

# “L’heure du mystère”: Cécile Chaminade in America

Jordyn Beranek and Andrew Steffen, Student Researchers  
 Dr. Mitra Sadeghpour, Department of Music and Theatre Arts  
 University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire



## Abstract

Next to Clara Schumann, Cécile Chaminade was one of the most prolific female voices in the post-Romantic era. Our research project, based largely on primary sources such as concert programs, reviews, newspaper ads, and records from several “Chaminade Clubs,” thoroughly investigates Chaminade’s 1908 American tour in the context of the changing role of women in American life and on the American musical scene. We explored the concerts themselves, the singers who performed them accompanied by Chaminade, their popular and critical reception, and of course, the songs which are infused with wit and élan. The characteristics of late Romantic French song and nineteenth-century French salon music elegantly intermingling in the songs, which are worthy of further study outside the fascinating context of Chaminade’s “L’heure du mystère” in the United States. The project culminated in a lecture-recital which recreated portions of the tour concert program and illustrated numerous Wisconsin connections.



Autographed photo of Chaminade at her piano.

The Tour Circuit	
October	Monday, 24—Carnegie Hall—New York Tuesday, 25—Memorial Hall—Columbus, Ohio Thursday, 29—Brooklyn Academy of Music—Brooklyn
November	Friday, 6—Academy of Music—Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Saturday, 7—Academy of Music—Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Monday, 9—Massey Hall—Toronto, Ontario Tuesday, 10—Carnegie Theatre—Petersburg, West Virginia Thursday, 12—Grand Opera House—Cincinnati, Ohio Monday, 16—Pike Theatre—Milwaukee, Wisconsin Thursday, 19—Cathedral—Minneapolis, Minnesota Sunday, 22—Orchestra Hall—Chicago, Illinois Tuesday, 24—Odeon—St. Louis, Missouri (Vacation at French Lake Hot Springs)
December	Thursday, 3—English Opera House—Indianapolis, Indiana Tuesday, 8—New National Theatre—Washington, D.C. Wednesday, 9—Academy of Music—Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Saturday, 12—Symphony Hall—Boston, Massachusetts Tuesday, 15—Carnegie Hall Farwell Concert—New York

List of performances during the American tour- *Rethinking Cecile Chaminade's Concert Tour of the United States, 1908*, p. 108

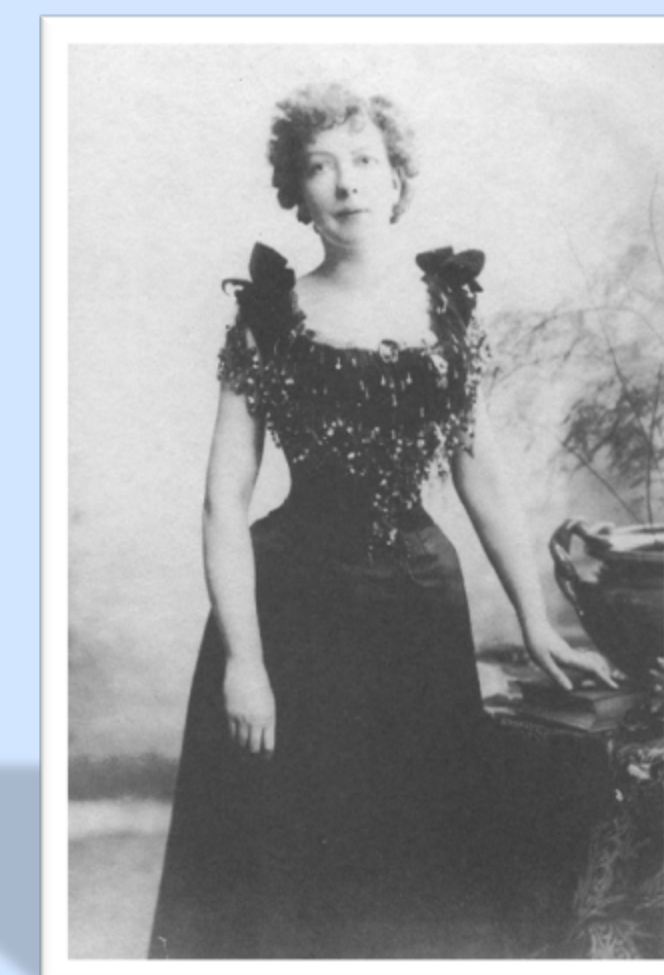


Photo of Chaminade in London, 1892

## Who was Cécile Chaminade?

Cécile Louise Stéphanie Chaminade was born on August 8, 1857 in Paris, France. She composed her first pieces in the 1860s. She composed *La Pastorale Enfantine* at age seven. Chaminade became well-known as a pianist, though she always thought of herself as a composer rather than a performer. In the early 1890's, she established herself internationally by appearing several times in England, beginning in 1892. Her status as an international performer was recognized by the awards she was given by rulers of other countries. Though she frequently traveled around Europe, she turned down multiple offers to travel to the United States because of concern for her mother's health. At the death of her husband, Chaminade had a change of heart and decided to tour the U.S. in 1908. Following the tour, she led a quiet life but still maintained a consistent compositional output. Her music's popularity gradually decreased, though she kept in communication with all of her self-titled music clubs. In her later age, she felt as if she was merely a forgotten old woman and after many health concerns in her old age, on April 13, 1944, Chaminade died at her home in Monte-Carlo.

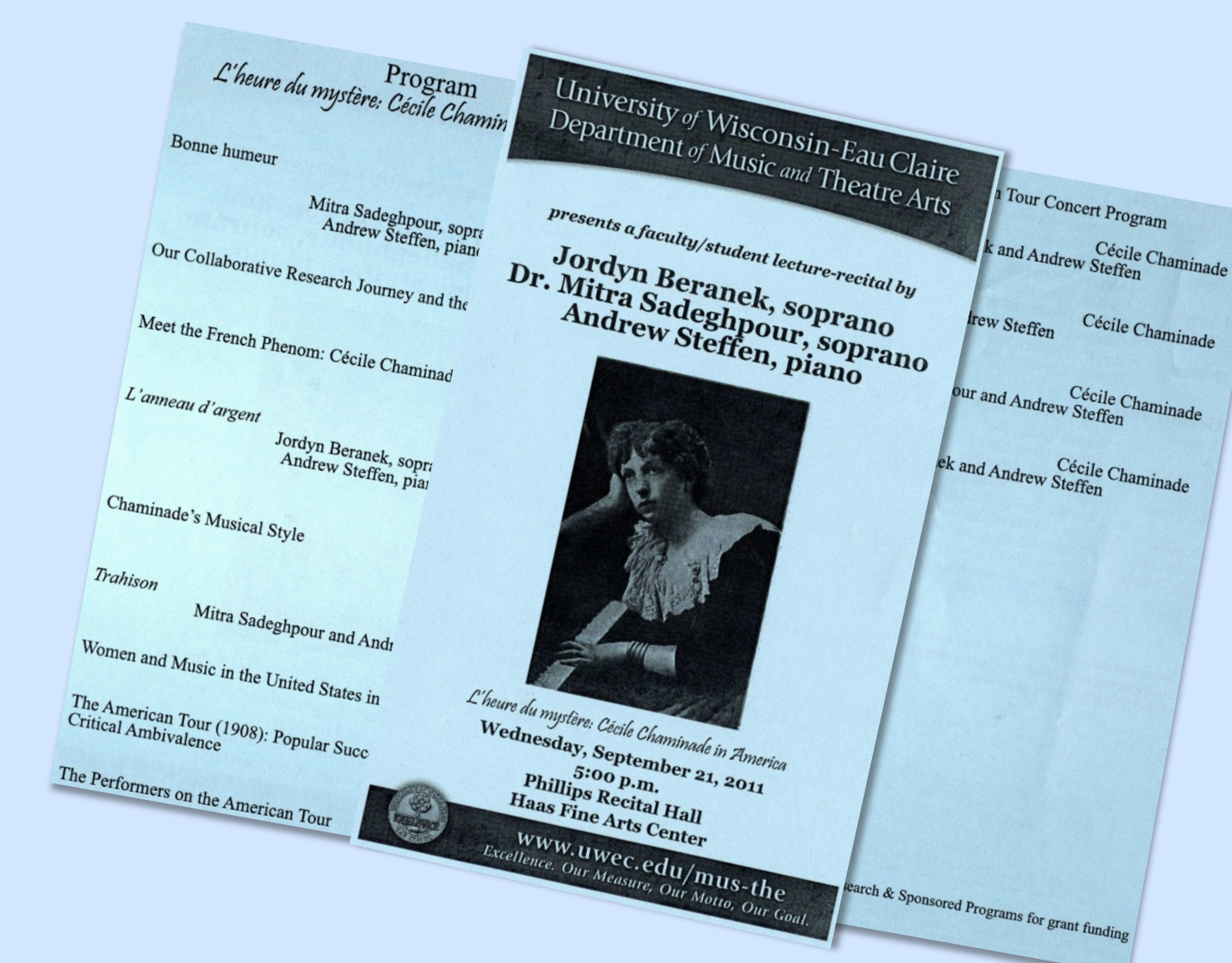
## Application

The research team gathered primary information about Chaminade and the American tour. This information included newspaper reviews and advertisements, programs, photographs, and sheet music. The sheet music included pieces written in Chaminade's hand, located at the Library of Congress. While unearthing these documents, the research team discovered Chaminade Clubs and performers of Chaminade's work in Wisconsin. The research team compiled an annotated bibliography of their findings. Additionally, we carried out an analysis of Chaminade's music to determine her overall compositional style.

### Excerpt of *Trahisson* – Musical Analysis



Roman numeral analysis shows Romantic style in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



Program from the research team's lecture-recital in September

## Chaminade in Wisconsin



Left: letter to the director of the Chaminade Women's Chorus, Appleton, WI



Center: photo of Mildred Perry, Chaminade enthusiast from Rice Lake, WI



Right: A copy of “The Flatterer,” an original US edition found in the Rice Lake Public Library

## The Music

The music of Cécile Chaminade was described as “gay, bright, and melodious” by one critic. The majority of her music has a lighter quality of melody and accompaniment. Chaminade focused primarily on chamber pieces and *mélodies*, and established her career on these genres. As stated by Oxford Music, “stylistically, her music is tuneful and accessible, with memorable melodies, clear textures and mildly chromatic harmonies. Its emphasis on wit and color is typically French.” Her pieces are primarily strophic, set to lighthearted poetry, with simple harmonies.

## Presentation of Research Combining research and practice

The student researchers and faculty mentor presented final research results in a lecture/recital format.

- The research team presented a lecture on Cécile Chaminade which included information on her life, musical style, and the American tour.
- The student researchers and faculty member each prepared music by Chaminade and performed her various works throughout the presentation.
- The lecture-recital included performances of pieces on the American tour.

In addition to presenting the results in a lecture-recital, the research team wrote final papers on the aspects of Chaminade's music and tour which they had focused the most: Chaminade's musical style, the singers that accompanied Chaminade on the tour, and a curriculum on how to teach Chaminade's work in a song literature class.



An original program from Chaminade's first concert in America.



Review of Chaminade's first concert at Carnegie Hall – *The Evening World*, October 26, 1908



The research team at the lecture-recital

## Conclusion

Though Chaminade's music is now rarely performed, it is an excellent representation of the musical transition between the Romantic era and twentieth century. Her piano pieces and *mélodies* are accessible to musicians at every skill level. Her connection to America heightened her celebrity within the country as a result of her tour. Many Chaminade Clubs were created, and as a result, helped to empower women during the fight for women's rights. The fact that Chaminade was a female composer in an era dominated by men contributed to her popularity in the United States. Due to the quality of her work and her intriguing connections with America, it is the opinion of the research team that Cécile Chaminade is worthy of further scholarship and performance.

Questions? Contact [msadeghp@uwec.edu](mailto:msadeghp@uwec.edu)

Acknowledgements:  
 UW – Eau Claire Office of Research and Sponsored Programs  
 UWEC Differential Tuition