

LA REVUE MUSICALE (1920–40) AND THE FOUNDING OF A MODERN MUSIC

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Founded in 1920 under the initiative of the musicologist Henry Prunières (1886–1942), *La revue musicale* adopted the principal mission to support the profound changes taking place in music during that period. The support the fledgling journal intended to lend to the development of music was grounded in its founder's desire to educate a music-loving readership as part of a general movement to develop musical understanding in France. In an interview of 1929, Prunières elaborated on the subject:

It seems to me that the duty of any music critic worthy of the title is to make every effort to dispel the public's ignorance and its absurd biases, to inspire simultaneously a love for the art of the past, which is above suspicion, and the art of the present, an *a priori* abomination. It was with this in mind that I founded *La revue musicale* in 1920.¹

Prunières directed this “international” revue until 1940, assisted by the music critic André Coeuroy, editor-in-chief until 1936, and later by composer-critic Robert Bernard who acted as co-director and editor-in-chief of the journal until the Second World War. Bernard later assumed directorship of the journal in the late 1940s.² *La revue musicale* published a great number of articles addressing questions of aesthetics, repertoire, and performance, devoting as much attention to early music as it did to contemporary works. Musical supplements, special issues, and numerous chronicles converge in an exceptional portrait of musical life in France and abroad—the journal having had collaborators in most European and American centers. Music critics (such as Vuillermoz or Schloezer), musicologists (such as Dufourcq, Dumesnil, Machabey, and Pincherle), composers

¹ “Le devoir du critique musical digne de ce nom me semble être de tenter les plus grands efforts pour dissiper l'ignorance du public et ses préventions absurdes, lui faire aimer à la fois l'art du passé qu'il ne soupçonne pas et l'art du présent qu'il abomine *a priori*. C'est dans cet esprit que j'ai fondé en 1920 *La revue musicale*.” Excerpted from an interview with Henry Prunières conducted by Frédéric Lefèvre for “Nouvelles Littéraires”, *La revue musicale* 10/98 (November 1929) 91.

² Composer and music scholar Robert Bernard (1900–71) was originally from Switzerland. After studying composition in Geneva, he became a professor at the Schola Cantorum and wrote music criticism. He contributed to *La revue musicale* with increasing regularity until he was appointed editor-in-chief. His publications include biographies of Franck, Aubert, and Roussel, as well as a work entitled *Les tendances de la musique française moderne* (1930).

(such as Auric, Samazeuilh, Koechlin, Milhaud, Honegger, Tansman, and Wellesz), and performers (such as Ansermet or Cortot) all contributed articles to this journal, which not only provided a remarkable representation of the musical milieu and the ideas that permeated it, but also situated musical works in an international context and explored deeply burning questions of language and aesthetics of the 1920s and 1930s, such as modernity, polytonality, the reception of Schoenberg's music, neoclassicism, the influence of jazz, and even the effect of technological developments such as recording and radio on musical creativity.

La revue musicale also constitutes a remarkable source of articles on contemporary composers (Dukas, Debussy, Hindemith, Ravel, Satie, Stravinsky, Caplet, and Roussel) and on early music that contributed to an understanding of the repertoire and the development of public taste. A number of articles are devoted to early music editing, correspondence and important texts, and historical studies of the biographies and works of composers from the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries (Boïeldieu, Mouret, Rameau, Lully). This pronounced effort would prove considerably influential on the new generations of composers of the 1920s and 1930s who had greater access to early music and to the aesthetic theories that surrounded the repertoire. The critical apparatus developed by *La revue musicale* may be considered a key element in the development of the "neoclassical" music that was so important in France at the time. It should be noted that in addition to intense publishing activity, journal editors organized concerts intended to complement monthly issues, and more particularly, a series of special numbers devoted as much to contemporary French composers as to earlier artists such as Wagner, Lully, Beethoven, Chopin, and Mozart, and including poets such as Goethe and Ronsard.

The texts that emanated from the editorial committee undeniably oriented the journal towards the promotion of a modern aesthetic that eschewed the intransigent nationalism that marked the French musical milieu prior to the First World War. In order to accomplish this, the journal developed a network of influence. Aside from correspondents placed all over the world, the journal would channel its readership's attention to specific topics such as ballet, the relationship between literature and music, and the state of music in the world. The journal also became a meeting ground with its *Mardi de La revue musicale* (Musical revue Tuesdays) that worked to define the bases and characteristics of the kind of modern music that Prunières and his regular contributors envisaged. First organized at the Théâtre du Vieux Colombier—which belonged to Jacques Copeau, an active member of *La nouvelle revue française*—these events provided occasions to hear works by certain French and foreign contemporary composers alongside music by early masters, much like the general programming at Copeau's theater, in which works by Molière, Shakespeare, and Claudel were freely intermingled. Thus audiences experienced concert combinations that were eloquent in terms of their symbolic meaning. In the course of a single season (1936), it was possible to hear a saxophone quartet concert, another featuring violin music by Mondonville and Biber followed by works of Pierre-Octave Ferroud, or a recital devoted to the music of Robert Schumann (to complement a special issue of 1936), which concluded with Albert Roussel's *Sinfonietta*.

HENRY PRUNIÈRES. Henry Prunières was born in Paris in 1886. He studied music history with Romain Rolland at the Sorbonne from 1906 to 1913, at which point he defended a doctoral dissertation entitled *L'opéra italien en France avant Lulli*. As

a musicologist, Prunières would later be considered one of the great specialists of 17th-century French and Italian music, in a career launched by the publication of his dissertation in 1913. After 1930 he directed the edition of the complete works of Lully, though the project was only completed after his death, and wrote a biography of the composer as well as numerous articles on a variety of subjects related to his period of specialization. It should be noted that Prunières's work on Lully continues to function as a point of reference for research in the field.

This tremendous interest in the music of the past strongly influenced *La revue musicale*, where early music occupied a place of privilege. Guided by the spirit of *La nouvelle revue française*, a publication grounded in an openness of spirit and sensitive blending of artistic disciplines, Prunières in no way limited his project to a strictly musicological approach. In any case, the *Revue de musicologie*, founded earlier in 1917, already satisfied the needs of this segment of the market. As a “friend of Stravinsky, Alban Berg, and Milhaud, and the biographer of Monteverdi and Lulli,”³ Prunières conceived of *La revue musicale* as a project that would not only create ties between music and other artistic disciplines such as dance and literature, but would also bring together an increasingly broad range of styles, genres, and aesthetic constructs. From its earliest issues onward, a basis of inclusion and interdisciplinarity is reflected in the review's subtitle “Revue internationale d'art musical ancien et moderne” (A international review of early and modern musical art).

LA REVUE MUSICALE AND LA NOUVELLE REVUE FRANÇAISE. Initially *La revue musicale* appears intimately connected to the same readership as *La nouvelle revue française*, as well as the Éditions Gallimard, which supported Prunières's review during the 1920s. The founding of *La nouvelle revue française* dates back to 1908–09 and coincides with the formation of André Gide's literary circle, which included Jacques Copeau and Jacques Rivière. By 1911 Gide felt compelled to widen the scope of the review's activities and, with Jean Schlumberger and Gaston Gallimard, he created the Éditions de *La nouvelle revue française*. Suspended throughout the First World War, publication of the review resumed in 1919 with the appointment of Jacques Rivière as director. At the same time Gaston Gallimard took indirect control of Éditions de la *Nouvelle revue française* by founding the Librairie Gallimard, a publication consortium that managed an increasingly significant group of editing activities. Over the years Gallimard flourished through initiatives that included the opening of a Parisian bookstore, an increase in the number of titles available for mass consumption such as *Nouvelles littéraires* (1922) and the sensational journal *Le détective* (1928), as well as more or less independent reviews from within the Gallimard consortium, including *La revue musicale* (1920), *La revue juive* (1925), and *La revue du cinéma* (1929). As a publication managed from the outset by Marcel Doisy, Gaston Gallimard, and Henry Prunières, *La revue musicale* was integrated within a remarkable intellectual and commercial network that explains, in part, not only its success, but also its national and international reputation.⁴

The fact that between 1920 and 1926 *La revue musicale* was published by *La nouvelle revue française*—which was clearly identified with literary figures such as Rivière,

³ “Hommage à Henry Prunières,” *La revue musicale* brochure (1952–53) 18.

⁴ Three months into its publication, *La revue musicale* circulated to some 1300 subscribers, which is considerable by comparison with the *La nouvelle revue française* which had the same number of subscribers during this time period. See Lefèvre, “Nouvelles Littéraires,” 92.

Cocteau, Gide, Claudel, Valéry, and Breton who defended new French literature, several of whom worked closely with composers such as Milhaud and Honegger—proved definitive in setting out the review's fundamental principles. Aside from political or non-political trends associated with *La nouvelle revue française* that infiltrated Prunières's review, this new music periodical appeared to be endowed with a "social" worldview similar to *La nouvelle revue française's* between the two world wars, more specifically in the years that Jacques Rivière directed the literary review. Rivière used *La nouvelle revue française* as a platform to express his "pro-European and pacifist stance, and to militate against Poincaré's policies in favor of a Franco-German reconciliation"⁵

Prunières shared this vision of a new and modern world, and this is why he surrounded himself with collaborators who would help him attain this ideal. André Coeuroy, a student of Max Reger who was also a polyglot with an excellent knowledge of German, was engaged as editor-in-chief and would later carve out a considerable place in the periodical for early and modern German music, as well as works from nations newly born from the treaty of Versailles such as Poland and Czechoslovakia.

Memoirs published by Claude Delvincourt reveal that Prunières meditated on his project for several years prior to the founding of *La revue musicale*. As a resident at the Villa Médicis in 1917, the composer met Prunières who "was thinking about creating a music journal in the grand style, which he ... spoke of often with a certain amount of anxiety.... Would he ever be able to realize this ambitious project?"⁶ The Italian music critic Guido Maria Gatti confirms this:

[*La revue musicale*] was born during one of his soirées, where musicians, painters, writers, and music critics assembled at his house on the Corso d'Italia.... I had several conversations with him and Alfredo Casella on a subject we took to heart: to create a review in support of the musical movement that was developing in all countries at the time, which appeared very distinctly as a fundamental disruption.⁷

When Jacques Rivière assumed the directorship of *La nouvelle revue française* in 1919, an exceptional set of circumstances was created for Prunières. From that point on he was able to count on an intellectual and publishing infrastructure that would support his project, the foundations of which were closely bound to the broader objectives of Rivière's *La nouvelle revue française*. The latter's intellectual and social vision emerged in Prunières's new publication, which defended the same idea of a universal modernity that was also based on a specific type of classicism, one that transcended boundaries, time, and the conflicts that had marked the history of Western music up to that point.

The editorial that Rivière published in 1919, as *La Nouvelle revue française* was beginning to resume its activities, constituted a rally cry that Prunières very much expected. In this text, Rivière defines the guiding principles and editorial policies not only for *La nouvelle revue française*, but also for the full range of activities of the Éditions

⁵ See the historical summary for Éditions Gallimard on the publisher's website.

⁶ "Pensait à la création d'une revue musicale de grand style dont il... parlait souvent avec une certain anxiété... Pourrait-il jamais réaliser cet ambitieux projet." "Hommage à Henry Prunières", 13.

⁷ "[*La revue musicale*] naquit pendant une de ces soirées au cours desquelles il rassemblait dans sa maison du Corso d'Italia des musiciens, des peintres, des écrivains et des critiques musicaux.... Je m'entretins à plusieurs reprises, avec lui et Alfredo Casella, du sujet qui nous tenait à cœur : créer une revue pour appuyer le mouvement musical qui se développait dans tous les pays à ce moment et qui s'annonçait avec l'aspect précis d'un bouleversement fondamental." Ibid., 16.

de la *Nouvelle revue française*. These directional lines of force would be more or less replicated in *La revue musicale*:

We would like to recreate the impartial review, a publication where we will continue freely to judge and to create, not as though “nothing had happened”, but by continuing to obey, in every instance, only specific principles.... In these pages, readers will find a minimum of will and intention, and a maximum of reality and evidence.⁸

Directed by Rivière, *La nouvelle revue française*'s aesthetic and critical project acquired great significance that most certainly had an influence on the editorial policies of *La revue musicale*, which, in Prunière's words, “reported from an international point of view”, without necessarily neglecting “to glorify certain outstanding French musicians.”⁹ A simple parallel between Prunière's words and those of Rivière tells much:

Already in the past what we admired in *La nouvelle revue française* was that alongside a perfect openness of spirit lay an ability to show taste and preference. Its opinions could be deciphered. It had ideas in the back of its head. At the same time, it could be as sensitive as a microphone to the slightest rustle of Beauty, even while it sought it out in likely places. Today, more than ever, it is our intention to do the work of the critic, that is, to discover, choose, and recommend.¹⁰

This passage reveals not only the affinities between the two men, but the similarities between the fundamental objectives of the two reviews. With respect to *La nouvelle revue française*, it was a case of Rivière conceiving an organ that would promulgate a new art built on the past (romanticism and symbolism) and on awareness through the process of reason: “We welcome the assertion of intelligence that visibly seeks to reclaim its rights in art today; not by entirely supplanting sensibility, but by penetrating it in order to analyze and master it.”¹¹ Prunière's found in *La nouvelle revue française* not only an echo of his thought, but also an exceptional vehicle that could be used to reach the French and international intellectual and artistic milieu that would nourish the movement towards a new art, musical responses to which eventually came from Stravinsky, Ravel, Prokof'ev, Bartók, Honegger, Casella, Hindemith, and Martinů, to name only a few.

The destiny of *La nouvelle revue française* changed course after 1925 with the death of Jacques Rivière and the appointment of Jean Paulhan as editor-in-chief, with the strong support of Gaston Gallimard. The political evolution in France, rumors first of fascism and then nazism, and then another world war motivated the publication of increasingly insistent position statements by the review's authors, and this despite Paulhan's considerable effort to distance the publication as much as possible from

⁸ “Nous voulons refaire une revue désintéressée, une revue où l'on continuera de juger et de créer en toute liberté d'esprit, non pas 'comme si rien ne s'était passé' mais en continuant de nobéir, dans chaque ordre, qu'à des principes spécifiques.... On trouvera dans ses pages, le minimum de volonté et d'intention, la maximum de réalité et d'évidence.” Jacques Rivière, “*La nouvelle revue française*”, *Études Études (1909–1924)*, ed. and annot. by Alain Rivière (Paris: Gallimard, 1999) 33–34.

⁹ Lefèvre, “Nouvelles littéraires”, 91.

¹⁰ “Déjà dans le passé, ce qu'on aimait dans *La nouvelle revue française*, c'est qu'à côté d'une parfaite ouverture d'esprit elle savait montrer du goût et des préférences. On lui devinait des opinions. Elle avait des idées de derrière la tête. En même temps qu'elle savait se rendre sensible comme un microphone aux moindres bruissements de la Beauté, tout de même elle la cherchait dans la direction d'où elle devait venir. Aujourd'hui, plus que jamais, nous avons l'intention de faire œuvre critique, c'est-à-dire de discerner, de choisir, de recommander.” Rivière, “*La nouvelle revue française*”, 34.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

every form of dogmatism.¹² As a result, those involved with *La revue musicale* began to dissociate themselves from the milieu of *La nouvelle revue française* and in 1926 the consortium seems to have withdrawn support from its sister publication. It is not difficult to imagine that with Rivière's death, Prunières's review lost some of its importance in the eyes of the Éditions de la *Nouvelle revue française* directors, as Gaston Gallimard turned towards other fields of interest he deemed more "contemporary", and above all, more profitable. The infant Gallimard empire immersed itself in the publication of *Le détective*, which had mass circulation, and *La revue du cinéma* in 1928. But not all bridges were burned. A close collaborator of *La revue musicale*, Boris de Schloezer, remained with *La nouvelle revue française* while contributing more than 100 items to the black-sheep journal between October of 1921 and June of 1940. And other writers also contributed to both reviews: André Suarès, Georges Jean-Aubry, and Léon-Paul Fargue in particular.

While there existed a close relationship between *La revue musicale* and *La nouvelle revue française* that was maintained by, among others, Rivière (whose particular sensitivity to the musical milieu and whose artistic affinities closely approximated those of Prunières), a number of points of contention grew up between the two organizations that provide concrete testimony to the aesthetic orientation and ideological autonomy that Prunières had in mind for his review. In the early 1920s, several texts devoted to the activities of the Ballets Suédois and to the works of the Groupe des Six betray a sure knowledge of dadaism and surrealism, and occupy an important place at the center of the literary review. Auric's *Parade* (1921) and Morand's *Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel* (1921) figured as reviews alongside Brossard's critique of Alfred Jarry's *Ubu-Roi* (1921). In the context of the surrealist universe cultivated by several authors affiliated with *La nouvelle revue française*, it is not surprising to read apocalyptic discourse such as Auric's in the passage below.

There is no doubt that a new world is imminent, and it seems to me that what we agreed to call "works" will no longer do. The generations that immediately preceded us are crushed beneath the vanity of all their art. Further discussion can only entail repetition ad nauseum, but it is nonetheless important to reiterate that our flight from so much "beauty" will truly be *a rising from among the dead*.¹³

There was little place for momentarily "extremist" thinking such as this in *La revue musicale* under Prunières's direction. If we are able to rely on what he wrote to Koechlin in 1921, Prunières had absolutely no interest in *Les Mariés de la Tour Eiffel* or the many other works by the young members of the Groupe des Six.¹⁴ But Prunières's opinions should not be considered absolute dictates, as another letter to Koechlin reveals:

¹² Martyn Cornick, *The Nouvelle revue française under Jean Paulhan, 1925–1940* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995) 20.

¹³ "Sans nul doute un monde nouveau se prépare et il me semble que ce qu'on a convenu d'appeler des œuvres ne lui servira en rien. Les générations qui nous précèdent immédiatement, les voici écrasés par la vanité de tout leur art. À parler encore de celui-ci on ne peut que rabâcher, mais il importe tout de même de le dire : notre évasion de tant de 'beauté' sera véritablement *le réveil d'entre les morts*." Georges Auric, "Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. – Les Ballets russes: à propos de *Parade*", *La nouvelle revue française* (1 February 1921) 224–27, reproduced in *L'esprit NRF, 1908–1940* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1990) 342–43.

¹⁴ Unpublished letter from Henry Prunières to Charles Koechlin dated 25 June 1921 (Paris, Médiathèque Musicale Mahler, Fonds Koechlin, correspondence, box 13).

Your article on sensitivity in music enchanted me. I entirely share your ideas on this point, and your wisdom provides a useful counterbalance to certain ramblings that can be found in the same issue of *La revue musicale*.¹⁵

For the review's editorial committee, this was more a matter of supporting the emergence of a new music guided by 17th- and 18th-century pre-Classic and Classic forms rooted in the double heritage of the Bach–Beethoven–Wagner line and the Fauré–Debussy tradition. The best example of this is found in the writings of Charles Koechlin, who contributed regularly to the review. This same agenda shines through Prunières's 1935 summary of musical creativity in France:

In all the work produced by French musicians today, there are really only two broad tendencies. The first leads the French, like the musicians of all the other countries, in tow towards classic and preclassic forms. The second provides many of its enthusiasts with a rather false ideal in the form of urbane salon music. In Germany, however, it was possible to discern a movement in favor of folk music between 1923 and 1933.¹⁶

This historical overview of the foundation of *La revue musicale* provides only a prelude to more substantial research that will be spread over the next few years. But it is already evident, and it is the hypothesis of the Observatoire International de la Création et des Cultures Musicales research group, that studying *La revue musicale* will shed light on the tremendous variety of influences and relationships that shaped the musical activity of this era in the same way as the creation of new works, in which the new blended with the nation's musical legacy and branched out far beyond the French border. We stand before a highly complex portrait of musical evolution after 1920 in which the interaction between new and old works plays a central role, and where the latter reemerges in the former through the aesthetic principles of neoclassicism.

The energy generated by *La revue musicale's* various spheres of activity undoubtedly contributed to the renewal of musical thought in France. The journal thus assumed a functional role—in Hans Robert Jauss's definition—in the same way that realities of music practice itself would later take part in the evolution of musical thought among musicians and audiences alike. The *Revue* both guided and modified its readership's vision of the discipline—something that had been shaped previously by its surrounding environment and context.¹⁷ Assimilation of the *Revue's* content also engendered a change in social behavior with respect to musical activities (i.e., concerts, publications, and recordings) through the development of new aesthetic criteria and exposure to new listening habits.

¹⁵ "J'ai été enchanté de votre article sur la sensibilité dans la musique. Je partage entièrement vos idées sur ce point et votre sagesse me paraît opposer un utile contrepoint à certaines divagations dont on pouvait trouver trace dans le même numéro de *La revue musicale*." Unpublished letter from Henry Prunières to Charles Koechlin dated 25 February 1929 (Paris, Médiathèque Musicale Mahler, Fonds Koechlin, correspondance, box 13).

¹⁶ "Dans tout mouvement créateur des musiciens français, nous ne pouvons guère aujourd'hui discerner que deux tendances. La première entraîne les français comme les musiciens de tous les autres pays vers les formes classiques et préclassiques, la seconde fournit à beaucoup d'entre eux un idéal assez factice de musique mondaine de salon. Au contraire, en Allemagne, nous voyons de 1923 à 1933, se dessiner un mouvement en faveur d'une musique populaire." Henry Prunières, "Les tendances actuelles de la musique (2^e partie)", *La revue musicale* 17/163 (February 1936), 85. This is a collection of excerpts from Prunières study published in volume 7 of *L'encyclopédie française* ("Les arts du temps" section).

¹⁷ See Hans Robert Jauss, *Pour une esthétique de la réception*, trans. from German by Claude Maillard (Paris: Gallimard, 1975) 80.

A shift in the attention of the bourgeois milieu occurs in the 1920s, from the concert that sustained, perhaps unknowingly, the art of the “scandalous event”¹⁸, to an activity that was fundamentally intellectual in character and based on an awareness of a historical lineage that was already part of contemporary music. This awareness coincided with the gradual crumbling of the bourgeois, partly aristocratic audience’s political and economic underpinnings.¹⁹ Modern art became distanced from more revolutionary models of radical change, breaking completely with the past, in favor of an intellectual approach that was more deeply rooted in the cultural values and treasures of a past that seemed more essential for consumers of learned music. *La revue musicale* thus created an extended network for the dissemination of musical knowledge that opened up new horizons. This network rested on a remarkable alliance between musical traditions in the process of rediscovery and the performance of new works that were also part of the revival. Prunières’s journal became a beacon for an entire segment of the European musical milieu that might well have disappeared after the First World War. After 20 years of methodically constructing a new musical art, firmly grounded in its roots and in its attachment to the Classicism of the Enlightenment, it would unfortunately take only five years of war to permanently extinguish the flame of this astonishingly illuminating musical torch.

¹⁸ We can quote the scandal around the premiere of Ravel’s *Histoires naturelles* or Stravinsky’s *Le sacre du printemps*.

¹⁹ Based on the partial list of guests for the opening of its new offices in 1936, the milieu surrounding *La revue musicale* differed substantially from societies such as *La Sérénade*. The urbane world has a presence, but those in attendance from this sector are atypical representatives, composed of intellectuals and highly placed government officials.