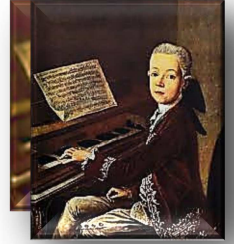


Notes of a Concert-Goer
Notes of a Concert-Goer
dans le Neuvième Arrondissement



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
Sublime. Chopin! Strange, how in his

As distinct from the Russian

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,
As the celesta silvers over,
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



*Beginning with the
duet, 'Est ist ein Traum'.*

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*

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...



A pupil of Ravel's. I astral-travelled to Gloucester Cathedral to hear the premiere, September 1910.



9. Young Turks

But in a way that makes one wince, key
Relationships are savagely
Distorted, the ears rhythmically
Assaulted by the mad Stravinsky!

(Diaghilew's a man of charm
And money. Gawkers stand on chairs
To watch pariah and *homme d'affaires*
Walk by the cafés arm in arm.)

*

I attended the second, placidly received performance of The Rite of Spring. Since its raucous debut it had quietly metamorphosed into a cornerstone of the Repertoire, Dears!

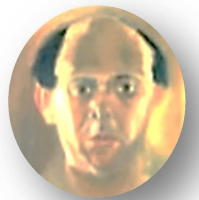


An impresario and art-collector, interested in acquiring some of Aubrey's erotic drawings.



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.



Sprechstimme,
Death-pale
Mad-
The twentieth



a glissando, shrill,
expressionist nightmare,
clowning of **Pierrot Lunaire...**
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.

