

MODERN MUSIC

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NOTES ON THE "NEW ORDER"

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IN FRANCE today there is much talk of the so-called "New Order," but since its significance is still undetermined, to most people the phrase is meaningless. Even those willing to accept it unconditionally find that its unintelligibility persists despite the German "specialists" who keep flocking to Paris to reveal the "New Order" and prepare for its advent. If and when it comes, it will no doubt be given definite form. In the meantime it exists in a preliminary state which, however shapeless, permits analysis of its characteristics.

First then – in all parts of Europe where this new order is now taking form, there may be noted the total eclipse of those values embraced in the concept of "Humanism." The mere acceptance of the coming "Order" seems to free the mind of the moral and intellectual connotations of humanism, at the same time absolving it of any feeling of trespass when abusing the term. Where the word humanism is still current it has been robbed of its true meaning, and turned cynically into a demagogic instrument of propaganda (by Marcel Déat and others of his kind). For such purposes the term remains useful, since the world, for centuries accustomed to humanistic ideology, is still chary of giving it up. But to be accused of distorting the concept itself no longer, as before, causes the guilty ones to feel reactions of shame or fury – only contempt and mockery for those still adhering to a discarded ideology. This is the essential sign of the replacement of the "old" by the "new."

In France the very strength of this replacement process will soon make it awkward even to discuss the subject, just as it would seem queer to stress the old style of a garment made over for a different purpose. Human-

ism in France is now in tattered rags. Those who still appear unwilling to discard them, are really more insistent on the "way" of discarding, rather than on the obvious necessity of burning such rubbish. People are beginning to admit that the whole European system of culture, social, economic and political, has become out-of-date, that, together with the associated concepts, it is void of meaning and significance.

This conviction is the tragic result of the capitulation, and therefore comes too late to be a volitional acceptance of the transformation. The change itself has the barbaric character of violence; it appears in the form of enslavement of the conquered nations. It is impossible to retain the "old," for the "old" has outlived itself. It is equally impossible to accept the "new," for its paths are loathsome and vile, bloody hands are forcing it on us. The solution of this problem, how to pass from the past to the future, is as yet unrevealed. And not by fire and steel alone will it come. Salvation can be born only when the monstrous will to world-reconstruction by slavery and force is opposed by another unyielding will, upheld by a burning faith in the need for world-regeneration. France lacked this faith, so France lacked resistance. But now, among the people, the great smoldering force of opposition begins to gather, although inaction keeps it dormant. Now hardly noticeable, it awaits the hour to kindle the fires of revolt against the oppressor whose presence defiles its soil.

III

The crisis in the role of humanism has been long drawn out. Artists were the first to foretell its advent; in the comedy of life they have long played the part of victim rather than of hero. Baudelaire, in his picture of the agony of the world in which he lived, gave us the passage "Le monde va finir. La seule raison pour laquelle il existe, c'est qu'il dure encore." And T. S. Eliot, in 1925, wrote:

"This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper."

In his notes in the same book of poems, Eliot quotes this significant passage from Hermann Hesse's *Blick in Chaos*: "Schon ist halb Europa, schon ist zumindest der halbe Osten Europas auf dem Wege zum Chaos, fährt betrunken im heiligen Wahn am Abgrund entlang und singt dazu, singt betrunken und hymnisch wie Dmitri Karamasoff sang. Ueber diese Lieder lacht der Bürger beleidigt, der Heilige und Seher hört sie mit Tränen." Baudelaire's forebodings were already reality to Eliot.

At the dawn of the Russian revolution, we were in humanism's last stages. The poet, Alexander Blok, welcomed the revolution, believing it meant the purification of the old world. Then he sensed the decay of his universe and, unable to overcome his despair, died at an early age. He spoke often about "the collapse of humanism" in connection with the loss of the "spirit of music." As the death throes of humanism prolonged themselves, the purest intellectuals made a last attempt to reprieve its existence by a process of galvanization. But this only gave the appearance of life to something already dead. Paul Claudel, another remarkable poet, was also willing "to accept a revolution," but only a "national" one. Despite his years he now seems unaffected by the crash "of an old world." He insists "that he never felt better in his life." A guardian of the highest Latin tradition and a leader of French Catholicism, Claudel is perfectly happy in the midst of the process of dislocation, but how he manages to feel so is known only to himself.

The contrasting attitudes of these two poets in the face of the crisis in world culture, reveal the fundamental difference between the Russian and French spiritual experience of these last twenty-five years. One stands at the beginning of the road, the other at the end. But all this is history!

III

The transformation of the old order into the new one will probably continue to be made on the down-grade. A time comes when the conscience of individuals weakens imperceptibly – and at such moments their inner being is prepared to accept a "New Order." Jacques Chardonne recently in *La Nouvelle Revue Française* told us how on a certain day in June, "... un vieux monde d'idées et de certitudes s'est défait en moi d'un seul coup parce qu'un autre univers m'apparut . . ." Chardonne has now become a symbol. A brilliant article by André Gide, entitled *Chardonne, 1940*, appeared in the April 12th issue of *Figaro*. A masterpiece of style, it is also an admirable expression of French thought in the first period following the downfall. Ephemeral, disincarnate ideas, feelings, the semblances of sentiment, vague hints of desire, nothing but riddles and tokens for the "chosen." Affirmation inseparably linked to negation in the same sentence, everything leveled down to dialectics, with an inexorable fear of the definite. A biting, overwhelming irony destroying everything which crosses its path remains the only manifestation of life. Every word said about Chardonne, Gide might apply to himself. As he frankly admits, the darts of his irony are aimed at himself as at his own circle. "... 'Presque toujours',

dit-il, l'homme s'affirme par réaction!' Ah, certes, je le sens bien en le lisant. Fruit comme lui d'hérédités croisées, écoutant se combattre en moi, comme en lui, des conseils divers, je me reconnais l'esprit parent du sien. En s'affirmant dans la non-affirmation, dans l'abscons et la reticence, dans 'le contraire pourrait se démontrer', il joue pour moi le rôle de l'ilote ivre du vin dont j'aurais tendance à me soûler." France's preeminent contemporary writer, whose greatest concern was always the avoidance of hypocrisy, now seems himself confused. All the cards are mixed; the game of art and life is irremediably spoiled for the players. Gide's article centers about the words of an English statesman who answered the question: "And now what's going to happen?" with "Nothing ever happens." To that Gide today replies: "Something certainly must have happened since the summer of 1939."

The final pre-war period was terrifying because of those "non-happenings." Everything was frozen to stillness, immovable, fixed. This state continued through the winter of 1939. Paris yearned for a change. The last dreadful days before the fall saw the churches crammed with people awaiting a miracle. The slogan ran: "France can be saved only by a miracle!" But if a part of the population expected this miracle to bring about the salvation of the country, a good many longed for it with the hope that it would cause "everything to remain as before."

III

There are two distinctive features of this "New Order" which may be termed "Academism" and "Collaboration." The first applies to specialists in the artistic, technical, or scientific fields, whose activity is recognized as indispensable and whose competence is unquestioned. Some doubt may exist about their wholehearted acceptance of the "New Order" but they are allowed to work within the strict limits of this "academism" on condition that they renounce all intervention in political life or any expression of personal opinion about it. People who suppress their opinions on events, seek an outlet in abstract intellectual activity. This kind of "academism" was born in France as a defense against the paralysis of the spirit caused by inactivity. The "academists" are now neatly docketed in a general filing system; a sorting out process will take place when the hour comes.

Of the much-used word, "collaboration," the only meaning at present is the complete, unreserved readiness to serve indiscriminately the will of the conqueror.

Those who do not belong to either of these categories, and are unfor-

fortunate enough to attract the attention of the authorities, are sent to concentration camps and to slow or speedy extermination.

All this seems coarse, rudimentary, schematic! But style and esthetics are not now to be considered. The trimmings will come later. The cultural process will follow the military period and create a "magnificent" front for this "New Order." The bloody age will blossom into the "dialectical" age. History repeats itself; we have seen such things happen before, although perhaps never on so vast a scale.

The "grand" manner is characteristic of the German style. It must have: "Eine prachtvolle Aussicht," it must be "Ganz kolossal!" In the very midst of the bloody slaughter, a German actor jumps into the arena and with finger pointed draws our attention to "the very greatest fight in history." Behold "the very largest number of machines." This tawdry language is contagious. Soon the rest of us are parroting his words, we repeat after him: "The very greatest! The very largest." So the destruction of millions of people and of a centuries-old civilization is turned by the Germans into a three-ring circus.

III

Music has played, so far, no active part in the scheme of things. Forgotten for the moment, it is referred to only when a back-drop is needed for solemn meetings of political ceremonies; then appropriate works are chosen.

It is true of course that it is through literature that the social conscience is most directly expressed. For many years music's place in the hierarchy of French cultural values has been subordinate. I am speaking here of the official attitude for, certainly, in the scale of French culture, music has always been on a plane equal to the rest of art. Probably the personality of the artists themselves has played a role. Since the death of Debussy, and, more recently, of Ravel, music has lacked such outstanding representatives and therefore music has lost much of the esteem in which it was once held. Albert Roussel was the last musician to occupy a position of moral leadership in this hierarchy. Today Alfred Cortot, a member of the State Council in Vichy, is considered the guardian of French musical culture.

Like everything else in France, music has passed under a racial guillotine which has truncated the effectiveness of choruses and orchestras. Since they may no longer be formed according to purely professional requirements, the quality of performance has been lowered. Poverty, hunger, dirt too are drains on vital energy. If music were not the only means of

existence for a great number of professionals, it would certainly have come to an end.

Georges Auric who took the place of Boris de Schloezer at *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, wrote last winter from occupied Paris: "The season here is excellent." He complains only about the monotony of the musical programs, and the non-performance of new works. Since that complaint has been heard for many years in Paris, one gets the impression that "nothing" had happened *except* that the Germans are in Paris.

What direct form does the German oppression take in the field of music? It would be an error to assume that the Germans plan to impose upon the French their own personal conceptions. The Germans, like "good landowners," strive for the best management of "their future property." Since art is one of the "great treasures" of the world, it may be permitted to survive in France and in other parts of Europe as well, except of course the so-called modern "Entartete Kunst" ("Jewish and decadent" in its esthetics). The leveling of art would mean its death, and this does not seem to be the wish of the occupants.

Eighteenth century music is being restored and reintroduced. The "Galanteries Musicales," with all the powdered, be-wigged, royal court ballet styles, are played all over France. It seems to me that the preference shown by the Germans for this particular aspect of eighteenth century music is nothing more than a reaction from romanticism. The typical light French musical taste is patronized and stimulated, not because of its real value – the perfect balance of musical expression – but because it is unfamiliar to the Germans and appears "quaint" to them (*Le pittoresque de l'art*). It is characteristic that Gabriel Fauré's music is played everywhere. He is considered *the* expression of French genius, although his music is only a weak reflection thereof. The authentic expression of this genius is certainly Debussy, who seems to be just a little in the shade at present. He hated Germany and the Germans, and his famous little song about "children who have no longer any home" is still well remembered: "Nous n'avons plus de maisons, les ennemis ont tout pris, jusqu'à notre petit lit . . ."

Perhaps music is still being composed in the depths of the cultural catacombs of Paris as well as beneath the ashes of razed towns in other parts of Europe. The future alone will reveal to us its form and expression. The present manifestations of musical life have only a moral meaning, depending as they do upon change and upon each separate situation in the lives of the individual musicians.

Experience must be personal; it must be lived, it cannot be intellectually understood. This seems commonplace, but that very commonplace explains the difference between the "catastrophic" and the "normal" world which is so very clearly defined today. The "normal" world cannot grasp the inner experience of the catastrophe because its spirit is not involved.

But life itself cannot be destroyed, for it will eternally be restored. Grass will grow on stone. There is taking place in Europe today a destruction of the forms of thought and of existence to which people have been accustomed for centuries. The breaking down of the old and building up of the new is a most terrifying experience for mankind. It is known as the transformation of a human era. In the process of history – whether we will or no – perhaps it is indispensable that such a transformation be preceded by a period of complete inertia.