

A Learned Lecture on Music and Animals

Being a Discussion, by a Great Modern Satirist in Music, of Certain Aspects of His Art as Practiced by What are Assumed to Be the Lower Creatures

By ERIK SATIE



OT being an orator, I cannot make a speech—I cannot even chat informally.

I will, however, permit myself to read you a letter—an open letter—that I have written for you. Before reading it to you, I will enlighten you on the subject of what I have done—in the past—for animals.

IN the most estimable Revue I know I recently had the honour of publishing an article on the *Intelligence and Musicality of Animals*. I had all the authority necessary to publish that article.

I love animals, and they return my affection. Animals know me—and they recognize me: especially dogs.

Yes, I love animals. I like chickens, sheep, ducks, smoked salmon, beef and turkey stuffed with chestnuts—even without the chestnuts—with truffles.

Yes, I love animals; for I am good to them—yes, too good.

I follow them in their infancy; I assist as a friend at their betrothals, at their marriages—that is, of course, if I can—

I intervene in a friendly way, in their fights—that is when I dare—

I ADVISE them; I give them advice as a father to his family.

They owe me a great deal—for all the time I have spent with them has cost me a half my fortune. Contact with them has caused infirmities in me; I have become bald—like an eagle. But, that is nothing, and it does not show.

Having thus spoken, I am going to take the liberty of reading the letter that I have addressed to you.

It is an open letter, so I permitted myself the great pleasure of opening it before reading it to you.

Music and Animals

Pray forgive me.

LADIES,
Gentlemen:

Michelet has modestly said that the animals are our inferior brothers, which means that man is the beast's superior brother. We are without any opinion of animals on the score.

What we do know, is that they are good citizens of Nature; that they have rights and duties; and that their intelligence is considerable. Some of them are designated as Domestic animals. Why? I know not.

A great deal has been said about the intelligence of animals. They are even more than intelligent—they are polite. Rarely is an animal rude towards man. It is man who shows a lack in courtesy towards the animal.

For example. A cat is asleep on a sofa; a man comes—and chases the cat away. I have never seen it the other way round—the cat coming and chasing the man from the sofa.

Painters and sculptors have often portrayed animals. In which case these artists are called—"Animalists." They—the animals—seem to ignore their opportunities. They are never called humanistic animals. There is no reciprocity.

Indeed we have no example either of painting or of sculpture made by an animal. Their taste does not lead them towards these two arts.

Architecture and Music, however, have attracted them—the rabbit constructs tunnels—both for himself and the beagle hound.

The bird builds a nest, a marvel of art and industry, wherein he himself may live with his family—

Even the cuckoo is a fairly good judge of architecture.

We could continue to cite similar examples indefinitely.

So much for architecture.

I KNOW of no literary work written by an animal—and that is very sad.

Have animals had, in the past, a literature of their own?

It is quite possible. No doubt, it was destroyed in a large fire—a very, very large fire.



Music and Animals

LET us now pass on to Music. We cannot doubt that animals like and practice music. That is obvious, but it seems to me that their musical system differs from ours.

It is another school.

One must hear them whinny, cackle, mieu, bray, whistle, croak, bleat, bellow, cluck, coo, howl, roar, purr, twitter, yelp—in order to have an idea of their sonorous art. The repertory and its usage is transmitted from father to son—by simple imitation. Already gifted, the pupil soon equals the master.

WE know nothing of their didactic works. Perhaps they have none.

The physical aspect of certain types indicates a particular aptitude. In Birds, the beak brings them close to the clarionette, and the flageolet.

And, in contrast, others have a general conformation that forbids their ever dreaming of an operatic or artistic career. Fish for example—these poor beasts cannot even think of it.

But nothing can stop us from considering the majority of animals capable of exercising an art for which Nature has prepared them with such care. That is why the musicians of the human species have a right to interest themselves in the efforts of their dear brothers of the animal kingdom.

That is all I had to say to you.

I wish to thank you for your kind attention. I do so with pleasure.

Believe me, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Your devoted servant,

ERIK SATIÉ.



Woodcut Decorations by PAUL VERA