arthur Honegger are true promoters of the saxophone. Francis Poulenc, unfortunately, will not write a single note for the instrument. The neoclassical music of "the six" develops a French language that is also embraced by academic composers who graduated from the Paris Conservatory, often laureates of the Prix de Rome. Within the movement created by "the six", one can also find independent groups and composers, such as Jean Françaix, Jacques Ibert, Jean Rivier, and Georges Migot, all of whom are attached to a certain French tradition. Concerts are organized at the Triton, a place for broadcasting contemporary music, where Darius Milhaud, Henri Tomasi, Jean Rivier, etc. can be heard. At the same time, other musicians, such as Paul Bonneau or Manuel Rosenthal, opt for lighter music. The Arcueil School, formed around Erik Satié, professed a music 'of simplicity', mainly through Henri Sauguet. Another group, "The Paris School", was represented by Parisian composers of foreign origin, such as the Romanian Marcel Mihalovici. The "Young France" group manifested a new 'musical humanism' in the face of the casualness of "the six" and the abstractionism of Schoenberg, especially through André Jolivet, who showed a spiritual and incantatory aspiration, using modes, and through the brilliant Olivier Messiaen, who brings a colorful, rhythmic, very modal language and passion about the Catholic religion. The latter would not write for the saxophone, a symbol of 'paganism', the instrument of the warm and sensual nights of cabarets. However, had he not been so caught up in writing his work, Saint Francis of Assisi, maybe he would have agreed to write something.

Two independent personalities, who would strongly mark the second half of the 20th century, must be mentioned here: firstly, Pierre Boulez, head of school, initiated into Webern's serial music by René Leibowitz; secondly, Henri Dutilleul, a symphonist with a very personal language, using a refined, flexible, dense, and complex writing.

Although he was familiar with the saxophone, thanks to his orchestral conducting, P. Boulez would not write for saxophonists because the instrument evoked too much of the vaudeville and jazz to him. At the Paris Conservatory, he would not be close to the saxophonists of M. Mule's 'marginal' class. The

saxophone did not really seduce Dutilleux either, a composer who was more attached to 'miniature' sounds than to rich harmonics<sup>7</sup>.

The Paris Conservatory is a significant hub for compositions that feature the saxophone. The number of composers who studied under Nadia Boulanger, as well as Olivier Messiaen, Darius Milhaud, Paul Dukas, and André Jolivet, is impressive, and highlights the profound influence these teachers had on the development and recognition of the saxophone in contemporary music.

#### **1.4. Piano Accompaniment and the Relationship between Piano and Saxophone**

The period between 1920 and 1975 is characterized by a vibrant creativity in French music, marked by a transition from post-impressionism and neoclassicism to jazz influences, and later to an interest in avant-garde. In this context, the role of piano accompaniment acquires a series of distinct functions and aesthetic valences, going beyond the simple dimension of harmonic and rhythmic support and becoming an expressive and timbral partner of great importance. Additionally, the piano accompaniment intersects significantly with the emergence of the saxophone as a prominent instrument in concert and chamber music, fostering a complementary relationship between the two timbres.

Following the legacy of Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel, French piano writing entered a stage of balance and clarity. If Impressionism favored colors, subtle nuances, and harmonic ambiguity, the following generations (especially the *Les Six* group) strive for a more transparent expression, often having a playful or ironic-satirical character.

In the French lied (*mélodie*), the piano becomes an active participant in the construction of musical expression, shaping the atmosphere, character, and dramatic tensions. Compared to the German lied tradition, where, as in Schumann or Brahms, the accompaniment has an important narrative role, in France, the piano retains a more colorful, refined tone, intended to enhance the subtlety of the poetic text.

Francis Poulenc stands out as a pinnacle of the art of piano accompaniment in the interwar and postwar period. His *Mélodies* are a landmark, as the piano becomes an equal of the human voice, developing a rich, and deeply lyrical texture.

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<sup>7</sup> Howell, Charles. *French Interpretive Practice, A Performer's Guide to Music of the Classical Period*, edited by Burton Karson, 2nd ed., pp. 239-258. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002, pp.137.

Darius Milhaud and Arthur Honegger, two members of the *Les Six* group, propose an accompaniment of neoclassical inspiration, which is often playful, with rhythmic and harmonic influences from American jazz.

Olivier Messiaen has a unique manner of approach for the piano, based on timbral palettes and modes of his own (modes with limited transposition); in chamber works, the piano no longer remains secondary, but becomes a sonorous axis.

Composers such as Henri Sauguet or Jean Françaix developed an elegant and clear accompaniment, representative of the French style of the second half of the 20th century.

### **1.5. Saxophone and Piano in the French Repertoire of the Century**

The saxophone, an instrument introduced relatively recently to the academic tradition, finds in France a fertile space for consecration, due to the school founded at the Paris Conservatory by Marcel Mule. Between 1920 and 1975, numerous composers wrote chamber works for saxophone and piano, thus consolidating the concert repertoire. In this context, the piano is not a mere accompaniment, but an instrument that dialogues on an equal footing with the saxophone.

In Francis Poulenc's *Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano* (1962), the piano is indispensable to the dramatic construction: with sudden register contrasts, character changes, and harmonic density, the piano score amplifies the saxophone's expressiveness, establishing a true chamber music partnership.

Jacques Ibert, Jeanine Rueff, and Pierre-Max Dubois make a considerable contribution via their compositions. In these works, the piano not only provides the harmonic foundation but also introduces elements of virtuosity and dialogue, thus creating a relationship of timbral complementarity with the saxophone.

The French repertoire for saxophone and piano from the post-war period has been characterized by an equilibrium between the supporting function and the concerto role of the piano, which often becomes the partner of choice in this chamber music configuration.

In French music between 1920 and 1975, the piano accompaniment reflected the aesthetic transformations of the epoch: formal clarity, coloristic refinement, and a subtle relationship between the supporting function and that of equal partnership. If the piano consolidated its status as an expressive and narrative instrument in melody, in the repertoire for saxophone and piano it contributed to the affirmation of the saxophone as an academic recital instrument. The piano-saxophone relationship, as it appears in the works of Poulenc, Ibert, or Rueff, confirms the tendency of French music to privilege chamber dialogue, timbral refinement, and expressive balance.

## 2. Cinq danses exotiques – Jean Françaix

French neoclassical pianist and composer, Jean Françaix studied music from a young age, first at the Le Mans Conservatory, then at the Paris Conservatory (1926), where he had Isidore Philipp as his piano teacher. Although he had a significant accompanist experience throughout France, his main activity was composition, despite the fact that, at the age of 20, in 1932, he would publicly present a symphony that would spark a wave of protests. After this, with great technical mastery, with much grace and often with humor, he outlined instrumental, symphonic, concert music and numerous ballets, some of which were represented at the Paris Opera.

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He writes scores full of vitality for chamber music, typically featuring a relatively short number of movements and a preference for fast tempos (*String Trio*, 1933). With the comic opera *Diable boiteux* (Devil's Boxes) from 1938, he also ventured into lyrical theater and later, in 1953, into film music, collaborating particularly with Sacha Guitry.

Initially composed as an eight-part piece for two pianos (1957), *Cinq danses exotiques* was revised and remodeled as a composition for saxophone and piano, with a pentastrophic structure.

Originally composed as an eight-part piece for two pianos (1957), *Cinq danses exotiques* was later revised and restructured as a composition for saxophone and piano, with a pentastrophic structure.

Taking the form of a dance suite, *Cinq danses exotiques* by Jean Françaix features five “exotic” dances, influenced by Latin American music. The sequence of articulations to be analyzed here includes: Pambiche, Baiao, Mambo, Samba lenta, and Merengue. These subtitles evoke the image of a Latin dance parade, where Jean Françaix employs a wide palette of rhythms derived from the Latin dance forms. Some of these rhythms can be really challenging to grasp, but the repetitive nature of the music ensures that the sound material becomes ingrained in our minds<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Whittall, Arnold. *Musical Composition in the Twentieth Century*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 97.



The most obvious feature of this articulation, at a macro level, is the repetitive dance rhythm. The rhythm dominates each movement, often sending the melody to the background. The differences created at a global level remain on the same metric and rhythmic trajectory, incorporated from one movement to the next.

The rhythmic consistency of the accompaniment resolves the ensemble of two instruments, making it unitary in four of the five movements. The fourth articulation, *Samba lenta*, may present some technical challenges, because of the 5/8 metric that will be subdivided into 3/8 and 2/8 in the saxophone score; in contrast, the piano score is clearly delimited by the composer as having two equal metric subdivisions of 5/16, a fact that can lead towards a lack of precision in the attack of the ensemble of the musical discourse.

In *Cinq danses exotiques*, the piano accompaniment is not just a simple harmonic and rhythmic support, but an equal partner for the saxophone, actively contributing to the exotic atmosphere and supporting the melodic line.

Jean Françaix's *Cinq danses exotiques* reveals a complex interaction between saxophone and piano. The piano accompaniment goes beyond the traditional function of harmonic and rhythmic support; the piano becomes an essential element in creating an exotic atmosphere and supporting the melodic line. Through various textures, the piano enriches the musical dialogue with unique depth.

The pianist must be a versatile musician, able to approach a variety of styles and techniques, from the staccato rhythms of *pambiche* to the complex syncopations of *baiao* and the melancholic lyricism of *samba lenta*.

## 2.1. *Pambiche*

The term “*pambiche*” has its origin in a variant of the merengue dance, known for its slightly slower and more danceable rhythm (Grove, 1954). Formally, the piece has a lied structure and follows this scheme:

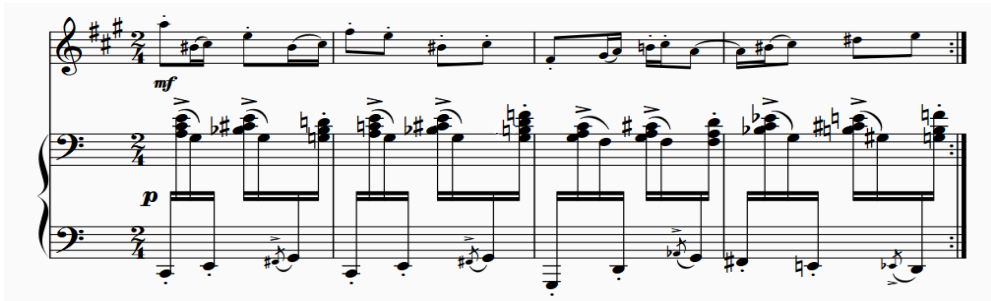
Figure 1

A		B		A <sub>1</sub>			Coda
a	a'	b	b'	a <sub>1</sub>	a <sub>1</sub> '	a	
m. 1-4	5-8	9-12	13-16	17-20	21-24	25-28	29-36

*Pambiche* structure

The tonal center belongs to the key of C Major, and the first movement (A) presents a melody dominated by leaps combined with scalar expositions, all of which are subject to accents and staccato techniques.

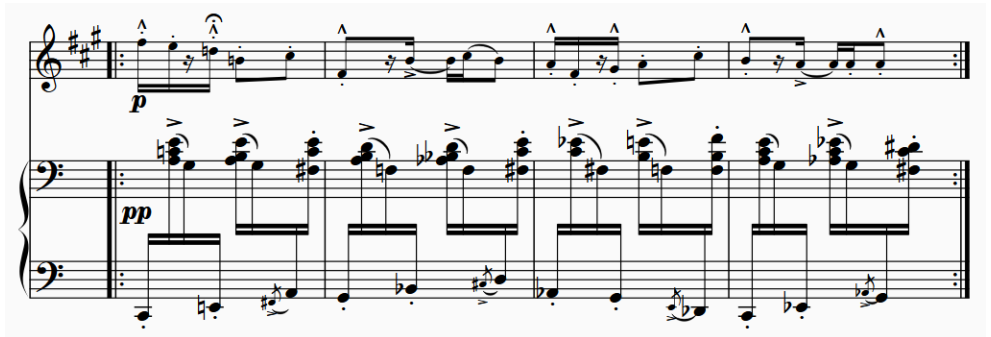
**E.g. 1**



**Jean Françaix, Cinq danses exotiques, Pambiche “, bars 1-4**

The phrase a’ has a descending melodic path, with a rhythmic peculiarity – sequential treatment.

**E.g. 2**



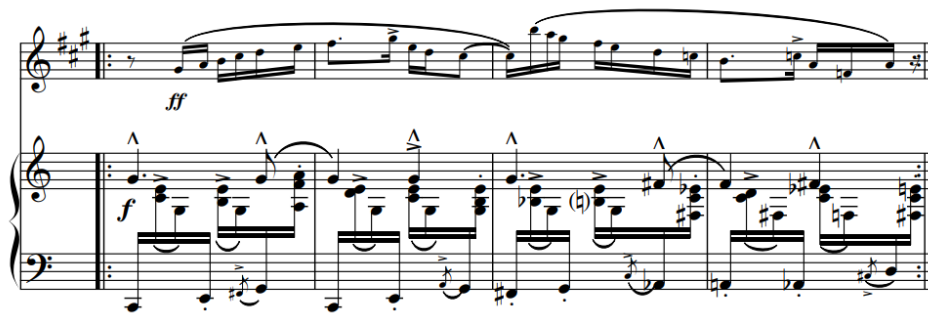
**Jean Françaix, Cinq danses exotiques, Pambiche, bars 5-8**

From an interpretive standpoint, the difference in intensity between the two phrases must be emphasized, achieved through good support of the air column, but also the numerous accents and staccato articulations executed in a uniform manner. Strict adherence to these elements, integrated into the designated risoluto tempo, will emphasize the dance-like character of the piece.

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The middle segment (B) approaches a contrast at the tonal level, falling within the sphere of the dominant (G M), with a graphic representation dominated by *legato*, preserving the same accents typical of the pambiche dance. The phrase b' has a predominantly scalar structure, with partially equal rhythm, making thus visible the thematic contrast between the distinct segments A B.

E.g. 3



Jean Françaix, *Cinq danses exotiques*, *Pambiche*, bars 13-16

The return of the initial thematic material (A1) is based on the same principles of writing, rhythm, and melodic trajectory, with the differentiation imposed at the tonal level - A B Major, the segment being able to be considered as a variation of the initial articulation A.

The transition from fortissimo to piano subito (bars 13-20), but also the legato in which the musical discourse in this part unfolds, raises the problem of sustaining the performer, who thinks a continuous “iuuuuu” while singing. Only in this way will he manage to maintain the vivid color of the sonority in both nuances.

The Coda of articulation retains the same character of rhythm and vivacity. A novelty with a cadential character is the presence of the trill as a sound effect, resolved, evidently, ascending. The way of completing this articulation is surprising by using dynamics as a key element, in decrescendo, up to *ppp*, contrary to the melodic sense. Thus, the melodic line has the appearance of the chaining of the initial tonal scale (Do M), with a chromatic completion of the last exposed tetrachord.

Technically speaking, the most important ingredient in shaping this first dance is the accent, present in almost every bar, in asymmetrical combinations. For a notable interpretation, strict observance of these features is required, even if the melody's development register often makes this difficult. In bars 32 and 33, the note B in the low register can also be articulated with the fingers, and, in this way, the performer gains a plus of certainty in obtaining the articulation with the noted accent.

## E.g. 4

musical score for piano accompaniment, featuring a rhythmic ostinato in the left hand and a melodic line in the right hand. Dynamics include *f*, *mf*, *pp*, and *ppp*. The piece concludes with a *dim.* marking.

Jean Françaix, *Cinq danses exotiques, Pambiche*, bars 29-36

### 2.1.1. Particularities of the Piano Accompaniment in *Pambiche*

In *Pambiche*, the piano introduces the characteristic rhythm with a simple but effective ostinato.

Staccato chords in the low register create a steady pulse, while chords in the high register add exotic color. In this example, the piano presents the rhythmic ostinato that will define the entire movement. The left hand plays staccato chords on beats 1 and 3, while the right hand adds chords on beats 2 and 4, creating a subtle syncopated effect.

## E.g. 5

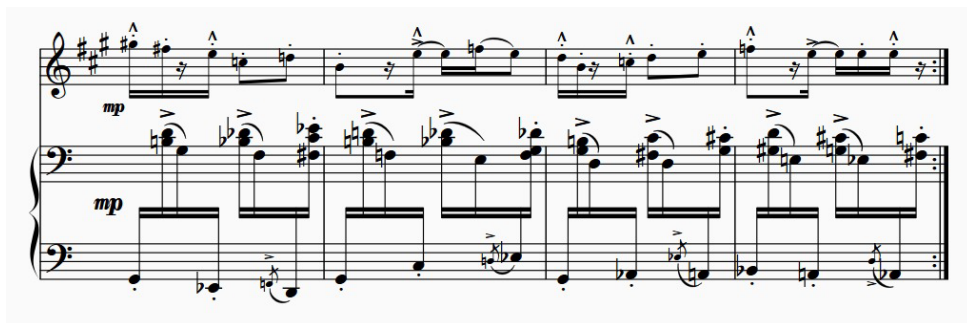
musical score for piano accompaniment, featuring a rhythmic ostinato in the left hand and a melodic line in the right hand. Dynamics include *mf* and *p*. The piece concludes with a repeat sign.

Jean Françaix, *Cinq danses exotiques, Pambiche*, bars 13-16

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In contrast with the initial ostinato, bars 21 to 24 feature an airy piano accompaniment that employs an imitative pattern between the two hands, creating a subtle dialogue with the saxophone.

**E.g. 6**



**Jean Françaix, „Cinq danses exotiques”, bars 21-24**

In the Coda (bars. 29-32), the piano accompaniment reintroduces the initial rhythmic ostinato, the gradual dynamic diminution emphasizing the feeling of completion.

**E.g. 7**

**Jean Françaix, *Cinq danses exotiques*, Pambiche, bars 29-32**

This ostinato gives energy and dynamism to the entire movement by its simplicity.

Among the technical difficulties could be maintaining a constant tempo and a balance between registers, and, with the title of suggestion for interpretation, the use of clear and precise articulation to highlight the rhythm.

In section A, the saxophone takes over the main melody, and the piano accompanies it discreetly, sustaining the rhythm and harmony. In section B, the roles are partially reversed, the saxophone having an ornamental role, while the piano takes over a more prominent melodic line.

By supporting the melodic line of the saxophone with an incisive rhythmic ostinato, the piano accompaniment contributes to defining the energetic and festive character of the *Pambiche*.

## 2.2. Baiao

The next articulation, *Baiao*, comes from a rhythmic formula originating in northeastern Brazil, which has become the foundation for a vast musical category. It has a major influence on modern Brazilian music, precisely because of its long history. The representative instrument that depicts this musical spirit is the zabumba, in A flat, which is a double-exposed drum, on which the instrumentalist will perform with a wooden mallet to produce a low sound and, respectively, a stick, to intone a sharp, acute sound. The result is a syncopated rhythm in 2/4 measure. The traditional baiao melody is based on a Lydian mode with a lowered seventh.

The composer employs these fundamental principles of baiao rhythms through the syncopated accompaniment from the piano, by differentiating the registers of low and high sounds (right and left hand). Another argument for the melodic origin of baiao could be certain modal insertions – the presence of F sharp, implicitly, the Lydian fourth, in the tonal melodic development centered on the C minor tonality. These modal chromatics only interrupt or distract attention from the monotony of the repetitive melody that will experience, during the thematic exposition, few variations in structure.

From a formal point of view, the articulation has a classical-romantic structure: strophic chain A A1 A2 Coda (rather, a codetta, having small size).

The first movement (A) has a classical structure – a double period pattern (a a'), differentiated through the accompaniment register, and an internal expansion (bars 15-16).

The main motif has a bicellular composition (t1 t2), with cells that will be processed sequentially, and unitary– in the form of the entire motif, or singularly, as one cell.



Jean Françaix, *Cinq danses exotiques, Baiao, bars 1-7*

As can be seen, the cellular treatment is melodically different: the first ( $t_1$ ) in the form of an ascending-descending minor third, the second ( $t_2$ ) taking the trajectory of a scalar march on triplets.

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The middle section ( $A_1$ ) induces a new breath through the tonality of the major relative (E b Major), although it preserves the line of action of the initial motif (with small temporal variations). It is worth mentioning that it is not completed by the double period; it contains only 8 measures.

In these sections ( $A$  și  $A_1$ ), the performer will follow the flow of the melody by correctly directing the air column according to the nuance, without fluctuations in intensity when changing positions or registers. The simple rhythm, made up of seconds, quarters and eighths, frames a pleasant, light, suave melodic line, very well characterized by the composer's indication – *con morbidezza* – softly.

The moment of technical and interpretative virtuosity is capitalized on in the last section ( $A_2$ ), in which, by changing the thematic exposition from one instrument to another, the saxophone will perform through the key elements of the baiao rhythm, trying to fill in all the aforementioned components: the differentiation of registers through low and high sounds, chromatics related to the modal side of the baiao melody and, of course, multiple appoggiatura in

combinations with accents and staccato articulations. The piano score will intonate the main motif in octaves, leaving the soloist to perform as countermelody.

The difficulty of this part lies in the large and very large intervals that define the sound material of the saxophone. The articulations of *staccato* are carried out in minor nuances; thus, the low notes also require finger attack for a clear sonority, and the appoggiatura (groups) have the indication *rapido* and will be executed clearly, precisely, evenly, and perfectly integrated into the rhythm.

### E.g 9

The musical score for Jean Françaix's 'Cinq danses exotiques, Baiao' (bars 25-31) is presented in two systems. The top system shows the first two measures, and the bottom system shows the next four measures. The piano accompaniment is characterized by octaves in the right hand and chords in the left hand, with triplets indicated by a '3' over a bracket. The saxophone part features staccato notes and appoggiaturas marked with an accent (^). The tempo is marked 'pp' (pianissimo) and 'rapido'.

### Jean Françaix, *Cinq danses exotiques, Baiao*, bars 25-31

The coda is a graphic representation of the basic rhythmic formula of the baiao, along the accompaniment line; the soloist concludes statically, through sustained sounds, the spontaneous modulation towards the homonymous (C Major), all on a decreasing intensity (*ppp*).

The last note – C – requires a helping position with the 4th finger of the left hand, or other combinations, depending on the instrument. These fingerings are indicated to maintain the same register throughout the musical phrase, but also to support the diminuendo towards *ppp*.



### 2.2.1. Particularities of the Piano Accompaniment in *Baiao*

In contrast to *Pambiche*, the piano accompaniment in **Baiao** is distinguished by its increased rhythmic and harmonic complexity, as well as by its greater virtuosity.

Frequent syncopations and the use of modal elements give the accompaniment an exciting and exotic character. In the following example, the piano presents the syncopated rhythm characteristic of the Baiao style. The left hand plays an ostinato bass, while the right hand adds syncopated chords and modal ornaments.

E.g. 10

The musical score for 'Baiao' by Jean Françaix is presented in two systems. The first system (bars 1-4) shows a treble staff with a melodic line featuring a triplet of eighth notes and a half note, and a bass staff with a syncopated bass line. The second system (bars 5-7) continues the melodic and rhythmic patterns, with the right hand playing syncopated chords and the left hand maintaining the ostinato bass. The score is marked with 'p' for piano and includes various musical notations such as slurs, triplets, and accents.

Jean Françaix, *Cinq danses exotiques*, *Baiao*, bars 1-7

In contrast to the predominant rhythmic role, measures 17-20 present the piano accompaniment taking over melodic elements and initiating an imitative dialogue with the saxophone.

## E.g. 11

musical score for E.g. 11, showing a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The tempo/mood is *poco più f*. The piano part features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and sixteenth notes, with a triplet of eighth notes in the final measure.

Jean Françaix, *Cinq danses exotiques, Baiao*, bars 17-20

In bars 25 to 31, the piano accompaniment uses a complex harmonic palette, abounding in chromatics and dissonances meant to intensify the dramatic tension and emphasize the virtuosity of the passage.

## E.g. 12

musical score for E.g. 12, showing a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The tempo/mood is *pp* and *rapido*. The piano part features a complex harmonic palette with chromatics and dissonances, including triplets of eighth notes in the final measure.

Jean Françaix, *Cinq danses exotiques, Baiao*, bars 25-31

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Among technical difficulties, great attention should be paid to rhythmic coordination and precision in the execution of chords. It is also recommended to use varied dynamics, emphasizing specific rhythms to create a swing effect.

In Baiao, the dialogue between saxophone and piano becomes more intense and dynamic. Both instruments assume equal roles, creating a perfect balance between melody and accompaniment.

Through rhythmic and harmonic complexity, the piano accompaniment contributes to creating an exciting and exotic character of Baiao, complementing the virtuosity of the saxophone.

### 2.3. Mambo

Mambo is a derivative of the Cuban dance of rumba, and with the passing of time, it became, like rumba, a ballroom dance for couples, acquiring elements of swing or other jazz styles. In another context, mambo could have the meaning of “conversations with the gods” and designated as a sacred song.

This movement is dominated by a single melodic motif of modal texture (minor hexachord), which undergoes continuous variation through modulations, the abundance of chromatics leading to tonal dissolution, dynamic contrasts, and changes in articulation. The accompaniment has a repetitive form, closely following the thematic exposition, being subordinated to its melodic-harmonic path.

The fundamental feature of the main motive is the rhythmic ostinato, but also the element of melodic oscillation conferred by the scalar progression, which will subsequently increase to the level of a third.

E.g. 13

The musical score for 'Mambo' (bars 1-4) is presented in a two-staff format. The top staff is for the saxophone, and the bottom staff is for the piano. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major), and the time signature is 2/4. The piano part features a repetitive rhythmic pattern in the right hand, with the instruction 'sempre stacc.' (always staccato) written above the bass line. The saxophone part has a melodic line with chromaticism, starting with a piano (p) dynamic marking.

Jean Françaix, *Cinq danses exotiques*, Mambo, bars 1-4

The formal structure of this articulation is based on the variational principle, taking the form of a strophic chain with a return to the initial stanza.

**Figure 2**

A    A<sub>1</sub>    A<sub>2</sub>    A<sub>1</sub>    A<sub>v</sub>    Coda

### ***Mambo – structure***

Section A is the structural pattern of the concentration of the main motive, with its slightly varied repetition (bars 1 to 8). A<sub>1</sub> does not draw major changes at the formal level, preserving the melodic outline of the previous stanza. The only contrast is at the tonal level.

As can be seen, the form is circular, with a median axis (A<sub>2</sub>) that shares a common factor with the culmination point of the section, the melodic area with the most diversified chromatic abundance, which, through motivic sequencing and intervallic parallelisms, reaches a high degree of abandoning tonality.

It is an example of a sound conglomerate where the outer voices have an accentuated chromatic load, due to overlapping chromaticism, and in the opposite direction to each other; added to this, to the middle voice, included in the chordal figurations, is a reversed chromatic formula.

**E.g. 14**



### **Jean Françaix, *Cinq danses exotiques*, Mambo, bars 25-26**

Next, section A<sub>1</sub> benefits from the same qualities of the rhythmic and melodic structure. In return, a contrast of articulation will receive the return of the initial motif in section A<sub>v</sub>, through the adoption of the counter-time in the thematic exposition, later of syncopation, all leading to the idea of variety, creating an element of surprise in the monotonous development dominated by rhythmic ostinato.

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E.g. 15

Jean Françaix, *Cinq danses exotiques, Mambo*, bars 45-50

The coda has a two-phase structure, with a new, freer variant of the main motif. The second phase of the coda is surprising, as the scalar structure is taken over by the initial motif, but, especially due to its subsequent solving, through successions of octaves in leaps, based on the three integral sounds of the core motif: D – E double flat - C sharp – D.

E.g. 16

Jean Françaix, *Cinq danses exotiques, Mambo*, bars 61-64

The entire section raises problems of interpretation dynamics, requiring the creation of crescendo and decrescendo games, notated by the composer in a surprising way (m. 21, 22, 28, 29, 44, 45, 52, 53). In addition, the soloist will strive to attain rhythmic clarity, equality between registers, and brief articulation to highlight the dancing and optimistic atmosphere.

To be noted are the breaths that will closely follow the musing, paying attention not to fragment the musical canvas, which is made up of simple rhythmic combinations of eighths and fourths, in organized nuances from *ppp* to *mf*.

To achieve fluency, but also for register stability, it is advisable to use the C2 position as often as possible for the D note in the middle register, instead of the classical one. An exception to this suggestion is measure 49, where, due to the very low intensity – *ppp* – the note D in the C2 position would generate a dull, faded sound, which is inappropriate in this situation.

The end of the dance is traced with the help of the same syncopated rhythmic formulas, arranged differently this time, in octave intervals, which extends the ambitus up to the E-flat in the superacute. The coloration of the phrase is also enhanced by the reversed proportionality of the arrangement of nuances in relation to the melodic progression, from *mf* to *ppp*; the intensity must be maintained uniformly for two more measures, until the end of the part. Technically speaking, this is quite difficult because it requires tremendous breath control to sustain the notes in the superacute uniformly, evenly, clearly, and neatly.

### 2.3.1. Particularities of the Piano Accompaniment in *Mambo*

The piano accompaniment in “Mambo” discreetly supports harmony and rhythm, creating a solid foundation for the thematic exposure of the saxophone. However, the piano contributes to generating the mysterious and sensual mambo atmosphere using chromatic chords and syncopated rhythms.

The example below presents a repetitive accompaniment for the piano, based on chromatic chords and syncopated rhythms. The left hand plays an ostinato bass, while the right hand adds chromatic chords that create an effect of tension and mystery.

E.g. 17

Jean Françaix, *Cinq danses exotiques, Mambo*, bars 1-4

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In bars 25 to 28, the piano accompaniment presents a repetitive harmonic structure, amplified by a dynamic crescendo, generating tension and anticipation.

Rhythmically, bars 25 to 28 are characterized by an ostinato pattern composed of eighth and fourth notes, the piano accompaniment generating a constant pulse that supports the melodic discourse of the saxophone.

**E.g. 18**



**Jean Françaix, *Cinq danses exotiques*, Mambo bars 25-28**

In bars 53 to 56, the piano accompaniment introduces an element of surprise through the use of syncopated chords in the high register, creating a rhythmic contrast with the saxophone's melodic line.

**E.g. 19**



**Jean Françaix, *Cinq danses exotiques*, Mambo, bars 53-56**

Maintaining a constant tempo, precision in the execution of chromatic chords is some of the technical difficulties of this part.

The use of subtle dynamic contrasts, emphasis on chords, and the syncopated rhythms employed to create an effect of mystery and sensuality will reproduce the atmosphere desired by the composer.

## 2.4. Samba lenta

The samba dance originates from the Afro-Brazilian couple dance, which is currently being reevaluated, within the Rio de Janeiro Carnival. The traditional quadrant of this dance is based on a binary metric structure, with melody and accompaniment that benefits from a rhythmic variety dominated by syncopations.

Jean Françaix's vision departs from the proper samba dance, through the imposed, much slower agogic, written in a combined composite measure of 5/8, subdivided by the composer into 3+2.

At the formal structural level, there is a classical-romantic lied pattern (A B A), in which the middle section (B) processes the same melodic material from the initial stanza, but in the tonality of the subdominant, with developments at thematic, harmonic level (which determines its possible status as a separate section).

The melody is predominantly scalar, with modal influences. The modal aspect is particularly prominent in the accompaniment score, overflowing with chordal figurations and rich chromatic ornamentation. A particularity of the modal representation in execution is the major-minor polarity of the consecutively chained chords, which results in the formation of diminished chords, but also in tonal ambiguity.

E.g. 20

*Tranquillo* (♩ = 144)  
*p cantabile e teneramente*  
*pp*

Jean Françaix, *Cinq danses exotiques*, *Samba lenta*, bars 1-3



JEAN FRANÇAIX : CINQ DANSES EXOTIQUES.  
A REFINED DIALOGUE BETWEEN SAXOPHONE AND PIANO

The principal motif presented here (see the previous example) is based on a major scale hexachord; having a scalar representation, ascendant and descendant, with asymmetrical rhythm, but with a slow, tranquillo, indication by the composer, one can formulate a presumption of an imitation of the Brazilian couple dance and the feelings that are attached to it: the game of attraction and seduction.

Throughout this articulation, the language elements are contained within the same limits, as repetitive structures; the interest is maintained through a few harmonic artifices, but also by a subtle dynamic gradation in the middle section (B), a segment that coincides with the culmination of the section, as an accumulation of tension, as an ambitus, but also as an area of modulating action towards the sphere of a distant tonality (in A-flat Major).

E.g. 21



Jean Françaix, *Cinq danses exotiques, Samba lenta*, bars 13-18

The second reprise (A) favors repetition, without adding new meanings. The concluding ending resumes the main motif, integrating a counter-tempo syncopation with an ascending trajectory.

## E.g. 22



Jean Françaix, *Cinq danses exotiques, Samba lenta*, bars 29-30

In this part of the suite, the soloist must interpret the score with a warm, expressive, light, but also balanced sound. Additionally, special attention will be paid to intonation, especially in the last two measures. Here, there is an ascending melodic line in decrescendo, and the performer tends to tighten the reed to achieve the minor nuance. This will produce a false sound, with a frequency higher than 442 MHz.

The range is relatively narrow, from F in the low register to D in the higher register, and the rhythm is obtained from combinations of sixteenths, eighths and fourths which, together with the articulations noted in the score with a soft indication - *detaché*, confer that dancing, graceful character to the piece, with a touch of melancholy, which the soloist must emphasize.

#### 2.4.1. Particularities of the Piano Accompaniment in *Samba lenta*

In *Samba lenta*, the piano accompaniment has a predominantly lyrical and expressive role, supporting the melodic line of the saxophone and creating a melancholic and intimate atmosphere.

## E.g. 23

Jean Françaix, *Cinq danses exotiques, Samba lenta*, bars 29-30

JEAN FRANÇAIX : *CINQ DANSES EXOTIQUES*.  
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In this example, the piano provides a delicate accompaniment based on arpeggiated chords and syncopated rhythms. The left hand plays a light bass, while the right hand adds arpeggiated chords that create a floating and dreamy effect.

In contrast to the initial exposition, bars 13 to 16 use arpeggiated chords, with the piano accompaniment creating an ethereal atmosphere that supports the ascending melodic line of the saxophone.

E.g. 24

Jean Françaix, *Cinq danses exotiques*, Samba lenta, bars 13-16

In bars 21 to 24, the piano accompaniment is highlighted by a delicate and transparent texture, generated by an imitative dialogue between the two hands.

**Jean Françaix, *Cinq danses exotiques, Samba lenta*, bars 21-24**

Among the technical difficulties that could be encountered are maintaining a constant tempo, the equilibrium between the hands, and precision in the execution of arpeggiated chords. Subtle dynamics are advisable, striving to obtain a melancholic atmosphere. Adding expressive lyricism, supporting the saxophone melody, and creating delicate textures, the piano accompaniment plays an essential role in creating the melancholic and intimate atmosphere of the *Samba lenta*.

## **2.5. Merengue**

Defined as a type of music and dance indigenous to the Dominican Republic, merengue has become popular throughout Latin America.

The traditional structure of merengue consists of a short instrumental introduction called *paseo*, with a continuation performed by the soloist, *jaleo*, which has a square segmentation on the 4x4 verse pattern, followed by a *merengue* section of the responsorial type.

JEAN FRANÇAIX : *CINQ DANSES EXOTIQUES*.  
A REFINED DIALOGUE BETWEEN SAXOPHONE AND PIANO

Françaix retains some of the characteristics of the traditional merengue pattern, such as the jaleo movement, with its versified 4x4 structure, integrating a double period in the first section (a a'). It is worth noting that on a formal level, the composer again resorts to the lied structure (A B A), which fits the merengue dance well.

The main motif presents an irregular melody, based on a dispersively induced chromatic path, dominated by the descending third leap and by the subtonal insertions.

**E.g. 26**

**Jean Françaix, *Cinq danses exotiques*, Merengue, bars 1-3**

Rhythmically, the above example has a palindromic scheme with counter-tempo figurations on small values. A visible peculiarity throughout the musical development would be the ascending or descending approach to the chromatic melody.

**E.g. 27**

**Jean Françaix, *Cinq danses exotiques*, Merengue, bars 6-8**

A difficult first moment for the soloist will be the very attack of the first sound – D – in the low register. To produce a fair and clear intonation, the soloist needs to apply the necessary pressure to the air column, while taking care not to tense the embouchure, which, closing the reed, will probably produce an unclear attack or, worse, a faux. In addition, it can be supplementary articulated with the fingers, to ensure a degree of certainty.

The middle section (B) proposes a thematic material that has some points in common with the main motif, namely the melodic dispersion through chromatic paths (bars 19 to 20), but also new modalities of melodic treatment, through latent polyphony.

**E.g. 28**



**Jean Françaix, *Cinq danses exotiques, Merengue*, bars 17-18**

The (A) reprise, an antiphony for the previous segment, revalues the identical main motif, while only the representation of the double period will acquire a conclusive consistency.

**E.g. 29**

**Jean Françaix, *Cinq danses exotiques, Merengue*, bars 29-32**

Configured in all the component articulations of this suite as a particularity that betrays the composer's modern affiliation, the descending dynamic gradation is in reverse proportionality with the high register in which the finale is presented.

The rhythmic formulas are of the most diverse kind, made up of sixteenths and eighths, complicated by sixteenth-note rests inserted randomly throughout the part, which directs the saxophonist's attention towards the correctness and equality of execution.

The rhythmic formulas are of the most diverse kind, made up of sixteenths and eighths, complicated by pauses of sixteenth inserted randomly throughout the part, which directs the saxophonist's attention towards the correctness and equality of execution.

The range used is vast, from D in the low register to D in the higher register and requires the player to be an accomplished master of the saxophone throughout its entire range.

The variations in intensity within the melody are surprising, making it difficult for the interpreter to have an intuition of it, the composer's notations indicating sudden transitions (m. 8, 9, 16, 17, 20, 21, 28, 29); they are difficult to achieve due to the fast tempo, *vivo con spirito*, but also to the developed rhythm.

A complicated moment arrives in the middle part (bars 21 to 22), when the instrumentalist must highlight notes in the low register in staccato, with very low dynamics and a moving tempo. To play these notes correctly, the performer must perfectly master the breathing technique, the support, and the articulation. At the same time, one can also resort to a technical artifice, consisting of a firmer than normal attack on the fingers to avoid a possible uncertain sonority or even a *faux*.

### **2.5.1. Particularities of the Piano Accompaniment in *Merengue***

In *Merengue*, the piano accompaniment has an energetic and rhythmic role, supporting the dance and creating a festive atmosphere.

In the following example, the piano presents a rhythmic and syncopated accompaniment, based on staccato chords and contrasting rhythms. The left hand plays a strong bass, while the right hand adds the staccato that creates an effect of energy and dynamism.

**E.g. 30**
**Jean Françaix, *Cinq danses exotiques*, *Merengue*, bars 1-3**

In bars 17 to 18, the piano accompaniment generates a sense of tension and anticipation through a syncopated rhythmic pattern, marked by accents of forceful dynamic. From a harmonic perspective, bars 17 to 18 are characterized by intentional simplicity, the piano accompaniment supporting the tonal stability and providing a secure framework for the saxophone's melodic exposition.

**E.g. 31**
**Jean Françaix, *Cinq danses exotiques*, *Merengue*, bars 17-18**

Contrasting with the previous rhythmic energy, bars 29 to 32 introduce a scarcity of the piano accompaniment, which is reduced to a few isolated notes (*ppp*), emphasizing the fragility of the saxophone's melodic line.



The musical score for Jean Françaix's *Cinq danses exotiques*, *Merengue*, bars 29-32, is presented in a two-staff format. The top staff is for the saxophone, written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature. The bottom staff is for the piano, written in bass clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb). The score consists of four measures. The saxophone part begins with a melodic line starting on a half note, followed by eighth and sixteenth notes, and ends with a dynamic marking of *pp*. The piano part provides a rhythmic accompaniment with chords and single notes, also ending with a dynamic marking of *pp*.

Jean Françaix, *Cinq danses exotiques*, *Merengue*, bars 29-32

Maintaining a fast tempo and precision in the execution of syncopated rhythms are just some of the technical difficulties encountered in this last part of the composition.

The rhythmic energy, dynamic contrasts, and harmonic simplicity of the piano accompaniment contribute to creating an infallible atmosphere.

## Conclusions

Jean Françaix's *Cinq danses exotiques* is a complex and fascinating work that highlights the virtuosity and expressiveness of both instruments: the saxophone and the piano. The piano accompaniment not only provides simple harmonic and rhythmic support but also confirms the piano as an equal partner to the saxophone, actively contributing to the exotic atmosphere and supporting the melodic line. The pianist must be a versatile musician, able to approach a variety of styles and techniques, from the *staccato* rhythms of the *pambiche* to the complex syncopations of the *baiao* and the melancholic lyricism of the *samba lente*. In carefully analyzing the score and understanding the role of the piano accompaniment, performers can bring this work to life and offer the audience the gift of a memorable musical experience.

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