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A Lecture On "The Six"

A Somewhat Critical Account of a Now Famous Group of French Musicians

By ERIK SATIE

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.

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 observa-
tions, and for the acuteness of their vision, or
visions.

The public, on the other hand, judges with-
out pre-judgments. It does not fear Imagination.
Its respect for old ideas is rather tem-
perate. 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 him-
self 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 Apolli-
naire 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

Auric, Francis Poulenc, Darius Milhaud.

As to the three remaining members of "The
Six", Louis Durey, Arthur Honneger, Ger-
maine Tailleferre, they are pure "impression-
ists". 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?



"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

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 sur-
prise. 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

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 estab-
lished harmonic formulas—this
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 intelli-
gent comradeship can accom-
plish—can tolerate.

Here we have a practical
realization of honest free-think-
ing 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 pub-
lic is concerned, Milhaud is the most widely
known. Monteux recently played a symphonic
work of his with the Boston Symphony Or-
chestra, 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 command-
ing 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.