

By way of a "song hit" (which Berlin audiences usually re-demand) the opera boasts a passage for Jonny (it is also worked up into a triumphant finale) as he gloats over the violin he filched and over what he conceives to be his proved destiny. The passage is a C major *maestoso*, marked in the score "im Ton eines Neger Spirituals." Krenek's notion of a negro spiritual sounds like the fruit of a union between a German chorale and a Turnverein solemnity. As for the harmonization, one hears it with an uneasy suspicion that someone must have furnished Krenek with a *Deep River* or two as treated by our own worthy Harry Burleigh.

And why, when all's said, so much pother and glorification over a violin? Doesn't Herr Krenek know that the instrument sacred above all others to jazz is the saxophone, not the fiddle?

*Herbert Peyser*

### STRAVINSKY AND RAVEL, WINTER, 1928

**F**OLLOWING in the footsteps of Serge Diaghilev, Mme. Ida Rubinstein has undertaken the organization of a ballet company and the staging of new works, enlisting some of the best musicians of today. While we may regret that all she asked of Arthur Honegger and Darius Milhaud was a simple arrangement of old works, she did at least order original compositions from Stravinsky and Ravel.

First then, let me state my disappointment on hearing the *Baiser de la Fée* of Igor Stravinsky. We all know, of course, that the great Russian master has undertaken to create the ancient forms anew. He has given us a *Sonate*, a *Concerto*, an *Oratorio*, an *Opéra*, and finally, last year, a classical ballet, *Apollon*.

When we think of the creative powers revealed in *Le Sacre du Printemps*, *Les Noces*, *L'Histoire du Soldat* and the *Octuor*, of the great number of this composer's works which have literally transformed the aspect of music, we regret to see him halt in his progress and strive to infuse new life into forms which fail to meet the needs of our emotions. But this reactionary movement in artistic creation is general today. There is no doubt that in music, as in painting and literature, we have gone too far and feel the need of a new classicism. I believe, however, that the best

solution lies not in slavishly imitating the forms of the past, but rather in making the new forms classical, as the old masters did in their day. When Haydn and Mozart wrote quartets and symphonies they carried media which were then new and revolutionary to the highest point of perfection. I should like to see Stravinsky, whom I consider the greatest living composer, demonstrate his genius in the founding of a new classicism, based on new elements and not on imitations.

With these reservations, I must admit that the earlier works, *Oedipus*, the *Sonate*, the *Concerto*, *Mavra* and even *Apollon*, contain some wonderful passages. We are always aware of a great constructive genius who takes exact count of the value and quality of his materials, who apportions the orchestral sonorities in the most unerring manner, and who exercises the same care and ingenuity on a simple dance tune as on the andante of a sonata. In all these works Stravinsky, always skirting the dangerous precipice of a pastiche, never falls over. The *Sonate* and *Oedipus* remind us of many classical works but the writing could come from no pen except Stravinsky's. By its dynamic essence, by its contrapuntal style, it proclaims his personality even in passages where he most closely follows a familiar model.

I cannot say as much for the *Baiser de la Fée*. From beginning to end this is an imitation of Tchaikovsky. We could understand Stravinsky amusing himself by facetiously writing a ballet in that style; but it is obvious that here he is extremely serious. Not only did he appropriate the melodic ideas of Tchaikovsky, but he has tried to adopt his style and his instrumentation. He was not brazen enough to imitate some of the more obvious flaws in his model, the vapid instrumental doublings, the banal harmonies. Stravinsky has created a sort of ideal Tchaikovsky ballet, without the formal defects of the original, and with little of that small, blue flower which exhales its romantic fragrance on every page of the Russian master's scores. We seem to be hearing Tchaikovsky played on a mechanical piano, without nuances of expression.

The scenario is borrowed from the old repertoire of the romantic ballet. In the first tableau, a mother loses her child on the mountain; the Snow Fairy finds him and kisses him on the

brow. In the following scenes, we see the boy, now adolescent, haunted by the memory of this supernatural being. He will abandon his sweetheart and join the Fairy in her kingdom in the heart of a glacier. The choreography required by this subject and the music consists of variations, a pas de deux, a ballabile etc., executed by the star and her troupe in ballet skirts.

In the middle of this ballet is inserted a village fête scene, in which Stravinsky abruptly reappears—not the author of *Les Noces* or *Le Sacre* but of *Petrouchka*. This is by far the most agreeable part of the evening. Unfortunately, the last scene, composed more than ever under the inspiration of the music of Tchaikovsky seems long, though it is short by the clock. This is the first time that a work of Stravinsky's has given me such an impression.

I confess I do not get the point of this stunt. That a creator of genius should masquerade in the garments of another musician in order to write a work which is, moreover, insignificant, is too fantastic to be understood. Can we believe that the composer, in a hurry for the money to be paid for the piece ordered, preferred writing an imitation like this to the effort of creating an entirely original opus? It would be the first time that Stravinsky was ever swayed by such a motive; no artist has been more conscientious or honest.

Yet I fervently hope that this was the case, and that the *Baiser de la Fée* is a trivial episode in the life of a great musician from whom we should still expect new and genuine masterpieces.

A masterpiece, however, is just what Maurice Ravel has given us in *Le Bolero*. This may seem too strong a term for a work which its composer appears to consider of no great importance. I would not indeed place it at the level of a ballet like *Daphnis et Chloé*, whose music is much richer. But a masterpiece is essentially a work finished at every point and as perfect as possible. This exactly characterizes *Le Bolero*.

Ravel, the master worker, loves to triumph over difficulties. He set himself a difficult problem and solved it with astounding ease. As in the *Violin Sonata* he strove to give the American Blues a classical style and form, here he has attempted to stylize an art which flourishes in the music hall. Padilla, the popular Spanish

composer, author of the too famous *Valencia*, succeeded in launching an ordinary but intriguing tune by repeating it twenty times to produce a rhythmic and melodic obsession in the public. I would not be surprised to find that Ravel set out to do something of the sort but, scorning popular means, again proved himself the supreme artist. The problem he set was to repeat a single theme incessantly over a basso ostinato, without the relief of any trick of development, of any change in rhythm, or of any incidental passage, contenting himself with giving different colors to the motif by the most varied play of instrumentation, thus achieving a sonorous progression uninterrupted until the end.

He followed this program rigorously. From the beginning, the drum, soon re-enforced by a small stopped trumpet, sets the rhythm of the classical bolero. It hammers this out relentlessly to the finale. The flute, the oboe, the saxophone, the English horn, the trumpet, successively take up the theme, a melody of popular appeal, otherwise quite banal. When the composer has used all the individual instruments he employs them in groups so that the swelling sound is graduated in a long crescendo lasting more than twenty minutes.

Ravel's instrumental art is such that this persistent repetition, always in the same rhythm, always in the same key, with the same motif, produces no monotony. At the conclusion the listener is so firmly established in the tonality that it seems as if it could never change. Just at this moment, however, it does change, in an explosive modulation. The brasses begin to play as a unit, and then the percussive instruments. The music suddenly assumes a tragic color, utterly unexpected, and the work ends in a tornado of sound, which surges up and breaks, leaving the audience literally spellbound by its magic.

*Le Bolero* achieved a considerable success in Paris as well as in Brussels where Mme. Rubinstein gave some performances soon after those at the Opéra. The scenic expression was difficult; it was necessary to follow to the letter the suggestions of this imperious music. Mme. Rubinstein was quite successful in her accomplishment, assisted as she was by the great artist, Alexander Benois, creator of the stage settings and the costumes. These were like a painting by Goya. In a sort of gigantic barn, on a platform .



like that for the Andalusian baile, the dancer executed a stylized interpretation of the bolero, amid the growing excitement of a crowd of spectators, encouraging her with their applause and their pounding heels. At the moment when the music took a dramatic turn, we saw a brawl. Everything seemed to be swept along by the music, a most beautiful spectacle.

If the *Baiser de la Fée* lacked life, *Le Bolero* overflowed with it. This music has absorbed all the sunlight of Spain; Ravel, born near the frontier, in real Basque country, has always been fascinated by Spanish art. We remember his fine *Rapsodie Espagnole* with which in his youth he demonstrated his mastery of the orchestra. His newest work is destined to immediate popularity because of its irresistible rhythmic force and dazzling color.

*Henry Prunières*

### PIZZETTI'S FRA GHERARDO

**F**RA GHERARDO, Ildebrando Pizzetti's opera soon to be introduced to New York, instead of being a logical development of his original dramatic style, shows a marked divergence from it.

Not that Pizzetti has betrayed or denied his conception of the drama, which made such a splendid clean sweep of all previous musical traditions of the stage in *Fedra* and later in *Debora e Jaele*. He is too fine and conscientious an artist for that. But it is obvious that he has been grafting alien elements on his own austere and logical style, tending to a new method, which, in *Fra Gherardo*, reveals a gradual, though not complete, reunion of his art with that of nineteenth century melodrama, especially Verdi's.

Is the result a conflict of two antagonistic forces, harmful to his own operatic style? Or is it a new and living form? While his original conception was, it is true, a fused and solidified synthesis of various elements, it was dominated by one logical idea. His new work is the fruit of two mutually contradictory theories.

Most of us are familiar with his original principle that drama should eliminate purely decorative elements and lyrical outbursts which interrupt its development. This dictated the style that