

LATIN GAIETY TODAY

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FOR some time now it has not been so difficult to talk about the music and the musicians of today. The two poles of polytonality and atonality seem to have relaxed the tension of their fierce opposition after having engendered respectively two such excellent works as *Christophe Colomb* and *Wozzeck*. The general trend appears to lie in the direction of a compromise of which Honegger has given us several important examples.

However, study of the recent work of certain composers reveals several quite distinct tendencies in the art of the Latin countries today.

Ten or fifteen years ago there was a very marked movement toward a simple, gay, unpretentious music. Has this desire for gaiety been revived by the world-wide economic crisis? I do not know, but at any rate, it has definitely returned to us with increased force; notably in the cultivation of comic-opera and the operetta.

But there is one great difference between the present and the years immediately following the war. Then many composers, often over-eager for a musical reconstruction, wrote somewhat carelessly. Today discipline seems more severe, and only works that are perfectly written, with simple but skilled and subtle craftsmanship, are considered worthy of survival. Even a gifted composer if he lacks sufficient training expresses himself but thinly. I am thinking of Sauguet, for instance, whose *Plumet du Colonel*, opera bouffé, performed fairly recently by Mme. Beriza, revealed much verve and true comic invention, but whose development, as *Contrebasse*, a sketch given this year by Balieff, clearly showed, seems arrested because he has not acquired sufficient formal perfection.

A perfect combination of gaiety and science, of humor, and an elegance approaching true beauty, has been presented to us in an extraordinary manner by Jacques Ibert. Not that this first-rate musician is confined to one genre. He began as a marked romantic in his symphonic poem after the *Ballad of Reading Gaol*. Then he developed a delicate impressionism, in his *Escalés*. His *Concerto* for cello and wind-instruments is a perfectly constructed piece of pure music, which stands completely on its own. But the true Ibert is the one who exploits his gift for the comic; he approaches actual clowning but remains this side of it by virtue of his great restraint. Even *Divertissements*, for four wind instruments, constructed on an impeccable instrumental and harmonic foundation, let loose the frankest hilarity. A definite step in the composer's career was the creation, for Mme. Beriza's all too short-lived theatre, of the little comic opera called *Angélique*. This score is delicious. Astonishingly sure, the music ranges from a rollicking pastiche (of Puccini, Rimsky, etc.) to the most inspired animation (the roles of the Italian and the Englishman, for instance).

Another comic opera, the *Roi d'Yvetot*, is of more considerable size. In spite of the violent color of its scenes, it keeps within the realm of tints and half-shades, revealing at times a very delicate sensitivity. Perhaps it is here that Ibert's surprising technic can be studied most easily; especially his harmonic system, so clear, on the surface so traditional in style, but abounding in the most canny artifices, notably those involved in the very personal use he makes of numerous appoggiaturas without resolution. In this, Ibert's work can be clearly separated from Ravel's, which is sometimes claimed to be its source.

Ibert's comic strength can be observed even more freely in the pieces of stage music he has written to accompany various plays. Here he exhibits extreme suppleness. The music for Jules Romain's *Donogoo*, for instance in the scene in the bar, exhibits the most acute modernity. The waltzes for the ball in *Castiglione* are deliciously Second Empire yet in no way borrowed from Strauss or Offenbach. More than these, perhaps, certain chamber orchestral pieces for Labiche's *Le Chapeau de Paille d'Italie*, are irresistible. The entrance, at one point, of a sifflet à roulettes

at the climax of a crescendo, would win the approval of the most staid censor. With Ibert effects of this kind are never derived from jazz.

The *Roi d' Yvetot* is, when summed up, a large illustration for a popular French song. Another composer who has successfully exploited this kind of song is Maurice Delannoy, former associate of Honegger and of Roland Manuel. Delannoy, notably with his comic opera *Le Poirier de Misère*, is one of the few composers who truly express the spirit of the Ile-de-France; he might be compared to the romantic writer Gerard de Nerval.

Outside France, in Italy for instance, the popular song has inspired a number of musicians of the younger generation. The ballet *Barabau*, by Vittorio Rieti, is a vast tapestry woven about a popular song. The well-known French motif: "*il court, il court le furet*," inspires the finale of the composer's *String Quartet*. But these works are far inferior to his remarkable *Orfeo*, an opera on the magnificent text of Ange-Politien, the poet-humanist of the Renaissance. What a pity that this work, one of the most representative of young Italian music, has not yet been performed!

One might devote a whole study to the popular spirit in Castelnuovo-Tedesco's art. I believe it is this feeling which has inspired his best works: the vocal ballet, *Bacco in Toscana*, which sparkles with the dionysian lightness of the vintages to be found between Florence and Siena. Though Castelnuovo-Tedesco's instrumental works are often disappointing, I retain a deep admiration for certain of his melodies, especially his *Heine Lieder*.

But in my opinion it is a very young man, Virgilio Mortari, who has best blended gaiety and finesse of technic in Italy. Certain slow movements of his instrumental works (sonatas for violin and piano, for violoncello and piano, etc.) occasionally in the severe style of the eighteenth century are, it is true, filled with the most serious emotion. But it is in works combining fantasy and humor that his talent is at its best. His childlike melodies are little gems. The tiny opera-bouffé for two characters: *Secchi e Sberlecchi*, is not without its faults, but its effect was of the sort to make one eager for *La Scuola delle Donne*, the musical comedy after Molière, which he has just completed. Mortari

seems to me to be perhaps the best fitted to carry on the grand tradition of Verdi's *Falstaff*.

I spoke in the beginning of this article of the recent vogue in Paris for the operetta. Among the most notable events of the last season were the creation of *Le Roi Pausole* by Honegger, and the revival of Offenbach's *La Vie Parisienne*. To these must be added a first work by a musician from whom much may be expected in this genre: *Moineau*, by Louis Beydts. In spite of a rather feeble libretto the music is so well written, so full of exquisite little inventions, that the composer seems to be in line as the successor to the late André Messager.

The tide in this direction is so strong that even a musician ordinarily very serious, like Jean Rivier, of whose talent we shall hear more some day, has given to the Straram Concerts an *Ouverture pour une Opérette Imaginaire*, and in the talking films, some of which are really operettas for the screen, there are veritable musical finds: e.g. in *Le Million*, the chorus of tenants on the staircase.

This taste for operetta is not limited to France. Several South American composers of great talent are not unfamiliar with the form. The tangos of the Argentinian, Carlos Pedrell, are truly impassioned, violent and at the same time refined, very often original. Their mixture of sentimentality and raillery comes off extremely well.

The Uruguayan, Alfonso Broqua, possesses an even better understanding of how to combine humor and fine writing. One could write a great deal about Broqua, whose style is extremely supple and in a state of constant development. Few have been inspired as he has by the admirable art of the Incas. Certain of his guitar pieces recall those skies illumined nightly by the Southern Cross. I remember among others a *Vidala*, a strange *marche funèbre* combining modernism with an ageless archaism. Broqua's symphonic poems: *Noche Campera*, or *Evocation Andine*, could also be studied to advantage.

One should not leave Spanish America without mentioning Chile, which is developing a most advanced musical culture. (I am thinking especially at the moment of Allende and his charming *Tonadas*). But there are many other things I should

like to mention concerning certain centers of esthetic activity of the Latin world. For instance, we know a few Spanish successors to Manuel de Falla, Salazar and Halfter, fairly well. But we are less familiar with the delicate impressionism of Catalonia, a country whose art is totally different from that of Spain, and two of whose principal exponents are Manuel Blancafort and Mompou.

Before closing this brief survey I must refer to one of the great regrets and hopes of French art. To the very lovely verses of the Uruguayan poet, Jules Supervielle, Jacques Benoist-Méchin several years ago wrote a great first work: the cantata, *Equateur*. It had many defects: a certain heaviness, and a clumsiness in the handling of the orchestra. But the music revealed a kind of cosmic awareness which is rare in these days. I know of few works showing such a strong Whitmanesque sense of human travail and of life in its totality. Since then Benoist-Méchin has given us but two or three books of melodies, written on sonnets of Michael Angelo, or on fragments of Petrarch's *Triumphs*, which show a feeling for the large decorative line, in the style of Rubens, if I may use a pictorial comparison, yet still marked by certain gaucheries. I fervently hope that this artist, from whom one may expect the greatest things, will continue his march ahead, and will produce works vast in dimension and high in conception.