

A LETTER FROM PARIS

MINNA LEDERMAN

LAST month I received a letter from France, postmarked Lyon but with the familiar Paris address inside – 70 Avenue Kléber – of the magazine, *La Revue Musicale*. It was my first word from the capital since the defeat.

"Dear Madam," said the letter. "We take this occasion to inform you that since the beginning of the occupation, *La Revue Musicale* has published a weekly entitled *L'Information Musicale*. This is now *authorized for circulation in the non-occupied zone and in foreign countries*. We are sending a copy in the belief that it will interest you and you will want to subscribe, since each week it brings news of the artistic activity of Paris." Signed, with the expression of the usual distinguished sentiments, very devotedly, Robert Bernard, Director of *La Revue Musicale*. I have not yet received a copy; neither, so far as I know, has anyone else in this country. But the message itself – and the enclosed circular – carry news. Interesting too is the passage I have italicized.

In its day – the years between the two wars – *La Revue Musicale* was one of the most delightful magazines in the world. The feel of the paper, the proportion of its margins, the restraint and subtle variation of types, its baroque cherubs, flutes, harps and lovers' knots blended, in a marvelous Parisian alliance, with cartoons, portraits and decors by great contemporary artists, brought every month, a very special pleasure. These physical charms alone set it apart from its venerable German competitor, *Die Musik* of Berlin which was of course always perfectly legible and no nonsense about it, or the acid, intransigent, little Viennese throw-away, *Musikblätter des Anbruch*. It was also more alluring than the literary reviews of the time or the painting magazines with their super-duper, often meaningless full-color reproductions.

For range, tolerance, perception, taste and musical scholarship it had no rival. Henri Prunières, its founder and director, was notoriously infatuated with Lully, but his homage to that figure gave the pages on occasion a grave, antique appeal. Here even letters of musicians long dead and gone were reprinted not in the usual lugubrious joy of disinterment but for their wit and prophetic vision. The critiques of Boris de Schloezer were profound through insight and experience, as they were erudite. Its international reportage set a standard beyond the enterprise of the provincial English or even the energetic Central European press. Bergson, Valéry, Branly wrote for it at length and with enthusiasm – for in this review music was always assayed as an element organic to a great culture. Cherished now as collectors' items are the special Bach, Mozart, Debussy and Stravinsky issues and, above all, that tribute to the most brilliant short period in the life of Paris, the Diaghilev issue. In its special way *La Revue Musicale* was a most authentic expression of contemporary French civilization.

The new weekly, now ready for export, has taken form in the shadow of this magazine, and under the guiding hand of its last representative. Prunières established *La Revue Musicale* in 1920 with André Coeuroy as editor; in the thirties Léon Kochnitzky of Belgium joined the staff and later the Swiss critic Robert Bernard; by the spring of 1939 Bernard alone was left. Meanwhile the hard-pressed review had received financial assistance from a patron reputedly active in the Fascist party of Colonel de la Roque. When Prunières, very ill, retired to the country, Bernard inherited its sole direction. The subject of his last issue – Music of the "Latin" nations: Argentina, Brazil, Belgium, Canada, France, Italy, Portugal, Roumania, Spain, Switzerland – already, in March 1940, carries obvious political implications.

But *L'Information Musicale* appears to have no other link with its distinguished predecessor. The printed circular makes, with one variation, the innocuous promises of a trade or amusement review. Every Friday it gives "programs of concerts, theatres, movies, music halls;" carries "reviews of musical affairs, drama, movies" and so on; echoes "news of artistic life;" offers "comment and analysis of works on concert programs." Reminiscent of our own *Etude* is a regular department of Teaching Problems. More purposeful is the weekly chapter of a History of French Music from the Middle Ages to the Present Day. Portentous, and a little suggestive of New Order phraseology is the statement of gen-

eral intention: "To consider all problems with the seriousness and conscience which are demanded if one really wants to serve art and contribute to its advancement."

The single arresting item, however, its list of contributors is, for a magazine of such modest objectives, impressive. I have chosen to mention here, from over fifty, only those familiar to Americans; several are international figures: Alfred Cortot, Arthur Honegger, Serge Lifar, Francis Poulenc, Jacques Copeau, Arthur Hoérée, Henri Sauguet, Marcel Delannoy, Daniel Lesur, José Bruyr, Marguerite Long, Georges Dandelot, André Jolivet, Paul Landormy, Paul Marie Masson, Gustave Samazeuilh.

It is impossible to read their names and not be deeply affected by the context. These are the citizens, or long-time residents, of what was once the most articulate country on earth, where the right to individual opinion was more cherished than anywhere else and freedom of expression literally knew no bounds. After two years of silence – which we well understood – they are to communicate with us once more. By special permission, in an "authorized" medium. What can this mailing privilege be except a reward for good behavior? It is not important, even significant to grade their allegiances, to point out that Cortot is a member of the Pétain Government, that Lifar works for the German controlled Paris opera and Lesur for the Vichy radio, that Honegger and Bernard, two Swiss musicians, should voluntarily attend a festival for Franco-German collaboration in Vienna, or, on the other hand, that Sauguet and Poulenc remain politically aloof. Aware or unwitting, eager or indifferent, collaborationist, complaisant or merely "correct," their heads are now impaled on the facade of a "French-culture-as-usual" in which frontal position they serve their conqueror well. From here the view is as disheartening as news of more remote countries left green and unscorched.