

NOW IN PARIS

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THERE is another generation. The talent of Milhaud and Honegger and Poulenc and Auric is no longer news. Their bids are made. Everybody's cards are known. The playing out of their hands may produce a great deal of satisfaction to posterity and the publishers, perhaps even a masterpiece or two for everybody to enjoy. It cannot produce any major surprises. The protagonists of the play are mature men. Their temperaments are fixed and visible.

They were the progeny of Stravinsky and Satie, formed closely after the parental images. Too closely. The principles of their expression, the modes of their feeling, the devices of their style are a heritage and not a creation, the unblended heritage of a *mésalliance*. Neither parent quite liked the result.

Satie found some younger men, children almost. He paid them some compliments and loaned them his prestige, called them the Groupe d'Arcueil. The group didn't exist very long as such. Its four members were still very young when Satie died. For a few years they revolved as satellites about the person of Darius Milhaud. Then they shot off, each for himself. Roger Désormière stopped writing and became chef d'orchestre for Diaghilev. Maxime Jacob had a short and successful career as a genteel composer in the style of Poulenc. Then he got converted to the Christian faith, entered a monastery and hasn't been heard from since. There remained Henri Sauguet and Henri Cliquet-Pleyel.

Sauguet was the first of all the Satie disciples to make a new thing, a really new thing. In 1925 Madame Beriza produced a short operetta by him called *Le Plumet du Colonel*, gay, tender, spontaneous, tuneful, harmonious, simple and sweet. Nothing in it is banal, nothing cheap, nothing pretentious. It was as

badly instrumented as only a piece can be by a youngster who has never read a book on orchestration. The conductor patched up some holes. It is still sold and sung.

In 1927 he wrote a ballet for Diaghilev called *La Chatte*. The music is charming and beautiful. The score, which was made with some counsel from Milhaud and some supervision by Rieti, is sonorous, varied, expert. *La Chatte* has been performed more than a hundred times. Sauguet has also written other ballets and much chamber-music.

I mention the matter of scoring in order to place Sauguet outside the Conservatoire-tradition. Except for a year or so of harmony lessons from Koechlin, he is self-taught. He has never submitted himself to any methodical pumping into him of merely knowledge. He learns what he needs to know as he needs to use it. He has avoided thus the ponderousness of the common autodidact, the tendency to compensate for lack of conventional training by a laborious swallowing of everything that's in the books.

You see, Sauguet is really intelligent. He was gifted with a facile inspiration, gayety, tender sentiment, and a high-class theatrical talent. Also with brains and taste. Consequently the music, however weak or trivial one may find it (for these are the chief findings of those who do not like it) remains real, because it is whole. It is no mere outpouring of talent unrefined. Nor is it a structure of the mind, nor just a gush of inappropriate tears. It is a fusion of feelings with inspiration and with taste. Consequently, there is style. Hence, visibility and remembrance. It is real like a pearl in the hash. One can spit it out or one can break a tooth on it. One cannot ignore it. Few ever forget it.

I dwell on its apparent fragility, its thinness, because many sincere persons of great musical experience and some taste have been deceived into thinking it negligible. It isn't bean soup, of course. Call it rather consommé madrilène. There is, after all, a more appropriate place for consommé madrilène than for bean soup at a high-class musical repast. I am not interested either in ranking it in any hierarchy of concert-values. But I do wish to situate it among its kind. It has not the vulgar afflatus of

Gounod and Massenet, the academic facility of Saint-Saens and Milhaud, the grandiose *envergure* of Berlioz and César Franck. But it has the just balance, the sweet reticence and the exactitude of fine French expression. Its purity, however thin, and its elegance, however inconspicuous, place it in the line of Couperin and Delibes and Fauré, the line even of Rameau and Bizet and Debussy.

I shall not enumerate the works. They are mostly in Rouart, Lerolle's catalogue. The most effective are *Le Plumet du Colonel*, *La Chatte* and the unfinished opera *La Chartreuse de Parme*. The chamber music has more charm than sustained power. The songs are numerous, but difficult because they are written for Sauguet's own composer-falsetto rather than for any female soprano and because the prosody, although natural to his own speech and quite exact is even more preposterous than the vocal line. The accompaniments don't help much either, although as music they are often *trouvé*. The songs, with all their difficulty, are both beautiful and inspired, but it will only be in another generation that they can be commonly or easily sung.



Around the personality of Sauguet the present epoch has begun to crystallize. Neo-romanticism is the journalistic term for it. Spontaneity of sentiment is the thing sought. Internationalism is the general temper. Elegance is the real preoccupation.

There are the Russians Markevitch and Nabokov, the Italians Rieti and Massimo. There is the Marquise de Casa-Fuerte, a French woman, who organizes the Sérénade concerts. There is Milhaud as a gauge of respectability and Kurt Weill as a gesture of friendship to young Germany and of admiration for his songs in the popular style from *The Beggar's Opera*.

Markevitch has been described in this magazine. Nabokov is known best as the composer of a ballet called *Ode*, given in 1928 by Diaghilev with décors of Tchelichev, and of a *Symphonie Lyrique*, played in America by Koussevitzky. He is the lyrical Russian, like Tchaikovsky, not the calculating virtuoso like Balikirev and Rimsky-Korsakov and Stravinsky and Markevitch. With less of deliberate effectiveness than the last of

these, he achieves perhaps a richer and more comprehensive expression, albeit a shade gushy.

Vittorio Rieti is of the generation of Milhaud and Auric, surviving by his skill at simplicity and precision into an epoch of purer classical style. His ballets and symphonic works are too well-known to need my recounting.

Leone Massimo is a pupil of Koechlin and a Roman. His melodic style is of the finest Italian marble, like that of Monteverdi and Cimarosa, and he makes musical architecture with it that is at once delicate in detail, monumental and grand. He is an aristocrat rather than an elegant. I recommend particularly to chamber-musicians the *String Quartet No. I*, and the *Sonata for Violoncello and Piano*.



Now for another neighborhood, another audience, another manner. Cliquet-Pleyel wrote in 1928 a very long piece for soprano and orchestra called *Commode* (meaning in this case the Emperor Commodus and not a chest of drawers). The poem by Georges Hugnet represents "quelques instants d'une vie impériale." The music is rich, flowery and abundant, full of pathos and parade, tangos and blues, battle, murder and sudden-death. The popular flavor in it is that of Satie's *Mercur*. If you want to call it Boulevard-music, be sure you mean the lower Boulevards, not Malesherbes or the Champs-Élysées. It has nothing to do with the dress-making trade.

Cliquet-Pleyel has more talent than anybody knows what to do about. He was a child-prodigy at the Conservatoire, an infant Mozart. Today he is a musician of prodigious powers. He is the best transposer and score-reader in Paris, probably in Europe. He can write you a symphony or a musical comedy almost any week-end, copy out the parts, rehearse it, conduct the show, perform a Mozart piano-concerto between the acts, all without seeming to lift more than his little finger, and all the while spending ten to fourteen hours a day making sound-films. His facility is so colossal that he can do the routine work that seems to be the usual destiny of men of his talent, and still write fine free music as if he had nothing else on his mind.

Sauguet is easier to situate in the French tradition than Cliquet-Pleyel. His talent resembles more closely an historical French type. He is compact and all-of-a-piece. Cliquet has the looseness and the ease of Delacroix, plus a disinterestedness that is naive and absolutely unique.

The list of his works is long. *Commode* is the most remarkable symphonic piece. It has nothing in common with the heavy-footed historical evocations of Milhaud and Roussel and Florent Schmitt. In spite of its length, it is as easy to sit through as a newsreel and quite as rich and tasty. *Les Impôts* (book and lyrics by Max Jacob) is a burlesque operetta and more than worthy of the stage that knew Grétry and Offenbach and Messager. It is an abundance-horn of wit and romance and fine melody, of fantastically varied musical invention and of the most delicious and grandiose absurdities. The film *Panurge* contains popular songs as fine as any in Weill's *Beggar's Opera* and which I prefer to those. I find them less monotonous, though they could probably stand just as hard usage.

The most spectacular of his chamber-works, and one of the most moving half-hours in modern music, is *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*, a set of concert-variations in the American manner for piano, saxophone, solo violin and string quartet. And when I say the American manner, I mean the American manner, not the Franco-American. I wish somebody like Duke Ellington (or even the League of Composers) would perform it in New York. It would be refreshing in a Gershwin-weary world.

There are plenty of other composers in France, even young or youngish ones. The subventioned orchestras play pieces by Canteloube and Jacques Ibert and Jean Rivier and Marcel Delannoy, even by Marius-Francois Gaillard. These are good men, talented men, competent men. Though their pieces usually bear a recent date, the matter in them is never, properly speaking, news. None of their kind has ever bitten a dog or sassed a professional critic.

Around Sauguet and Cliquet-Pleyel there is plenty of sassing and back talk and frequently a first-class fight. There is always fighting where somebody has struck a vein. Paris squabbles get noised about a good deal, and people imagine that artistic life

there is all advertising and throat-cutting and graft. They forget that there can be at the same time friendship and loyalty and high passion.

As a matter of fact, there is less log-rolling and underhand dealing anywhere among artists than among critics, less grafting in any younger generation than in an older. And there has never been at any time in France the irreducible bitterness that is felt here in New York among the cliques.



Lots has been said and written also about the crisis in contemporary music. The crisis was passed years ago. The critical decade of modern music was the one that began so bravely and so cockily with *Petrushka* and ended with the calm and translucent *Socrate*. Since 1920 there has been only coupon-cutting. Since 1925, there has also been a new growth.

The ideas and the lives of the young everywhere today are centered about problems of sentiment and feeling. Nobody expects further technical research to provide its own corrective, in music any more than in manufacturing. We have had quite enough technical research. Call it too much, if you like, because enough is always too much. Diminishing artistic returns prove that it is no longer artistically profitable to labor that vein. Let's try another. Grand passion is no good. That hasn't recovered from Wagner yet. What about well-bred salon-music? That was tried in 1920 and called neo-classicism.* It turned out to have charm and some style. It was, however, a bit anemic. It needed that same corrective that the late eighteenth century needed, an infusion of warm, personal feeling. Let's give it that then, say the young; we can cultivate our warm feelings as easily as our cold ones (recently so fashionable). They do. And the result is called popularly Neo-Romanticism.

The life of the sentiments is weaker today than at the end of the eighteenth century. The seventeenth century categories of sympathy, friendship, love, of antipathy, dislike, hatred; desire, passion, lust; respect, admiration and awe; magnificence, grandeur and majesty; all these distinctions and many more existed still and were commonly used as dramatic channeliza-

*The idea of being well-bred is behind all neo-classicism; Vergil, Racine and Pope, for example.

tion for living and for writing. They don't exist very much nowadays. The more recent terminology of Will to Power, Feeling of Inferiority and Oedipus-Complex are not yet sufficiently subdivided to be very useful in describing people and their deeds. And so we begin again where there is still some tiny living tradition surviving after a century of gigantic hypertrophies and gigantic destructions. Sentimental love, spontaneous sympathy, faithful comradeship, playful libertinage, pastoral domesticity, tolerant rivalry and affectionate bickering, these are modes of living still at hand, stylizations usable in art. They will do as a beginning till some ritual can grow that will be capable of handling grander emotions in a grander way.

In an age that is busy making ritual instead of destroying it, the retelling of old legends in a new way is a thing that is always interesting to everybody. Racine made Phèdre and Bérénice behave like ladies at the court of Versailles. Cleopatra as the New Flapper getting what she wanted out of Caesar by showing him a good time said something to Shaw's public in 1900. When Charpentier enlarged the love affair of a Paris midinette, and Debussy that of an obscure medieval lady into epic proportions and gave their doings thus an almost legendary prestige, they burst the bubble of romantic inflation. They left us no way of enlarging further the sentiments of simple people. Nobody has tried seriously since 1900 to apotheosize the Common Man.*

On the contrary, the history of the musical stage (and that includes opera, oratorio and ballet) since 1900 has been mostly the retelling of grand old stories and a reducing of them to the measure of life as we know it. Stravinsky's *Oedipus* would make no sense whatever to an age that had never seen a Russian duke in exile. To an age that has seen a great many, the conception has some grandeur (and no little monotony). The stage-works of the so-called Neo-Romantics are actual in a similar way. *Fabrice* and *Mosca* and the *Sanseverina* from Sauguet's *Chartreuse de Parme* are *vedettes* of contemporary high life. *Vogue* would take a lively interest in their movements. Cliquet-Pleyel's *Commodus* is poignant like Al Capone.

The twentieth century does not change its problems or solve them overnight. They are being attacked one by one. The first

**Petrushka* is not about the common man. It is the old Pagliacci-hokum about the private life of the artist. *Sacre* and *Les Noces* have no individuals in them. They are glorifications of the abstract ideas of, respectively, killing a young girl, and getting into bed with a new wife; that is to say, pure cruelty and sex-appeal.

twenty years occupied itself with technic. The present age is concerned about feeling. When these elements have been satisfactorily co-ordinated, there will be plenty of time to bother about taste and the perfection of stylistic conventions; and when that time comes there will be a way of living, of contemplating and of writing grandiose tragedy.

There is no occasion at present for being depressed about the state of music on other than commercial grounds. The commercial market may grow or it may diminish. The rich may get poor and exclusive and the poor may get poorer and picturesque. A great deal of good and bad music will continue to be written, nevertheless, by those who can afford music paper. Some of the good may sell and some bad will certainly sell and some good will not sell and a great deal of bad will also not sell and various critics and conductors will have a very good time and some will lose their jobs. And all of that makes absolutely no difference whatever to the art of composition.