

Chapter II

Paris, 1918–45

MARK DEVOTO

21 March 1918 was the first day of spring. To celebrate it, the German army, hoping to break a stalemate that had lasted more than three years, attacked along the western front in Flanders, pushing back the allied armies within a few days to a point where Paris was within reach of long-range cannon. When Claude Debussy, who died on 25 March, was buried three days later in the Père-Lachaise Cemetery in Paris, nobody lingered for eulogies. The critic Louis Laloy wrote some years later:

The sky was overcast. There was a rumbling in the distance. Was it a storm, the explosion of a shell, or the guns at the front? Along the wide avenues the only traffic consisted of military trucks; people on the pavements pressed ahead hurriedly . . . The shopkeepers questioned each other at their doors and glanced at the streamers on the wreaths. 'Il paraît que c'était un musicien,' they said.¹

Fortified by the surrender of the Russians on the eastern front, the spring offensive of 1918 in France was the last and most desperate gamble of the German empire – and it almost succeeded. But its failure was decisive by late summer, and the greatest war in history was over by November, leaving in its wake a continent transformed by social convulsion, economic ruin and a devastation of human spirit. The four-year struggle had exhausted not only armies but whole civilizations. In the West, no country had suffered more than France, who had sacrificed one and a half million lives to preserve the republic. As the map of Europe came to be redrawn during the two decades after the war, it was the security of France against a resurgent Germany which dominated all other national issues. Yet by May 1919, when the Treaty of Versailles was concluded between Germany and the allies, the radiance of victory had already given way to disillusionment, for it was apparent to most observers that the war had failed to decide the paramount questions, that hatred and revenge would be the order of the foreseeable future and that there was no credible foundation for a lasting European peace. Marshal Ferdinand Foch, who had led the

allied armies in 1918, said of the Treaty of Versailles with perfect prescience: 'This is not peace; it is an armistice for twenty years'.

THE ARTISTIC LEGACY

If the years of cautious experiment with the new French republic after 1871 had been punctuated by the severest kinds of social and political ordeal, they were also marked by the most extraordinary explosion of creative vigour in the arts. The artistic momentum of *la belle époque*, as the Parisian period of 1871 to 1914 is usually called, was transformed but not ended by the Great War, and those who lived through it propagated and led the major directions of the arts for another quarter-century. In music, Paris had created and sustained a large and extraordinarily successful society of professionals and institutions equalled only by those of Vienna. In both cities, but particularly in Paris, unparalleled opportunities existed and were continually created for acquiring training, for obtaining performances, for reaching intelligent audiences – and there were even appropriate bastions of corrupt artistic tradition against which the young and impetuous might rebel.

The largest and most famous of the conservatories was of course the Paris Conservatoire, but the Ecole Niedermeyer, the Ecole Normale de Musique and the Schola Cantorum attracted many students, as did somewhat later the conservatory at Fontainebleau. Among the established performing institutions, there were the very conservative Opéra and the more adventurous Opéra-Comique; Dyagilev's incomparable Ballets Russes which began performing in Paris in 1909; the venerable orchestras established in the names of Lamoureux, Colonne and Padeloup, to which would be added the Orchestre Symphonique de Paris, the Concerts Straram, the Concerts Koussevitzky and the Concerts Golschmann among many others; chamber music and recital series almost without number; and from the mid-1920s regular performances from a number of jazz ensembles, both home-grown and imported. Composers had their own organizations, such as the Société Nationale de Musique Française and its chief rival, the Société Musicale Indépendante. And beginning in November 1920 there was the monthly *Revue musicale* which, under the able editorship of Henri Prunières and with a staff of astute and forward-looking writers, reported in detail on this whole musical scene and on many other musical matters in Europe and America.

The end of the *belle époque* coincided with the end of a brilliant and versatile older generation of French composers and the rise of a hardly less brilliant younger one, with a middle generation led by Maurice Ravel and the Russian Igor Stravinsky (43 and 36 years old in 1918). The death of Debussy (1862–1918) in the darkest hours of the war was a

reminder that no living composer in western Europe had achieved as much as he – no other French composer had ever done so – and the impressionist aesthetic in music, which Debussy himself had ignored but which his works had done so much to nurture, would exert an influence on every succeeding generation. It remained to be seen what direction the next generation would choose, for by 1918 the momentum of impressionism in music was past its peak; its greatest vigour had been reached in the six years before the war, culminating in two ballets given their premières in Paris by the Ballets Russes: Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé* (1912), his largest piece, and Debussy's *Jeux* (1913), his most colouristically complex score. It was hard to imagine anything more resplendent than works like these; and yet in the same year as *Jeux*, the explosive ecstasy of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* offered the starkest possible challenge to the impressionist aesthetic, as well as a striking foreshadowing of the violence about to be let loose on European civilization. The outbreak of war was a signal for a decisive change in the direction of all three composers. Debussy, the arch-anti-classicist, would rediscover sonata form; Ravel and Stravinsky would both become leaders in the youthful neo-classicism that became the strongest and most cohesive aesthetic movement in European and American music up to World War II.

CLASSICAL SURVIVORS

The classical tradition in French music was still proudly represented by a generation of grand old men, of whom the oldest was Camille Saint-Saëns (1835–1921). Saint-Saëns had had a long and successful career as a concert pianist and continued to play and conduct even in the last year of his life. In his many popular works he re-created Mendelssohn's unimpaired elegance, and much of the same flavour, in a distinctive Gallic manner. As one of the founding members of the Société Nationale, Saint-Saëns had done more than anybody to assure the revival of concert music in France after 1871. His most illustrious pupil, Gabriel Fauré (1845–1924), had been one of the most forward-looking composers of the 1880s and 90s, with a large body of piano pieces, songs and chamber music in an original and very personal harmonic idiom. Fauré in turn had been the beloved teacher of a generation of composers beginning with Ravel, and had served as director of the Paris Conservatoire; suffering from deafness in his last years, he retreated into an isolation somewhat like Beethoven's, writing a series of chamber works of great concentration and harmonic originality, including his only string quartet, completed shortly before his death.

The principal legacy of the Belgian César Franck (1822–90) was the continuation of a genuinely French school of symphonists. Many of these composers were influenced by Wagner's chromaticism and

orchestral style, though Bruckner and Mahler had as little effect on them as Debussy's anti-classicism. The oldest and best-known was Vincent d'Indy (1851–1931), whose reverence for Franck's teaching was matched by his absorption in Wagnerian music drama; d'Indy's orchestral music is saturated with Wagnerian harmony and motivic development, and his opera *La légende de St Christophe*, performed in 1920, is one of his most significant late works. A more important composer of symphonies was d'Indy's pupil Albéric Magnard (1865–1914), killed in the war, whose impressive works had only an underground following but are now being rediscovered. D'Indy's idiom was inherited in part by his pupil Joseph Canteloube (1879–1957), composer of the opera *Vercingétorix* (Paris Opéra, 1933) but best known for his tastefully arranged and beautifully orchestrated *Chants d'Auvergne* (1923–30), still widely performed.

Franck's symphonic aesthetic, most familiar from his orchestral and chamber music, is demonstrated equally in his organ works, which together with Liszt's are the most important examples of their genre in the nineteenth century. But their influence on succeeding generations was even more impressive, and the works of the 'modern' French school became and remained the most widely played music for the 'king of instruments' after the works of J. S. Bach. Their natural vehicle was the 'symphonic' French organ of multiple divisions with vastly extended registers and an enormous variety of reed pipes. With such instruments, whose great size could be controlled for the first time by electric action, it was possible – for better or worse – to emulate the orchestra's resources. One of the most versatile of these organ composers was Charles-Marie Widor (1844–1937), the teacher of many composers of the youngest generation (including Varèse). His eight symphonies for organ, still widely performed, are in an idiom comparable to that of his contemporary Saint-Saëns. No less enduring is his modern edition, in collaboration with Albert Schweitzer, of Bach's complete organ works.

Louis Vierne (1870–1937), a blind pupil of both Franck and Widor and himself a composer of six symphonies for the organ, adopted the harmonic vocabulary of Debussy and Ravel in a well-crafted, personal manner; his *Pièces de fantaisie* and *Pièces en style libre* are still staples of the modern repertory. Vierne's pupil Marcel Dupré (1886–1971) was especially known for his skill in improvisation, which helped to sustain an interest in this art that had flagged for a century. Another Vierne pupil, Maurice Duruflé (1902–86), who also studied with Dukas, had a distinguished career as an organist and professor of harmony at the Conservatoire; as a composer he is known today especially for his Requiem (1947), an expertly crafted work in an original post-Fauré manner, which remains one of the most widely performed pieces of twentieth-century sacred music. The tradition continued with Dupré's

pupil Olivier Messiaen, one of the most important French composers to emerge after World War II.

THE ACHIEVEMENT OF RAVEL

At the time of Debussy's death, the only other living French composer with a record of achievement comparable to his was Ravel (1875–1937), and he too had been permanently affected by the war. After a year of service at the front as a truck driver, transporting munitions during the agony of Verdun, he suffered a breakdown and was discharged. He never regained his remarkable earlier productivity. Ravel's salute to the end of the war was *La valse*, a 'choreographic poem for orchestra', completed in 1920; his original title had been *Wien*, but even with the new one the satirical intent is plain enough.

Ravel's second opera, the 'lyric fantasy' *L'enfant et les sortilèges*, to a libretto by Colette, was begun soon after the war but not completed until 1925. In this delightful work, a naughty child, impatient with his lessons, throws a tantrum and smashes his favourite possessions, which come to life and haunt him into repentance. In a way that a decade later would have done credit to Walt Disney, the stage is populated with a personified armchair, a teapot, a fire, a magic princess, an arithmetic book and a fine collection of animals, including a memorable duo of cats. Parts of this opera, especially the end, show a sentimental side of Ravel as does no other work. In striking contrast are the *Chansons madécasses*, composed in 1926. Here Ravel's harmony is the most complex in any of his music, from a carefully controlled mixture of diatonic and polytonal harmony in the first song to strident atonality in the second and third.

Ravel wrote few works after this, but his *Boléro* (1928), a ballet commission from Ida Rubinstein, became his most universally popular piece. Few of those who complained of *Boléro*'s obsessive repetition took pains to ascertain that the complete melody appears only four and a half times. 'Once the idea of using only a single theme was in mind', Ravel apparently said with modesty, 'any conservatory student could have done as well'. But it required a composer of his ability to create that extraordinarily long and intense theme with such consummate craft and refinement.

THE IMPACT OF STRAVINSKY

Only 28 years old in 1910, when the première by the Ballets Russes of his dazzling *Firebird* established him immediately as the most brilliant composer of his generation, Stravinsky (1882–1971) continued to dominate musical life in pre-war Paris. After Beethoven, the history of music offers no other example of a composer who could produce as

many pathbreaking masterpieces in so short a time as did Stravinsky with the ballets *Petrushka* (1911) and *The Rite of Spring* (1912–13) and the opera *The Nightingale* (1908–9, 1913–14), not to mention a number of excellent smaller works. Stravinsky spent the war years in Switzerland; his isolation caused his musical language to undergo marked changes, leading eventually to his 'reinvention' of eighteenth-century diatonic melody and rhythm.

When the war ended, Stravinsky returned to Paris with an assortment of new works revealing unsuspected sides of his developing musical personality. *The Soldier's Tale*, 'to be read, played, and danced', composed in 1918 to a libretto by C. F. Ramuz, was the musical antithesis of his large-scale productions of the pre-war years; with only three characters and a narrator, accompanied by a miniature orchestra of clarinet, bassoon, cornet, trombone, violin, double bass and percussion, it could be produced on a stage not much bigger than the flatbed of a truck. The 'Great Chorale' in this work is a harbinger of Stravinsky's later neo-classical harmony; it sounds like *Ein' feste Burg* with wrong-key cadences and pungent dissonances, but it retains a strong and obvious tonality. Other parts develop a sense of bitonality, while the chromatic dissonance of the 'Triumphal March of the Devil' verges on atonality, though no more so, probably, than some parts of *The Rite of Spring* and *The Nightingale*. Another deeply personal side of Stravinsky's protean harmonic language was revealed in the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*, written in 1920 in memory of Debussy. At a distance of 70 years, this 'austere ritual which is unfolded in terms of short litanies between different groups of homogeneous instruments',² as he described it, still stands as a notable example of a complex bitonal harmony which he did not explore further.

The characteristic rhythmic and harmonic language of *The Rite of Spring* appeared with new vigour in *The Wedding* (often known by its French title, *Les noces*), produced by Dyagilev in 1923 after Stravinsky had worked on it sporadically for nine years. The attempt to re-create a nineteenth-century Russian peasant wedding through a series of stylized dialogues and gestures, in twenty minutes of uninterrupted singing, wailing and shouting of six solo singers and a chorus accompanied by four pianos and sixteen percussion instruments, is as refreshing as anything in our century.

NEO-CLASSICISM

The aesthetic movement known as neo-classicism reached its fullest flowering in the 1920s and 30s, led by composers like Prokofiev, Hindemith and, especially, Stravinsky; but its roots go back a century or more. Even in the eighteenth century there was a tendency towards preserving the spirit of the elaborately contrapuntal styles of Baroque

sacred music, and Mendelssohn and Schumann would look 'back to Bach' in some of their works. By the end of the nineteenth century, when counterpoint was revitalized in the symphonic domain through the increasingly complex chromatic harmony of Bruckner, Mahler and Franck, there were still pieces by Brahms that recaptured the forms of the sarabande, the minuet and the chorale prelude for organ. In France the establishment of the Société Nationale (1871) ensured the preservation of classical values in orchestral music and especially chamber music, upheld by the conservative Saint-Saëns as well as by the more 'chromatic' generation of Franck and his disciples.

By the second decade of the twentieth century, neo-classicism, even if not articulated as an aesthetic doctrine, represented the strongest counter-current to impressionism in the music of Debussy and Ravel. Throughout his career, Ravel was the more classically minded. His *Menuet antique*, inspired by Chabrier's *Menuet pompeux*, was written in 1895 when he was twenty, while *Le tombeau de Couperin*, six movements for piano modelled after the French Baroque suite (including an ingenious 'school fugue' of haunting beauty), appeared in the last year of the war. And Debussy, the star pupil of the Conservatoire, whose entire career had been a testimony of rebellion against textbook forms, set himself a final project of 'Six sonates pour divers instruments, par Claude Debussy, musicien français'. He lived to complete only three of them, but in his last work, the Violin Sonata, he made no effort to conceal his mastery of sonata form. Even such an unconventional character as Satie contributed to the Parisian neo-classical movement with his *Sonatine bureaucratique* of 1917, an unabashed parody of Clementi's *Sonatina in C major* op.36 no.1.

Stravinsky's gradual stylistic change from the expressionist harmony and percussive textures of his Russian works to the fully developed neo-classicism of the 1920s was widely regarded as a *volte-face*, as an unnatural tendency in his musical evolution; and his adoption of eighteenth-century stylistic mannerisms alienated many of those who preferred what they considered the more exotically authentic style of works like the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* and *The Wedding*. In *Pulcinella* (1919), a ballet for Dyagilev with décors and costumes by Picasso, Stravinsky adapted excerpts from operas and chamber music by Pergolesi and other eighteenth-century Italians in a way that retains all that century's melos and feeling but marks the music indelibly with his own harmonic language. It is not too hard to imagine that Stravinsky perceived in Pergolesi's rhythms and catchy tunes an obvious vehicle for a set of dance pieces, and today we can enjoy the marriage of eighteenth and twentieth centuries in *Pulcinella* as easily as in Respighi's *Antiche arie e danze* written a few years earlier. Critical opinion at the time, indignant over the alleged disrespect to Pergolesi, received Stravinsky's rejoinder: 'You "respect", but I love'.³

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No work by Stravinsky is more appealing than the Octet for wind instruments, a perfect realization of his neo-classical ideal: 'Composition, structure, form, here all are in the line of the 18th-century masters'.⁴ He composed it quickly in 1922 for the painter Vera de Bosset, whom eighteen years later he married, after the death of his first wife. By contrast, the Concerto for piano and wind instruments of 1924 is on a larger scale, with a curious mixture of Bach-inspired counterpoint and cantilena, dissonant triadic harmony and a percussive, rhythmically complex pianism. The spirit of Bach also looms large in two works for solo piano from 1924 and 1925, the Sonata and the Serenade in A, and Stravinsky's new style seemed to be consolidated. Stravinsky's largest stage work of this period was the opera-oratorio *Oedipus rex*, with a Latin text translated from a libretto by Jean Cocteau, produced by Dyagilev in Paris in 1927.

At a tangent from these are two major works inspired by Tchaikovsky. *Mavra*, a short comic opera in one act with a libretto adapted from Pushkin by Boris Kochno, consciously attempts to recapture the Italianate *bel canto* style of Tchaikovsky's songs and operas. On the other hand, *Le baiser de la fée*, a ballet on Stravinsky's own scenario based on Hans Christian Andersen's story *The Ice Maiden*, adapts directly a number of Tchaikovsky's own melodies and even whole passages from his songs and piano pieces, for which Stravinsky provided about half the additional connective material and a rich, subtle orchestration. *Le baiser de la fée* was commissioned in 1927 by Ida Rubinstein, a former dancer with Dyagilev's Ballets Russes who had recently formed her own company, and was choreographed by Bronislava Nijinska. Dyagilev broke with Stravinsky over this, deeply offended that he should have undertaken the project with a rival company; 'Our famous Igor, my first son, has given himself up entirely to the love of God and cash', he wrote to his choreographer Serge Lifar.⁵

The climax of this decade of Stravinsky's continually evolving activity was one of the prime masterpieces of neo-classicism and the most important single achievement in twentieth-century sacred music: the *Symphony of Psalms* for chorus and orchestra. Stravinsky's orchestra here does without the 'expressive' clarinets, violins and violas, instead increasing the volume of wind tone with extra flutes, oboes and trumpets and adding two pianos to the percussive resources. The result, 'composed to the glory of God', is a proclamation of faith through the unadorned expression of triadic or unison choral writing, diatonic counterpoint (the second movement is a fine double fugue) and the spirit of King David's orchestra of the 150th Psalm, which forms the text of the final movement; much of the characteristic sound of the Piano Concerto and the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*, but little of the austerity, survives in the *Symphony of Psalms*, which after the early ballets remains the best loved of all Stravinsky's works.

SATIE AND LES SIX

At the outbreak of the war, Erik Satie (1866-1925) had for years been well known to his fellow Parisian composers as a gentle eccentric who wrote absurdist piano pieces with fantastic titles like *Embryons desséchés* and *Obstacles vénimeux* and who even in his earliest works of the late 1880s had shown an original harmonic imagination, with a fondness for non-functional harmony and unresolved dissonances. His music had a distinct influence on Debussy and Ravel, with whom he maintained a self-effacing but enduring friendship; after 1910 he made friends with the newcomer Stravinsky, who later wrote about him: 'He was certainly the oddest person I have ever known, but the most rare and consistently witty too . . . With his pince-nez, umbrella, and galoshes he looked like a perfect schoolmaster, but he looked just as much like one without these accouterments'.⁶ To the larger Parisian public Satie was unknown, and he had never had even a modest popular success; it was characteristic of his wit that he three times offered himself as a candidate for the Institut de France.

In 1915 Satie was discovered by Jean Cocteau (1889-1963), the *enfant terrible* poet and tireless organizer who had been part of Dyagilev's circle. Unable to work out a collaboration with Stravinsky (who was spending the war years in Switzerland), Cocteau, with Dyagilev's encouragement, had written a bizarre scenario for a ballet called *Parade*; Satie composed for it the most complex orchestral score he ever wrote, including at Cocteau's suggestion such special instruments as a lottery wheel, a pistol, a typewriter, two sirens, a 'bouteillophone' and something called 'flaques sonores' ('sonorous puddles'). Pablo Picasso, commissioned to design the décor and costumes, dressed the sideshow's manager in a costume ten feet tall which looks like nothing so much as an aerial view of New York. When *Parade* was produced by the Ballets Russes in 1917, the uproar was reminiscent of the one at Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* four years before. The avant-garde poet and art critic Guillaume Apollinaire (1880-1918) saw in *Parade* a milestone not only for music but for the visual arts as well, as he wrote in a short piece for the programme book:

[*Parade*] is a scenic poem transposed by the innovative musician Erik Satie into astonishingly expressive music, so clear and simple that it seems to reflect the marvelously lucid spirit of France.

The cubist painter Picasso and the most daring of today's choreographers, Léonide Massine, have here consummately achieved, for the first time, that alliance between painting and the dance, between the plastic and mimetic arts, that is the herald of a more comprehensive art to come . . . This new alliance . . . has given rise, in *Parade*, to a kind of surrealism, which I consider to be the point of departure for a whole series of manifestations of the New Spirit that

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is making itself felt today and that will certainly appeal to our best minds. We may expect it to bring about profound changes in our arts and manners through universal joyfulness, for it is only natural, after all, that they keep pace with scientific and industrial progress.⁷

Apollinaire was not a musician, but what he predicted as the musical legacy of *Parade* seems as tellingly accurate as what he foresaw in the other arts. Apollinaire's poetry had done much to free French literary art from traditions and inhibitions, and the *esprit nouveau* of his *Parade* critique (which gave the word 'surréalisme' to the world) would be echoed by many successors. Within a year, the 'new spirit' in music would have a manifesto, in the form of a lively booklet by Cocteau called *Le cog et l'arlequin*.⁸ In words that would be echoed in the succeeding decades by those who wanted a new objectivity, a new proletarian music, or 'music for use', Cocteau called for uninhibited and direct music, stripped of intellectual refinement and artistic understatement:

TO BE DARING WITH TACT IS TO KNOW HOW FAR WE MAY GO TOO FAR.

Wagner, Stravinsky, and even Debussy are first-rate composers. Whoever goes near them is hard put to it to escape their tentacles; Satie leaves a clear road open upon which everyone is free to leave his own imprint.

. . . The music-hall, the circus, American Negro bands – all this is as fertilizing to an artist as life itself.

For the first time Satie found himself a famous composer, looked up to by a younger generation who were as eager to throw overboard the impressionist legacy as they were to scorn Wagner and all 'Boche' music. Though he may have enjoyed his new celebrity, he continued to live 'poor by conviction',⁹ as Stravinsky put it, and to compose steadily in larger forms than he had worked in before *Parade*. Soon another commission came, from the Princess Edmond de Polignac, the American-born heiress of the Singer sewing-machine company fortune, who had commissioned Stravinsky's *Renard* during the war and would soon commission Manuel de Falla's marionette opera, *El retablo de Maese Pedro*. Satie's commission was for his 'symphonic drama' *Socrate*, a work that must be regarded as unique not only for its time but also in Satie's output. *Socrate* is not very symphonic and only subtly dramatic; it is more of a ceremonial cantata in three parts, for three sopranos and chamber orchestra, narrating the death of Socrates in a text from Plato's *Phaedo* in Victor Cousin's translation. The vocal style has more *bien chanté* than Debussy's *Pelléas*, but rocks in 6/8 or walks in 4/4 for lengths that must have been hypnotic in 1920, when *Socrate* was performed at the princess's salon and again at the famous Paris

bookshop, Shakespeare & Co. Stravinsky was not convinced: 'Who can stand that much regularity? All the same, the music of Socrates' death is touching and dignifying in a unique way'.¹⁰ The steady rhythm, which never seemed problematic in Satie's shorter pieces, is so persistent in *Socrate* that it seems a perfect harbinger of the minimalist music of the 1960s.

Shortly after the première of *Socrate*, in connection with a performance in the Galerie Barbazanges, Satie invented what he called 'musique d'ameublement' ('furniture music'), to serve as unobtrusive decoration to ordinary human activity. A note in the printed programme read:

We present to you for the first time, thanks to M. Erik Satie and Darius Milhaud, and under the direction of M. Delgrange, 'musique d'ameublement' during the entr'actes of the play. We beg you earnestly to attach no importance to it and to behave during the entr'acte as if it did not exist. This music, specially written for Max Jacob's play (ruffian, always; vagrant, never), claims to contribute to everyday life just like a private conversation, a picture in the gallery, or the chair on which you may or may not be seated. You will try it out. Messrs. Erik Satie and Darius Milhaud remain at your disposal for all information and requests.¹¹

Satie positioned five instrumentalists in various corners of the hall, and during the intermissions they repeatedly played melodic phrases from popular operas. The experiment failed, however; in spite of Satie's entreaty, people stopped talking and listened as soon as the music began. It was another 30 years before Satie's idea was reborn as the banal and ineradicable instrument of sonic climate control that we now call Muzak, found everywhere from offices to aeroplanes – exactly as Satie might have predicted when he composed his own *Carrelage phonique* ('sonic tilework'): four bars repeated ad infinitum.

Satie still had two important premières to come. *Mercur* (1924), sub-titled 'pictorial poses in three acts', was a collaboration with Picasso, whose scenery and costumes were cheered by the same group of surrealists that derided Satie's music. *Relâche*, 'instantaneist ballet in two acts, with a cinematographic entr'acte and "the tail of the dog"', was the brainchild of the dada artist Francis Picabia, who put together an absurdist scenario for which Satie provided a boisterous score full of heavy harmonizations of popular tunes. The 'cinematographic entr'acte' was provided by a ten-minute film by René Clair in which, among other things, Picabia and Satie appear firing a cannon from the roof of the Louvre, and a hearse is drawn by a camel around a five-foot-high miniature Eiffel Tower. Satie's score for this entr'acte is like his *Carrelage phonique* – short phrases repeated over and over again.



Erik Satie and the Dada artist Francis Picabia in René Clair's film 'Entr'acte' (1924), which was shown between the two acts of the ballet 'Relâche' (1924), with music by Satie, scenery by Picabia.

Performed in November 1924, *Relâche* was a considerable and uproarious success, but it was the last production of the Ballets Suédois, which disbanded soon afterwards.

It was also Satie's last work. Already ailing from cirrhosis of the liver, and without funds or family, he left his room in Arcueil and moved to a hotel in Paris, where his friends cared for him. After his death in July 1925, Milhaud and a few others saw to the disposition of his possessions, including the dozen identical corduroy suits which Satie had never worn, several thousand miniature fantastical drawings and curious calligraphic inscriptions, and a number of music manuscripts, many of which were published in later years.

Darius Milhaud (1892–1974), who became in time the most famous of Satie's young enthusiasts, had begun his career only a few years before. From a distinguished Jewish family from Aix-en-Provence, and a product of the Conservatoire, he was 22 when the war began and had shared in the rich experiences of Parisian musical life with all the vigorous enthusiasm of one discovering an entire culture for the first time. His war service, as a civilian, did not stifle his remarkable productivity as a composer. In 1917 he went to Brazil as personal secretary to the writer Paul Claudel, who had been appointed to a ministerial position by the French government. After the armistice, Milhaud returned to Paris with a sheaf of new works – chamber music, piano pieces permeated with Brazilian rhythms, songs, several stage works with texts or scenarios by Claudel and a symphony for small

orchestra. Soon he became *de facto* leader of what the critic Henri Collet called the 'Groupe des Six'. As Milhaud wrote later:

Quite arbitrarily [Collet] had chosen six names: Auric, Durey, Honegger, Poulenc, Tailleferre, and my own, merely because we knew one another, were good friends, and had figured on the same programs; quite irrespective of our different temperaments and wholly dissimilar characters. Auric and Poulenc were partisans of Cocteau's ideas, Honegger derived from the German romantics, and I from Mediterranean lyricism. I fundamentally disapproved of joint declarations of aesthetic doctrines and felt them to be a drag, an unreasonable limitation on the imagination of the artist, who must for each new work find different, often contradictory means of expression; but it was useless to protest. Collet's article excited such worldwide interest that the 'Group of Six' was launched, and willy-nilly I formed part of it.¹²

In spite of the irrepressible Cocteau's animation, Les Six were active as a group only for a few years during the 1920s, producing concerts of their own works and those of their contemporaries. As individual composers they were too different to ensure successful collaborations,

'Les Six': group portrait of five members of Les Six by Jacques-Emile Blanche, with Jean Cocteau (top right), Marcelle Meyer, pianist (centre), and Jean Wiener, conductor (centre background). Les Six appear thus: Germaine Tailleferre (bottom left), Darius Milhaud (left, facing front), Arthur Honegger (left, facing right), Francis Poulenc (right, head inclined), Georges Auric (seated right); Louis Durey is absent.



and only once did they compose a work together (the *Album des Six* for piano, 1920), although they came close in Cocteau's ballet *Les mariés de la tour Eiffel*, written (without Durey) in 1921 for the Ballets Suédois. After their all too brief flowering as a semi-organized group, the six composers pursued their careers separately, though remaining friends. Louis Durey (1888–1979) and Germaine Tailleferre (1892–1983) continued to write interesting music but within a decade had lapsed into undeserved obscurity. The music of Georges Auric (1899–1983) interested Dyagilev, who commissioned two successful ballets from him; but his most famous work today is the 'Song from the *Moulin Rouge*', from his film score of 1952. Of the remaining composers of Les Six, Milhaud and Honegger (1892–1955) became and remained the most distinguished native French composers of their time up to the beginning of World War II; Poulenc, slightly younger, achieved his fame later, particularly after 1945 with a number of highly regarded operas and choral works.

In many ways Milhaud's music perfectly illustrates the new ideals in French music that Cocteau had striven to articulate: a classicism inspired by Bach and Mozart rather than the later German 'heavies', usually serious but never solemn, direct and assertive with no trace of Debussy's understatement or perfumed subtlety, and sometimes lighthearted or even farcical. It is marked by a vigorous melodism deriving from international folksong, popular dance and American jazz, from the *bel canto* of Italian opera more often than the *bien chanté* of French art song, and even from the *nigun* of the Provençal synagogues' Sephardic rites. Milhaud's harmony is the most complex aspect of his style, varying from an unadorned Stravinskian pandiatonicism to a polytonality so dense as to be completely obscure. Bitonality had been used before Milhaud in isolated moments in Ravel's *Jeux d'eau* and earlier, and more extensively in Stravinsky's *Zvezdoliki* and *The Rite of Spring* and some of Charles Ives's works; but the use of a layered and systematic bitonality became an outstanding feature of Milhaud's style as early as *Les Choéphores* (1915, to a text by Claudel after Sophocles), first performed in Paris in 1919.

Milhaud's populist tendencies are most apparent in his well-known ballet *Le boeuf sur le toit* (1920), for which Cocteau wrote a scenario that takes place in an American speakeasy, with décors by Raoul Dufy. *Le boeuf sur le toit* was 'assembled' out of popular tunes that Milhaud had picked up in Brazil, 'with a rondo-like theme recurring between each two of them'.¹³ This uninhibitedly rowdy work, together with his ever-popular *Scaramouche* (1939), has given the impression outside France that Milhaud was a figure of fun, impeding his appreciation as a serious composer. Much more interesting is the ballet *L'homme et son désir*, written with Claudel during their years in Brazil and performed by the Ballets Suédois in 1921. Claudel's programme note describes the

scenario 'born of the Brazilian forest': 'The action proper takes place on the intermediary platform between the sky and the waters below. And the principal character is Man, over whom the primitive forces have resumed their sway, and who has been robbed by Night and Sleep, of Name and Countenance'.¹⁴ The 'primitivist' fascination that had inspired Picasso's *Les demoiselles d'Avignon*, with its shapes drawn from African sculpture, and Stravinsky's 'sacrificial virgin' in *The Rite of Spring*, now made its mark on this Franco-Brazilian ballet, for which Milhaud had assembled a wailing chorus and a large percussion ensemble in addition to the usual orchestra. (Two years later, in 1923, a native Brazilian, Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887-1959), would come to Paris with another 'jungle' piece, his *Nonet* with chorus, percussion and seven instruments.)

The climax of this stage of Milhaud's art is *La création du monde* (1923), still perhaps his most often performed work. Blaise Cendrars wrote a scenario, freely based on creation legends in African folklore, that gave Milhaud 'the opportunity I had been waiting for to use those elements of jazz to which I had devoted so much study. I adopted the same orchestra as used in Harlem, seventeen solo instruments, and I made wholesale use of the jazz style to convey a purely classical feeling'.¹⁵ The orchestra consists of six woodwind, four brass, piano, a dozen percussion instruments and a solo string section in which an alto saxophone substitutes for the viola. The 'classical' feeling is provided by a gentle D minor lullaby, but the jazz style, in which the saxophone and bowed bass take leading roles, is Dixieland with overtones of a klezmer band. The production, with scary décors by Fernand Léger, was one of the triumphs of the Ballets Suédois.

Throughout the 1920s Milhaud composed and performed, appearing as a pianist and conductor in his own works and occasionally in others. In 1921, in one of the concert series organized by the pianist Jean Wiéner, Milhaud conducted the first performances in Paris of Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire*, with Marya Freund as the speaker, giving the Parisian public the opportunity to hear first-hand, in French, the work that had influenced Ravel's *Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé* and Stravinsky's *Trois poésies à la lyrique japonaise* (both 1913). In his own works Milhaud divided his attention between chamber music, orchestral music and the theatre and took a special interest in opera. His first, *La brebis égarée*, a 'musical novel' based on a play of Francis Jammes, was completed in 1915 and produced by the Opéra-Comique in 1923. Fortified by its success, Milhaud wrote a series of shorter operas, *Les malheurs d'Orphée* (1926, Brussels) on a libretto by his childhood friend Armand Lunel and, with Cocteau, *Le pauvre matelot* (Opéra-Comique, 1928) which became his most popular opera. Lunel also wrote the libretto for *Esther de Carpentras*, a two-act comic opera in the form of a Purim play. Not content with the relative brevity of these



Design by Fernand Léger for the first production of Milhaud's ballet 'La création du monde' by the Ballets Suédois in Paris, 1923.

pieces, Milhaud wrote a trilogy of 'opéras minutes', 27 minutes long in all. On a more impressive scale were the full-length operas *Christophe Colomb* (1928), to Claudel's libretto about Columbus, and *Maximilien* (1930), on Lunel's adaptation of Franz Werfel's play about the short-lived Emperor of Mexico.

Arthur Honegger, born in France of Swiss parentage, like Milhaud had studied at the Conservatoire with Widor, Gédalge and d'Indy. But while Milhaud's melodic style is Mediterranean, Honegger's is more Germanic, with a preference for thicker instrumental and vocal textures. Like Milhaud, Honegger was particularly interested in symphonic music and works for the stage. His *Antigone* (1927, Brussels) and his 'biblical drama' *Judith* (1926, Monte Carlo), were reasonably successful, as was his comic opera *Les aventures du roi Pausole* (1930), based on Pierre Louÿs's novel. In the field of dramatic composition, however, Honegger's reputation rests entirely on his popular choral oratorio *Le roi David*, with an extensive part for a narrator; the French

libretto was adapted by René Morax from Old Testament texts. Honegger wrote this work in only a few months in 1921 for a chamber orchestra of wind, piano and percussion, revising it the same year for full orchestra. The style is heterogeneous, from neo-Handelian counterpoint to percussive chordal textures worthy of Stravinsky; but the lyric Alleluia chorus, as Honegger once amusingly suggested, points back to Massenet. On a much more lush and imposing scale—and less successful—is the opera-oratorio *Jeanne d'Arc au bûcher*, on a text by Claudel (1935). Among his numerous orchestral works, which include five symphonies, the most popular is still the 'train' piece *Pacific 231*, depicting a locomotive slowly achieving full speed. The Prelude, Fugue and Postlude, adapted from the melodrama *Amphion* (1929), is another good example of Honegger's mature orchestral style, in which colouristic polytonal harmony, with shimmering orchestra to match (including a saxophone), co-exists with episodes of dense contrapuntal development.

Francis Poulenc (1899–1963) had enjoyed modest early success immediately after the war with his Satiesque *Mouvements perpétuels* for piano and his whimsical song cycle *Le bestiaire* (to texts by Apollinaire); the works of the 1920s, however, show the vigour of his maturity. *Les biches*, his 1924 ballet for Dyagilev, became very popular, and in 1927 he was one of the composers who collaborated on a mini-ballet, *L'éventail de Jeanne*, written for the salon of Jeanne Dubost and performed in her home (the others were Ravel, Ferroud, Ibert, Roland-Manuel, Delannoy, Roussel, Milhaud, Auric and Schmitt). Poulenc's Concerto for two pianos and orchestra (1932) shows all the characteristics of his style: a clattering, percussive pianism reminiscent of the Javanese gamelan, a brash can-can from the music hall, an expressive lyricism couched in rich, Ravel-like appoggiatura chords and shameless parodies of Mozart's piano concertos are all juxtaposed, sometimes with deliberate crudeness, more usually with effortless elegance. The same eclecticism appears in greater or lesser degree in his numerous chamber works of the 1930s and later, especially the well-known Sextet for piano and wind (1932) and *Le bal masqué* (1932) for voice, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, violin, cello, percussion and piano, to a text by Max Jacob. In the mid-1930s Poulenc began to appear regularly as a pianist with the baritone Pierre Bernac, supplying part of the repertory with his own songs, which have since been recognized as among the finest of their time in any language.

Jacques Ibert (1890–1962) was not a member of Les Six, but the urbane and witty Parisian style of his very successful works is comparable to theirs. Of his operas, *Angélique* (1927) and *Le Roi d'Yvetot* (1930) were the most successful; *L'aiglon* (1937) was written in collaboration with Honegger. Two of his orchestral works, the impressionistic *Escapes* (1924) and the Flute Concerto (1934), are still often heard.

During the last years of Satie's life yet another group of young Turks rallied to his cause, forming what was informally called the 'Ecole d'Arceuil': Roger Désormière (1898–1963) soon achieved international fame as a conductor; Henri Sauguet (1901–89), a pupil of Koechlin, became well known as a composer of comic operas, especially *La chartreuse de Parme* (1939), based on Stendhal's novel.

SOLITARY HEROES

Some older French composers who lived in the 1920s stand out for their individual achievements and are not usually associated with groups, artistic movements or 'schools'. One was Ravel's close contemporary Albert Roussel (1869–1937), a pupil of d'Indy who had initially chosen a career in the French navy. Roussel's work is marked to some extent by Debussy's impressionist harmonic vocabulary and orchestral style, by the classical forms of the Franck school and by an interest in oriental subjects (the opera *Padmâvatî*, based on an Indian legend, was one of the big events of the 1923 season); in his later works Stravinsky's influence is apparent. Yet Roussel's well-crafted and colourful style is distinctive: his four symphonies are the most impressive representatives of the French symphonic tradition in the 1920s and 30s, and the ballet *Bacchus et Ariane* (1931), having little in common with the stylized Hellenism of Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé*, is still one of his most popular works.

The early fame achieved by Florent Schmitt (1870–1958) with his brilliant ballet *La tragédie de Salomé* (1907) and his setting of the 47th Psalm (1904) was sustained in the postwar years in several dramatic works, including incidental music to Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* (1920, Opéra) and an opera after Hans Christian Andersen, *Le petit elfe Ferme-l'oeil* (1924, Opéra-Comique), as well as a film score rewritten as an orchestral suite, *Salambô*, after Flaubert (1925). Thereafter Schmitt composed prolifically in a variety of genres, but his popularity in France was increasingly eclipsed.

The strict Conservatoire tradition had been preserved by the venerable professor André Gédalge (1856–1926), teacher of a generation from Ravel to Milhaud and author of a standard textbook on the 'school fugue'. After he died the pedagogical mantle, but not the professorship, passed to his pupil Charles Koechlin (1867–1950), who had made his mark with his expert orchestrations of Fauré's *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1899) and Debussy's *Khamma* (1912). Living quietly in Paris and supporting himself by private teaching, by writing for the *Revue musicale* and in other enterprises, Koechlin did not aggressively promote his own compositions, and his achievement is only now beginning to be widely recognized. He adopted the neo-classical manner of his time in an extensive list of piano pieces and chamber

works. A number of his fellow composers had visited the east coast of America, but Koechlin, almost alone among his countrymen, went to California as a visiting teacher and was enriched by the Hollywood experience; among the curious results is the *Seven Stars Symphony* op.132, a set of orchestral portraits of cinema personalities.

In the 1930s Koechlin was one of the few French composers to become interested in the techniques of the Second Viennese School. The influence can be seen in his largest and probably most remarkable work, *Les bandar-log (Scherzo des singes)* (op.176) completed in 1940 as the seventh and final symphonic poem in a series based on Kipling's *Jungle Book*. As descriptive music this 'monkey scherzo' is as brilliantly effective as any of the interwar years, with its luminous polytonal harmony, frantic orchestral virtuosity (the 'Entrance of the Monkeys') and broadly comic parodies of academic counterpoint and twelve-note orthodoxy.

Most of these composers gained reputations as teachers of composition, but their achievement was surpassed by Nadia Boulanger (1887-1979), a brilliant organist who studied with Vierne and Fauré. Following the early death of her superbly talented younger sister Lili (1893-1918; Grand Prix de Rome, 1913), she gave up composing, devoting herself to teaching and to obtaining performances and publication of Lili's works. Nadia Boulanger's classes at the American Conservatory at Fontainebleau (from 1921), and later in her own studio, soon attracted a large number of students, especially from the USA, including such diverse personalities as Aaron Copland, Walter Piston, Virgil Thomson, Roy Harris, Elliott Carter, Harold Shapero, Lennox Berkeley, Jean Françaix, Dinu Lipatti and Philip Glass. Stravinsky and Roussel were regular visitors to her gatherings and often gave her their new scores for study even before publication. A consummate master of sight-singing and score-reading, she was widely known as an analyst with an unerring ability to discern a score's essential qualities; she could go to the heart of the difficulties and uncertainties in a new piece, but at the same time could suggest improvements and fortify a young composer's self-confidence. Her 'Oh, you can do it!' was gratefully believed - and triumphantly vindicated - by composers for half a century.

RUSSIANS IN PARIS

Stravinsky had been as important in Parisian musical life as any Frenchman since 1910, and after 1914 he more or less established himself in the West, first in Switzerland and then, after the war, in France. Meanwhile he would be followed by a rich assortment of his musical countrymen. When the war ended in the West, it began again within Russia as Lenin's Bolsheviks consolidated their grip on the

scattered and starving multitudes of the Russian republics. The first few years after 1918 witnessed the departure from Russia of thousands who could not accommodate to the new régime. Among the musicians who fled to Paris, one of the first was Serge Koussevitzky (1874–1951) who had begun a distinguished career in Russia as a conductor and music publisher (Edition Russe de Musique). By 1923 his series of summer orchestral concerts in Paris, which continued until 1928, were notable both for their high standards and for the frequent performances of new works, many commissioned by Koussevitzky: in the 1924 season alone, he conducted premières of Honegger's *Pacific 231*, Prokofiev's *Sept, ils sont sept*, Stravinsky's Piano Concerto and several other works.

Sergey Prokofiev (1891–1953), who had been an *enfant terrible* in pre-war Russia, spent the war years in his native country and then, after a world tour as a pianist, settled in Paris in 1920, renewing the brief association that he had begun just before the war with the Dyagilev ballet companies. Except for occasional periods on tour in Europe and the USA, he remained in Paris for the next twelve years, stimulated by the variety of music round him and writing, with great facility and intensity, what are considered his best works. Among them were three ballets for Dyagilev, *Chout (The Buffoon)*, 1920, *Le pas d'acier* (1924) and *L'enfant prodigue* (1928); two operas, *The Fiery Angel* (1919) and *The Love for Three Oranges* (1920–21, after a fairy tale of Carlo Gozzi); two symphonies; the popular *Overture on Hebrew Themes* for clarinet, string quartet and piano; and his Piano Concerto no.3, the most popular of all modern works in this genre, which he performed with surpassing brilliance. Prokofiev continued to be profoundly influenced by Stravinsky, but his individual mature style was as influential as Stravinsky's on the developing neo-classicists in Paris, Poulenc especially.

Among the occasional features of Parisian concerts were the works of several Russian composers whose music seems to derive from the peculiar chromatic harmony and arcane aesthetics of the late works of Alexander Skryahin (1872–1915). A complex, atmospheric and almost atonal harmony characterizes the music of Arthur Lourié (1892–1966), who went to Paris in 1921 and for a while did editorial work for Stravinsky. Ivan Vyshnegradsky (1893–1979), who arrived in 1920, composed works for a microtonal piano of his own design and for two pianos tuned a quarter-tone apart. The strangest of these expatriate mystics was Nicolas Obukhov (1892–1954), who had studied with Ravel. Several fragments of his *Le livre de vie*, written in a complex musical-hieratic notation, were performed in Paris in the 1920s, but he continued to work at it long afterwards; the unpublished, 2000-page orchestral score is partly written in the composer's blood.

THE 1930s

The end of the 'Roaring Twenties' coincided with the beginning of the worldwide economic collapse that would soon be called the Great Depression. By 1933 this would propel Adolf Hitler and his National Socialists to political triumph in Germany. In France discontent brought old anti-republican elements out into the open, when aging monarchists, Boulangists from the 1880s and anti-Dreyfusards from the 1890s looked sympathetically on the gangster régimes rising in Germany and Italy. When a pro-fascist mob confronted the police in the Place de la Concorde in February 1934, a number of people were killed; the reaction brought together a coalition under the leadership of the Socialist Léon Blum. Blum's Popular Front, through effective social legislation, was able to address the principal complaints of the working class but could not carry out a rearmament programme to keep pace with Germany. In 1936 Hitler sent troops into the demilitarized Rhineland. The French forces, which could have opposed this strategic affront decisively and with vastly superior strength, decided to accept it rather than aggravate discontent at home. By 1938 the new government of Edouard Daladier was faced with continuing a defence policy of too little and too late, hoping to buy time with the course of appeasement urged on it by Neville Chamberlain's ministry in England. The tragedy of Munich followed, and within a year, in September 1939, France and Germany were at war.

Ravel composed his last work, *Don Quichotte à Dulcinée*, in 1931 and conducted his new Piano Concerto the following year. He lived five more years, hoping to write a large-scale ballet, *Morgiane*, on the subject of Ali Baba and the 40 thieves, but a still unexplained neurological condition left him incapacitated. After an unsuccessful brain operation, he died in 1937.

Milhaud, Honegger and Poulenc, their reputations secure and their production of new works vigorous as ever, were beginning their middle age; and some composers in their twenties were beginning to be heard. The twenty-year-old Jean Françaix performed his clever and witty Concertino for piano and orchestra in 1934. That year, Stravinsky, expatriate from Russia for twenty years (it would be another twenty-eight before he saw his native land again), became a French citizen, and his *Perséphone*, a ballet with singers, chorus and reciter on a perfumed libretto by André Gide, was produced at the Opéra. In 1935 Stravinsky and his son Sviatoslav Soulima gave the première of his Concerto for Two Pianos.

In 1936 Stravinsky sought election to Paul Dukas' seat in the Académie Française (it went to Florent Schmitt), and the second volume of his autobiography was published. One of the big events of the year was the première of *Oedipe*, the magnum opus of the Romanian

violinist and composer Georges Enescu (1881–1955), who never composed a work that would capture public attention as had his early and too repetitive *Romanian Rhapsody no.1*. Also in 1936 a concert of works by members of a new group of four composers was accompanied by a manifesto: 'La Jeune France has for its goal the dissemination of youthful, free works as far removed from revolutionary as from academic formulae'. The works of Daniel Lesur and Yves Baudrier did not become widely known, but André Jolivet, the most prolific of the four, achieved a durable reputation in France and abroad, and Olivier Messiaen (1908–92) came to be regarded as the avatar of French music in the post-1945 generation.

Messiaen had studied the organ (with Dupré) and composition (with Dukas) during eleven years at the Conservatoire beginning in 1919; he later carried on independent studies of Hindu and ancient Greek music and of the songs of birds from round the world. These subjects, and a deeply personal Catholic philosophy, continued to be the dominant influences on Messiaen's music, which also shows an absorption in Ravel's harmonic and orchestral sound and, in the later works, a complex chromaticism resembling Schoenberg's serial music. An early orchestral work, *L'ascension* (1933), is remarkable for its tonal chromaticism freely indulging in frank sentimentality and for its strongly mystical flavour, reinforced by the abundance of descriptive expressions and tempo markings similar to those in Skryabin's sonatas; Messiaen, however, claimed that his music was theological, not mystical, in intent. His interest in Asian rhythms is reflected in the variable bar lengths of *Les offrandes oubliées* for orchestra (1931), in which regular rhythms are distorted by the addition of one or more short note-values. Other works followed in which an increasing complexity of harmonic texture and rhythm is apparent: *La nativité du Seigneur* (1935) for organ, *Poèmes pour Mi* (1936), *Chants de terre et de ciel* (1938), *Les corps glorieux* (1939) for organ. From 1936 Messiaen taught at the Ecole Normale and at the Schola Cantorum.

The threat of war increased as the decade drew to a close. In summer 1939 Stravinsky went to the USA to give lectures at Harvard, and he stayed mostly in California during the war, becoming an American citizen in 1946. His last music written in Europe was the first two movements of the Symphony in C which, as he later confided, bears the imprint of his own illness with tuberculosis and the deaths of his wife, daughter and mother within a few months of each other, as well as the development of the catastrophe about to break out in Europe.

WAR, OCCUPATION, LIBERATION, RENEWAL

The collapse of the Third Republic is still remembered with horror by those who lived through May and June 1940. The world watched in

stupefied amazement as the mighty French nation, which had withstood four years of appalling destruction to achieve victory in 1914–18, was brought to her knees in a little more than a month by the armies of the Third Reich. The instrument of this conquest was the Blitzkrieg – ‘lightning war’ – the armoured vehicles of which simply ran round the northern end of France’s fixed fortifications and broke through the line of infantry at every point; the world had never seen anything so swift and violent. After giving up a third of her younger generation in the previous war, France had no heart for further slaughter, and in sullen surrender would be spared much physical destruction. But the hated Vichy régime was a constant reminder (as Marcel Ophüls’s 1969 documentary film *The Sorrow and the Pity* has shown so effectively) that the repression and deprivation wrought by the Nazis was not as dehumanizing as the acts that they forced the French to carry out on their own people and their own nation. For four years France would suffer this shame and despair, until the triumph of liberation brought forth again the republic that stands today.

It may seem surprising that during the occupation the arts continued to function in France with a vigour that seemed to contradict the repressions in everyday life and commerce that prevailed. Most composers were able to practise their art privately, and many of the official institutions continued to function as well. The national theatres, including the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique, reopened even in summer 1940 with *La damnation de Faust* and *Carmen*, and the favourite music halls, the Folies-Bergère, the Casino de Paris and many others, continued to operate; these institutions were especially popular with the occupying forces, and it was difficult to overlook the indignity of the best seats being turned over to Wehrmacht officers and Nazi bigwigs who were enjoying themselves in Paris. After a year of occupation, when there was severe rationing and widespread hunger, artistic activities became at once more difficult and more vital. As Georges Auric wrote after the liberation: ‘As time passed, it became clear that music would be called on to take a far more important place than we had dared hope at first. Was it not, in the midst of our daily anguish, one of the best, the surest of refuges?’¹⁶ After the war the world heard what the best French composers had expressed in their music of those years. Honegger’s *Symphony no. 2* for strings (with trumpet added in the final bars) projected a feeling of despair concluding on a note of pride and hope. Poulenc’s cantata *Figure humaine*, for twelve-part *a cappella* chorus on a text by Paul Eluard, struck a similar mood.

The Opéra functioned in what was called a ‘state of hibernation’, but *Tristan und Isolde* and *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* were part of the 1940–41 winter season, with Herbert von Karajan conducting; later productions included *Aida*, *Otello*, *Faust*, *Boris Godunov*, *Die Zauberflöte*, Rabaud’s *Mârouf*, Lalo’s *Le roi d’Ys*, Rameau’s *Castor et Pollux* and,

incredibly, Milhaud's *Medée*.¹⁷ Some organizations were able to mount new works; Sauguet's operetta *La gageure imprévue* was successfully produced in 1944 by the Opéra-Comique and Jolivet's ballet *Guignol et Pandore*, with choreography and scenario by Serge Lifar, was performed the same year at the Académie Nationale.

Orchestral concerts flourished. The Association des Concerts du Conservatoire under Charles Münch performed 'every Sunday afternoon for four years' in the Palais du Chaillot. The Concerts Colonne, under the Vichy régime, were officially renamed the Concerts Gabriel Pierné because Colonne, who had founded the orchestra in 1874, was Jewish. In protest, Paul Paray refused to conduct the orchestra and spent the war years in retirement; he was cheered for his brave stand when he returned after the war.

Milhaud and his family had to flee for their lives, and with great difficulty got to Portugal and then to the USA. Before leaving, Milhaud hid all his manuscripts in a secure place, recovering them after the war. Poulenc and Bernac continued their 20th-century song recitals throughout the war years. Auric wrote of 'the fine courage they displayed in rejecting the least compromise, the least concession, the least hint of propaganda', and noted the risk they took in performing Poulenc's songs on texts by Louis Aragon, the communist writer whose works were banned by the Nazis.¹⁸ One is the bittersweet song *C*, about the desperate flight across the Caesar bridges at Angers in 1940:

<i>... Et j'ai bu comme un lait glacé</i>	(And I have imbibed like iced milk
<i>Le long lai des gloires faussées</i>	The long song of falsified glories
<i>Le Loire emporte mes pensées</i>	The Loire carries away my thoughts
<i>Avec les voitures versées</i>	Along with the overturned cars
<i>Et les armes désamorçées</i>	And the defused weapons
<i>Et les larmes mal effacées</i>	And tears badly wiped away
<i>O ma France, ô ma délaissée</i>	O my France, my abandoned one
<i>J'ai traversé les ponts de Cé.</i>	I have crossed the bridges of Cé.)

The month of fierce combat had claimed a few musicians. The organist Jehan Alain, at 29 already a prolific composer of vividly imaginative organ works and even greater promise, was killed in action on 20 June. The 40-year-old Maurice Jaubert, composer of film scores and concert music, was killed on 19 June. Messiaen was captured and interned in a Stalag, where he composed a memorable chamber work, *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* for clarinet, violin, cello and piano, performing it there with fellow prisoners. Released in 1942 and brought back to Paris, he was appointed professor of harmony at the Conservatoire, where a number of young composers attended his classes. During the next two years he wrote several works on a larger scale than before, including *Sept visions de l'amen* for two pianos (1943), *Vingt regards sur l'enfant Jésus* (1944) for solo piano and *Trois petites liturgies de la présence*

The last section of Francis Poulenc's setting of 'C' by Louis Aragon, composed in 1943.

Céder un peu *pp* **a Tempo** *infinitement doux*

cy - gars dans les fou - ses De la grai - rie ou

vient danser Une É - ter - nel - le fi - an - cé - e Et j'ai lu comme on

fait gla - cé Le long loi - des gloi - res faus - sé - es La Loire em -

por - te mes pen - sé - es A - vec les voi - tures ver - sé - es Et les ar - mes dé -

Céder un peu *mf* **a Tempo**

- sarmor - ce - es Et les lar - mes mal ef - fa - cé - es O ma France, ô ma

Céder *pp* **molto** *portando* **Tempo** **Céder** **Céder** **Céder encore** *temu* *long*

de lais - sé - e J'ai tra - ver - sé les punts de Cé - Céder Céder

pp *mf* *p* *pp* *long*

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divine (1944) for eighteen sopranos, piano, ondes martenot and orchestra (1944). These works, which show an increasing density in Messiaen's harmony, oscillating between Ravel-like polychordal sonorities and a thick chromaticism which is often fully atonal, are among the earliest French works to demonstrate a sympathetic leaning toward Viennese atonality without actually adopting serial techniques; Koechlin's larger works were still unpublished, and the teachings of Webern's pupil René Leibowitz, resident in France since 1925, would not become widely known until after the war.

When Paris was liberated in summer 1944, the organized forces of the Free French marched at the head of the allied armies that entered the city. 1945 brought the end of the war and the beginning of recovery for an exhausted but jubilant nation. One familiar sign of the new vitality in French music was the riotous performance in April of Messiaen's *Trois petites liturgies*. Messiaen's star pupil, the twenty-year-old composer Pierre Boulez, graduated the same year from the Conservatoire and would within a decade be leader of his generation of French composers as well as a distinguished conductor.

Yet it was already evident to the rising generation that French music had been transformed by the war years to the point where it formed only one component of a new postwar European music, even without surrendering its Gallic individuality. Radio and the phonograph, and later television, became ever more powerful vehicles for musical communication between cultures. It was possible, even in the wake of social cataclysm, to look forward to the 1950s and 60s and an internationalization of music on a scale never before imagined. Stravinsky and Milhaud would come back to Paris and return to America again and again, proud citizens and masters of two cultures; Maurice Chevalier would sing the glories of Paris in English; Satie's *Gymnopédies* would enjoy worldwide renown as pop tunes. If the free world, in an era of instantaneous intercultural communication, was being transformed into the 'global village', Paris remained one of the capitals of the planet, confident of being in the forefront of another millennium of artistic and social progress.

NOTES

¹ L. Laloy, 'Debussy', *Revue des deux mondes* (15 July 1932); quoted in E. Lockspeiser, *Debussy: his Life and Mind*, ii (London, 1965), 225.

² I. Stravinsky, *Chroniques de ma vie* (Paris, 1935-6, 2/1962); Eng. trans. as *An Autobiography* (New York, 1936), 95.

³ I. Stravinsky and R. Craft, *Expositions and Developments* (London and New York, 1962), 129.

⁴ I. Stravinsky, programme note (1952); quoted by R. Craft in notes for a recording (Columbia ML 4694).

⁵ S. Lifar, *Diaghilev* (London, 1940); quoted in E. W. White, *Stravinsky: the Composer and his Works* (London, 1966), 314.

- ⁶ I. Stravinsky and R. Craft, *Conversations with Igor Stravinsky* (London and New York, 1959), 71.
- ⁷ G. Apollinaire, 'Parade', in *The Documents of 20th-Century Art: Apollinaire on Art – Essays and Reviews 1902–1918* (New York, 1972), 452.
- ⁸ J. Cocteau, *Le coq et l'arlequin* (Paris, 1918) (according to Cocteau, published by himself and Blaise Cendrars). The quotations here are from F. Stegmüller's *Cocteau: a Biography* (Boston, 1970), 206–7.
- ⁹ Stravinsky, *Conversations*, 74.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 75.
- ¹¹ P.-D. Templier, *Erik Satie* (Paris, 1932), 43.
- ¹² D. Milhaud, *Notes sans musique* (Paris, 1949); *Notes without Music* (New York, 1953), 97.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 101.
- ¹⁴ Quoted in Milhaud, *Notes*, 80.
- ¹⁵ Milhaud, *Notes*, 148–9.
- ¹⁶ G. Auric, 'Paris: the Survival of French Music', *Modern Music*, xxii/3 (1945), 157–60.
- ¹⁷ J. Gourret, *Histoire de l'Opéra de Paris 1669–1971* (Paris, 1977).
- ¹⁸ Auric, 'Paris: the Survival of French Music'.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The historical and aesthetic background of the early part of the period is exhaustively surveyed in E. Lockspeiser's *Debussy: his Life and Mind*, 2 vols. (London, 1962–5), which is especially strong on the literary and visual arts of Debussy's time. A more recent book by E. Brody, *Paris: the Musical Kaleidoscope 1870–1925* (New York, 1987), is more general but richly detailed; neither book dwells on analysis of the music. E. B. Hill's *Modern French Music* (Boston, 1924) is full of historical detail and makes good reading; M. Cooper's *Modern French Music: from the Death of Berlioz to the Death of Fauré* (London, 1951) is more specialized but deals extensively with the music. Individual composers of the later part of the period are discussed in a long article by D. Drew, 'Modern French Music', in *European Music in the Twentieth Century*, ed. H. Hartog (London, 1957, 2/1961).

The later years of the Diaghilev Ballets Russes are well described in S. L. Grigoriev, *The Diaghilev Ballet: 1909–1929* (Harmondsworth, 1960); much about the personalities can be found in A. Gold and R. Fizdale, *Misia: the Life of Mistia Sert* (New York, 1980), and in F. Stegmüller, *Cocteau: a Biography* (Boston, 1970).

The last years of Satie and flowering of Les Six are covered in R. H. Myers, *Erik Satie* (London, 1948), and especially in J. Harding, *The Ox on the Roof* (London, 1972). R. Shattuck's superb *The Banquet Years: the Origins of the Avant-Garde in France, 1885 to World War I* (New York, 1958), provides some musical coverage of the period but its main emphasis is on the *belle époque*. A. Orenstein, *Ravel: Man and Musician* (New York, 1975), is the best recent study of Ravel's life and works.

Stravinsky's memoirs and conversations with Robert Craft are full of intensely readable information about his French years, especially the first three volumes, *Conversations with Igor Stravinsky* (London and New York, 1959), *Memories and Commentaries* (London and New York, 1960), and *Expositions and Developments* (London and New York, 1962). Stravinsky's *Chroniques de ma vie* (Paris, 1935–6), in English as *An Autobiography* (New York, 1936), is chronologically ordered but not as detailed. No less interesting is Milhaud's autobiography, *Notes sans musique* (Paris, 1949, rev. and enlarged 2/1974 as *Ma vie heureuse*), in English as *Notes Without Music: an Autobiography* (New York, 1953).

The historical background to the catastrophe of 1940 and occupation is treated in *detail* in W. L. Shirer, *The Collapse of the Third Republic* (London, 1970). M. Ophul's poignant documentary film, *The Sorrow and the Pity* ('Le chagrin et la pitié'), produced in 1969, is also published as an illustrated screenplay (New York, 1972).