

RAVEL AS THE MOLIÈRE OF MUSIC

French Composer, in His Villa in St. Cloud, Propounds His Musical Doctrine—As a Devotee of Debussy—Would Have His "L'Heure Espagnole" Taken "Nonchalantly, Like a Bon Bon"

By MISCHA-LEON

Paris, Dec. 20, 1919.

AN iron gate opened, there is a harmonious ding-dang of glass bells; the gate closes.

A pair of small, quick feet in patent leather shoes trip over the gravel and a little, extremely elegant man, around the thirties, clean-shaven, with slightly aquiline features, refined, studious, full of keen intelligence, the Voltaire-like lips firmly closed, wearing a loose-fitting morning jacket of black satin with a yellow silk shirt as background stands before us.

It is Maurice Ravel himself, the impressionist; Maurice Ravel, the despair of all pianists; Maurice Ravel, the composer of the epoch-making triumph, the masterpiece, "L'Heure Espagnole."

Out here, in the corner of a half-hidden alley in St. Cloud, lives and works this man, undoubtedly the most interesting composer of our time, in a beautiful villa surrounded by flower gardens, and in a silence one nearly can hear.

With an unforgettable grace does he show us the way to the interior of the villa. It has large, square, spacious rooms, as they built in olden days, adorned with a color splendor and refined culture which is rivaled only by the master's works. The paintings on the dark-colored walls attract one from the first glance. Here is a radiant sunrise, so realistic that it pains the eyes to look at it long for a time; here an enormous bouquet of chrysanthemums in the sinking sun's last blood-red rays; and there, on the piano, near the window, with a view over the back gardens, is thrown a dark Salomé-green Spanish shawl with enormously long fringes.

There was also a carpet, of course, but I have forgotten the exact color, I think it was pearl-gray.

Time—mid-day.
Light—beaming golden sunshine.
Odor—cigarettes (black Algerian).

Impressionistic Personality

A score of "L'Heure Espagnole" in extravagant binding leads our conversation toward the object of our visit, and as Ravel goes deeper into the subject his individuality shows itself clearer and clearer.



Maurice Ravel, the Brilliant French Composer

One can scarcely find a face more full of life and more changeable than Ravel's. His whole impressionistic, restless being shows in the nervous raising and sinking of the eyelids; his hundreds of small grimaces, his flashes of wit, the changing of accents while speaking. Sometimes he speaks clearly and quickly, sometimes as if he hummed a "Berceuse." All the time he smokes thousands of cigarettes. And over it all rests this plastic, nervous culture, typical of the race of a Pascal and a Molière, a Montaigne and a Victor Hugo—this strange and fascinating combination of all the Gallic traits. Finesse, gaiety, irony and temperance are wedded to the culture, education and elegance of the seventeenth century.

"If I am happy over the London success of my 'L'Heure Espagnole'?" Oh, yes; very, very. The English public has always had a soft spot in my heart, and I am happy if I have won such a spot in theirs. I have heard from my friends in London the most enthusiastic report of the performance, and I am greatly indebted to the excellent artists who brought the victory home.

"Yes, of course, I meant the whole opera as a farce (as *blague*), a musical parody. As such it must be played, and as such it must be listened to and judged. It is a Molièresque parody on life in a Spanish setting; it must be taken nonchalantly as one eats a *bon-bon*."

"I hear that it is to be performed in New York and Chicago; that Maestro Mugnone is working on an Italian translation which I am happy to know Ma-

dame Donalda is chosen to create, and that the opera houses in Madrid and Barcelona are in full swing with the rehearsals. I am a little weary, you know, about its performance in Spain; one hates to be mocked at in one's own rooms."

We go over the score together. What a wonderful pianist! What a stylist, impeccable and serious; sculptural in his art, romantic in his baroqueism! Surely Ravel is the trembling nerve in the modern school of French music.

Most Fanatic "Debussyist"

It is a well-known fact that each genius (let him be as original and as revolutionary as he may be), always, by some or other tie, is connected to those that have gone before. After Claude Debussy, one became in France Debussyist or anti-Debussyist, exactly as in the eighteenth century, one had been Gluckist or anti-Gluckist. Among Ducasse, Dupin, Roussel, Dupont, Schmitt, Dukas and the others, Maurice Ravel stands foremost as the most fanatic Debussyist scholar of to-day. Ravel's idea as creative artist is to picture the moment's vibrating life. That he sometimes paints on a background of sarcasm, sometimes on one of sadness, is of lesser importance. From Debussy did he inherit his impressionism; from the Slav, Moussorgsky, his strange symbolism; the irony, the sarcasm, the laughter are his own.

We continue our conversation in the alleys of the garden. His small feet in the patent-leather shoes, trip busily over the yellow gravel. He pauses here and there to caress a flower. With special pride he shows us a bed with large, white fantastic flowers which close their cups with the last rays of the sun and open again at sunrise. He pets a dog whose mother was a wolf—"Où, où; une vraie louve; ha-ha!"—and his small eyes shine with that fanaticism which is typical of them.

In these peaceful surroundings one can understand that he is happy, and can throw himself into the work he so longed to return to during his five years' soldier service in the French army. Here he can keep the dust away from the atmosphere, and here he can laugh from the bottom of his heart at Haydn's musical innocence as well as at the last "Chanson" from Moulin Rouge.

Need Voices Plus Intelligence

And his thoughts jump from subject to subject—from the Dutch composer, Nierderman's "Tableaux D'Après Gorky" to the modern opera and concert audience, who, as he says, "often would be just as happy for a machine as for a singer, apparently because they do not know the difference. But the time has passed—and ought to—where the public is satisfied with the singer who only exists *qua* his tones and voice. What we need and want is the beautiful voices, in the service of keen intelligence, carried forth by rich culture and musicianship. Only then can we composers hope to have our thoughts expressed in the right way, and only then the singer can be happy in his conscience, because he has the greatest mission ever given to a human being."

The sun was going down. We parted. We had to return to a rehearsal in Paris; he to the piano to finish a new work (a capital joke), a "tango symphonique" for grand orchestra.

As we turned the corner of the alley I looked back and in the last glimpse I saw the little man tenderly bent over one of his white flowers. . . . The sun was nearly down behind the forest of St. Cloud.

ZANESVILLE, OHIO.—A concert was given at the I. O. O. F. Hall recently by members of the Thursday Matinee Music Club. Those taking part were: Marie Hannum, Gertrude Shoemaker, Frances Wehosky, Mrs. C. Lee Hetzler, Margaret Van Voorhis, Cora Jean Geis, Ruth Woods and Mrs. H. C. Pugh.

BRILLIANT PLAYING BY MR. LHEVINNE

Russian Piano Virtuoso
Pleases a Large Audience
at Second Recital

At Carnegie Hall, Wednesday afternoon of last week, Josef Lhévinne gave his second recital since his return last fall. The pianist's lengthy absence seems to have affected his popularity not at all. He had an audience of very respectable size, as recital audiences go, and the applause had a quality unmistakably fervid and sincere. Had he so chosen he might have repeated almost a third of the numbers on his program. This was comprehensive and planned with an eye to contrasts. If these were not achieved the reason lay in the nature of Mr. Lhévinne's pianism rather than the character of the compositions presented. D'Albert's arrangement of Bach D Major organ prelude and fugue, Schumann's "Symphonic Studies," the F Sharp Major Impromptu and F Sharp Minor Polonaise of Chopin, Rachmaninoff's preludes in E Flat Minor, G Major and G Minor, a Schloetzer Study, the Glinka-Balakireff "L'Alouette," an Etude-Caprice of Dohnanyi and Balakireff's "Islamey" offered opportunity for a large and varied display of resources.

Mr. Lhévinne's playing unceasingly pursues the ideal of effulgence. It was in this case brilliant first, last and at all times. It has light without heat, the glitter of ice and the coldness thereof. The vibrant, steely tone does not lend itself to the weaving of dreams or communications of a poetic import. The pianist showed small concern for fine-spun gradations of light and shade. Nuance with him is a very relative matter. Thus it came that his Schumann and the subtler Chopin of the Impromptu left the listener unmoved and hardly convinced. Moreover Mr. Lhévinne concerned himself little about styles. Between the manner of his Bach, his Schumann and his Chopin dividing lines were drawn to the extent only of a hairbreadth.

But the audience evidently relished the bravery of his technical show far more than it felt the lack of imaginative essence or poetic divination. In truth Mr. Lhévinne's playing seems bolder and more thoroughly liberated than it used to. The Chopin Polonaise consorted well with his sweeping, aggressive method. Of the Rachmaninoff preludes the first—an elfish conceit in E flat—had to be repeated. But the familiar one in G minor wanted the large, heroic gesture one associates with it. The Etude-Caprice of Dohnanyi glorifies mechanical virtuosity and in this respect Mr. Lhévinne idealized it. "Islamey" went well as far as technic carried it. But there is more in it than technic and that residue remained unrevealed.

H. F. P.

Edwine Behre to Give Recital

Edwine Behre, pianist, is to give a recital at the Garrick Theater, New York, on Sunday evening, Feb. 29, under the management of Stella Comyn. The principal works on her program are Beethoven's Sonata, Op. 81, "Les Adieux;" Schumann's "Kinderscenen," two Brahms Intermezzi, Op. 118; classical pieces by Scarlatti, Gluck-Sgambati and Rameau, and some Chopin pieces. There is also a modern group of Carpenter, Debussy, Scriabine and Borodine.

Anna Case Delights Columbia, S. C.

COLUMBIA, S. C., Feb. 16.—Anna Case, soprano, appeared in recital at the Columbia Theater on the evening of Feb. 13, offering an interesting program which included song groups and several operatic arias. The audience was very enthusiastic and recalled Miss Case many times during the recital and at the end.

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