

## **Fauré's Reforms and the Conservatoire Concours: the Sight-Reading Works for Brass**

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*When Gabriel Fauré assumed the Directorship of the Conservatoire de Paris in 1905, he set about vitalizing and modernizing the « final exam » solos for instrumentalists, the Morceaux de Concours. Values that Fauré instilled were lyricism alongside virtuosity, interpretive over mechanical performance, modern French advances in harmony and expressivity. The contest structure and related pieces predated Fauré by a century, but earlier works tended to stress virtuosity over lyricism. The Morceaux de Concours have remained internationally significant for the advanced teaching and concert repertoire, representing Fauré's Paris and French music education for brass and all orchestral instruments. Some celebrated, Fauré-styled Morceaux de Concours are the Fantaisie for trumpet by Paul Vidal, the Villanelle for horn by Paul Dukas, and the Morceau Symphonique for trombone by Alexandre Guilmant. Far lesser known, and yet a treasure trove for brass players and teachers, are the 100s of excellent Morceau à Déchiffrer, or Sight Reading Solos, that were composed virtually every year. Exemplifying the systematic testing of brass players at the Conservatoire, the short and engaging exercises illustrate French pedagogy in the early 20th century. Most often the composer of the major and final work of the competition, the Morceau de Concours, also wrote the Sight Reading Solo that year. Candidates first played the Sight Reading and, if successful, passed on to the Contest Piece, which would be prepared and performed in the days ahead. I will discuss brass compositions for Conservatoire sight reading by Saint-Saëns, Vidal, Delage, and Guilmant. These miniatures of about 40 measures exhibit a parallel lyricism, expressive goals, and stylistic advances of the Contest Pieces, pursuing Fauré's new lyric standards. They are indeed worthy of entering the teaching studio for sight reading and for technique building, and on occasion for performing in sets for student recitals.*

## **Le renouveau lyrique de Fauré et le Concours du Conservatoire : les morceaux à déchiffrer**

*Lorsque Gabriel Fauré prit la direction du Conservatoire de Paris en 1905, il s'employa à moderniser les morceaux de concours destinés aux instrumentistes solistes. Il y insuffla du lyrisme en plus de la virtuosité, une vision interprétative et non seulement mécanique, outre les avancées modernes françaises dans le domaine de l'harmonie et de l'expressivité. La structure des concours et de leurs morceaux était en place depuis un siècle déjà à l'arrivée de Fauré, mais les œuvres antérieures semblaient mettre l'accent sur la virtuosité plutôt que le lyrisme. Les morceaux de concours continuent aujourd'hui d'occuper une place importante au plan international, tant dans l'enseignement supérieur que dans le répertoire de concert, illustrant la pédagogie musicale parisienne et française de Fauré, pour les cuivres comme pour les autres instruments de l'orchestre. Parmi les célèbres morceaux de concours dans le style de Fauré, on peut citer la Fantaisie pour trompette de Paul Vidal, la Villanelle pour cor de Paul Dukas, et le Morceau symphonique pour trombone d'Alexandre Guilmant. Les centaines de « morceaux à déchiffrer » composés chaque année, beaucoup moins connus, sont néanmoins un trésor pour tous ceux qui enseignent les cuivres ou en jouent. Ces*

*exercices brefs et intéressants témoignent des épreuves systématiques qu'on faisait subir aux cuivres au Conservatoire et illustrent la pédagogie française du début du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle. Le plus souvent, l'auteur de l'œuvre majeure finale du concours, le « Morceau de Concours », écrivait aussi le solo à déchiffrer de cette même année. Les candidats passaient d'abord l'épreuve de déchiffrement et, en cas de succès, jouaient le morceau de concours, qui avait été préparé et travaillé au préalable. Cette communication traite des morceaux à déchiffrer pour cuivres de Saint-Saëns, Vidal, Delage et Guilmant. Ces miniatures d'une quarantaine de mesures révèlent un lyrisme, une expressivité et des avancées stylistiques comparables à ceux des morceaux de concours, prolongeant le nouveau lyrisme que cultivait Fauré. Elles méritent d'être posées sur le pupitre tant pour le travail du déchiffrement que pour la technique, et même parfois d'être jouées lors de récitals d'élèves.*

Claude Debussy wrote in *Le Figaro* in 1909:

*I view the Conservatoire as an establishment for excellent teaching, which nonetheless might gainfully be modified... Harmony teaching seems completely defective... Voice students attend singing classes but not solfège, even when that is the basis of good singing and all music... And instrumental teaching? Ah! Those classes are perfect. There are no instrumentalists in the world who equal French instrumentalists. [1]*

The context of the Conservatoire sight-reading pieces is twofold. The first context reviewed today is the pedagogical reforms of Gabriel Fauré after he assumed the directorship of the Conservatoire de Paris in 1905. The second to which we then turn is the system of yearly *Morceaux de Concours*, which served as final examinations for performers as for composers. I offer only a review, as they occupy a distinctive place today in the teaching and professional repertoire. Finally, I want to explore in some depth the sight reading solos preceding the *Morceaux de Concours*, variably called *Morceaux à déchiffrer*, *Morceaux à lire*, or *Morceaux à première vue*. These number in the hundreds but remain virtually unknown; they deserve to be in the teaching repertory, I will argue. Like the *Morceaux de Concours*, the sight reading solos after 1905 bear the unmistakable imprint of Fauré by eschewing blatant virtuosity and adopting values of lyricism, expressive depth, and stylistic innovation.

We might place Gabriel Fauré in the context of French music. After the deaths of Massenet, Debussy, and Saint-Saëns respectively in 1912, 1918, and 1921, and upon d'Indy's recusion when his Germanist tendencies lost all favor, Fauré stood supreme for French musical values. By his death in 1924, he was recognized universally as the epitome of moderation, elegance, and clarity - Frenchness in music. Among his few large-scale works, the popular and delicately written *Requiem* op. 48 and the «song opera» *Pénélope* (1913) are notable masterpieces at the turn of the century. However delicate, *Pénélope* ought to stand in comparison with the other modernist revolutions of 1913, Debussy's *Jeux*, Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du printemps*, and from 1912 Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*. Fauré withdrew after 1920 but his presence did not diminish, as the *Groupe des Six* made their boisterous entrance onto the musical stage: with a juvenile snip Francis Poulenc dismissed the orchestration of *Pénélope* as a « leaden overcoat » and as «instrumental mud.»[2] When the Conservatoire in essence dismissed him, Fauré wrote to his wife in March 1920: « I'm extremely concerned and upset... The only thing that's certain is that I stop being director on 30 September. They think I'm too old [he was then 74] and tell

me so quite plainly.» [3] Despite such an inglorious ending, after his passing such new apaches as Milhaud and Poulenc (retracting his jibes) would rank him alongside Debussy and Ravel as a leader of the new music.

The Conservatoire had named him to a composition professorship in 1896, and his subtle « Greco-Latin art » as one critic put it, gained a further life in the music of his pupils Maurice Ravel, Nadia Boulanger, and Charles Koechlin. As a professor Fauré had come to know intimately the habits and mentality of the Conservatoire, the dowager empress of French official music. Fauré was named Director of the Conservatoire in 1905, the year his most important pupil, Maurice Ravel, failed in his fifth and final attempt to gain the First Rome Prize in composition. Authorities on the « affaire Ravel » credit that event for turning the light on Fauré's understated authority. The surprise over Fauré's appointment was widespread. He had studied composition not at the Conservatoire but at the *École Niedermeyer*, under Camille Saint-Saëns. Fauré associated only indirectly with the turf wars of the 1870s and 1880s in French music, those between nationalists, who would promote French taste and neo-classicism, and those who were transfixed by Wagner. Under his directorate, a reformist wind « blew through the corridors » of the august establishment on the *rue Bergère*. He was given authority over all acts of governance, including precedence over the governing board and the Committee on Examinations.[4]

As the Conservatoire scholar Gail Hilson Woldu notes, « While many of the curricular reforms were inspired by initiatives already in place at the Schola Cantorum, they were unprecedented at the Conservatoire, and constituted a radical departure from the way in which musical education was conceived there in the early 1900s ». *La Revue musicale* voiced the conservative opposition, « The true role of the Directeur is not to make reforms. He is... to inspire respect, to discipline the personnel... The *maîtres* should meet classes at assigned hours and must not take unauthorized leaves. The Director coordinates the budget of the establishment, oversees its proper functioning, and exercises a firm will over... the intrigues thereof. »[6] Here was a call for a mere functionary like Théodore Dubois and Amboise Thomas had been, scarcely leading lights for musical progress. But in contradistinction, Debussy wrote Fauré a congratulatory note upon his appointment, quipping that « Oh, won't traditional old dust be shaken up! »[8]

[10] The critic Pierre Lalo commented on instrumental education specifically: « The future of the Conservatoire concerns itself not solely with teaching students the technical aspects of their instruments, making them « virtuosos » of a sort... but in giving them a real music education -a sense of musical understanding, intelligence, and esthetic appreciation- that will enable them to become artists. »[11] Laetitia Chassain-Dolliou sees in Fauré's leadership a path to liberality and, where the *concours* was concerned, a clear movement to integrity.

The Under-Secretary of State for Fine Arts, Dujardin-Beaumetz addressed the faculty and student body in August 1905:

*Although it may seem contradictory to speak of modern art concerning the Conservatoire [sic!], I think that the contradiction is only illusory... Whatever the newness... one is bound to see a sound classical instruction... We are concerning ourselves with enlarging the scope of this education and looking into ways of making it more fecund. With this goal in mind, we are asking [the music historian] Bourgault-Ducoudray to organize a course introducing the musical forms of the various [historic] schools, successively and analyzed. We are creating new ensemble classes... for analysis; students of instrumental music will take an active part... [This is] the surest way of developing students' minds and virtuosity simultaneously... In a word, we want our young musicians to know what they are supposed to know when they leave the Conservatoire... We want concern for art to come before a concern for a career. And finally, we want music education at the Conservatoire to be on a par with its technical instruction.[9]*

In his outstanding biography, *Gabriel Fauré: A Musical Life* (originally *Gabriel Fauré: Les Voies du clair-obscur*), Jean-Michel Nectoux outlines Fauré's reforms. He notes the deep influence of his manner and presence, his intervention in a sagging opera program, the creation of posts and obligatory requirements in music academics including music history, and the emphasis on collaborative music-making for both orchestra and chamber music. Fauré reformed the entrance and exit juries, again perturbing the old guard, by placing expert journalists and, to Saint-Saëns's dismay, *women* on the juries. In a pout, the eminent if difficult Saint-Saëns quit attending the elite Governing Council. On a number of occasions Fauré declined to appoint the titular professors on the juries of their specialty, seeking a disinterested evaluation of candidates. Before Fauré, major professors would understand » that candidates would take private, paid lessons before entrance exams, a practice Fauré found unseemly and actively discouraged. He hired renowned soloists to lead the instrumental classes, to the consternation of the traditionalists, reasoning that the « stars » would intrigue the students, demand their best efforts, and enhance the prestige of the Conservatoire internationally.


Fauré appointed the leading lights of French and international music for Conservatoire teaching and for composing for the Concours, including Debussy, Alfred Bruneau, Paul Dukas, and André Messager. Fauré appointed Maurice Emmanuel in 1909 to teach music history that, in the spirit of integrative learning, would combine history and analysis of Medieval, Renaissance, and Baroque music. In 1914 Fauré instituted a formal class in orchestral conducting; and an informal percussion class was assembled that year that was made formal in 1942.[12] In 1911 he moved the Conservatoire to more spacious quarters in the rue de Madrid, its only move between its establishment in 1796 at the *rue Bergère* and *rue Poissonnière* until its present site beginning in 1990.


Established in 1795 under Napoléon, the now-Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et de Danse de Paris was to be free to all qualified students, admitting an equal number of young men and women even if, before about 1900, the classes were separate. The Conservatoire was the first truly modern institution of its kind, organized on a national basis, free from charitable aims and with an entirely secular, indeed anticlerical, background. As such it soon emerged as the model for all subsequent conservatories in the West [13].

The annual Concours for instrumentalists served as final examinations, in large part scheduled by the titular professors at the end of the academic year when the time was ripe for the students. In fact the French horn player Louis-François Dauprat, renowned for his horn method, took a first prize at age 17 in 1798 at the first public Concours organized by the Conservatoire.[14] Please read further on the *Concours* in the remarkable history of the Conservatoire from its beginnings under Napoléon in 1795, exposed brilliantly by the essay collection of Anne Bongrain, Alain Poirier, and Marie Hélène Coudroy-Saghai, *Le Conservatoire de Paris*.


A student of the instruments just as the more famous ones in composition first trained in a succession of music academic courses and public recitals. The final test for instrumentalists came in two phases, first the Sight Reading piece and, if successful before a professorial jury, the public *Morceau de Concours*. The final exam could terminate an instrumentalist's Conservatoire training with a first or second prize or an honorable mention. Needless to say, the much-coveted first prize often led the student secure a good post in teaching or playing. Fauré led a reinvigoration of the *Morceaux de Concours* and the related sight reading solos by commissioning leading composers for *Concours* works, some Conservatoire professors but also certain outside the Conservatoire.[15] The roster is distinguished: Debussy, Paul Taffanel, Paul Dukas, Isaac Albéniz, and Guillaume Balay and, after Fauré's retirement but following his values, Jacques Ibert, Carlos Salzedo, and Pierre Sancan. Fauré himself wrote exemplary works for the *Concours*, both sight reading briefs and the *Morceaux*, including the *Fantaisie* for flute, *Morceau de concours* for piano, and the *Impromptu* for harp. Fauré's own examples for the *Concours*, together with his gentle persistence, seem to have led to *Concours* writing that was subtle, lyric, and with modern tonalities. In the spirit of reform, Fauré discouraged instrumental « show » and, where the brass were concerned, the militaristic idiom so often heard before 1905. For brass instruments, there were outstanding, enduring solos in the Fauré spirit by Dukas in the *Villanelle* and Chabrier in his *Larghetto for horn*; Saint-Saëns and Paul Vidal in their *Morceaux de concours* for trumpet; and trombone contest pieces by Samuel Rousseau and Alexandre Guilmant. It is true that the *Zeitgeist* after 1900 paralleled Fauré's inclination, as well.

We might turn directly to the Sight Reading pieces, extremely few of which have been published. Fauré has sightreading *Concours* pieces for flute, harp, and several for piano. Many will know Debussy's *Morceau à lire* of 1909 for clarinet, published as « *Petite pièce* ». A single collection has been published for the bassoon by William Waterhouse. And yet, very many are worthy of publication because of their value for the studio and, perhaps grouped, for the recital. Advanced players from the university student to the professional ought to enjoy this untapped wealth. I have explored in depth hundreds of the *Conservatoire Morceaux à première vue*, which are housed in manuscript at the *Archives nationales* here in Paris. Having chosen the strongest with the advice of Indianapolis Symphony players, about ten for each instrument, I have transcribed them on Professional Composer and will publish them in a short while. My aim is a collection for each brass and woodwind instrument and the harp, in time followed by collections for the strings and piano. Because of advancing chromaticism and copyright issues after 1925, I will stop there.


To begin, two trumpet examples contrast and thereby suggest Fauré's probable influence in the *morceaux à première vue*. Example 1. Georges Huë studied with Gounod and Franck, winning the *Prix de Rome* for his cantata *Médée* in 1879. Debussy reviewed his lyric opera *Titania* favorably in 1901, but the fantastical tale must have intrigued him as he was placing the final touches on his remote, symbolist *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Huë travelled in the Far East later in life, regrettably too late to expand his stylistic idiom, and he does not respond to Fauré's modernism. Moreover, in example 1 the imprint of the military march tradition is unmistakable. Please see measure 9. Some faint chromatism Huë employs is not even up to Chopin's level, such as in m. 9 when the *A* minor chord (odd for *F* minor) is in fact a substitute dominant of *C*, the *V* function leading to tonic *F* minor in m. 11. Hear the Huë *Morceau à déchiffrer*, Example 1. 



Guillaume Balay's *Morceau* is distinct from Hue's, stylistically. See Example 2. Balay trained at the *Conservatoire*, in 1894 receiving the First Prize in valve cornet. His heart was in military music, and after graduation he returned to directing several music concerns of the Infantry. It is indicative that the alert Fauré commissioned this sight reading solo and the attendant *Morceau de Concours* from Balay in 1913, since he was an outstanding virtuoso in the band and not the Paris concert scene. Long since departed from the context of the *Conservatoire*, Balay nonetheless could foreswear the unalloyed, militaristic tricks of 19<sup>th</sup> century trumpet music and instead write in modern and broadly lyric idioms. Example 2. The trumpet player is Marvin Perry, first trumpet in the Indianapolis Symphony. For all these examples, Anna Briscoe is the pianist. 

The French horn has enjoyed a centuries-old tradition in concert music and has been treated lyrically since Beethoven and Berlioz's days. Even so, the sight reading solo by the famous horn professor at the Conservatoire François Brémont strongly hints at the virtuosic concentration before Fauré's coming. We may see here Example 3, which all the while is competently written. 

By contrast subtle but significant, Paul Vidal's writing 12 years after exhibits something beyond a natural stylistic evolution. I suggest that it bears the marks of Fauré's artistic vision. A composition student of Massenet, Vidal placed ahead of Debussy in the 1883 *Prix de Rome*, and Debussy won the *Premier Prix* the following year. Vidal was something of a part-time professor of composition and taught both Jacques Ibert and Lili Boulanger. However, he devoted himself centrally to opera conducting, and he premiered works by Chabrier, Massenet, and d'Indy. Example 4 illustrates a melody redolent of Fauré's *Mélodies* - almost an homage to the Director. The tonal plan is striking, such as when the pedal point *C* binds an otherwise unhinged chromatic parenthesis, rather like Fauré himself or at times Debussy and Stravinsky in this year of *Jeux* and *Le Sacre du printemps*. The horn player in examples 3 and 4 is Gail Lewis of Butler University. 

Please see Example 5. There is no *Concours* literature written specifically for euphonium, tuba, or percussion in this period. However, there do exist works for saxhorn that might be adapted, as I plan. Moreover, there is a rich array of sight reading and contest pieces for the entire family of saxophones, and according to

range and technique certain of these may be adapted for euphonium and tuba. In Example 5,  Marcel Tournier composes a *Morceau à lire* for E-flat baritone saxophone with great craft, fashioning a collaborating piano that is transparent in its higher register while providing a lower-pitched, firm bass throughout. Spending his life within the context of the Conservatoire de Paris, Marcel Tournier won the First Prize in harp in 1899 and the second *Prix de Rome* for composition in 1909. Fauré appointed him Professor of Harp in 1912, and he continued in that role until 1948. Thus in his case, Fauré selected an « insider » who shared his values, even for an instrument still of the *Gymnase militaire* and to be admitted to the *Conservatoire* in 1942 [16]. The lyricism Tournier conceived for the baritone saxophone recommends the euphonium particularly, and the beauty of this miniature indicates the esteem in which the French held the saxophone family. The brief work of 39 measures interestingly traces an adapted ABA' form, recapitulating the opening at the octave and truncating it. Most representative of the Fauré impact is the vocalise the instrument sings. The euphonium player is Robert Grechesky of Butler University.

The unidentified composer of Example 6  for trombone, follows the march-like, military idiom common up to about 1900. I will not criticize this writing negatively, for it served its purpose. Fauré had a new purpose that Isaac Albeniz respected when writing in 1906, your Example 7.  This miniature is richly expressive, generally modal in the Spanish idiom, but also ambivalent in a chromaticism that would have challenged the 1906 hopeful graduates. Jared Rodin, first desk in the Indianapolis Chamber Orchestra, is playing.

Thus one hears a gradual, subtle, but highly significant new attitude at the Conservatoire from 1905 to 1920. As we have seen, that emanates directly from its Director, the highly advanced composer, music thinker, and administrator Gabriel Urbain Fauré. His proclivities led to the reform of the *Morceaux de Concours* as true concert, and not merely « useful » competition solos. Now the competition was quite on the level of recital and chamber playing, beyond the realm of the military band or in some regards the opera orchestra, for these had been the 19<sup>th</sup> century paradigm. As we have seen, I trust, the little-known but worthy and representative solos for sight reading follow a like impulse.

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- [2] Nectoux, Jean-Michel. *Gabriel Fauré: A Musical Life*. Trans. Roger Nichols. Cambridge: Cambridge, 1991, p. 258.
- [3] Nectoux, *Gabriel Fauré: A Musical Life*, p. 424.
- [4] Op. cit. Bongrain. Jean-Michel Nectoux, « Gabriel Fauré au Conservatoire de Paris : une philosophie pour l'enseignement », p. 219.
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- [8] Woldu op. cit. 104, citing *Claude Debussy: Lettres, 1894-1918*, ed. François Lesure (Paris: Hermann, 1980), p. 139.
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- [10] Woldu op. cit., 107, quoting *Le Matin* of 27 September 1905.
- [11] Woldu op. cit., 108, quoting *Le Temps* of 17 October 1905.
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- [13] Gessele, Cynthia M.: Conservatories: 1790-1945, French-speaking countries. *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed 8 June 2007), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>
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- [15] Nectoux, op. cit., p. 268-269.



[16] Chassain-Dolliou, op. cit., p. 47.

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Example 1

# Trumpet Solo

Morceau à déchiffrer

Georges Hué  
1900

Mouvement de marche modéré

Trumpet in B $\flat$

Piano

*mf*

*f* *dimin* *p*

*cresc.* *f* *mf*

*cresc.* *mf* *ff* *mf*

*ff*

Example 2

Morceau à première vue

Guillaume Balay  
1913

Trumpet in B $\flat$

Piano

*Lent*  $\text{♩} = 60$

*f* *dim.*

*f* *dim.*

6 *p* *f* *p*

6 *p* *f* *p*

12 *Même Mouvt.* *p* *cresc.* *tempo*

13 *f* *f*

### Example 3

François Brémont  
1901

The musical score is divided into three systems, each with a Horn in F part and a Piano accompaniment. The key signature is D major (two sharps) and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo is marked "Quasi andantino".

**System 1 (Measures 1-6):**  
Horn in F: Starts with a triplet of eighth notes (D4, E4, F4) marked *p*. The melody continues with triplets and slurs.  
Piano: Accompaniment with chords in the right hand and bass notes in the left hand, marked *p*.

**System 2 (Measures 7-11):**  
Horn in F: Continues with triplets, marked *p* and *mf*.  
Piano: Accompaniment with chords, marked *cresc.*, *p*, *cresc.*, and *mf*.

**System 3 (Measures 12-15):**  
Horn in F: Starts with a triplet marked *dim.* and *p*, then moves to a triplet marked *f*.  
Piano: Accompaniment with chords, marked *dim.*, *p*, *cresc.*, *f*, and *mf*.

### Example 4

Paul Vidal  
1913

*Allegro Molto* ♩ = 132

Horn in F

*mf*

Piano

*mf*

3

*f*

6

*mf*

6

*p*

Example 5

Morceau à lire  
*transcribed for Euphonium*

Marcel Tournier  
1925

*Andantino*

Saxophone in E

Piano

The musical score is written for Saxophone in E and Piano. It is in 6/8 time and consists of three systems. The first system includes a Saxophone in E part and a Piano part. The second system continues both parts. The third system includes a crescendo (cresc.) and mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic marking.

**Exemple 6**

**Concours de trombone**

Année 1879

Anonymous

Morceau à lire à première vue

The musical score is written for Trombone and Piano. It begins with a *Moderato* tempo and a *f* dynamic. The Trombone part features a melodic line with a *rit.* (ritardando) and *a tempo* marking. The Piano accompaniment consists of chords and a bass line, with dynamics ranging from *f* to *fp* and *cresc.* (crescendo). The score is divided into systems, with measures 5, 9, and 13 marked at the beginning of their respective systems. The piece concludes with a *f* dynamic in the final measure.

Exemple 7

Morceau à lire

Issac Albéniz  
1906

The musical score is arranged in two systems. The first system includes a Trombone part and a Piano part. The Trombone part begins with a *Andantino* tempo marking and a *dolce* dynamic. The Piano part also starts with *Andantino* and *pp* dynamics. The second system continues the piece, marked *a tempo*. The Trombone part features dynamics of *pp*, *p*, and *poco f*. The Piano part includes *ppp*, *poco f*, *p*, and *poco f* dynamics. The score concludes with a *rit.* marking. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 3/4.