

intuitive talents, is marked by unevenness; yet, despite its flaws, it can leave us in no doubt that we have here an unusual creative gift which deserves sustained and careful appraisal.

*Leonid Sabaneyeff*

### MAKING THE GRAND TOUR

WHATEVER the ultimate appraisal of contemporary composers may be (if such a thing as an ultimate appraisal were possible!), there is no denying their industrious activity. So eagerly do they work, so readily do they adopt a banner, whether it be "True tones are quarter tones" or "Back to Bach," so open-minded are they in most cases about changing their ways as the spirit willeth that non-composers are likely to find themselves several laps behind in the business of keeping up with the motley and racing procession. André Coeuroy in his *Panorama de la Musique Contemporaine* (Les Documentaires, Simon Kra, Paris), proves immediately and vividly serviceable because, without hesitation, he defines, assesses, and labels the modern composer as he believes him at the moment to be. It is refreshing to find a writer who indulges thus, without apology, in the courage of the moment, and it is helpful to readers who are less sure of their bearings in the swift and shifting stream of present-day musical life. In characterizing a composer, a tendency, a school, M. Coeuroy discloses a typically Gallic talent for the concise and epigrammatic phrase. Whether or not one agrees with this or that dictum, quotation becomes both a duty and a delight.

"Now the Five, who were not at all revolutionary, with the sole exception of Moussorgsky saw no salvation outside the forms of European music. It was the genius in Moussorgsky who divined that these forms were inharmonious with the original spirit of the Russian popular treasure."

What M. Coeuroy thinks of Stravinsky is indicated in this passage. "He gives us today the unique example of a musician who through his fame, his influence, and his spirit is of the whole world. One can no longer say that he is Russian: he has been repudiated by the young Bolsheviks. His youth belonged to Asia,

his maturity to the Occident, but the Russian soul, the Asiatic soul, still exists undiminished under the Occidental vesture." Again, Stravinsky is "a creator who, from on high, dominates all contemporary music."

It is not only the greater schools of the tonal art that M. Coeu-roy deals with in his volume: he touches on Spain, on the Scandinavian countries, on England, on Hungary, the Balkans, Asia Minor, and at length on American jazz. His epigrams, as he makes the grand tour, are often striking.

The music of Prokofieff is "a serum against the Scriabinesque contagion . . . . Neither in its essence nor in its technique does the music of Prokofieff recall that of his elder (Stravinsky). It is naive . . . . Certain *Sarcasms* for piano attempt to express a philosophy and actually unveil a candor. . . . Stravinsky has never had these innocences. Stravinsky is complex and naturally intricate; his music is freighted with an extreme culture which he excels in dissimulating but which he cannot repudiate; his subtle smile is ambiguous, while there is nothing more instinctive than the inspiration of Prokofieff."

"Ernest Bloch seeks neither to reconstitute ancient Hebrew music nor to modernize traditional melodies. He seldom borrows from the Israelite patrimony, but he wishes to express his race."

"Italian music has learned Rossinian laughter once more."

We find Anton Bruckner dreaming in the midst of his symphonies "with those adagios where the grass grows between the notes. Even more than he, Mahler, his disciple, had a Cyclopean heart, yet it was too small to lodge the world. One dies of it. He died of it."

M. Coeuroy cites a young composer, "very advanced," as saying of Schönberg: "After *Pierrot Lunaire* one is satisfied, one has no desire to go and hear something else to clear out one's ears; but after this *Five Pieces for Orchestra* one must flee, must go to hear no matter what, some Puccini or some Thomas, as one drinks lukewarm water on top of a glass of Angostura."

It is, in fact, cacophony "in the sense that it is evil for the ear. But it doesn't follow that on that account it is cut off from the world of music and that it is 'even more foolish than evil,' as an

elderly critic has rashly declared. On the contrary, it is not 'foolish' enough. There is nothing but brain in this aggregation, a too lucid brain, which, through too much ingenuity, risks killing the life of sounds instead of stimulating it."

Our author opposes Fauré to Saint-Saëns: "Saint-Saëns was a classicist, but of that cosmopolitan language which issues from the great German symphony. Fauré was a classicist, but of that language which is impenetrable to him who does not speak it from birth."

The genius of Debussy "was that he enlarged the whole Fauréan horizon by opening unto music all the gates of thought . . . . Musician primarily, but suckled by all the Muses and servitor of sensation. . . . The Debussyian magic was the revelation to musicians of a new manner of feeling and of understanding."

"Lyricism of crystal," that is Ravel. "It was neither chance nor fantasy which led Ravel to write *Le Tombeau de Couperin*. The ever present spirit of a clavecinist has kept Ravel from dangerous temptations, has guarded him from the seductive spells of Schönberg."

As for Arthur Honegger, of the younger French musicians the one who has impressed America most strongly, he belongs to the history of French music, but in his nature he is "profoundly Swiss." (Whatever that may mean!) *Le Roi David* is a "great and beautiful work." It shows Honegger "at the cross-roads of the German and the French highways: Franck-Strauss, Fauré-Debussy. The veritable Honegger begins to emerge in *Horace Victorieux*, an enormous atonal block; as André George has said, a block in which, 'according to his principles he has broadly carved a prodigious living bas-relief': Honegger, the sportsman, who has been inspired by locomotives (*Pacific 231*), by roller skates (*Skating Rink*), and, within the last year, by football (*Rugby*). There is the ardor of *Judith* and of the sonata for violoncello. There is the purely Alpine freshness of the *Pastorale d'Été*, or the delicate mingling of this freshness with lyricism in the *Chant de Joie*. This *Chant de Joie* is not a musical work of the first rank, but it is a confession of the first order. No composition of Honegger shows us better to what degree gravity commands

his nature: it tempers, it balances his joy. The gaiety here is meditative. This is why it is lyrical, without effort in its sustained eloquence."

That outstanding young German, Paul Hindemith, we learn, is "obsessed with the problem of form to the extent of having the courage, which the young Frenchmen have not emulated, of seeking a new style for moribund opera (*Cardillac*). His vitality is splendidly obstinate. He possesses that puissant will which always has animated the great Germans. He goes in search of everything that is living and scorns nothing, not even mechanical music and military music. We have seen him set to music newspaper advertisements less through irony than through the need of putting down everything that is real."

M. Coeuroy considers modern harmony, "horizontalism," polytonality, atonality, quarter-tones ("The error of a Haba," he declares, "is to introduce his quarter-tones into the old system and thus to create only what has been called a 'super-chromaticism.'"), "pure timbres," "spoken song," percussion, "noise-makers," mechanical music, modern opera, operetta and ballet, and the jazz which necessarily interests us Americans especially. M. Coeuroy is a partisan of jazz, which he thinks can be to America what the folk-song has been to European countries; that it may create a culture, a style, a tradition. "It is indeed negro music," he admits, "but where the man of routine hears only noise and sees only grimaces, the historian and the artist find a source of life." Of course he recognizes Mr. Gershwin for his *Rhapsody in Blue* and he pays tribute to Irving Berlin, Eastwood Lane, Mr. Sowerby, Mr. Gruenberg, and others.

Aside from this emphasis on jazz, M. Coeuroy classifies American composers in general. MacDowell, for instance, and Messrs. Carpenter, Hadley, Cadman, Griffes, Taylor, and Whithorne belong in the Anglo-Celtic current, whereas Messrs. Gruenberg and Jacobi and Miss Marion Bauer are rather cosmopolitan. Mr. Loeffler has been influenced by Berlioz, Mr. Clapp by Mahler, Mr. Eichheim, naturally, by China and Japan.

In conclusion, M. Coeuroy poses the question: Whither is music bound? This is his answer: "Music is a great city which is

developing its environs today. As one walks one makes many discoveries, but though it is easier to lose one's way, instinct invariably leads lost children back into the old quarters."

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