***Notes of a Concert-Goer***

***Notes of a Concert-Goer***

 ***dans le Neuvième Arrondissement***

♫

*Speaking as a Parisian ghost-about-town as well as a somewhat dingy ‘Inn-*

*Spectre’. In the Afterlife, partly under the influence of Mr V, I have become*

*much more interested in music than I was in life, Dears. One could say my*

*‘I’ is becoming ‘all ears’, but perhaps one shouldn’t. Here are some reviews.*

1.

Not the arts only, all of life

 Aspires to the condition of

 Music, where all the passions love

Themselves, yes, even pain and strife.

As Nietzsche tells us in *The Birth*

 *Of Tragedy*, in dissonances

 The very soul of suffering dances,

Exulting in its trials on earth.

On a blind giant’s shoulders rides

 (In Schopenhauer’s allegory)

 The lame man who can only *see*,

Beset by instincts on all sides.

But that poor crippled, seeing mind

 Finds fleeting Heaven in the ear

 When the Will, imageless and clear,

Sings Passion purified and kind.

Music in which mere repetition

 Holds sway narcotically but serves

 To soothe or stimulate the nerves;

While that of genius, with a ‘vision’—

And yes, I mix my metaphors

 Advisedly: every ‘aesthetic’

 Is, on some level, *synaesthetic*—

Such melody as Mozart pours

Over our heads like sacred oil,

 Anointing us with happiness

 That brings us close to gods (they bless

This angel resting from his toil):

Such music is our sacred bread,

 Or should be consecrated thus,

 Estranging and enlarging us,

Joining the living and the dead

In tentative and secular

 Communion: so intense, so clear,

 Tuned to the inner eye and ear,

It sings in candles like a star,

Shines like brass fanfares! Though the bliss

 Of the young dancer fades, alas!

 In *moments musicaux*, the ‘was’

Is momentarily an *is*.

2. *After an Evening of Mahler*

Suppose that music, audible,

♫

 Is only writing in the ear;

 Then writing, it is equally clear,

Is music intellectual,

The melody that thinking makes,

 Or rather the polyphony

 Of its conflicted symphony,

Mahler-esque, dark, where lightning breaks

Only at times on the overbearing

 And rather sophomoric Storm

 And Stress at the loose edge of form.

Ah, best when all the pompous blaring

Of brassy fanfares and the dense

 Black Nietzschean moustachioes

 Of Nihilist dissonance find repose

In the Slow Movement, where the tense,

Brow-beating histrionics and

 Heroics give way to a free,

 Pure flow of complex reverie

And thought with thought walks hand in hand

Through Alpine glades in bracing air,

 Crisp vistas of nostalgia,

 With cow-bells tinkling, and ah!

Nietzsche and God are with us there.

3. *Chopin*

Recently I heard Rubinstein’s

(Arthur’s, I mean) Chopin:It is *As distinct from the Russian*

 Sublime. Chopin! Strange, how in his *composer-pianist Anton Rubinstein.*

Hands a brief nocturne redefines



The world, and modulates its key.

 One’s hearing grows chromatic: birds

♫

 In the trees trill in minor thirds,

Full of Polish melancholy.

Refined, and yet through Marsyas’ throat

 His pain at times forced melody.

 For resolution endlessly

Deferred is the true modern note.

4. *Richard Strauss*

But, Beecham’s *Rosenkavalier*!

 At Covent Garden I was present

 And through the ears of a quite pleasant

Young man heard all, and shed a tear

♫

For the great Marschallin, and scoffed

 At Baron Ochs when Mariandel,

 Whom on his knee he tries to dandle,

Proves, when the sly disguise is doffed,

To be the man who steals his catch.

 Margarethe Siems *lived* the rôle

 With her clear notes and tender soul,

And what a queenly She to watch!

And ah, the splendid final scene, *Beginning with the*

 As the celesta silvers over*, duet, ‘Est ist ein Traum’.*

 The rose-red fire that burns ‘twixt lover

And lover when the Marschallin

Leaves Sophie and Octavian

 Alone together, is a dream’s

 Dream-consummation. And those gleams

Of dissonance? They are the wan

Smile of Princess Marie, resigning

 Her claim with an *auf Wiedersehn*

 To youth we shall not see again.

Clouds with them take their silver lining

When into nothingness they fade,

 Leaving in memory a rack,

 At most. She thinks (and turns her back),

*Es ist vorbei!* Yet, how well-played!

5. *Fauré*

Last night I went to hear Fauré:

♫

 *Piano Quartet in C Minor*.

 In chamber music there’s no finer

Expression of Provençal *gai*

*Saber* (save in the *Violin*

 *Sonata*, also wrought when he

 Was a young man passionately

In love). The scherzo, sparkling in

The mind as Keats’s beaded bubbles

 Brim full the cup of vintage wine,

 Moves in an agile, elfin line

Through that love’s dark and gathering troubles:

Rebuffed proposal, heart’s wound, rage

 And sorrow, the dispiriting chore

 Of running the Conservatoire,

♫

The politics… The War. Old age.

6. *Debussy*

Now the mysterious *L’Après*

 *Midi d’un Faune* wafts through the gloom

 And like a poisonous flower in bloom

Nijinsky with himself doth play! *Théâtre du Châtelet, May 29, 1912.*

 *Ah, quel succès de scandale!*

(His leaps are such miraculous things:

 He seems to hover in mid-air

 Before descending; one could swear

Hermes had lent the boy his wings!)

7. *Ravel and l’Enfant et les Sortilèges*

♫

And as for those svelte ear machines

 Of the Swiss-Basque Maurice Ravel,

 That *paradis artificiel*

Of pastoral wallpaper scenes

Torn by a child in petulant rage,

 Where shepherds beating on a tabor

 Make soft lament for love’s lost labour,

And innocence must turn the page

And hear the woodwinds’ mortal quavers:

 I rode in one, vicariously,

 Through a young lady named Marie

At the Opéra last month. One savours

The rich, expressive ether of this

 Precise nostalgia of the ear

 In an aloof child engineer

Who prizes a frail, guarded bliss,

The benediction falling on

 Him softly in the shadowy garden,

 When, hurt, he gains the creatures’ pardon

And he and innocence are one.

8. *Vaughan Williams A pupil of Ravel’s. I astral-travelled to Gloucester*

 *Cathedral to hear the premiere, September 1910.*

*Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas*

 *Tallis:* haunted as an old chapel,

 The strings sound. The old story, apple

And fall and death, and distant promise…

♫



**9. *Young Turks*

But in a way that makes one wince, key *I attended the second, placidly received per-*

 Relationships are savagely *formance of* The Rite of Spring. *Since its*

 Distorted, the ears rhythmically *raucous debut it had quietly metamorphosed*

Assaulted by the mad Stravinsky! *into a cornerstone of the Repertoire, Dears!*

(Diaghilew’s a man of charm

♫

 And money. Gawkers stand on chairs

 To watch pariah and *homme d’affaires An impresario and art-collecter, interested in*

Walk by the cafés arm in arm.) *acquiring some of Aubrey’s erotic drawings.*

\*



But when the gate of light’s unlocked

 And I walk home into the Vast,

♫

 Let it be to the mystic last

Strains of Schoenberg’s

***Verklärte Nacht.***

♫

S*prechstimme*, a glissando, shrill,

 Death-pale expressionist nightmare,

 Mad-clowning of ***Pierrot Lunaire***…

The twentieth century is ill.

***The Serialist Schoenberg***

 ***and his Disciples***

[*A screed against Serialism and the ‘Emancipation*

*of the Dissonance’, by the amateur musician, Mr V.*]

Beyond the highest tessitura

 Of an Expressionist soprano

 The high, thin keys of the piano

Make a cold *musica obscura*,

Sound of the interstellar void,

 A black noise as of some dark matter

 Whose hymns to itself make glass shatter:

This is the music I avoid—

That is, of the twelve-tone variety.

 In dodeco-cacophony

 Of an affective palette free

Of every affect save anxiety,

It blandly ignores the nature of

 The intervals. So dissonance

 Must be freed? What, freed of nuance?

Insults to hearing win no love.

Theory’s Pyrrhic victory

 Over the ear only accents

 The split ‘twixt intellect and sense

In fractional overtones so high

That they amount to a dog-whistle

 Music for dogs, and the dogs do

 Not like it. And our poor ears, too,

Feel they are suffering a dismissal.

The hexachord is universal,

 An aural grammar Nature ingrains

 In foetal ears and foetal brains.

By a mechanical reversal

To embitter music, scorn the natal

 Desire for consonance, and blame

 Ears for not relishing the game,

Will to this music prove quite fatal.

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