

V A N I T Y F A I R

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A Lecture On "The Six"

*A Somewhat Critical Account
of a Now Famous Group of*

French Musicians

By ERIK SATIE



"THE SIX"

Five of "The Six" are here shown photographed on the Eiffel Tower. The sixth member of this group, who appears here in place of Louis Durey, is Jean Cocteau, the poet, who has assisted "The Six" in arriving at the basis of the New Aesthetic. They are, from left to right, Germaine Tailleferre, Francis Poulenc, Arthur Honneger, Darius Milhaud, Jean Cocteau, and Georges Auric

LADIES— Gentlemen— Young Ladies—
What a pleasure it is to speak to you
of my young friends "The Six"!

They are young—and yet I have an old
friendship for them. Possibly this is because,
several years ago, I had the honour of, in some
measure, presenting them to the public. I have
shared many happinesses with them. To-
gether, we endured the attacks of the same ad-
versaries; we received the support of the same
friends; we faced the same critics.

All this is an agreeable bond, particularly
for me. At my age, the friendship of young
people is a great help.

It prevents the petrification, ossification,
mummifying of one's habits.

I don't mind having the
habits—but not cast-iron ones.

YES, I am very proud of find-
ing myself in with "The
Six".

They know I am fond of
them. Therefore they keep me
with them. They consider me a
kind of mascot, and this is
rather curious, for I, who have
never been a mascot to myself,
seem now to have become use-
ful to others.

It is well to reflect that it is
others who judge us and not we
ourselves; for the judgment that
we pass on ourselves can never
be anything but a sort of check-
ing up or verification. Toward
the success of "The Six", the
public, rather a small public, it
is true, has contributed a good
deal. And the public—com-
posed, after all, of men like you
and me—is certainly not a
worse judge than the critics.

Only it does not write in the
papers . . . that's all.

“The Six”

Evidently the critics judge us—at least they tell us so—but their opinion seems to me a mere accessory and a superfluity. However, I thank them for their amiability, for their courtesy, for the profundity of their observations, and for the acuteness of their vision, or visions.

The public, on the other hand, judges without pre-judgments. It does not fear Imagination. Its respect for old ideas is rather temperate. For, after all, an idea is not respectable simply because it is old, very old. Just as all old men are not necessarily worthy of veneration. Things themselves follow this law; old wagons, old locomotives, old umbrellas and old hats aren't particularly sought after, even by amateurs.

CUSTOM has willed it that a lecturer—if he wants to be taken seriously—must himself be very serious.

Yes.

That is only fair.

I am quite in agreement.

There are several ways of being serious; gravely; boringly.

The first may have its advantages. The second has its drawbacks. I will, if you will permit me, use another procedure. I shall be natural and simple.

THE Six, through their æsthetic theories, belong to the New Spirit. But only a few of the Six—not all of them. I shall explain this later.

What is the New Spirit? Guillaume Apollinaire has written: “The New Spirit shall dominate the world”. And he adds: “The New Spirit resides in Surprise. This is the quality in it which is the newest and the most alive. *Surprise is the greatest new mainspring.*

. . . It is through surprise that the New Spirit is distinguished from all the artistic and literary movements that have preceded it”

The New Spirit is the spirit of the time in which we live—a time fertile in surprises.

In short Apollinaire insists on surprise—on the effect of surprise.

It is certain that—as far as surprises go—the events of the last few years have proved to be surprises, and rather original ones at that, surprises of all makes—and at all prices. We live in a state of amazement.

For instance, in Paris a great discovery has been made. Just think! Wagner has been discovered. This is a surprise. A little surprise. Very little.

TO me, the New Spirit seems a return to classic form, with an admixture of modern sensibility. This modern sensibility you will discover in certain ones of the “Six”—Georges Auric, Francis Poulenc, Darius Milhaud.

As to the three remaining members of “The Six”, Louis Durey, Arthur Honneger, Germaine Tailleferre, they are pure “impressionists”. There is no harm in that. I, myself, thirty years ago, was terribly “impressionist”.

Modern sensibility was then “impressionist” . . . it lived on impressions. Once, even, I was a “humourist” . . . Now . . . I have given it up. It is too ugly . . .

In life, one must be serious. I know nothing else. Everything must be done seriously. If one is dull, one must be dull seriously.

Yes, one must preach, even if one preaches stupidly. Preaching is a duty. If it were not for sermons, where would we be?

I RETURN to my subject. Fancy — Spontaneity — Daring—these are the first things we see—in Auric—in Milhaud—in Poulenc.

Preoccupation with academic conventions—with well established harmonic formulas—this

“The Six”



is the lot chosen by Durey—Honneger—Tailleferre.

They are free to make their choice.

I have not the time to go into all these differences between “The Six” with you.

They are born of opposite temperaments; they show you what a sympathetic and intelligent comradeship can accomplish—can tolerate.

Here we have a practical realization of honest free-thinking among artists—among artists who are really independent. It is the quiet recognition of the Right of Expression for all.

The artist is free in his tastes—I would never dare attack any one who did not think the way I do.

Thought is property. No one has the right to touch it.

A Note on “The Six”

“Les Six” is a title once given to a group of young musicians embodying more or less the musical ideals of Erik Satie. They are still spoken of under this heading, in spite of the fact that they have drifted in many directions. They are: Georges Auric, Darius Milhaud, Francis Poulenc, Arthur Honneger, Louis Durey, Germaine Tailleferre. As far as the public is concerned, Milhaud is the most widely known. Monteux recently played a symphonic work of his with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and his fine ballet “Le boeuf sur le Toit”, based on South American melodies, has been produced both in London and Paris. He is constantly played at Paris concerts—his group of “Chansons Juifs” always commanding deep and respectful attention. Auric is as powerful and as interesting, but a far younger man, and writes with more difficulty. Poulenc is the youngest of the group—his piano music is exceedingly graceful and charming and is played very frequently.