

UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI

June 19 68

I hereby recommend that the thesis prepared under my supervision by Leonidas Nicholas Sarakatsannis

entitled The Piano Works of Erik Satie

be accepted as fulfilling this part of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

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THE PIANO WORKS OF ERIK SATIE

Presented by

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To partially fulfill the thesis and public lecture re-
quirements for the degree of

Doctor of Musical Arts

College-Conservatory of Music
of the
University of Cincinnati

June, 1968

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PREFACE

Erik Satie is still a largely neglected and misunderstood composer. The music of Erik Satie presents one of the most controversial studies for the musician-scholar. His reputation is based on his very early works, notably the three Sarabandes and Gymnopédies which were composed in 1886 and 1887, and the four-hand piano duet Trois Morceaux en Forme de Poire of 1903. These are significant works, but a judgment about Satie cannot be made without a sufficient knowledge of his aesthetic orientation and his complete oeuvre.

The problem he creates is disconcerting for many musicians and musicologists principally because his interest and aesthetic orientation apparently represent a complete reversal of traditional values; he abandoned the means of nineteenth-century romanticism in favor of a more austere language. On first examination one can easily be misled in dismissing his works by the seeming simplicity of presentation. The humorous and often ridiculous titles, running commentary and waggish directions, which accompany most of his piano works tend to add to the confusion. Thus, most of his music is simply ignored or politely dismissed as the work of an insignificant and eccentric composer. One of the intentions of this essay is to place his music in the proper perspective. Therefore, a brief survey of his rather unique career is essential.

Satie was born in Honfleur, a seaport on the Normandy coast on May 17, 1866. His French father was a ship broker and later was established as a music publisher in Paris. His mother was born in London of Scottish parents. The family moved to Paris in 1870 and two years later Satie's mother died and he was sent back to Honfleur to live with his grandparents. In Honfleur he began his music studies with Vinot, an organist

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who taught him piano. The study with Vinot exposed Satie to plainsong which became a significant influence in his first period of composition and veritably underlined his entire works.

During his early years in Honfleur Satie was instinctively attracted to his uncle Adrien who was nicknamed "Sea-Bird." "Sea-Bird" was a fun-loving, irresponsible and eccentric bachelor. The relationship with his uncle made a very strong impression on young Satie and his later fantasies are very similar to the eccentricities of his uncle.

In 1878 Satie was enrolled at the Paris Conservatory and back in Paris, living with his father who had remarried. He obviously did not make an impression at the conservatory, where his harmony teacher, Taudou, told him to concentrate on the piano and his piano teacher, Mathias, advised him to devote himself to composition. Satie remained at the conservatory for five years, resisting his training and most forms of conformity.

During these years he became an avid reader and was fascinated with the fairy tales of Hans Christian Andersen.

This is an interesting illustration of the attraction of 'like to like' and gives us a valuable insight into Satie's mentality. For the similarity of outlook between these two artists can hardly escape unnoticed. Both had the uncanny clairvoyance of a child, enabling them so see through shams and pretences-- not to say pretentiousness-- of all kinds; both possessed the gift of being able to express profound truths disguised in the simplest language."¹

After a brief adventure in the infantry Satie settled

¹Rollo H. Myers, Erik Satie, (London: Dennis Dobson Limited, 1948), p. 17.

in Montmartre where he began his career as a cabaret pianist when he was engaged as second pianist at the famous cabaret Chat Noir. By this time he had a few songs published and his first piano works, Ogives, of 1886. In the following year two modest piano works, Valse-Ballet and Fantaisie-Valse were published in an album entitled Musique des Familles, but were composed in 1885. He gave these works his first printed humorous commentary by labeling them opus 62. The three Sarabandes were also published in 1887. During this time he became interested in the works of Flaubert and began intense study of Gothic art and music at the Bibliotheque Nationale and was reported to have spent much time in churches. The three Gnossiennes of 1889 were partially the result of his exposure to Javanese dances at the Paris Exhibition in 1889 and the Greek choruses at Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre.

In 1890 he became involved for a short time with Joseph Péladan and the mystical Society of Rosicrucians. The association with this sect resulted in a group of mystical and ritualistic compositions designated as the Rose-Croix works.

Satie's association with Ravel and Debussy began at this time. Ravel was taken by his father to the cabarets to hear Satie's impressive improvisations. Ravel had stated later in his life that "the musician who had had the greatest influence on him was Erik Satie."¹ During their early relationship Satie dedicated his second Sarabande to Ravel.

Satie met Debussy in 1891 at the Auberge du Clou which resulted in a lasting friendship. This early relationship between the two composers, in the final analysis, was mutually beneficial but as the years went by there was a great distance

¹Rollo H. Myers, Erik Satie, . . . p. 129.

between them, musically and aesthetically.

Debussy himself never disguised the vital influence that Satie had had on him. He repeated to Jean Cocteau Satie's remark which had decided him on the aesthetic of *Pelleas*: 'The orchestra should not grimace when someone comes on the scene. Look. Do the trees in the decor grimace? A musical decor, a musical climate should be created in which the characters move and speak. No couplets, no leit-motivs--instead, it needs some of the Puvis de Chavannes atmosphere.' ¹

Satie had associated with painters during his early years and throughout his life and admitted he learned much about music through this contact. Many of his aesthetic concepts regarding technique seem to stem from this association.

An important event took place in 1898 for Satie when he decided to leave his bohemian surroundings in Montmartre and live in a drab little suburb south of Paris called Arcueil-Cachan. Here he acquired a room without running water or heat, located above a dingy cafe-restaurant. This single room remained his home until his death in 1925. Curiously, he was the only person who ever entered his quarters while he was alive. Although he moved from Montmartre to Arcueil-Cachan, his time was divided between both places. In this semi-seclusion he earned his meager living by composing popular songs and accompanying singers. In Arcueil-Cachan he took part in civic affairs and with his literary talents began to write a column in the town newspaper. The famous piano duet, 3 Morceaux en forme de poire of 1903 was the only significant composition from these lean years of composition.

In 1905 Satie took an even more astonishing step and decided to go back to school. He was in his fortieth year when he entered the Schola Cantorum, principally for contrapuntal

¹Paul Collaer, A History of Modern Music, ... p. 205.

studies with Albert Roussel. He also studied under Vincent d'Indy. This was quite a bold step for a man who had published and developed an individual style. Debussy was against his studying and said: "At our age you don't shed your skin again." Satie replied: "If I lose, too bad. It would mean I had no guts in the first place."¹ Roussel relates that "... he was a tractable and assiduous student. He handed in his exercises punctually, well-written and set off with notations in red ink. He was extraordinarily talented!"² He remained at the Schola Cantorum for three years and received a Diploma signed Très Bien by his two professors. Roussel wrote of him that he was a "prodigieusement musicien."

Satie was rediscovered by the public in a series of historic concerts that began at the Société Musicale Indépendante (S. M. I.) in 1911. Ravel and Debussy were partly responsible for this sudden interest in Satie's music.

The first concert included performances by Ravel of the second Sarabande, the prelude to Fils des étoiles and the third Gymnopédies. On another program at the Cerle Musical, Debussy conducted his own orchestral versions of the Gymnopédies. Satie was becoming a celebrity for the first time, however, the interest was in the works he had written almost twenty-five years previously. The program notes gave him credit as an "explorer, forerunner of genius," and as a composer who in 1887 "was already speaking the daring musical 'jargon' of tomorrow."³

¹Roger Shattuck, The Banquet Years, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1958), p. 104.

²Paul Collaer, A History of Modern Music, . . . p. 207.

³Rollo H. Myers, Erik Satie, . . . (from P. Templier, Eric Satie, Paris, 1932), p. 42.

The public wanted to know more about this strange man and as a result publishers began to request his works for publication. This new interest in his music gave Satie a renewed courage for composition as exemplified by the many piano suites of 1912-1915.

The humorous commentary that is superimposed above most of his piano works of this period was described by Satie: " 'My humor resembles that of Cromwell. I also owe much to Christopher Columbus, because the American spirit has occasionally tapped me on the shoulder and I have been delighted to feel its ironically glacial bite.' "¹ Mémoires d'un amnésique is an interesting example of his ironic literary work and has been compared to the works of Lewis Carroll and Sidney Smith.

In the last eight years of Satie's life he was associated with the Russian and Swedish Ballets, poet Jean Cocteau, Serge de Diaghilev, Pablo Picasso, Leonide Massine, Francis Picabis, and René Clair in the production of the ballets Parade, Mercure, and Relâche. In addition to the ballets his vocal work, Socrate, (drame symphonique), which some critics consider to be his greatest masterpiece, had its first performance in 1920. Socrate is scored for chamber orchestra and four sopranos and the text is taken from the Dialogues by Plato. Other works of his last period are Musique d'ameublement for three clarinets, trombone, and piano, 4 Petites pièces montées for orchestra, Ludions for voice and piano, 4 Petites mélodies for voice and piano, La Belle excentrique for cabaret orchestra, and the piano works: Sonatine bureaucratique, 5 Nocturnes, and Menuet. Mention should be made of his only composition for violin and piano, entitled Choses vues à droite et à gauche (sans lunettes) of 1914.

¹Roger Shattuck, The Banquet Years, . . . p. 88.

The ballet, Parade, caused a scandal at its first historic performance in 1917. The cubist sets and costumes by Picasso, among other things, brought on a very hostile reception from the critics and public; the work was ahead of its time and Paris was not ready for it. Satie anticipated many musical trends with his use of jazz and mechanistic techniques. The original score called for the use of sirens, typewriters, steam whistles, revolvers, lottery-wheels, airplane propellers, and Morse tickers. "Stravinsky says: 'Parade reconfirmed my belief in Satie's worth and the importance of his role in French music in countering the uncertainty of decaying impressionism with firm, clear language stripped of the embellishment of imagery.' The Soldier's Tale, Mavra, and Apollon Musagètes would never have seen the light of day if Parade had not preceded them"¹

Satie's last work, Râlâche, contained a film strip entitled Entr'acte Cinématographique; he was once again a pioneer. The incorporation of a film into a ballet was another innovation. Satie had actually appeared in the film firing a cannon from a roof top. The background music for this film is based on essentially the same principal as Musique d'Ameublement, which was music to be performed between the acts of a play while people went about conversing. The music itself was not to be listened to but was merely there to set up vibrations and become part of the surroundings.

Satie's views on French music were recorded from a lecture he had given on Debussy:

Debussy's aesthetic is symbolist in some of his works and impressionist in most. Please forgive me--for am I not a little bit responsible? When

¹Paul Collaer, A History of Modern Music, . . . p. 217.

I first met him . . . he was full of Mussorgsky, and very conscientiously was seeking a path which he had difficulty in finding. . . . I explained to Debussy the necessity for a Frenchman to free himself from the Wagnerian adventure which in no way corresponded to our national aspirations. And I told him that I was not anti-Wagner in any way but that we ought to have our own music--if possible without choucroute. Why shouldn't we make use of the methods employed by Claude Monet, Cézanne, Toulouse Lautrec, etc. . . . ? Nothing simpler. Aren't they just expressions? That would lead to results which would be almost bound to be successful--and profitable too. . . . Who could have provided him with examples? Show him new discoveries? Point out to him the ground to be explored? Give him the benefit of one's experience? Who? I don't wish to answer; I am no longer interested.¹

Satie probably went further than any composer during his time in evoking a new spirit of independence, one of his most important characteristics, by withdrawing from Germanic influences with its dependence on elaboration and ornateness as a principle means of development. Most of Satie's endeavors are characterized by an uncompromising courage and individualism to express his aesthetic views and ideas concerning music. His music is of the non-heroic category, and he was not concerned with expression in the nineteenth-century romantic sense as compared with Schoenberg and his followers.

Comments on other composers by Satie may offer some insight into his own creations. He speaks of the transparency of Stravinsky's music, the transparency of sound that never leaves any residuum in the sonority. He criticizes the impressionists and romantic composers for having this residuum quality. Satie

¹Rollo H. Myers, Erik Satie, . . . pp. 32-33.

further states his admiration for Palestrina and Mozart and said "Palestrina makes us 'hear' this sonorous 'transparency;' he was an expert manipulator of it, and seems to have been the first to import this phenomenon into music. The exquisite Mozart used it in a way that defies analysis. One stands confounded before such mastery, such a subtle 'clairvoyance' of sound, a phonic lucidity so calm and so perfect."¹ The above statements exemplify Satie's thinking in 1923, two years before his death, which was after all his piano works were written and his ballet Parade (1917) and the symphonic drama Socrate (1918).

He also said in 1923: "La Jeunesse présente et future se chargera de mettre les choses au point" and defines his meaning of esprit nouveau: "it teaches us to aim at an emotive simplicity and a firmness of utterance enabling sonorities and rhythms to assert themselves clearly, unequivocal in design and accent, and contrived in a spirit of humility and renunciation."²

Satie was always interested and involved with the new movements in the arts, and assumed the part of a spiritual godfather in his later life to many young composers and new movements, in particular, Les Six composed of Georges Auric, Louis Durey, Arthur Honegger, Darius Milhaud, Francis Poulenc, Germaine Tailleferre, and the spokesman for the group of Jean Cocteau. He has also been linked with the "so-called" Arceuil^{ve} School composed of Henri Sauguet, Maxime Jacob who used the pseudonym Dom Clément, Henri Cliquet-Pleyel and Roger Désormière. However, Satie was adverse to the idea of establishing a Satie

¹Erik Satie, "Igor Stravinsky," Vanity Fair, (February, 1923), Vol. 19, No. 6, p. 39 and p. 88.

²Rollo H. Myers, Erik Satie, . . . p. 130.

school and said in 1920, "Satieism could not exist. I would be hostile to it. There should be no slavery in art. With each new work I have always made an effort to throw off imitators of my style or material. This is the only way an artist can avoid becoming the leader of a school, that is, a pawn."¹ He told the Arceuil composers, "You must march alone . . . Don't do as I did. Listen to nobody!"²

With Satie, form takes on a new guise. He was fascinated with static qualities, in which he concentrates on a succession of ideas resulting in a oneness and a systematic monotony, creating a hypnotic effect. Variety is achieved by subtle changes in detail and by juxtaposing or interposing melodic fragments or a series of chord patterns. An ostinato accompaniment is an essential feature of his style, and suggests movement and rest simultaneously, depending on the manner of listening. His music has been compared to studies in immobility and to the still-life painting of the period, in which it progresses by standing still.³

Essentially, Satie is a miniaturist, and does not employ the traditional clichés used for development. Generally, in his piano works, he adopts brevity as a form, and since it is of the non-developing type, all parts of his music are presented simultaneously and do not require restatement. He juxtaposes his melodic and harmonic material usually without preparation or transition, and extends his work by alternation and repetition.

¹Paul Collaer, A History of Modern Music, . . . p. 224.

²Claude Rostand, French Music Today, Trans. Henry Max, (New York: Merlin Press, 1957), p. 21.

³Roger Shattuck, The Banquet Years, . . . pp. 111-112, p. 144.

Satie's construction principles are mosaic-like, built on fragmentary melodies that are exquisitely shaped, usually utilizing a limited number of sonorities supported by a short ostinato.

Satie composed almost half of his piano works in groups of threes. This trinitarian idea, in the early works especially, concentrates on a basic idea, and then is presented in three different versions. However, in his second and third periods each of the three pieces becomes more autonomous. The technique of composing three versions of the same basic idea can be compared to the procedure used by the cubist painters, in which a subject is viewed from three different angles, obtaining the effect of observing an object from many points of view. In Satie's piano works the basic mood stays the same, the outline of his melodic material retains its general shape, the overall rhythmic approach is the same, and the harmonies are varied slightly but create the same function. Satie expressed his view on composing his piano works in groups of threes and said: "I invent an absolutely new form. The piece I write seems good to me. But might that not just be luck? If I compose a second and third piece along the same lines but with different melodic ideas, and if these pieces are still good, then the form I have invented is good in itself."¹

¹Paul Collaer, A History of Modern Music, . . . p. 204.

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FIRST PERIOD 1885-1896

The first published piano compositions, which are currently out of print, are entitled Ogives published in 1886, and consist of four pieces and show medieval and plainsong influences. The title is associated with a Gothic arch and Satie probably tried to portray a Gothic atmosphere by using a succession of block-parallel triadic harmonies in octaves for both hands. An excerpt from one of the Ogives can be seen in an article by Rollo Myers in Music and Musicians (1966). The work is written in a barless notation, without key or meter signatures, a practice he was to continue throughout his life. The use of block-parallel chords is a characteristic feature of his works from the Rosicrucian Period (1891-1895).

The next group of pieces are of dance-like character. The most important historically are the three Sarabandes of 1887, in which Satie employs successive harmonies without preparation or resolution of sevenths and ninths. Satie was only twenty-one years of age when the Sarabandes appeared and Debussy's Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un Faune did not make its appearance until 1894. The use of ninths by Satie probably owes something to Emmanuel Chabrier's Le Roi Malgré Lui in which he presents similar uses of ninths. Chabrier's opera was produced in Paris in 1887 and Satie had actually helped with the production. Roland-Manuel has emphasized that the Sarabandes:

are a turning-point in the evolution of our music. Here are three short pieces -- composed in an unprecedented harmonic technique springing from an entirely new aesthetic -- which create a unique atmosphere, a magic in sound which is absolutely original. Claude Debussy was well aware of it.

Fourteen years later he composed a Sarabande that pays distinct homage to Satie through charming effects of an influence deliberately sought after, and a relationship deliberately established.¹

With the variety of harmonic interest that the Sarabandes provide, the melodic interest should receive our attention. If thought of in this context, melodically instead of harmonically conceived, we can see the relationship to the austere liturgical elements of medieval music rather than the sensuous association of impressionism and Debussy. Satie's method of using harmonies differs from Debussy, with Satie the melodic line dictates the accompanying harmony, whereas Debussy employs chords as individual entities in themselves. Satie expressed his harmonic principle toward the end of his life in a sketch-book and said:

Material (Idea) and craftsmanship (sewing). The craftsmanship is often superior to the material.

To have a feeling for harmony is to have a feeling for tonality. The serious examination of a melody will always constitute for the student an excellent exercise in harmony.

A melody does not have its harmony, any more than a landscape has its color. The harmonic situation of a melody is infinite, for melody is only one means of expression in the whole realm of Expression.

Do not forget that the melody is the Idea, the contour just as much as it is the form and content of a work.

¹Paul Collaer, A History of Modern Music, translated from the French by Sally Abeles, (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1961) p. 203.

Harmony is lighting, an exhibition of the object, its reflection.

In composition the parts no longer follow "school" rules. "School" has a gymnastic purpose and no more; composition has an aesthetic purpose in which taste alone plays a part.

Don't be deceived: the knowledge of grammar alone does not imply literary knowledge; it can either contribute or be set aside by the writer without his responsibility. Musical grammar is neither more nor less than a grammar.

This statement was made when he was working on Socrate and as we observe his emphasis is placed on the melody as being the idea, contour, form and content, in which everything else is subordinate.

David Drew brings attention to the composed silence in the second Sarabande that was to become a feature in the music of Webern and he depicts "violence" in the use of the ninth chord in second inversion marked forte in the fifth measure and says this event underlies Satie's entire output. He further relates that Debussy was incapable of anything as violent as this.²

The most celebrated of all his early works are the three Gymnopédies composed in the following year (1888). The recognition of these works is due partly to Debussy, who paid a

¹Roger Shattuck, The Banquet Years, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1958) pp. 131-132.

²David Drew, "Modern French Music," European Music in the Twentieth Century, edited by Howard Hartog, (London: Rutledge & Kegan Paul, 1957) pp. 247-48.

tribute to Satie by orchestrating the first and third Gymnopédies. The numbering in the orchestral version by Debussy is reversed, thus the first orchestral version is actually number three. Debussy's orchestration partially destroys the clarity and transparency of texture of Satie's unique atmosphere in which Debussy places emphasis on the "so-called" impressionistic harmonies.

These dances whose title is derived from a Greek yearly festival mentioned in Herodotus and others, suggest the naked feet of young dancers, representing a completely different aesthetic than the Sarabandes. The modal character is still present especially in the cadences with the preference for the lowered seventh and is predominantly aeolian. The linear technique which Satie employs in these works become an essential feature of his later style in works composed after 1890.

The perfectly curved melodic material is supported by an iambic ostinato rhythmic pattern in each of the three dances and creates a static and at the same time a hypnotic effect. There is a certain bareness in the supporting harmonies with a prevalence of major and minor sevenths. This early instance of an ostinato pattern became an important feature of his later works.

A classic quality exists in most of Satie's works and the Gymnopédies seem to foreshadow neo-classicism spirit. The beauty of these works lies in their simplicity, lean economy and their unique freshness. Considering the date of composition the originality of Satie's genius asserts itself clearly at the age of twenty-two. The Gymnopédies are remarkable in contrast to the feverish contemporary music of the time. Besides Debussy, who expressed admiration for these works, Ravel

himself called the La Belle et la Bête from Ma Mere l'Oye a fourth Gymnopédies. In the second movement of Ravel's piano concerto in G major we feel the aesthetic influence of Satie and considering this influence the movement will have a new meaning. In the introduction to Stravinsky's Mavra the influence of the Gymnopédies is unmistakable and also in the first variation of his Sonata for Two Pianos.

Satie is usually given credit as a precursor of many innovations and Darius Milhaud has stated ". . . that each work of Satie's has foretold the lines on which French music of the last fifty years was going to develop. Thus, he says, 'developments since 1900 owe the same debt to the Gymnopédies as those since 1920 owe to Parade.' "¹

The next set of pieces, the three Gnossiennes, appeared in 1890. The titles refer to the palace of Knossos in Crete. Satie's noted eccentricities begin to assert themselves. He reverts to the practice that had originated in Ogives of illuminating bar lines, key and meter signatures. These are the first works in which he inserts humorous commentary written above the music, a practice he continued through his late works in which the running commentary becomes a text, at times in narrative form as in the Embryons desséchés. The Gnossiennes have a quasi-oriental flavor with emphasis placed on the augmented second and the tritone. Despite the barless notation these works fall conveniently in a 4/4 meter. A basic rhythmic ostinato pattern is established in the first measure of each piece and persists unaltered until the final measure. In the

¹Rollo H. Myers, Erik Satie, (London: Dennis Dobson Limited, 1948), p. 19.

In the first and third versions the accompanying harmonies are root position triads. In the first Gnossiennes the harmonies oscillate between two harmonies (f minor and b flat minor) and with the insertion of one cadence measure in c minor. In the second and third versions the harmonies are more varied. The obstinately repeated phrases in the melodic upper voice is present in all three pieces. The grace notes in Gnossiennes are not unrelated in style to a Chopin Mazurka. Francis Poulenc has made an orchestral arrangement of the third Gnossiennes.

During the next four years Satie composed music motivated by the mystical Society of Rosicrucians. Satie came under the influence of the Rosicrucians' Paris leader "Sâr" Joseph Péladan, High Priest of the Rose-Croix du Temple et du Graal, in the 1890's. This period of composition is also designated as Satie's Rose-Croix period. Satie was offered and accepted the position as official composer for the society. The results of this association were the three Preludes from Le Fils des Étoiles (1891), which were composed for a play written by "Sâr" Péladan called a Wagnérie Kaldéenne, and the three Sonneries de la Rose-Croix (1892). The incidental music for Péladan's play Le Fils des Étoiles anticipates the harmonic superimposition in fourths that was to be used by so many composers of the twentieth-century and particularly by Scriabin. These preludes are interesting examples of Satie's thinking which was contemporaneous with such works by other composers such as Debussy's Clair de lune and Borodin's opera "Prince Igor." These two works were not originally written for piano, however, the piano versions are by Satie. The incidental music to Le Fils des Étoiles was written for flutes and harps and

in 1913, Ravel re-orchestrated the prelude to the first act. Sonneries de la Rose-Croix was written for brass and harps.

Satie remained in the society for a very short time and publicly renounced his association with Péladan in a letter dated August, 1892, because his freedom was being restricted through Peladan's dictums and the society's aesthetic theories. The works that followed this break with the Rosicrucians are in the same style, and still were under the influence of the mystical religious sect. The works included in this period are Danses Gothiques pour Piano (1893), four Préludes (1893), and the Prélude de la Porte Héroïque du Ciel (1894), which was later orchestrated by Roland-Manuel in 1912. The Messe des Pauvres was the last composition from this period (1895).

Following the Rosicrucian adventure Satie actually founded his own church which he called L'Eglise Métropolitaine d'Art de Jésus Conducteur, complete with his own publication, Le Cartulaire. The journal was used to verbalize his strong artistic and aesthetic views regarding his enemies. By establishing his church, his fantasy began clearly to assert itself. "For instance he would require no less than 1,600,000,000 'Pénéants Noirs Convers,' who would be clad in black robes with a grey hood; eight million of another sort of 'Pénéants;' forty thousand of another kind, and so on."¹

An underlining characteristic is evident in the works of the Rosicrucian Period in which thick chordal sections are

¹Rollo H. Myers, Erik Satie, . . . p. 25.

alternated with single line melodies or melodic fragments usually in octaves. This technique resembles the liturgical style of responsorial psalmody between soloist and choir.

In the chordal sections the harmonies throughout this period could be considered as in a neo-medieval style. They are static, hypnotic, repetitive, and have a searching less positive quality than his earlier works. The harmonies and chord successions are not concerned with achieving a climax. They oscillate between common chord types and altered sevenths, ninths, elevenths and thirteenth chord formations. The harmonies portray a rather wandering and rootless effect.

The melodies are beautifully shaped, decorative, at times pentatonic and portray their derivation from plainsong in being impersonal, ritualistic, non-harmonic and in creating a certain quality of aloofness. The attributes of plainsong attracted Satie during his early period "to his own uniquely lonely mode of utterance."¹

¹Rollo H. Myers, Erik Satie, (see Meller's Studies in Contemporary Music), pp. 22-23.

SECOND PERIOD 1897-1915

The next group of pieces begins a new phase in Satie's style after almost two years of not composing. The Pièces Froides (1897) were written one year before he withdrew from Paris and moved to the unappealing suburb Arcueil-Cachan where he remained until his death in 1925.

The Pièces Froides are in two sets, Airs à faire fuire and Danses de travers, each set containing three pieces. The titles of these pieces are misleading, as are most all of Satie's works written after 1897, and have very little significance with the actual music. His practice of inserting comments which are at times humorous -- Ne pas trop manger, and some that are intended as expression marks -- être visible un moment, are present in these works.

In the first set, Airs à faire fuire, which is dedicated to the famous pianist Ricardo Viñes, Satie's style is becoming more individual, less medieval sounding, more pianistic, and contain a new rhythmic vitality. The harmony has thinned out compared to the Rosicrucian works in which Satie seemed to be searching for new sonorities. The Airs are reminiscent of the Gnossiennes in character, especially in the opening phrases of the first and third Airs. There is more variety and a less overall static quality. Interesting features are the skillful and abrupt modulations, in which a group of phrases establish a tonality and suddenly change to another tonality in the following phrase.

The second piece of the first set contains the elements of a cabaret popular song, light, gay and carefree. An unassuming melody is stated, transposed, restated and ends with

a new cadence phrase concluding on a half-diminished seventh. The final cadence phrase could be considered also as a transition leading to the third Air. Satie's preference is the successive use of the lowered and natural seventh degree.

The third Air commences with the same material that is employed in the first Air, transposed down a perfect fourth. In the remaining material there is nothing new which is not in the first Air. There seems to be apparently no concern for traditional tonal relationships. Each phrase could be interposed at any time with any other phrase and still sound convincing. This technique of composition resembles that of a montage used by painters. The three Airs thought of as a complete work, in the conventional sense, form a large A B A' pattern.

The Danses de travers return to the plan of presenting one basic idea which is presented in three different versions as in the Gymnopédies. The works are based on ascending arpeggios in root position in eighth notes with a continuous uninterrupted rhythm that remains constant throughout each of the three dances. The three dances make the outward appearance of an etude. The first two tones of each arpeggio form the interval of a fifth. The arpeggio figure together with an added melodic voice form long flowing lines in a state of continual modulation. Part of the arpeggio pattern forms the melodic line which occurs on the fourth eighth note of each pattern. The eighth notes in the upper part following the quarter tied to the eighth, function predominantly as anticipations and suspensions. The smooth wave-like arpeggios are unified by a firm bass line. The dances demonstrate the

economy of technique that Satie was to perfect later in the suites and preludes of 1912-1915. There are unexpected and subtle changes in each phrase repetition. Satie uses " . . . repetition and near repetition to create a feeling not of stillness but a controlled circular movement."¹ The Danses de travers have been compared to the works of Gabriel Faure in the skillful use of subtle harmonic progressions and modulations.

The Pièces froides are to be ranked as some of Satie's best piano compositions and as Myers has said: "Only a born musician of the finest sensibility could have conceived these limpid and so essentially 'musical' pieces which ought to be in the repertory of every pianist who is more interested in music than virtuosity."²

In 1903 Satie completed his most ambitious work thus far, the famous four hand piano duet the three Morceaux en forme de Poire. This was the last work he composed before entering the Schola Cantorum for additional contrapuntal study.

Darius Milhaud possesses a rather extensive collection of the unpublished manuscripts and notebooks of Satie. There are twenty-eight notebooks or booklets, half of them averaging forty pages each. In the collection is a fifteen page orchestral score which dates from 1890 entitled Danse that was incorporated in the three Morceaux en forme de Poire.³

¹Roger Shattuck, The Banquet Years, . . . p. 101.

²Rollo H. Myers, Erik Satie, . . . p. 74.

³Virgil Thomson, The Musical Scene, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945) pp. 117-118.

The circumstances of the creation of the three Morceaux en forme de Poire is well-known. It seems that Satie composed this suite and presented it to Debussy in answer to Debussy's criticism that his works were lacking in "form." There is a double meaning in the title, the word poire literally translated means pear or pear-shaped, however, in colloquial French it also means a dupe or simpleton. Thus, Satie was probably poking fun at both Debussy and himself.¹ William Austin, however, has questioned the authenticity of the story in stating ". . . the story connecting Debussy with this piece rests on no documentary evidence."²

The only satire in the suite seems to be in the humorous title. The work is well constructed with lucid textures, is straightforward, serious and contains all the formal attributes of traditional composition. By the necessity of requiring two performers, bar lines and meter signatures are inserted in each piece. Dynamic, tempo and expressive indications are also employed. Completely absent are the humorous comments and directions. These traits foretell the formal studies which Satie was to undertake in a few years.



The complete title of the suite is: 3 Morceaux en forme de Poire, à 4 mains, avec une Manière de Commencement, une Prolongation du même, et un En Plus, suivi d'une Redite. Satie models the titles for four of the pieces after a formula that was in current use by the professors at the Conservatoire. Actually there are seven individual pieces in the suite. The first piece, Maniere de Commencement, is the

¹Rollo H. Myers, Erik Satie, . . . p. 74.

²William Austin, Music in the 20th Century, (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1966) p.161.

same material extracted from the incidental music for Fils des Étoiles which is probably the Danse manuscript that Milhaud has in his collection, and is veritably another Gnossienne. This duet presents more variety than the earlier three Gnossiennes with added harmonic interest and sudden contrasting dynamics, such as a four measure phrase marked forte followed by a similar phrase indicated piano and by the "pppp" indicated two measures before the final fortissimo secco harmony in the concluding cadence phrase.

Prolongation du même is followed by three separate pieces designated as movements I, II, and III. This group of four pieces results as a miniature suite within a suite. Prolongation du même is a contrast to the opening piece of the suite and stands in opposition to the title. It is only thirty-two measures in length and shows leanings toward counterpoint, as most of the suite demonstrates, which anticipates his approaching contrapuntal studies. This miniature piece foreshadows the later works of Satie in its brevity and demonstrates his originality in small forms.

In the seconda part of Prolongation du même, the opening measures begin with an ascending scale figure encompassing a seventh and serves as a leading motive throughout the short piece. This ascending scale passage is derived from the first measure of the prima part of Manière de Commencement. This figure also occurs in measures six and seven and in measure eleven of the final piece of the suite Redite. The opening measures of Prolongation du même also contain a unifying rhythmic pattern ( or ) which usually outlines a third. This rhythmic pattern is present in all four pieces and in the final work of the suite Redite. The nuances are

very carefully indicated in the entire suite as compared with the scanty indications of the Rosicrucian works.

Movement I is also very short consisting of thirty-six measures. Sudden changes in tonalities are evident whereby a tonality once established is canceled out as in the abrupt fortissimo cadence in d minor in measure eleven and in the corresponding measures seventeen and thirty-one. The germ for abrupt changes in dynamics or mood is already present in measure five of the second Sarabande.

Movement II is the longest of the four pieces and is in a traditional A B A form. The outer sections are identical and display once again the gaiety of cabaret music. The contrasting middle section is slower in tempo and introduces sustaining, sensitive, tranquil and linear phrases.

An unusual term is used by Satie to indicate the beginning of movement III designating the piece to be played Brutal. The piece contains rhythmic variety with many syncopated phrases and sudden dynamic contrasts. The final six measure phrase points to a grand nineteenth-century climax with his usual trademark of the lowered seventh degree in the cadence.

The sixth piece of the suite is entitled En plus, creates a mood and is constructed similarly to the earlier Gymnopédies with the ostinato bass patterns supporting long flowing melodic lines. Emphasis is placed on the tonic D and the supertonic E in the ~~lower~~ part.

The final movement, Redite, consisting of twenty-four measures is cast in a 3/4 meter as opposed to the meter signatures of the previous six pieces which are in either 2/4 or a 4/4 meter. There are no abrupt changes in dynamics, except for a fortissimo phrase which crescendos to a piano in measures

twenty-one and twenty-two. A rhythmic ostinato pattern persists throughout this movement which relates to the hypnotic effects of his earlier works.

There are two solo piano works which date from his studies at the Schola Cantorum with Albert Roussel and Vincent d'Indy which were published posthumously. The Prélude en Tapisserie and Passacaille are perhaps not musically the most important but they do reflect his compositional training during the Schola Cantorum period. Both these works date from the year 1906. The Prélude en Tapisserie particularly points to the piano works of his most productive period of 1912-1915. The idiom consists of numerous juxtaposed fragmentary motives that are completely opposite in character, requiring different inflections and a certain abruptness in articulation. This technique is present in the Morceaux en forme de Poire. The Prélude en Tapisserie is written with barlines and a 2/4 meter signature and comprises eighty-one measures. This prelude contains no less than six individual and opposing motives. To demonstrate Satie's method of employing these fragments we will examine their order of appearance: motive I measures 1-2, motive II measures 2-3, motive III measures 7-10, motive IV measure 11, motive V measures 16-19 and motive VI measures 42-44. The motives are juxtaposed and interposed in the following sequence: motive I, II, III, IV, I, II, V, IV, II, I, I, III, III, V, II, VI, II, IV, IV, III, IV, V, II, VI, V, and III.

The Passacaille to a large extent contains the same elements of juxtaposition of ideas and use of sequential patterns. It has a scholastic feeling in trying to fit in the traditional design of three part form with trio. Both of these works

reveal the contrapuntal training he was undertaking.

The first works following his studies at the Schola Cantorum were two suites for piano duet, Aperçus désagréables which contains a Pastorale, Chorale and Fugue (1908-1912) and En Habit de Cheval which consists of two chorales and two fugues, Fugue litanique and Fugue de papier (1911). The Chorale and Fugue from Aperçus désagréables date from 1908 and Satie added the Pastorale in 1912.

The chorales are short and compact and have an expansive quality with a positiveness of style and an authoritarian vigor. The humorous indications are beginning to appear again. The fugue from Aperçus désagréables commences with the answer before the subject in which Satie indicates "smile" above the subject in measure three and "willingly" in measure four. This fugue is rather extensive, chromatic and extremely syncopated.

Satie commented to his publisher about Aperçus désagréables and declared: "Before writing a work I go round it several times accompanied by myself."¹

Satie relates in a letter to his brother the dissatisfaction with the criticism of his works after his study at the Schola Cantorum:

So there I was, in 1908 in possession of a license conferring on me the title of Contrapuntist. Proud of my learning I set to work to compose. My first work of this kind was a Chorale and Fugue for Piano duet Aperçus désagréables. I have often been insulted in the course of my miserable existence, but never before was I treated with such contempt. 'What on earth had I been doing with d'Indy? The things I had written before were so full of charm -- And now? merely pretentious and boring.' Whereupon the 'young ones' start a campaign against d'Indy, and begin play-

¹Rollo H. Myers, Erik Satie, . . . p.42.

ing things like the Sarabandes, and the Fils des Étoiles, etc., works which were once considered to be evidence of my appalling ignorance -- quite wrongly, as these young men now assert. And that, my dear fellow, is how life is; one can't make head or tail of it . . .¹

The piano duet En Habit de Cheval was originally conceived as a suite for orchestra. The Fugue litanique reflects plainchant material and the Fugue de papier refers to a diligently worked-out study by a refined craftsman that is not unlike the quicker sections of Morceau en forme de poire. The title alludes to the costume of the horse not to the costume of the rider and Satie explains in a footnote: ". . . for example, two shafts attached to a four-wheel cart."² This statement has been referred to by some as analogous to the restrictions of theorists on the composer that bind his freedom.³ At any rate, the music does not seem to exemplify this theory.

Satie's preoccupation with formal contrapuntal techniques was less prominent for a time, but was to return in one of his masterpieces, Parade (1915-1917), in which the score commences with a chorale followed by an exposition of a fugue. The final of the ballet concludes by resuming the opening fugue. The piano suite Sports et divertissements of 1914 is also prefaced by a chorale. However, his piano writing that followed his studies is less vertically oriented and is in predominantly two or three voices.

After an absence of six years of solo piano music, the remarkable Véritables préludes flasques (pour un chien) appeared

¹Rollo H. Myers, Erik Satie, . . . p.42.

²Rollo H. Myers, Ibid., p. 43.

³Rollo H. Myers, Loc. cit.

in 1912. These preludes were his only creative effort in that year, and they launch his rigorous new linear style which paved the way to his most productive period of keyboard suites. These preludes are athletic and forceful, displaying a new vigor and unique individual pianistic style. The title is a complete antithesis, being called "flabby." Collaer has said: ". . . the title is like a bone thrown to a dog to distract its attention. The titles and subtitles are there to amuse those who understand nothing of the music."¹ Satie wrote a self-portrait for his publisher and commented: "I wrote the Descriptions automatique for my birthday. This work is a pendant to the Véritables Préludes Flasques. It is clear that the Deflated, the Insignificant and the Puffed-up Ones will not appreciate these works. Let them shallow their beards! Let them dance on their own stomachs!"² Satie had difficulties with his publishers at this time and the last part of the title, pour un chien, may be a reference to them.³

There are three preludes which are sub-titled Sévère réprimande, Seul à la maison and On joue. The first prelude is a rigorous study in two parts and is an impressive example of a renewed freedom. This prelude has the quality of an etude or possibly a toccata with the austerity of a work by Hindemith. In spirit and in some degree its technical format is similar to the first etude in C major, opus 10 by Chopin. It is monothematic, through-composed, with a constant four eighth note rhythmic ostinato pattern in the upper part with generally

¹ Paul Collaer, A History of Modern Music, . . . p. 208.

² Rollo H. Myers, Erik Satie, . . . p. 111

³ John Cage, "Letters to the Editor" Musical America, Vol. LXX (Dec. 15, 1950), p. 12.

symmetrical octave phrases in the lower part. There are mimicking Latin indications throughout each prelude, such as Imitativus, Subitus, and Caeremoniosus.

The slower second prelude Seul à la maison is a delicate contrasting work in two voices. This prelude is built on a six note wandering motive, that is repeated in sequence until the final cadence. The upper voice is in short phrases that seems to wander along with the lower voice until both emerge an octave apart in the final eighth note phrase.

The third prelude On joue is in a quicker tempo, and returns to the rigorous keyboard style of the first prelude. The right hand in the first half of the prelude is composed of double notes in fourths or fifths not unlike an etude by Chopin, in which emphasis is placed on the tritone. The left hand contains accented rhythms, and suddenly both voices are interrupted by an allusion to a cakewalk motive. The music after the cakewalk motive quickly returns to the texture and material of the opening. The second half of the prelude reverts to the technique employed in the Prélude en tapisserie of juxtaposing contrasting short phrase motives. A quasi-tango dance rhythm is one of the motives.

At this stage of Satie's development he begins to insert popular melodies or phrases from well-known compositions, usually in parody form. It is not a new idea with Satie but a continuation of his practice of relating his music to liturgical chant or to the clichés of cabaret music.

Some of the titles and droll commentary in Satie's works were used in mockery of the impressionists and Debussy. Cocteau says: "No doubt they are meant as a good-humoured piece of ill-humour, and maliciously directed against Lunes

descendant sur le temple qui fut, Terrasses des audiences du Clair de lune and Cathédrales englouties." Cocteau goes on to say that: "The public is shocked at the charming absurdity of Satie's titles and system of notation, but respects the ponderous absurdity of the libretto of Parsifal."¹

The humorous titles could be related to the classic French tradition of Rameau and Couperin with their adoption and fondness for such titles as Les Trois Mains, La Poule, Le Tic-toc-choc ou les Maillotins, and Les Barricades mystérieuses.²

There are other instances of humorous titles employed by the nineteenth-century composer Gioacchino Rossini who in his "Sins of Old Age" uses such titles as "Butter Variations," "Hygienic Prelude for Morning Use," and "Miscarriage of a Polka-Mazurka."³

The written interpolations accompanying each piece become more important and tend to be a descriptive narration or monologue, instead of merely running humorous commentary or expressive indications. The texts sometimes are completely unrelated to the music and move toward the absurd and nonsensical. The whole approach seems to be in the interest of comedy. Cocteau maintained the text was self-protective, "...in order to protect his works from persons obsessed by the sublime."⁴ Alfred Cortot, on the other hand, states that the

¹Norman Demuth, Musical Trends in the 20th Century, (London: Rockliff, 1952), pp. 26-27.

²Rollo H. Myers, Erik Satie, . . . p.45.

³Rollo H. Myers, Loc. cit.

⁴Rollo H. Myers, Ibid., p. 44.

verbal commentaries ". . . are an essential part of Satie's intentions and not merely added to put the critics off the scent."¹ Nevertheless, there is an element of both of their opinions in the suites of 1912-1915. Practically all of Satie's works have a literary association. His talents were both musical and literary, and he gave both complete freedom. Collaer explains: "It is obvious that Satie wrote for his own pleasure, and not for the good of readers or audiences. If his little manuscripts, such as they are, please them, so much the better."²

Satie relates his instruction to the performer concerning the text and the music, in the score to the suite Heures séculaires et instantanées (1914), in which he gave explicit directions: "I prohibit any person to read the texts aloud during the period of musical performance. Every infraction will arouse my just indignation against the culprit. He will be granted no mercy."³

The year 1913 begins a very productive two-year period for piano composition. He composed in a period of a few months Descriptions automatiques, Embryons desséchés, Croquis et agaceries d'un gros bonhomme en bois, Chapîtres tournés en tous sens, Vieux séquins et vieilles cuirasses, Enfantines, and Les Pantins dansent. All of these works are suites composed in sets of three with the exception of Les Pantins dansent. In the following year three suites were composed, including

¹Rollo H. Myers, Erik Satie, . . . p. 45.

²Paul Collaer, A History of Modern Music, . . . p. 209.

³Roger Shattuck, The Banquet Years, . . . p. 115 (from footnote)

Sports et divertissements, a suite of twenty miniatures, Heures séculaires et instantanées and Valses du précieux degoûté. The works of 1912-1915 are referred to as the "humoristic" period.

The ternary arrangement of the suites are no longer in keeping with the idea of viewing an object from three directions as in the early works, which results musically in three similar versions. In the suites of 1912-1915, there is very little similarity between each of the three pieces, with the exception of a possible similar descriptive commentary or narrative as utilized in Embryons desséchés.

The composer had indicated the Descriptions automatiques of 1913 is a companion work to the Véritables Préludes flasques, although there was an eight month interval between.

The three pieces in Descriptions automatiques are entitled Sur un vaisseau, Sur une lanterne, and Sur un casque. A phrase from the popular song Maman, les petits bateaux is adopted in Sur un vaisseau, and a tango rhythmic ostinato pattern is used unrelenting until the final octave. Sur une lanterne also contains an allusion to the popular song. The third piece, Sur un casque, illustrates drum rhythms, in a quick march tempo. The suite places emphasis upon the tritone at particular points in each piece, and presents the tritone in a new perspective, such as the close of Sur un vaisseau, the middle of Sur une lanterne, and the drum cadence of Sur un casque.

The musical parodies that are adopted in his works, evolve very naturally in context during the music and gives them a new meaning and character that is not basically inherent.

" . . . Satie's little pieces drop the comic touch into an at-

mosphere of delicacy, balance, and charm which endows them with incontestable poetic value."¹ Inserting well-known melodies was in vogue at the time as exemplified by Debussy's use of two folk songs in Jardins sous la pluie (1903), a quotation from Wagner's Tristan und Isolde in "Golliwog's Cake walk" (1908) and a reference to the Marseillaise in the prelude Feux d'artifice (1913). Most of the works contain surprises, both rhythmic and harmonic, that are non-expectant in the initial presentation.

Embryons desséchés contains the often quoted phrase for the interpreter to play "like a nightingale with a toothache," which occurs in the first piece of the suite. In this suite there is a mixture of a descriptive text, and parodies on popular songs and well-known compositions. In the manuscript Satie states: "This work is absolutely incomprehensible, even to me. Perhaps I wanted to be humorous. That would not surprise me and be pretty much in my manner."² The three pieces attempt to describe three creatures of the sea. The titles of the three undersea creatures d'Holothurie, d'Edriophthalma, and de Podophthalma, are actual words derived from Latin and Greek. At the beginning of each work a short description of each creature is printed in the score. The music of the first piece, d'Holothurie, is predominantly in two voices, with the left hand portraying an Alberti bass figure. The ending is a humorous parody on the Grandiose effect of symphonists and operatic composers, in which a G major harmony is repeated eighteen times in the appropriate style. Satie advises in the middle of this conclud-

¹Paul Collaer, A History of Modern Music, . . . p. 209.

²Roger Shattuck, The Banquet Years, . . . p. 140.

ing phrase De votre mieux. Musically, the piece is closest in style to Mozart.

In the contrasting somber Edriophthalma, Satie chooses to parody Chopin's Funeral March from his second piano sonata in B flat minor, opus 35. The parody begins in the first line after the arpeggiated chords with the dotted rhythms. In the fourth line the melody from the trio of Chopin's march is evoked, which is inscribed as a Citation de la célèbre mazurka de Schubert. Thus, we encounter a joke within a joke. The piece is in the form of A B A, which is encountered with more frequency in these suites.

The third piece, de Podophthalma, is in a livelier tempo and corresponds to the overall tendency of all the suites in this period to fall into a fast-slow-fast design. The phraseology is symmetric in de Podophthalma with the rhythmic patterns falling in groups of four. The meter shifts from simple duple to compound duple and back to simple duple. Harmonic emphasis is placed on the seventh. The final extended cadence phrase is similar to the first piece, d'Holothurie, with a surprise reiteration of mostly tonic harmony, in which Satie ironically remarks, Cadence obligée (de l'Auteur).

In the suite Croquis et agaceries d'un gros bonhomme en bois the musical parodies proceed in the same manner. The first piece, Tyrolienne turque, subtly portrays an allusion to Mozart's Rondo alla Turca, and has an affinity to Ravel's Valses nobles et sentimentales (1911). The first and third pieces complement each other with similar rhythmic patterns, and with the same 3/4 meter set in a moderate waltz tempo.

The second piece entitled Danse maigre (à la manière de

ces messieurs) is again a contrasting slower middle piece, which seems to place emphasis on the augmented triad. The third piece, Españaña, contains parodies on Spanish themes, notably Chabrier's España, and some passages which poke fun at Debussy. The text phrases are mostly Spanish oriented, such as Sous les grenadiers, Comme à Séville, and La belle Carmen et le peluquero. España, and the third piece, Regrets des enfermés of the following suite are dedicated to Madame Claude Debussy.

Chapitres tournés en tous sens continues in the same humorous vein and further demonstrates Satie's interest in musical parodies. The three pieces of the set are entitled Celle qui parle trop, Le porteur de grosses pierres, and Regrets des enfermés. The first piece quotes the popular air Ne parle pas, Rose, je t'en supplie. The third piece quotes Nous n'irons plus au bois, which was also used by Debussy in his piano work Jardins sous la pluie (1903). The text in Celle qui parle trop is about a woman who talks too much to her husband and he finally dies of exhaustion. Satie portrays this story line with the popular air supported by a lively triplet eighth note figure that finally comes to a rest in the concluding death phrase on an augmented eleventh harmony. Le porteur de grosses pierres employs fermati on individual sixteenth notes, which are part of a group of four sixteenths. This procedure resembles the durational emphasis of the rhythm of plainsong. The final cadence chords of the third work Regrets des enfermés is in the same manner as the final of Debussy's Prelude from Pour le Piano.

The suite Vieux sequins et vieilles cuirasses is listed

in many sources as belonging to the year 1914, however, the score clearly indicates September, 1913, as does the corrected list in an unpublished manuscript by Paul Collaer. The manuscript is said to have been corrected by Satie.¹ The incorrect date endures partially from the biography of Satie by Rollo Myers, in which the date of composition is placed as 1914.² Carl Van Vechten's book, Interpreters and Interpretations of 1917 gives the correct date of 1913.

The titles of the three works of this suite are Chez le Marchand d'or, Danse cuirassée, and La Défaite des cimbres. Two military bugle tunes are adopted, and there are references to Gounod's Faust, King Dagobert and Marborough.

The final suites of 1913 were the three sets of children's pieces, Menus propos enfantins, Enfatillages pittoresques, and Peccadilles importunes. These little pieces were written for children to play and are limited to five finger set patterns that do not move out of position, and thus do not require finger extension or crossing under of the thumb. Each set contains three pieces, for a total of nine. Especially appealing is the set Peccadilles importunes. Satie's musicality is in evidence even in such a limited texture.

The terminal piano composition for this most productive year of 1913 was the single piano work Les Pantins dansent, which temporarily broke the trinitary groupings. This piece was published posthumously. It is less interesting musically than the suites of this period. The structure resembles the Prélude en tapisserie in the juxtaposition of short motives.

¹William Austin, "Satie Before and After Cocteau," Musical Quarterly, Vol. XLVIII, (1962), pp. 218-219.

²Rollo H. Myers, Erik Satie, . . . Myers' incorrect date on pp 80 and 145.

One innovation for this period at least, is a curious absence of a text or commentary.

One of Satie's most important piano works Sports et divertissements dates from the following year, 1914. This work combines colored illustrations by Charles Martin for each of the twenty miniatures, and the semi-narrative text and music in Satie's artistic calligraphy. The original manuscript was done in black ink on a red staff. The use of colored ink was a habit of Satie's, that dates to his Rose-Croix works. The publication is a facsimile reproduction of the manuscript, and has a unique visual appearance, displaying Satie's meticulousness.

The circumstances concerning the creation of the Sports et divertissements, characteristically reveals the irony of Satie. "The story is that the publishers originally commissioned Stravinsky to compose a work. He declined, maintaining that the fee was too small. When the same proposal was made to the poverty-stricken Satie, he also declined at first, maintaining that the fee was insultingly large."¹

The work consists of a chorale which is followed by twenty individual pieces that are limited to one page. Each piece is a miniature or sketch that demonstrates how far Satie's style had developed in the use of brevity as a form and in stripping his creations of nonessentials. This music displays the consummate, mature technical wisdom of Satie; the extreme economy of means, juxtaposition of opposed materials, vivacity of rhythm, bitonal effects, unexpected results, descriptive elements resulting at times in inspired nonsense, interesting pianistic figures, athletic movements, beautifully

¹Roger Shattuck, The Banquet Years, . . . p. 115.

shaped linear lines, ostinato patterns creating hypnotic and spatial effects, and above all an impeccable taste, which brings his unique style into closer focus.

In the preface Satie describes his work:

This publication is composed of two artistic elements: drawing and music. The drawing part consists of lines--animated lines; the musical part is represented by dots--black dots. These parts put together--in one volume--make a whole: an album. I recommend that you turn its pages with a tolerant thumb and with a smile, for this is a work of fantasy. Let no one regard it otherwise.

For the "dried-up" and "stultified" I have written a chorale, sober and suitable. This makes a sort of bitter prelude, a kind of introduction quite austere and unfrivolous. Into it I have put all I know about boredom. I dedicate this chorale to those who do not like me. And I withdraw.¹

The Choral inappétissant is actually a very intense, severe setting in four voices with a tight texture and is similar to the chorale in the piano duet Apercus désagréables. It is an impressive opening and is the opposite of the title "unappetizing" and the indications "repulsively," "hatefully," and "hypocritically," which are written in the score. Notated under Satie's signature and date of composition (May 1914) he writes: "In the morning fasting." The comments in the preface and score should be considered in the light that the time of composition was the eve of the first World War.

The twenty titles in the work are as follows: La Balance, La Chasse, Comédie Italienne, Le Réveil de la Mariée, Colin-Maillard, La Pêche, Yachting, Bain de Mer, Le Carnaval,

¹William Austin, Music in the 20th Century, . . . p. 164.

Le Golf, La Pieuvre, Les Courses, Les Quatre Coins, Pique Nique, Water-Chute, Le Tango, Trainbeau, Flirt, Feu d'artifice, and Le Tennis.

Satie then began to utilize very few musical parodies compared with his suites of 1912-1913. The most obvious references occur in Le Réveil de la Mariée, in which he alludes to the military bugle tune Réveille, and in Les Courses to the Marseillaise. Occasionally the gaiety of the cabaret spirit is heard, as in Le Réveil de la Mariée and Le Pique-nique.

The narrative text accompanying each piece is ironically witty, poetic and imaginative. The music tends to be illustrative of the mood of the text, but in general there are only a few obvious relationships such as the extended descending scale passage in Le Water Chute, which also has a definite visual appearance. The text of the first piece, La Balançoire, demonstrates a poetic text: "It is my heart that swings. It does not get dizzy. What tiny feet it has. Will it want to come back to my breast." The semi-narrative text is exemplified in the second piece, La Chase: "Do you hear the rabbit singing? What a voice! The nightingale is in the burrow. The owl is suckling her young. The wild boar is going to get married. As for me, I am shooting down nuts with my gun." In the final piece, Le Tennis, Satie uses a combination of English and French: "Play?" "Yes!" Le bon serveur, comme il a de belles jambers!, Il a un beau nez., Service coupé., "Game!"

"Darius Milhaud considers Sports et divertissements to be one of the most characteristic works of the modern French School..."¹

¹Rollo H. Myers, Erik Satie, . . . p. 85.

The work has been compared to a Japanese haikai and Koechlin says: "Extra-condensed art-why not? To develop is not an end in itself, but a means, and is not suitable for all compositions. A small Japanese ivory is worth more, isn't it, than so many official statues that turn our public squares into cemeteries?"¹

Sports et divertissements remains a unique work of the twentieth-century that combines music, poetry, illustration, and calligraphy.

The next work of 1914 is Heures séculaires et instantanées, a suite with his usual grouping of three pieces: Obstacles vénimeux, Crépuscule matinal (de midi), and Affollements granitiques. The verbal indications are a definite narration and the music attempts to depict the story line. Satie eliminates the whimsical running commentary that was present in the earlier suites of 1912 and 1913. His warning to the performer not to read the text aloud while playing, as mentioned previously, is notated in the first piece. The music is straightforward, appealing, and places emphasis in the melodic phrases on repetition and sequence.

The final piano suite of 1914 was the three Valses du précieux dégoûté: Sa taille, Son Binocle, and Ses Jambes. Another aspect of Satie's literary and musical fantasies is introduced. He precedes each waltz with a quotation from the classics: the first from La Bruyere's Characters, the second from Cicero's De la République, and third quotation is from Caton's De re rustica. In addition to these quotations he adds his usual textual elaborations with the music. There

¹Paul Collaer, A History of Modern Music, . . . p. 211.

seems to be no apparent connection between the thoughts in the quotations and commentary or between either of these and the music. This procedure is analogous to a surrealist montage. The titles, however, of each of the waltzes reflect the commentary. Musically the waltzes demonstrate lightness and clarity of texture with some use of bitonality, and can be placed among his best works.

A single piano suite, Avant-dernières pensées, was composed by Satie in 1915. It bids farewell to his second period and terminates his most fertile period for keyboard works. This suite seems to bridge the second and third periods, in which Satie produced his most important stage works and Socrate.

Satie returns to the parody of the ternary suites of 1912 and 1913 with the ironic extraneous commentary. Each of the three pieces, Idylle, Aubade, and Méditation, are dedicated to Debussy, Dukas and Roussel, respectively. A continuous, unchanging ostinato pattern, a favorite device of Satie, is again incorporated in each piece. The short ostinato patterns, each consisting of three or four notes, remain on the same tonal and dynamic level. The melodic voice is presented in his most expressive lyric manner and occasionally both parts are in a bitonal relationship and each piece is an exquisite study in immobility, representing one of Satie's finest suites.

THIRD PERIOD 1916-1925

The Sonatine bureaucratique is the only piano work of 1917, which was the year that produced the ballet, Parade. This sonatina is a parody on the pianistic style of Clementi's C Major Sonatina, opus 36. This work is related to the neo-classicists of the 1920's and a similar effort by Debussy in his Dr. Gradus ad Parnassum. The commentary is a running monologue concerning the life of an office worker. The work is straightforward and the only piano work by Satie written in this form, showing Satie's complete command of the idiom.

Satie's next piano solo works and the most important, musically, of the third period, are the five Nocturnes of 1919. These works reflect the serenity and classic quality of Socrate that was completed a year earlier. In spirit they are closer to the first period works, namely Gymnopédies and Gnossiennes, which portray a certain timeless quality and stand apart from the complete piano works. The classic approach is supported by the use of traditional notation and his usual running commentary is noticeably absent. The Nocturnes create an austere and gray mood with an emphasis on parallel fourths, fifths and octave doublings. "In these extremely beautiful pieces we seem to find once again a direct statement of the 'isolation' which was embodied in the very first dances, with this difference: in the perfect lucidity of the linear writing a lifetime of experience

seems to have intervened."¹ The symmetrical melodic phrases are decoratively repeated and are predominantly supported by a slow, flowing eighth note pattern in a 12/8 meter. The linear lines are built mainly on fourths and fifths, creating a rather expansive aria quality. Each of the Nocturnes are in an A B A design. The middle sections are usually broader and more diatonic, with a meditative quality. They are excellent works, well constructed and they satisfy the so-called traditional formal requirements of composition.

The Premier Menuet of 1920 was Satie's last composition for the piano and is an interesting example of still another facet of his piano works. The title would indicate that it probably was the first of a group of three that was never realized.

The Menuet is in the abrupt style of Satie, employing sudden dynamic contrasts, using the traditional notation and is presented without commentary. As we have observed in his Nocturnes, he abandons commentary during this time for the piano works. The work employs syncopation and is reminiscent of the fugue from Aperçus désagréables. It has an elated and energetic quality, consisting of symmetrical phrases with a continuous use of repetitive and sequential patterns.

There remains one other work, Vexations, that dates from 1920 that should be mentioned, which had its first complete performance, largely through the efforts of John Cage,

¹Wilfred Mellers, "Erik Satie and The 'Problem' of Contemporary Music," Music and Letters, Vol. 23, 1942, p.220.

on September 9 and 10, 1963 in New York's Pocket Theater. It consists of a fifty-two beat piano piece to be performed eight hundred and forty times in succession. The first performance of this unusual project began at 6:00 o'clock in the evening and continued until 12:40 P.M. of the following afternoon. It was performed by a relay team of ten pianists, with two additional standby relief performers. The New York Times is reported to have carried an hour-by-hour report-cum-review.¹

¹Stephen Cannon, "Eric Satie: A Testimonial on the Occasion of his 101st Birthday," HiFi/Stereo Review, Vol. 19, No. 4, October, 1967, p. 99.

CONCLUSION

Our appraisal of the complete piano works of Satie has clearly illustrated the variety and extent of his unusual imaginative powers. William Austin and Roger Shattuck have implied that most of Satie's piano works, and in particular Sports et divertissements, do not belong in the recital hall. This is a rather extreme position, as most of Satie's piano compositions can stand on their own without the commentary. It seems as though Satie is talking to himself and these thoughts and nonsense associations he wants to share with the performers and audience, be they one or two people gathered around a piano, or one or two thousand in a recital hall. Why would Satie condemn anyone for reading the text aloud during the performance, unless he wanted our concentration to be focused on the music. Setting out the commentary in program notes or reading the text before the actual performance is a possible solution for presenting the text. Satie states that Sports et divertissements is a work of fantasy. Does this imply that it cannot be shared by groups of people simultaneously? I think not. The autonomous nature of music is more plastic. To imply that these works are not for the recital hall would indicate that pianists and the public have been in error for some time. Debussy has said that his Préludes would be better understood with just one or two people in the same room as the performer, and while it may be true that this type of intimate surrounding would be an ideal situation in the case of any work, it

certainly does not mean that these works cannot be meaningful in a concert presentation.

The piano works of Satie are an important contribution to piano literature and would be a welcome and novel addition to the current concert repertoire. The suites of 1912-1915 are analagous to the suites of many composers of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries and they can take their place with the suites of Couperin and Rameau, as well as Schumann. The brevity of Schoenberg's Six Little Pieces of 1911 would make an interesting comparison.

The technical problems for the pianist in presenting the works of the second and third periods are the abrupt contrasting varieties of touch, mood and sensitive nuances that are required, usually in the extreme registers.

Virgil Thomson has said in his recent autobiography: "I only know that during an acquaintance with it of more than forty years his music has never ceased to be rewarding."¹ Thomson has also stated elsewhere that ". . . to ignore all art that is not heroic or at least intensely emotional is to commit the greatest of snobberies." Cocteau, a contemporary of Satie, relates that Satie taught "what in our age is the greatest audacity--simplicity."² A composer of our own time, Aaron Copland, says: "As I see it, music that is born complex is not inherently better or worse than music that is

¹Virgil Thomson, Virgil Thomson, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), p. 64.

²Rollo H. Myers, Erik Satie, . . . p. 113.

born simple. . . ." ¹

Satie has a significant place in the evolution of twentieth-century music in being prophetic and one must look to Satie for the currents of our own time and the challenge of the future. As John Cage has so eloquently said: "It's not a question of Satie's relevance. He's indispensable."

¹Peter Yates, Twentieth Century Music (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967) p. 145.

APPENDIX

Chronological List of Piano Works

FIRST PERIOD 1885-1896

1885 Valse-BalletFantaisie-Valse1886 Ogives1887 Sarabandes1888 Gymnopédies1890 Gnossiennes1891 3 Preludes from Le Fils des étoiles1892 Sonneries de la Rose-Croix1893 Danses gothiques4 Préludes1894 Prélude de la Porte héroïque du ciel

SECOND PERIOD 1897-1915

1897 Pièces froides: 3 Airs à faire fuir
3 Danses de travers1903 3 Morceaux en forme de poire1906 PassacaillePrélude en tapisserie1908 Aperçus désagréables1911 En habit de cheval1912 Véritables Préludes flasques--pour un chien

1913 Descriptions automatiquesEmbryons desséchésCroquis et agaceries d'un gros bonhomme en boisChapîtres tournés en tous sensVieux séquins et vieilles cuirassesEnfantinesLes Pantins dansent1914 Sports et divertissementsHeures séculaires et instantanéesValses du précieux dégoûté1915 Avant-dernières pensées

THIRD PERIOD 1916-1925

1917 Sonatine bureaucratique1919 5 Nocturnes1920 Premier MenuetVexations

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