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***‘Excellent pupil, much future.’ The Paris Conservatoire teachers’ remarks on their pupils, end of 19th century.***

An appreciation of the individual contribution of an artist is an essential part of European learned culture. I ask in my paper how the institutional music education nourished this ideal. My case in point is the activity of the Paris Conservatoire in the end of the 19th century.

An aspect of the practices of this institution was that the teachers submitted written reports on the talents, skills, and progress of their pupils to the Conservatoire administration. The reports thus reveal something about the power of the institution over the student.

My basic assumption is that the potentials of the pupils had a better chance of actualising if the interaction between the teacher and the pupil was fruitful. This is one aspect of the larger issue of the consecration given to musicians by state institutions. I will use these Conservatoire reports in this sense when analysing the teachers’ views on their pupils.

The material consists of reports submitted by composition, harmony, piano, voice, declamation, and solfège teachers of the Conservatoire, such as Jules Massenet, Gabriel Fauré, Charles Lenepveu, Albert Lavignac, Louis Diémer, and Edmond Duvernoy. They concern, by way of example, the Conservatoire pupils Maurice Ravel, Florent Schmitt, Albert Roussel, Georges Enecu, Alfred Cortot, and Aino Ackté.

Sometimes the documents speak of the teacher’s identification with his or her pupil, at other times of commodication. The evaluations may be based on clearly defined criteria concerning skills, or they can express an appreciation of the pupil’s expressive capacities and artistic special character.

My material comes from the Archives nationales de France.

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