

# FORECAST AND REVIEW

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## EUROPE TAKES FRESH BEARINGS

IN spite of its habitual quantum of newness—newness is almost a *noblesse oblige* abroad, particularly in France—Europe today is not the site of tonal upheaval and excitement it was in the novelty-drunk Twenties. But at least one can always find a dozen fresh happenings where one least expects them, in the stillest, most unadventurous fields.

Take Switzerland. Its musical life, formerly so cloistered and conservative, is now full of events and figures that would have seemed misplaced before. In that tranquil musical region on the lake of Geneva between Montreux and Lausanne, dominated by the gifted clan of the de Ribaupierres, you will find one of them conducting his own orchestral suite based on contagious mountaineer tunes—a spurt of the new Swiss musical nationalism—and at the other end of the Leman, André de Ribaupierre, former professor in Cleveland, presenting works of Stravinsky, Respighi, Bloch, and other moderns.

Zurich, one of the few remaining musical centers free and unhampered by political bigotry, is fast becoming a great focus of European musical life, with two streams of musicians flowing from the German and Austrian North, and the Italian South. One of the most interesting figures in Zurich is Robert Denzler, a highly gifted and subtle musician, the conductor of Berg's *Lulu* and a valuable and progressive new musical force. One of his chief soloists at the Zurich Opera House, Marko Rothmüller, is a picturesque combination of brilliant singer, interpreter of Strauss and Berg operas and a composer of unusual color. He is a leader of the young composers' group that forms the progressive vanguard in Jugo-Slavia.

Through another engaging visitor in Switzerland, the well-known Milanese novelist and writer on music, Mary Tibaldi Chiesa, I received at first hand details of an important stage production soon to materialize in Italy. Mme. Tibaldi Chiesa is the author of a book on Ernest Bloch and of the Italian version of his libretto for *Macbeth* which will be staged shortly by the opera house of Naples. *Macbeth*, which met with such a strange fate in Paris, after being acclaimed by all the leaders of French art, has never seen a second performance. This opera has always intrigued the musical world. One can not help marveling that the land reported so hostile now to foreign and progressive music, is the first to release an important work by a master of today from its shocking oblivion.

My own musical affairs took me also to London this summer. Easily the chief event of the Coronation season was the premiere of Eugene Goossens' opera *Don Juan de Mañara*, with the composer conducting the premiere himself and Lawrence Tibbett giving a splendid impersonation of the central role, difficult both musically and dramatically.

Take good note of this. Goossens used the Mérimée version of this greatest of all "wandering tales," the Mañara pattern, not the Tenorio. This in itself sets a larger dramatic frame for the opera. The rascal-in-chief of Goossens' opera is something of an idealist; he turns penitent and is groomed to live an ascetic after the last curtain. This makes him a much ampler and more varied dramatic personage than the other Don Juan, who stems from the Tirso de Molina sources. And it also satisfies the stage canon that only a broad and complicated personality can unfold an interesting drama.

The music of *Don Juan* is virile, multi-colored, full-blooded, in typical Goossens idiom; and the dramatic structure is outlined most expertly. Goossens' harmonic vocabulary is catholic. A frank polytonal scaffolding (the opening choral exclamations) is as natural to him as a clear flowing modal mélopée. Such is the attractive serenade of Don Juan before the boudoir of his half-brother's mistress whom he, of course, seduces. Mañara or Tenorio, Don Juan is Don Juan; he has his accepted duties to perform.

Now to Paris, the great caravansery of new things on whose presentation the Exposition and its dependent and affiliated instrumentalities laid double stress.

There was, to continue our English line, the premiere of Arthur Bliss' ballet *Checkmate* at the Théâtre des Champs Elysées, a scintillating demonstration of the Anglo-French *entente cordiale*, with the French President, ambassadors, the artistic *élite* of Paris all united in a dazzling entourage. *Checkmate* is a clever ballet of action drawing its drama from a game of chess, the Black Queen "bumping off" the Red King in order to get sole possession of her *amoroso*, the Red Knight, in fine, a story of Love and Death. The music is typical Bliss, lively, transparent, of fresh color and adroitly scored. In the same Paris season of the Vic-Wells English ballet, Constant Lambert, its music director, conducted his own ballet, the delightful *Pomona*.

But let me come to the French composers, in and about the Exposition, who, as usual in Paris, were the chief thing.

The orchestral concert of "*La Jeune France*" revealed a remarkable constellation of fresh creative gifts, each in possession of a personal and firm technic. In *Action de Graces* of Olivier Messaien, striking and somehow of our day—in spite of its archaic bent and strange Gregorian, Hindu flavor—is the pathos of its chanting line. And just as striking is the grace of Messaien's polyphonic ornament. The tonal basis of his work has very original points. Enamored of the ancient Catholic canticle he does not follow, however, the medieval modality. He has one of his own. His modes are non-transposable; he calls them "*modes de transposition limitée*," as are non-tempered scales. He has also a trick of using the accruing metres ("*unités de valeur ajoutée*"), of accelerating them as it were, not for contrapuntal purposes, à la Bach, but for intra-melodic development.

At the same concert the *Passacaille* for piano and orchestra by Daniel Lesure, the most elegant spirit and the subtlest craft of "*La Jeune France*" was enchantingly spontaneous, far from any scholastic or academic revival of a form that in our own day should be an incentive rather than a mold. In Lesure's *Passacaille* the opening ostinato theme of a Dorian turn and the beautiful diatonic texture of the piece, its quasi-classical, radiant sen-

sitiveness and fancy are of a rare technical finesse, so individual and yet so French.

André Jolivet is the tonal anarchist among them. Yet even he is swayed by the neo-Catholic tendency of his group; he also, wishes to render to music its original antique character, give back its incantatory expression of a creed animating a large human mass.

To the American mind this presents a strange spectacle, a ghost of the Huguenot wars of the sixteenth century, this neo-Catholic musical current, in the sea of modern music, of all places, opposed by a neo-Protestant current. However, *spiritus movet ubi vult!* And as long as remarkable new works emerge from this creative struggle, let us have the struggle and let us see the works.

The premiere of George Migot's vast oratorio *Sermon on the Mount* for a huge chorus, soli and orchestra, was one of the most important events of the Paris season.

Migot, a very independent and unusual musician, is a cultivator of the Protestant musical tradition. A descendant of the famous Huguenot minister Jean Migot, who was burned at the stake in the Religious Wars, he is a fiery exponent of very remarkable ideas. He believes that the root and essence of French art is Gothic, not Latin: that the dynastic and religious interchange of the French Renaissance under the Valois dynasty made the Italian and Catholic influence rampant and diverted French culture, and so French music, into a Latin channel contrary to its nature.

The plan of Migot's oratorio is ingenious. The first of his three sections represents pictorially a cortege of all creeds toward the Mount of Revelation; musically it is a reservoir of themes and motives from which the whole work is created. Of course, vast forms like this are rarely even, in either interest or quality, but on the whole it is of striking power and contrapuntal skill. A few days before this premiere I heard Migot's *Trio* and also the *Zodiac* suite for piano. These pieces of rare freshness and of delicate water-color quality, a little too wordy for their genre, made the oratorio even a greater surprise. The *Sermon on the Mount* seemed over-concentrated, of almost excessive violence.

Aside from this remarkable evidence of a cultural struggle which after four hundred years is not yet exhausted, there are in

the musical life of Paris clear traces of a new important influence emerging from the remote corners of France. Robert Bernard, a young musician of great subtlety and remarkable science, a composer, lecturer and organizer, was born in the French Swiss borderlands. He started as a *Wunderkind*. First songs, very moving and amazingly expert, curiously enough written to poems of Matilde Wesendonk, were published when he was thirteen. His *Poem* for violin and piano, and particularly his *Nocturne* for piano have emotional delicacy and reserve that are typically French, but there is also a singularity of accent which is Bernard's own.

Bernard's lectures on modern French music have also revealed many valuable points. His lucid and timely exposition of Albert Roussel's music, for instance, is worth repeating here. Roussel he sees as distinctly the banner-bearer of resistance to the post Debussy current, a reaction that ended the domination of the musical concept by extra-musical aims. Roussel's was a nature deaf to anything extra-musical as an incentive to musical creation. But his anti-romantic and anti-impressionistic rigidity do not exclude a sensibility of the most subtle order.

Another important young musician of gifts who has brought to Paris his tremendous energy as composer, conductor and leader of new organizations is Henri Tomasi, founder of the "Triton," now one of the most active modern music societies in Paris. Tomasi is a Corsican, and in his "*oeil clair, dent dur*" there is the stamina of the southern mountaineer. His ballet and the orchestral poems *Vocero* and *Tamtam* were given lately at the Opéra and Lamoureux concerts. I liked particularly his *Cambodia Dances* with their peculiarly bent diatonic line and transparent, resourceful scoring.

This centripetal movement of musical forces, from the country's periphery to the center, is, perhaps, one of the most fruitful in the musical life of France. For two centuries the music of Paris has been the music of France. In all its creative implications this state of things is as harmful as is the fact that over a long period the music of New York has been the music of the States.

The tremendous hold of Paris on French music (as that of New York on the creative music of our country) has been both

valuable as well as harmful. Valuable in the setting of a high technical level and sharpening of the composer's craft, harmful in segregating the young creative forces into stifling pockets of highly specialized cults and chapels.

The earth, the wide fields of the far hinterland of France are coming into their musical own and French music will not long continue in its present process of drying up.

*Lazare Saminsky*

### PARIS, 1937—THE I.S.C.M.

THE fifteenth festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music took place in Paris at the end of June, and it can be said that scarcely a ripple was created in the general music consciousness of the world at large or even in the festival city itself. Probably for the first time in the history of the society the concerts were not open to the general public and seats could be obtained, even at full price, only by applying to the secretary of the Paris section, hence saving money and advertising and, it was rumored, avoiding a government tax!

This exclusiveness would not deserve comment except that it frankly expresses a symptomatic condition of the International Society, and indeed one of the major problems of modern music. In Paris this time it seemed as if contemporary music, as sponsored by the Society, had become a completely specialized field, only to be understood by, and of interest to the few people immediately concerned in its creation and performance. The principle behind the founding of the I.S.C.M.—to build up a dynamic international group constantly exchanging contacts, ideas, musical works, etc., and to secure the widest possible public—has apparently fallen into abeyance.

That the consciousness of a new dawn should, in the course of fifteen years, have been supplanted by a more or less anarchical defensiveness can certainly not be held against it. In that it is only reflecting the tendency of most forms of human activity today.

More worthy of reproach and of importance to the life of the society, is the practical functioning of the jury. While the elected jurors are certainly all, all honorable men, they far too often lose sight of the more distant fundamental principle of absolute, not