

Nietzsche's dominance

Although he spent most of his life in France, Picasso's intellectual formation had occurred in Barcelona in the 1890s and early 1900s, where the dominant ideology was anarchism. He became a convert to the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, the godfather of Nazism, and a lifelong Gnostic, a believer in the notion that Good and Evil have equal existence in the world.

Stassinopoulos reports on p. 46, "Uneducated but quick to learn, Picasso devoured ideas and philosophies through his friends who had read and absorbed them. Pempeu Gener, who first introduced Nietzsche to Barcelona, and Jaume Brossa, another Nietzsche popularizer and a staunch anarchist, became Picasso's friends, and through long discussions they familiarized him with the Nietzschean staples of the death of God and the birth of the Superman, that extraordinary being who, alone on his mountaintop, can survive the death of God. . . . 'I myself am fate and have conditioned existence for all eternity,' Nietzsche had declared, and Picasso readily responded to this trumpet call of absolute freedom. Nietzsche's *The Will to Power* also struck a chord in his heart. Power was the only value set up by Nietzsche to take the place of love and the transcendent values that had lost their meaning for modern man. And Picasso, for whom transcendent values were associated with Spain's repressive Church, and who thought that he had tried love and it had failed him, found that philosophy admirably suited to his own needs and dreams of power."

Nor was this simply a youthful episode. On p. 180, in 1923, the surrealist painter André Bréton again reads Nietzsche to him. On p. 301, Picasso's attitude toward his wartime mistress, the artist Dora Marr, is identified as the "Nietzschean superman and survival of the fittest." He had no problem in embracing the Russian version of this outlook, embodied in the overtly Satanic art of Russian ballet-master Sergei Diaghilev, one of whose ballerinas became Picasso's first wife, and the nihilistic music of Igor Stravinsky.

During World War II, the anarchist Picasso was treated with respect and status by the Nazi Occupation in Paris, yet, in one of the most ignoble episodes recounted in this book, refused to use his influence to save the life of a lifelong Jewish friend interned in a concentration camp. Then in 1944 Picasso joined the Communist Party, and for the rest of his life, was used as a cultural symbol of the international Communist movement.

Last year, *Picasso: Creator and Destroyer* caused quite an uproar in the art world. The guardians of the mythology of 20th-century culture have not appreciated the book's unveiling of the evidence of physical and mental cruelty in Picasso's relations with the many women in his life. It seems that those hideous images of hacked-up women, correlated with a real-life fascination with the effects of razor blades and burning cigarettes.

The real question, which Stassinopoulos never poses, is, how did our sophisticated century come to embrace the art of Pablo Picasso, the apotheosis of evil, and reward it with fabulous sums of money and mass adulation? And why is it, that the heritage of the Renaissance, enshrined in our museums, did not inspire an art for our century that would have an enduring message?

Can it be that our guardians of culture share Picasso's Nietzschean cultural pessimism and believe—indeed, insist—that the great art of the past must be treated as forever dead? Yes, it can.

Ravel letters reveal cultural debauchery

by Odile Monjon

Maurice Ravel: Lettres, écrits, entretiens
compiled and annotated by Arbie Orenstein
Harmoniques, éditions Flammarion, Paris, 1989
In French; 626 pages, 350 French francs

Flammarion's edition of the letters, writings, and interviews of the French modernist composer Maurice Ravel (1875-1937) offers the great expectation of showing us an unrevised and uncorrected Ravel, through an abundance of well-presented documents. In this respect, if the content of these letters leads us to think that Ravel had little to say, the recipients of the letters, by contrast, come to us as plenty revealing.

Ravel was certainly not a leader, a *chef de file* of a new musical esthetic as Debussy was, or as Erik Satie was; and we can wonder if without his most famous work, the "Bolero," he would be known nowadays. It is surprising how his letters are exempt of any passion, polemic, or crisis, and only deal with trivia. They reflect a world so well described in Ravel's own works: fairy tales, "reveries," a world of childish fantasy which seems to be the birthmark of this new musical school.

However, Ravel's propaganda activities, through the SMI (Société musicale indépendante, which he created with some friends), for the Russians composers, "Esoterik" Satie, and even for Arnold Schoenberg, set fire to a house badly defend-

ed by a conservative, sterile old guard, and revealed a more determined side.

Among the people who made up Ravel's entourage, there regularly appeared the representatives of the very elite who mobilized themselves to impose an irrational and anti-scientific culture in Europe. Among them we find the Princess Edmond de Polignac, who commissioned the "Pavane for a Dead Princess"; she would organize musical soirées where Ravel regularly played. Heiress to the immense Singer sewing machine fortune, Princess Edmond, née Winnaretta Singer, married into the Polignac family which played a very important role in financing the most bizarre "artistic" movements. This "salon" was certainly one of the most important for the avant-garde, and not surprisingly it appears that Mme. de Polignac also commissioned such works as the "Socrate" of the former Rosicrucian Erik Satie.

Let's see here, how accurate was the perception which Roland Manuel, one of Ravel's closest friends and his main biographer, wrote about another Satie ballet, "Mercure," which was produced together with nihilist artist Picabia: "The vague musical religion which we would have seen born and die, carried no name until it linked up with the instantaneism of Mr. Picabia. His principal dogma was the dogma of *non-resistance to evil*, carried on the esthetic level. His clearest design, the pursuit of originality, with the collaboration of chance" (emphasis added).

We also find the name of Mme. Ida Rubinstein—the woman who, in 1928, asked Ravel to compose "Bolero." She was a habituée of the demi-monde where one lost count of one's lovers, and had as a friend the fascist poet Gabriele D'Annunzio, well-known for his "inadmissible vices" and his admiration for Benito Mussolini. D'Annunzio developed photos for posterity's benefit of Mme. Rubinstein dressed down in the most simple of attire. Mme. Rubinstein contributed to the financing of Ravel.

It was in the apartments of the Polignac family that the famous "Ballets russes" were rehearsed at the outset of this century. Diaghilev, an admirer of the satanic German composer Richard Wagner, made no bones about his destructive goals: "We reject the West and Western culture for the love we bear our Russian national culture." (For further discussion of Diaghilev's purposefully evil influence, see *EIR*, No. 32, Aug. 11, 1989, page 27.) Ravel's connection to this assault on classical European culture was not merely the shared patronage of the Polignacs. It was on a commission from Diaghilev that Ravel composed one of his major works, *Daphnis and Chloe*.

The first 'rock' music

Although Ravel and most of the "avant-gardistes" strongly rejected Wagner, their music glorified the same idols, one of them Dionysus. The sensual, erotic character of Wagner music was widely recognized. Let me here quote Héléne

Jourdan-Morhange, violinist and Ravel's close friend, about "Bolero" in a text written *in memoriam* for Ravel: "Ravel was very amused at the idea that this 'Bolero' owed its triumph to this musico-sexual element. It was not disguised, was his music not the reservoir of his repressed lyricism?" "Bolero" shares with Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring" and with Satie's less known but very decisive "Parade," the privilege of being those musical works which definitively buried the classical and were the "matrix" which generated so-called modern music.

Needless to say, Ravel was very enthusiastic with Stravinsky's "Spring." Let's go back here with Héléne Jourdan-Morhange at the time of the premiere of "Bolero": "After its first triumphant hearing, there was a little incident: An old lady feverishly rooted to her seat, shouted incessantly: 'Madman! Madman!' It was Edouard Ravel who saw her and understood her. . . . And as he told the story laughing to his brother Maurice, the latter answered him mysteriously: 'That one, she understood it!'"

Innocent, Ravel?

In a certain sense, and without entering into a major discussion, we could say that "Bolero" is the first rock music, with the hypnotic repetition of the same theme remaining in the same key except for the paroxysm of modulation in the last measure, resulting from the very long and progressive crescendo of the orchestra. Only here, as in backward rock, do we hear a separation of the melody and the rhythm, the latter never departing from the obsessive beat.

Alas, the "nationalism" Diaghilev preached when he said, "The only admissible nationalism is the nationalism of blood," was echoed by the racialist conceptions that Ravel defended in his essay on contemporary music, which Ravel read at a presentation held under the auspices of the Rice Institute Lectureship in Music at the Scottish Rite Cathedral in Houston, Texas on April 17, 1928. "We often perceived that the roots or subtle sources [of musical composition] present a double characteristic: The one might be called the national consciousness, in the rather more vast domains, whereas the other, the individual consciousness, appears to be the product of an egocentric process. . . . With Arthur Honegger . . . we find not only individual traits but hereditary and racial characteristics entirely different from those of the four composers mentioned above"; and further on, "If we should again consider the young French musicians, we should find in evidence this aspect of the racial consciousness."

It's probably no coincidence that the British eugenicist Julian Huxley had been brought to Rice University to head its biology department in precisely that period. After World War II and the Nuremberg Tribunal, these "race hygiene" theories were discredited and assumed different guises—such as "ecology" and "family planning." The fascist roots of this kind of science, and the art that went with it, must not be forgotten.