

To judge with confidence between Hopkins and Baudelaire would however require a depth of spiritual experience approximating to that of either ; and perhaps this is an occasion when, if ever, one should be content to talk of technical perfection.

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THE COMPOSER AND CIVILIZATION (II)

ALBERT ROUSSEL AND LA MUSIQUE FRANÇAISE

' Le génie musicale de la France, c'est quelque chose comme la fantaisie dans la sensibilité.'—Claude Debussy.

' . . . le culte des valeurs spirituelles est à la base de toute société qui se prétend civilisée et la musique, parmi les arts, en est l'expression la plus sensible et la plus élevée.'—

Albert Roussel.

I.

ONE wouldn't say that Roussel is ever likely to be a popular composer, but his career is, among contemporary musicians, almost unique in that he has been treated, even when misunderstood, with the respect that ought, in any civilized society, to accrue to the serious artist. He came to music late ; he proved himself consummate master of the materials of his craft ; almost alone among contemporary composers he was unmistakably recognized as a personality whom it was impossible not to respect. Young musicians have looked to him as a contemporary, but a contemporary whose experience and wisdom their inexperience might envy and admire ; older musicians admitted that they could not understand him but knew they had no right to smile. They didn't smile ; and even the most recalcitrant were in the long run converted. His reputation was, and is, international, unlike Fauré's, for the

latter was accepted only in his own country. He dedicated himself to his art as religiously as did Fauré, but he makes contact with the life of to-day at more points and in more ways, for Fauré's conception of civilization belongs, as I have shown, in a sense to the past. It may be that this explains why discerning musicians of all countries have respected Roussel as the French respected Fauré—even the pugnacious Mr. Sorabji, who can hardly be suspected of a temperamental partiality for French music, saluted the later symphonies as music with heart and guts—at last a juicy steak amid the perpetual bubble and squeak of present day music-making. We respect Roussel's integrity, his eager love of his art ; and we feel that he too has had to grapple with the problems that confront us. We are on more comfortable ground with Roussel than in tackling Fauré who remained so majestically aloof from many of the values we are forced to live by. Though perhaps Roussel might be called a more difficult composer in the sense that he is more sophisticated.

Here, anyway, is something to start from. I suggested in the postscript to my Fauré essay that Roussel's music was the sort of music that a man with a sensibility similar to that of Fauré might write if he were confronted with the problems of the modern world. One could make the point more neatly by suggesting that whereas Fauré is civilized, Roussel is urbane. I don't use the word pejoratively for his urbanity represents always a serious and sometimes even a solemn attitude to life ; but I do want it to suggest Roussel's greater self-consciousness, his peculiar modernity. We recognize Fauré as being aristocratic, ' polished ' ; but his polish is inseparable from, indeed is, his civilization. We recognize Roussel as polished also, but by calling him urbane we imply that the relation between his civilization, his sophistication and his way of ordering his experience is complex and precarious as Fauré's conception of civilization had no need to be. He is the more self-conscious, the more allusive in his cultivation. I don't want to suggest that either attitude is superior to the other. But I do think that to insist on this distinction between Roussel's *urbanity* and Fauré's *civilization* is a key to any intelligent approach to Roussel's music. If the distinction seems at the moment rather hazy, my apology must be that to illustrate and elucidate it is what I am trying to do in this essay.

II.

As far as concerns the earliest works the distinction is pretty obviously and simply pertinent. The point is often made that they are written in an idiom which is a compromise between d'Indy and Debussy—on the one hand 'formal,' on the other impressionistic—though the somewhat unpleasant Parsifalish ascetic aspects of d'Indy's music can hardly have been congenial to Roussel. They are anyway, though intensely French, rather naïvely sophisticated in their subtle inflexion of line, almost a superior sort of dilettante music, the same *type* of music as Ravel was writing at the time, though probably tougher if less accomplished, and certainly of greater potentiality. The first piano pieces, the *Rustiques* (1904)—I pass over the initial amateurish exercise, *Des Heures Passent* (1898)—the first symphony, *Poème de la Forêt* (1905), the first *Trio* (1902) and the first Violin *Sonata* (1907), all these are overlong and meandering but none is without distinction. The reconciliation of impressionism with 'classical' formalism is the achievement of a personality of real force and originality, not merely a facile if intelligent tampering with other composers' mannerisms. To describe the technique of d'Indy and of impressionism is unnecessary; it is familiar enough, can be easily investigated at first hand, and anyway has little bearing on the work of Roussel's maturity. What I want to do here is to indicate briefly characteristics in these earliest compositions which are Roussel's own, which make his use of the d'Indy-Debussy technique inimitable. They are all traits which will be developed in the Rousselian technique of maturity, a technique which cannot be properly understood unless it is realized that the germ of it is present in the very earliest compositions.

Firstly, both the melodic and rhythmic structure of these works bears some relation to the traditional French *chanson*; the tunes have a racy vigour that reminds us that Roussel knew and admired the *beau musicien de la campagne* Déodat de Séverac, but at the same time he is never, like de Séverac, simply a regional composer. It is not merely that he uses, basically, the impressionistic, arty, technique; so did de Séverac. But his attitude to his rusticity is not simple but extremely sophisticated; if his melodies have qualities resembling those of the *chanson*, they wear them with an air of deliberate decorativeness and whimsicality. Roussel some-

times assumes an air of wide-eyed bumpkin innocence ; but he does not let us forget that he is at heart the sophisticated man of cultivation—I almost said ‘ man of the world ’—who writes those impressionistic harmonies, and the peculiar charm of his early music comes largely from this juxtaposition, in melodic and harmonic structure, of two apparently opposed points of view.

Roussel’s rusticity is, then, in these early works, partly artificial. One might bring out the nature of this artificiality by suggesting that if his tunes are reminiscent of those of the *chanson*, it is the *chanson* in an eighteenth century setting that he is most interested in. Even at this date, though he takes over in some measure the prevailing technique of Debussy, the seeds of the revolt against impressionism are sown. Like de Séverac’s, his early music is, of course, in a sense music of the open air and of the sun—the *Poème de la Forêt* is even directly evocative and illustrative. But he is much more equivocal than de Séverac in trying to create a musical corollary for the ecstasies of sea and sunlight ; nor is he ever, like Debussy, interested in sensation for its own sake. The *Poème de la Forêt* may be a very successful piece of nature music ; but what we are most conscious of is not its evocative brilliance but its geniality of melody, the precision and ingenuity of its rhythmic structure, its exquisite placing of sonorities and timbres. The *Divertissement* for piano and wind instruments (1906) reveals explicitly what we had always, indeed, suspected ; that it is not so much the natural aspects of Nature that appeal to Roussel as the eighteenth century elements of *champêtre* and *fête galante*. The *Divertissement* is a musical evocation of the eighteenth century *parc* of rivers, woods and lawns, a world of the *fantasque à la Watteau*, such as Debussy was more bitterly to turn to in his last years. The tunes are slender, but have an unimpeded dulcet lyricism, a delicious pastoral suavity, an autumnal gentleness and melancholy gentility ; the rhythms are elaborate, yet tactfully controlled. With its rhythmic ingenuity, the neat solidity of its lines, the unexpected juxtaposition of its harmonies, the *Divertissement* was in its way as important an event in musical history as Stravinsky’s *Sacre*. Roussel had, in 1906, done with real melodic distinction what Poulenc was to do fifteen or twenty years later without much distinction of any kind except such as he borrowed second-hand from the tunes of the nursery

and from Rossini. We shall see later how this elegant artificiality becomes not altogether distinct from the tradition of the *Commedia dell' Arte*.

In describing these early works we have concentrated mainly on their relation to French music of the past as revealed in their melodic and rhythmic structure. But there is one harmonic peculiarity which immediately distinguishes his work from that of any other composer of the time using the same more or less Debussyan idiom, and that is his use of the tritone. The central position given by Roussel to the tritone in his harmonic scheme is so characteristic that it might almost be called a mannerism. It is noticeable in his very earliest compositions and helps to give that oddly acrid quality to their bucolic sophistication. The device may be part of his legacy from d'Indy who got it, of course, from Wagner ; but there is no resemblance whatever between d'Indy's use of the tritone and Roussel's ; in d'Indy it has a rather emasculating effect while it is one of the conditions of Roussel's caustic vigour.

All these qualities are developed and synthesized in the first compositions of Roussel's maturity, the piano *Suite* opus 14 (1911), the piano *Sonatina* opus 16 (1912), the ballet *Le Festin de l'Araignée* opus 17 (1912), and a few songs. These works may be called mature in the sense that in them the rather jejune *ambivalence* between the bucolic and the sophisticated is first resolved into what for want of a better word we must call an 'attitude'—a way of experiencing which is *at once* toughly earthy and hyper-fastidious and cultivated. In technical terms one can make the same point by saying that the idiom no longer depends on artfully *juxtaposing* the idiosyncracies of impressionism with those of, say, the *chanson* and the eighteenth century, but evolves 'from within,' is a dialect peculiar to Roussel and to no one else. The *Suite* is composed of traditional French dance forms treated with the sardonic brilliance characteristic of Roussel. Except in the tender, elegant, and Watteau-like *Sicilienne* the music is brusque and racy, of a bucolic toughness but with a superb alacrity and distinction in the contour of the lines. The *Sonatina* manifests a trenchancy almost Haydnesque, with a brittle Scherzo such as we shall become familiar with in the later works, an adagio with a robust if dolorous melody in a swaying irregular measure, and a finale (telescoped

with the *adagio*) in complex rhythmic formation—a movement as sunlit as de Séverac, but much more sinewy and ironic. *Le Festin*, the best known, I suppose, of all Roussel's works, is pastoral music in essence, music of the most witty and genial lyricism of spirit ; and it gains its peculiar flavour from what might almost be called a harmonic system developed from syncopated fourths and tritones. The rhythms of these works, supple and undulating, for the most part based on traditional French dance forms yet so briskly unexpected, testify to a sense of *physical movement* that no modern composer can rival. Some of the songs employ modern dance forms with the same *éclat* ; *Amoureux Séparés* written, surprisingly, in 1906, is a tango of delicate but full-blooded suavity.

III.

' *Roussel, marin favorisé,
Entrelaçant l'ancre à la lyre,
Les moussons et les alisés
Servent le gré de ton navire . . .* '

Before he decided on a musical career at the age of twenty-five Roussel, it is well known, had been destined for the sea. His love of the sea and of travel never left him, and in 1909 he went a long voyage to India and the Orient. This expedition proved a turning point in his musical life. On his travels he heard oriental music and watched oriental dances. When he returned to France he spent a year or so maturing his impressions, then he produced his first two major compositions, the *Evocations* opus 15 (1910-1911) and *Padmavati* (1914).¹

Evocations is an odd work, a *tour de force*. It is quite deliberately an evocation of the Orient in a western technique, and hindoo and pentatonic scales are woven into a gorgeous orchestral fabric. There is, of course, no attempt to create 'atmosphere' ; it is Roussel's sympathetic comment, in his own language, on the peoples and countries of the East—and we must remember that even in his very earliest work Roussel had given evidence of a

¹Chronologically the piano *Sonatina* and the *Festin* were written after the *Evocations*. I regard them, however, as the consummation of the early manner not as the beginning of something new.

certain exoticism of imagination. Here is music of a strange voluptuous fascination, a rich and sumptuous power. Mr. Sorabji, who should know, places it among the few really convincing evocations of the Orient in western music.

In *Padmavati* the process is carried a step further. Here there is no attempt to 'evoke' the Orient. Eastern scales and rhythms have been assimilated into the Roussel idiom, becoming as much French as oriental. Before *Padmavati* he had, of course, created his own idiom by means of the tritonal elaboration of his harmony; but it was an idiom too restricted to express anything more than the limited states of feeling I have tried to describe. After *Padmavati* he never looked back, he was done with impressionism and with all contemporary experimentism. He had added a language to the history of music, a language of tragic austerity and ardent lyricism. *Padmavati* was frowned upon by critics because of its wilful gaucherie and harmonic incompetence. Actually its technique marks a newly won vitality, and Roussel himself realized this when he wrote, in April, 1916: 'Je réfléchissais à cela hier et je me demandais justement si je n'avais pas à craindre ce nouvel état d'esprit, qui résultera de la crise actuelle, pour *Padmavati* qui a été conçue et composée entièrement avant la guerre. Toute réflexion faite, je ne crois pas. Je ne vois dans mon œuvre aucune trace d'influences morbides ou déliquescentes. Il me semble au contraire que le ton général en est plutôt viril et fort . . . ' This seems to be the place to give some general account of this fresh technical mastery—of the typical late Roussel language in which all the works after *Padmavati* were with various modifications to be written. For a more comprehensive treatment of some of the points I am going to make very briefly the reader is referred to the chapters on technique in M. Hoérée's admirable little book on Roussel (*Les Editions Rieder*, 1938).

IV.

The key to the technique of Roussel's late work is by way of what M. Hoérée calls its *polymodality*. Most types of defective scales are to be found in hindoo music, the most modally fecund, and the scales of hindoo music are almost all exploited in *Padmavati*. Greek modes are used in *La Naissance de la Lyre*,

the pentatonic scales of Chinese music in *A un jeune gentilhomme* and *passim*. But to catalogue the various modes employed by Roussel is futile, and, moreover, impossible, since like Fauré, Roussel evolved his idiom quite spontaneously and it is not true to say that modalism influenced the shape of his melodies but rather that the shape of his melodies—and behind that the mould of his sensibility—precisely determined their modality. He seldom writes melodies in one specific mode, but his melodic thinking tends towards modality in the way in which his tunes oscillate round a fixed point, generating other related figurations (the basses of *Padmavati* by this process vitalize the whole score despite their apparent immobility ; and *cf.*, the *Danse des Nymphes* from *La Naissance*, and the *Sarabande* from the *Suite in F*) ; in the undulating contour of the melodies, their abrupt leaps (particularly of sixths and sevenths), their irregular accentuation, their sinewy chromaticism, and above all in their perpetual modulations and tonal instability.

Roussel's conception of his art is essentially melodic, rather than thematic. He works on a principle of melodic evolution by modal alteration, independent of the customary procedures of repetition, transposition and development. This trick of incessant transition from one mode to another by means of *modes altérés* is a distinctive feature of his principle of modulation and hence of his harmony. (The major scale with the flattened sixth is used in, for instance, the *Second Violin Sonata*, and the minor scale with the augmented fourth *passim* ; that is, the tritone, in the later work, has become as much a melodic as a harmonic idiosyncrasy). All this means, of course, that Roussel's phrases tend to be of exceptional length and sustained power. In this respect his technique resembles Fauré's in a more 'advanced' form. Though his melodies are tonally much freer than Fauré's they too are never atonal since even his most complex departures from diatonicism can be referred back to some scale system or chordal structure. M. Hoérée quotes an interesting case (a passage from the *Sarabande* of the *Suite in F*) proving that the composer himself is not always—or indeed usually—'intellectually' aware of any such system. It seems natural and inevitable that a composer so concerned with the civilized virtues should not defy the physical laws of the art of sound.

But not only does each melodic line, while being firmly based

on a sense of tonality, glide rapidly through a multiplicity of modal and defective scales, but the various melodic strands that make up the complete score may pass *simultaneously* through different modes. 'Rien ne s'oppose au contrepoint polytonal, à la superposition des lignes mélodiques se développant dans deux ou trois tons différents.' Here Roussel is not referring to polytonality of the somewhat artificial kind practised by Milhaud but to this *polymodie simultanée* I have been describing; and it becomes quite obvious that his polymodal melodic thinking must condition his scheme of harmony. (M. Hoérée mentions the corollary in the case of Honneger, whose counterpoint is the result of the adoption of 'modern harmony'; but he doesn't point out what a give-away this is, how much it explains about Honneger's inflated reputation).

It is possible to find instances in Roussel's work in which the harmony is conditioned by one particular mode; the harmony of the *Ode Chinois*, for instance, is completely controlled by the pentatonic scale. And sometimes the equivocal Rousselian harmonic flavour is to be attributed to his use of interior pedals—a device which, again, is found in oriental music and double appoggiaturas. Most often, however, the harmonic tang is the outcome of his polymodal contrapuntal writing; defective scales produce modifications in the tetrachord, and a singular shift to the most obvious harmony. The predominance of certain intervals—the tritone, the major seventh and minor ninth—the frequent use of the chord of the eleventh with the major seventh between the ninth and the fundamental, and of the thirteenth with the minor ninth between the third and the eleventh—these are harmonic traits which owe their existence to modes of melodic expression which had been implicit in Roussel's music ever since, and in a subterranean sort of way even before, the creation of *Padmavati*. His melodic sense does not call for exact symmetry; and there is no place in his music for 'academically' developing harmonies. He was accused of writing false—harmonically unsound—basses precisely because his basses were so integral to his unique melodic idiom. The convention of the Bass was a convention deduced from the music of the eighteenth century, to which it was perfectly adequate. In a more subtle and fluid way it is applicable to such a comparatively homophonic music as that of Fauré. But there was absolutely no musical reason why, in the nineteenth century,

it should have been academically elevated into a universal unalterable Law. There are, as several distinguished musicians of to-day have pointed out, many types of polyphonic music to which such a harmonic conception in chordal 'blocks' simply isn't pertinent. It isn't relevant to Roussel's mature music; his basses have an importance equal with, but by no means greater than, his 'middle' parts, whether it be in such diverse manifestations of his genius as the austere chromaticism of the *Marche Funèbre* from *Padmavati*, the comparative diatonicism of the chorales and fugues of the *Psautier*, or the supple canonic writing of the piano *Concerto*.

Rhythmically the Roussel language is rich and complex, inevitably so since his melody and polyphony are rich and complex. But he preserves, as we shall see, his respect for the traditional dance forms of France and of eighteenth-century Europe. His rhythmic vitality and sanity perhaps comes from this delicate compromise between freedom and discipline. Roussel's æsthetic, in so far as he can be said to have had one, was very simple:

'Ce que je voudrais réaliser, c'est une musique se satisfaisant à elle-même, une musique qui cherche à s'affranchir de tout élément pittoresque et descriptif et à jamais éloignée de toute localisation dans l'espace . . . Loin de vouloir décrire je m'efforce toujours d'écarter de mon esprit le souvenir des objets et des formes susceptibles de se traduire en effets musicaux. Je ne veux faire que la musique.'

There are to be no more 'evocations.'

V.

Padmavati is one of the major achievements of the twentieth century; but it is in Roussel's development a transitional work. Without knowledge of it it is difficult to understand the works in the late manner and perhaps the reason why *Pour un Fête de Printemps* and the *Second Symphony* appeared at first so baffling was that they were actually performed before *Padmavati*, presentation of which was delayed, owing to the war and consequent economic difficulties, until 1925. After *Padmavati* Roussel never again touched, except indirectly, on exotic subjects; but he had learned from oriental music the direction which his melodic thinking

was to take, he had escaped the tyranny of conventional idioms. The language he evolved for *Pour un Fête* and for the *Second Symphony*—the language I have tried to describe in the preceding section—remained his musical speech for the rest of his career. He modified and simplified it ; but it remained substantially the same.

One might make the point more concretely by suggesting that hearing the modal melodies, the subtle inflexions and complex rhythmic organization of oriental music awoke Roussel to a realization of the true nature of his own heritage. The relation of his earliest music to the *chanson* tends to be, as I have shown, decorative and whimsical ; the first mature pieces incarnate a serious attitude, but are still somewhat topically sophisticate in their urbanity and locally regional in their rurality. In the late works he has realized, whether consciously or no, that he, born at Tourcoing, in French Flanders, belongs to the tradition that produced the great religious and troubadour composers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the tradition of Pérotin, Machault, Binchois, Dufay and Jannequin.¹ Of course his music only superficially 'resembles' theirs ; he has not their European culture. But this is what his new-found rhythmic and melodic independence—his sanity, his suppleness, the mature humour or melancholy of his linear inflexions—really means ; he has divested the idiosyncracies of his earlier work of their merely topical and local elements, he has taken his place in the evolving tradition of *la musique française*. Certainly I know of no other contemporary music which has precisely this poise and ripeness of attitude. The late works of Vaughan Williams have something of the same toughness and perhaps Vaughan Williams's relation to the tradition of English

¹Convinced of its importance, I was yet doubtful as to how far this point could be pressed until I found that M. Hoérée bears me out. He makes the point only in passing and doesn't bring out its full implications, but he does, as one of Roussel's most intimate friends, suggest that the composer himself was aware of, and recognized some such relationship. M. Hoérée interestingly compares Machault's 'balancement mélodique' with the insistently oscillating line of such a thing of Roussel as *Ciel, aer et vens* for soprano and flute.

music is similar to that of Roussel to Machault and Jannequin ; but the tradition of Vaughan Williams is hardly one that can be called urbane ; he, in his late works, for all his toughness of emotional fibre, is more hysterical in his modernity.¹

There is one more aspect of this relation, in the last works, to the traditional *chanson* to be noticed. On the one hand the relation to the *chanson* provides a link between Roussel and fifteenth-century French music and the work of the Flemish polyphonists ; on the other hand it connects him, by way of the nursery song, with the tunes of the café-concert and hence with certain aspects of the art of Erik Satie. The subtle poise of his best work is to be attributed to the equilibrium he achieves between these various ways of feeling ; the latin culture he inherits from France (partly a mature Machault-like tenderness of lyricism, partly sympathy with the French eighteenth century classical forms) ; the robust gravity and impudent drolerie he inherits from Flanders (*cf.* the enormous soaring melodies of his adagios, and some of the tunes of the scherzos) ; and the equivocal naiveté and sophisticated brutality he shares with the French nursery song and the tune of the café-concert respectively (*cf.* the relation of the scherzos to Chabrier, Bizet and Satie). The rhythmic poise which I have noticed earlier as being produced by a combination of melodic freedom with the traditional discipline of the movements of the dance is, of course, a more particular example of the same maturity of attitude. We can understand what Roussel meant when he said that he hated 'tout sentiment résultant d'une hypertrophie du moi.' We shall be examining further these various traits in considering with some particularity the works in the final, the 'classical' manner.

¹If we admit that there is some similarity between the positions occupied in English and French musical life by Vaughan Williams and Roussel respectively, we can also see that Roussel enjoyed the advantage in being French. I don't think it is an accident that Vaughan Williams, before he arrived at his late manner, should have written such a depressing amount of music that is utterly bad. Roussel in his early days wrote some music that is crude and amateurish and therefore dull, but nothing that is bad in the sense of being emotionally muzzy or cheap or vulgar.

VI.

Roussel was aware, himself, that *Pour un Fête* and the second *Symphony* (opus 22 and 23 respectively, composed 1919-1921), marked a fresh stage in his musical career. 'Je travaillerai (he writes), avec plus d'ardeur et de frénésie que jamais. Jamais je ne suis senti aussi dispos et aussi frais d'esprit et aussi dégagé de toute influence, et cela provient évidemment du grand repos de mon cerveau . . . ' The new polymodal technique, the harmonic system of appoggiaturas is in these works consummated ; the task of simplification—of concentration—remains. In 1925 Roussel retired to Vasterival, small fishing village so congenial to his temperament, and in one year produced *La Naissance de la Lyre* opus 24, the *Sérénade* for flute, violin, viola, cello and harp, opus 30, the second *Violin Sonata* opus 28, the *Suite in F* opus 33 and a number of songs. These works inaugurate the ' new classicism ' of the final manner.

The manner is called ' classical ' because, I suppose, it represents a return to *le style continu* (compared with the fragmentary methods of the impressionists). In *La Naissance de la Lyre* and the *Sérénade* the lyricism is more supple, the harmony more acid, the orchestration delicate and fluid. The *Suite* is written in three eighteenth-century dance forms ; a Prelude with a fierce, jaunty rhythmic pulse and an immense bounding second subject characterized by abrupt leaps and racy twists ; a Sarabande with a long flowing line of a sweet yet powerful elegance and sumptuousness of stature ;¹ and a Gigue in which a comic truculent nursery tune is introduced on the trumpet, the entry being timed with the most consummate skill so that the balance between the ludicrously vulgar (the *café-chantant* element) and the vigorously earthy (the

¹I use the word stature in an attempt to indicate the curiously static quality of the Sarabande and some other of Roussel's late slow movements—a sense of motion within immobility. The rhythmic feeling is very subtle and strong but it seems, as it were, disembodied. It is rather like an aural form of the visual phenomenon of watching a cinematograph representation of a slow and courtly dance (which the Sarabande is) ; one applauds and appraises the elegance of the pose, the charm of the movement, while remaining personally aloof.

folk-tune element) is perfectly poised. It is movements like this that remind one of Satie, not only in their chanson-like lilt and persistent repetition of rhythmic formulæ, but also in that curious urbane distinction and precariousness in the melodic contour¹—a subtle, almost cynical detachment (note the slightly caustic insouciance given to the nursery tune by flattening the leading note)—and that singular piquancy of orchestration. Roussel must, indeed, be counted among the few really significant orchestrators of the twentieth century. His instrumentation is unatmospheric, taut, but with a tortuous spiced quality, a knack of juxtaposing sharply defined sonorities for the sake of polyphonic clarity, which helps to give his music its stringent, almost wry flavour.

'J'ai toujours poursuivi le dessin de la construction et du rythme ; le recherche de la forme et du développement ont été ma constante préoccupation.' This sentence of Roussel emphasizes his concern for discipline in these compositions of his final years. The setting of Psalm LXXX uses only the simplest technical means, so simple as to appear on paper almost gauche ; yet it attains in its detached way—for Roussel's urbanity hardly presupposes any accepted religious creed—to a farouche majesty and grandeur. The *Concert* for small orchestra, opus 34 (1927) and the *Petite Suite*—Aubade, Pastorale, and Mascarade—opus 39 (1929) have an elegant lucidity and sprightly concision that make them the music par excellence of the commedia dell' Arte ; and the piano *Concerto* opus 36 (1927), with its percussive rhythms and bouncing themes in the first movement, its comic frustrated café-chantant tune in the finale—we may compare some of the tunes of Wiéner, though Roussel's tunes are much less 'juicy,' more aristocratically poised—attains in the adagio to a truly noble chastity of line and distinction of pianistic ornament.

The peak point of the Rousselian idiom is perhaps reached in the third and fourth Symphonies (1930 and 1934). All the

¹I know Satie's melodies are short and symmetrical whereas Roussel's are longish and complex ; that's the inevitable reflection of the simple singlemindedness of Satie's sensibility and the comparative tortuosity of Roussel's. But the fact that Satie is so miraculously singleminded also means that he is a much smaller and more limited composer than Roussel.

elements we have noticed combine here with deeper substance and richness. The first movement of the *Third Symphony* has the familiar prancing modally inflected themes, the ferocious pulsing rhythmic organization—the sense of physical movement. The grave and ripe adagio reaches a climax in a clattering fugue and then subsides serenely in a sustained soaring aria for violin. The Scherzo is a racy waltz, more acrid version of Chabrier ; the finale combines a chanson-like lyricism with passages of tranquil melodic solemnity. The *Fourth Symphony* explores similar reaches of experience with almost equal power.

It is not necessary to describe the long list of compositions written (mostly at Vasterival) during the nineteen-thirties. They manifest—through the *Sinfonietta*, the *String Trio*, the *Quartet* and the ballets, down to the last unfinished Trio for wind instruments—no falling off from mastery and an ever increasingly stringent economy. Perhaps the best introduction to Roussel's late work is by way of the songs of these final years. *Cœur en Péril*, elliptical but comparatively diatonic in line, offers a characteristically wry transformation of the clichés of Spanish music, just as the odd *Jazz dans la Nuit* opus 38 had metamorphosed the rhythms of jazz into something as unlike jazz as it is like Roussel. *L'Heure du Retour* is a mournful and bitterly *fauve* perversion of the nostalgic song of the café-concert ; and the two songs that comprise opus 55, *Vieilles Cartes* and *Si quelquefois tu pleures* are perfect examples of the Rousselian whimsical yet melancholy urbanity in their 'modally' evolving yet symmetrically poised polyphonic contour, and their consequent piquancy of harmony. In the *Deux Poèmes Chinois* opus 47, the apparent inconsequentiality of the various linear strands—their apparent disjointedness and independence of one another—produces an effect at once amused and nonchalant, yet hardly cynical. The inconsequentiality is the result of a peculiarly French aloofness of attitude ; it creates no feeling of vapidty but rather of calculated understatement.

The masterpiece of all these late songs is undoubtedly, however, *Le Kérioklepte* from opus 44, in which the droll tune is so delicately moulded that the most apparently simple triad or the most undemonstrative rhythm takes on, beneath it, an inexhaustibly surprising irony. It would never have been written, obviously, but for such things of Satie as the *Ludions*—it is a case here of

the pupil teaching the master ; but Satie achieved nothing as profoundly human in its urbanity.

The *Rapsodie Flamande* opus 56 (1936) might be mentioned in conclusion because it is the only occasion on which Roussel directly employs Flemish folk tunes. It is light music of delicious buoyancy, orchestrated with that crisp pungency I have already referred to. There is a berceuse transparently harmonized for strings ; the other tunes are treated with unashamedly rowdy jocularly. Again the orchestration, particularly in its use of the brass, is reminiscent of Satie. This brilliantly urbane little work should be a lesson to all sentimentally rustic folkmongering musicians.

VII.

Something remains to be said about Roussel's conception of the place of music in opera and ballet. An account of the history of opera might be given in terms of its tendency to aspire now to the dramatic and realistic, now to the balletistic ideal, and Roussel follows Satie and most twentieth century musicians in coming out, roughly speaking, on the side of the ballet. His principles were indicated in a programme note to *Padmavati*, with which work he said he was trying to revive the form of *opéra-ballet* in the manner of Rameau :

' L'opéra-ballet se distingue de l'opéra ordinaire en ce que la danse y tient autant de place que le chant et qu'au lieu de n'intervenir que comme un divertissement elle doit se rattacher constamment à l'action.'

Since ' tout est conventionnel au théâtre ' realism is a false ideal ; the essential relation is that between music and physical movement.

It will readily be perceived that Roussel, with his superb musical sense of physical movement, especially as reflected in the traditional French dance forms, combined at the same time with his sustained melodic power and linear freedom, was peculiarly endowed for the creation of works in this form, and the ballets he wrote at Vasterival, *Bacchus et Ariane* (1930) and *Aenée*s (1934)—*ballet avec chœurs*—are certainly among his most

impressive accomplishments. He possibly learned something from Satie, learned how to combine the maximum of personality with the 'objective' organization of rhythmic sequences ; but the idiom is his own, substantially that of the *Concertino for Cello* opus 57 (1936), the late songs and the other works of the period ; and it is a logical extension of principles implicit in all his mature music. Readers wishing to examine his method cannot do better than to read over the extremely beautiful *Danse de Didon* and the majestic and rhythmically exciting *Hymne Final* from *Aenéas*.

The year before he died Roussel unexpectedly produced an opéra bouffe, *Le Testament de la Tante Caroline* (1936). I have been unable to obtain a score of this work, which seems to be unpublished. It must surely be a creation of remarkable interest—the *Rapsodie Flamande*, composed about the same time, is suggestive of the kind of fluent ironic gaiety we might expect from it, though it would probably be too allusive to be really popular. It was, I believe, a financial success in France ; there is no reason to hope that it will ever be produced in this country.

VIII.

'Un artiste dérive toujours de quelqu'un, d'un maître antérieur dont il s'est inspiré, consciemment ou inconsciemment . . . On se juge très mal soi-même et je n'arrive pas à retrouver mon père musical . . . à qui me rattachez-vous?'

Albert Roussel.

Roussel's distinction, I hope I have made it clear, lies in his creation of a personal language ; and he has created that language because he has been aware of his place in the traditional evolution of French music ; so that an attempt to estimate his position has amounted, really, to an attempt to answer the question he asks in the quotation at the head of this section. But when I say that he is 'aware' of his position I do not mean that he has thought about it as I have tried to do in these pages ; only that he has, through a long process of evolution, assimilated what he wanted from French music of the past and taken his place in the succession of great figures that make up that tradition. He does not recreate in music, like Machault, a European civilization ; nor, like

Couperin, a great but comparatively local French civilization ; he does not express an ideally formulated civilization like Fauré. But his response to the world is that of a man who has understood and sympathized with all that Machault and Couperin and Fauré have stood for. True, though his music is powerful, it has not the effortless power of Fauré's finest work ; and his achievement is less important and less remarkable than that of the completely cosmopolitan van Dieren. Yet his urbanity must, I think, for its traditional originality, be recognized as a sort of wisdom ; and I suppose, anyway, that France is about the only country that still offers the material—the cultural heritage—necessary for such an undertaking.

I think it is significant that though his language was universally recognized as an accomplishment utterly independent of and comparable in importance with, the various revolutions of the most influential of modern composers—Stravinsky, Schönberg and Hindemith—this language has had absolutely no influence on practising musicians—and this despite the fact that young composers looked to him, as a commanding personality, for guidance. (Satie took a course of strict counterpoint under Roussel but if there is any question of influence involved here it is, as I have suggested, the pupil who influenced the master. And it is not as surprising as it superficially appears that the Parisian-American, completely anti-traditional revolutionary Edgar Varèse, should have been among Roussel's pupils). In his way, Roussel was as lonely a figure in his generation as Sibelius. He didn't seem to mind being lonely :

' Il n'est pas nécessaire qu'une symphonie ou un drame deviennent aussi populaires qu'une chanson de Mayol. La Musique est l'art le plus fermé et le plus inaccessible. C'est du musicien bien plus encore que du poète qu'on peut dire qu'il est complètement isolé dans le monde, seul avec son langage plus ou moins incompréhensible . . . A part deux ou trois belles œuvres qu'on pourrait écrire pour le peuple, pour des fêtes analogues aux fêtes suisses et qui seraient comme de grandes fresques largement brossées, tout le reste, dans l'état réciproque actuel de la musique et de la foule, sera toujours destiné à de très rares auditeurs.'

I suppose this is sensible enough ; only it's a bit hard on the composer who has not his genius, and his self-sufficiency. There must be few who can have the right to feel so confident.

W. H. MELLERS.

NOTE.

The following are the extant recordings of music by Roussel :

Third Symphony opus 42, orchestra Lamoureux, con. Albert Wolff, Polydor CA 8199-8201.

Suite in F opus 33, con. Coppola, Gramophone W 1132-3.

Danse des Nymphes, con. Coppola, Gramophone W 1133. From *La Naissance de la Lyre*.

Le Festin de l'Araignée, orchestra Straram, Columbia LFX 47-8.

Sicilienne from piano Suite opus 14, Lazare Levy, Gramophone L 909.

The following songs recorded by Claire Croiza for Columbia :

Invocation, Light, Amoureux Séparés, Le Bachelier de Salamanque, A Un Jeune Gentilhomme, Sarabande, Jazz dans la Nuit.

The following have been withdrawn from circulation but may sometimes be obtained second-hand :

Sinfonietta opus 52, orchestra Jane Evrard, Gramophone.

Ciel, aer et vens (soprano and flute), A. Noordewier Reddingius, Col. hollandais DHX 36.

More detailed Rousseliana can be found in M. Hoérée's book.

The most important of these is, of course, the recording of the *Symphony*. The performance is fine and authoritative, the recording is good, though a little shrill. The recording of the *Suite* is not as lucid as it might be in the more polyphonic passages, but quite adequate on the whole. The songs are sung with insight and delicacy by Claire Croiza, but unfortunately each one is backed by a 'manufactured' song of unbelievable insipidity by Milhaud or Honneger.

E. M. FORSTER¹

THE problem with which E. M. Forster immediately confronts criticism is that of the oddly limited and uncertain quality of his distinction—his real and very fine distinction. It is a problem that Miss Macaulay doesn't raise. In fact, she doesn't offer a critique ; her book is rather a guide, simply and chattily descriptive, to the not very large corpus of Mr. Forster's work. Nor does she provide the biographical information that, however impertinently in one sense of the adverb, we should like to have and that we might have been led by the publisher's imprint to hope for, however faintly. We should like to have it because it would, there is good reason for supposing, be very pertinent to the problem facing the critic. Still we do, after all, without extra-critical prying or impartings, know quite a lot about the particular milieu and the phase of English culture with which Mr. Forster's work is associated ; enough, perhaps, to discuss with some profit the extent to which, highly individual as it is, it is also, in its virtues and its limitations, representative.

The inequality in the early novels—the contrast between maturity and immaturity, the fine and the crude—is extreme ; so extreme that a simple formula proposes itself. In his comedy, one might carelessly say, he shows himself the born novelist ; but he aims also at making a poetic communication about life, and here he is, by contrast, almost unbelievably crude and weak. Yet, though his strength in these novels, it is true, comes out in an art that suggests comparisons with Jane Austen, while it is in the element, the intention, relating them most obviously to *The Celestial*

¹*The Writings of E. M. Forster*, by Rose Macaulay (Hogarth Press, 7/6).

[I have to call attention to the essay on E. M. Forster by Mr. D. A. Traversi that appeared in *Arena* for April, 1937. If I had re-read it before writing my own note instead of after, I might perhaps have decided that Mr. Traversi, with his admirable economy, had made my observations superfluous. As it is, I offer my particular limited approach, with its attendant stresses, with the less misgiving because there is his essay to refer the reader to].