The Darius Milhaud Society Newsletter, Vol. 1, Spring 1985

Darius Milhaud Society

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THE DARIUS MILHAUD SOCIETY
Newsletter

Cleveland, Ohio Spring 1985 Vol. I, No. 1

PURPOSE OF THE DARIUS MILHAUD SOCIETY — The Darius Milhaud Society was founded to fulfill several goals:

1. The primary purpose of the Society is first and foremost to encourage and expedite the performance of the large repertoire of Milhaud’s music throughout the United States. Milhaud published 443 compositions, a staggering output for any individual — even one who worked as quickly as did Milhaud — and the treasure of his music is comparable in both quantity and quality to that of J. S. Bach. The Darius Milhaud Society hopes to familiarize individuals and symphonic, choral, and chamber music organizations, colleges, universities, and conservatories with the scope of possibilities and to encourage them to perform a wide variety of Milhaud’s music as part of their standard repertoire.

2. The Society serves as a repository for an archive of scores, recordings, publications, programs, pictures, and other memorabilia of and pertaining to Darius Milhaud. The Society is willing to advise performers, help obtain music when assistance is needed, give counseling concerning program choices, and to aid in a variety of ways those individuals and organizations who seek to perform Milhaud’s music.

3. The Society is in the process of establishing a mailing list to aid in the development of subscribers to a Milhaud newsletter to be sent for the purpose of informing individuals and organizations of new publications, recordings, performances, and activities relating to Darius Milhaud and his music.

DARIUS MILHAUD SOCIETY HISTORY — The Darius Milhaud Society was founded in Cleveland in January 1984. Its chief purpose is to encourage the performance of a wide repertoire of Milhaud’s music all over the United States. As its initial undertaking, the Society planned, coordinated, and helped sponsor a festival during the spring of 1984 in which 18 different cultural and educational institutions and organizations participated, to present 275 artists in 19 concerts, two master classes, three lectures, two films, and an art exhibition.

Madame Madeleine Milhaud traveled to Cleveland from Paris, performed Suite de Quatrains, conducted a master class on Milhaud’s songs, and gave two lectures. She also accepted a document from Mayor George Voinovich of Cleveland to proclaim Darius Milhaud Day on March 31, 1984. Madame Milhaud will return to Cleveland during the fall of 1985 to give the first United States performance of Cantate pour l’Inauguration du Musée de l’Homme, accompanied by members of the Cleveland Orchestra. She will also give lectures at the Cleveland Institute of Music and Cleveland State University.

While Madame Milhaud is in Cleveland, the Dave Brubeck Quartet will present a concert to benefit the Darius Milhaud Society, with the assistance of the University Circle Chamber Choir, directed by Gilbert Brooks. The concert will include performance of Milhaud’s Miracles of Faith with orchestral accompaniment, Brubeck’s Pange Lingua Variations, and jazz by the Quartet. The day after the benefit concert, Dave Brubeck will speak at the Cleveland Institute of Music about what he learned from Darius Milhaud while studying composition with him.

AMERICAN PERFORMANCES OF MILHAUD’S MUSIC — Those known to have occurred during 1984 and the first half of 1985 have included:

- Cantate de l’Enfant et de la Mère, Op. 185 (1938), with Mary Metz as récitante, Mills College, February 1984
- Carnaval d’Aix, Op. 83b (1926), the Oakland Ballet, late 1984
- Concerto for Percussion and Small Orchestra, Op. 109 (1929-30), in Calaveras County, California, in 1984; and in Oklahoma City, Visalia (California), Baltimore, and Stockholm (Sweden), March 1985
- Miracles of Faith, Op. 914 (1951), Cleveland, April 11, 1985
- Suite, Op. 157b (1936), for violin, clarinet, and piano, Cleveland, April 14, 1985

To be heard in Cleveland on June 25, 1985:
- Three selections from Sept Poèmes de Paul Claudel de la Connaissance de l’Est, Op. 7 (1912-13)
- Trois Poèmes de Cocteau, Op. 59 (1919)
- Deuxième Sonate, Op. 293 (1949), for piano
- Premiere Sonate, Op. 240 (1944), for viola and piano
- Sonatine, Op. 76 (1922), for flute and piano

Please send information to the Society about performances in your area.
To be heard on June 17: 300 children of five public schools will sing the Milhaud works for children's voices—songs. They will also perform some instrumental works with de Bottes, Op. 118 (1932), Un petit peu d'Exercice, Op. 133 the students of the Milhaud Conservatory in Paris.

1985, or soon will be performed:

FOREIGN PERFORMANCES OF MILHAUD'S MUSIC — Although the list is not complete, the following works are known to have been heard in Europe in 1984 and 1985, or soon will be performed:

Christophe Colomb, Op. 102 (1928), with text by Paul Claudel, staged in France for the first time by the Marseille Opera, under the artistic direction of Jacques Karpo, for four performances October 5, 7, 9, and 11, 1984. The opera was televised live, and the broadcast occurred on French TV on May 26, 1985.

L'Homme et son Désir, Op. 48 (1918), performed in public concert at Radio France, by students of the National Conservatory, December 1984. The work was also performed in a concert organized by IRCAM during a conference on percussion.


To be heard on June 17: 300 children of five public schools will sing the Milhaud works for children's voices — A propos de Bottes, Op. 118 (1932), Un petit peu d'Exercice, Op. 133 (1934), and Un petit peu de Musique, Op. 119 (1932) — as well as Chansons de Vidrac, Op. 167 (1936-37) and some other songs. They will also perform some instrumental works with the students of the Milhaud Conservatory in Paris.

DARIUS MILHAUD'S CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS OPENS MARSEILLE OPERA — The opera season in Marseille opened October 5, 1984, with four performances of Darius Milhaud's opera Christopher Columbus (Christophe Colomb). This work, with a text by Paul Claudel, received a production at the hands of Jacques Karpo, Artistic Director of the Marseille Opera, that was thoughtful, stimulating, and visually beautiful. Audience enthusiasm was so exuberant that Mr. Karpo hopes to stage the other two operas in Milhaud's trilogy — Maximilien and Bolivar — in coming seasons.

Christopher Columbus is a real spectacle in the best sense of the word, and its conceptions are expressed on a grand scale. The long, complex work is full of pageantry, symbolism, history, and fantasy. The inspired musical setting of the text combines with imaginative staging to result in a work that is both dramatic and spiritual, powerfully moving yet always lyrical, and as fresh today in its expressiveness as it was at its premiere in 1930. Since the personage of Christopher Columbus is of such importance in the United States, there should be much interest in having the Milhaud opera staged in this country.

Below are excerpts from two reviews of the Marseille production, which was televised live. The telecast was scheduled for broadcast in Europe via French TV channels on May 26, 1985.

REVIEW by David Stevens, International Herald Tribune, October 13-14, 1984 — Christophe Colomb, a vast opera that is probably the most ambitious of the many collaborations of the composer Darius Milhaud and the poet Paul Claudel, has just emerged from half a century of semi-oblivion with its French stage premiere — in a handsome and passionately committed production by the Marseille Opera.

The work was given its world premiere in 1930, apparently with great success and under prestigious conditions, at the Berlin Staatsoper under Erich Kleiber's musical direction. But it was several more years before it was heard in concert form in France and elsewhere, and not until the late 1960's did anyone try to stage it again.

The reasons for the neglect are as understandable as they are lamentable. Christophe Colomb is an immense undertaking, a kind of scenic oratorio in two parts, with 28 scenes (in this production) of three hours running time. It requires large instrumental forces in the pit and offstage, more than 40 solo spoken and sung parts plus a kind of Greek chorus, and spectacular but quick-changing scenic effects, including film projections, a novelty in the opera house at the time of its premiere. It looks back to such diverse traditions as French grand opera, medieval mystery plays and religious oratorio, not to mention Claudel's varied theatrical palette — grandiose, symbolic and picaresque.

Another "problem" is that Milhaud goes far beyond his persistent image as one of the more fun-loving members of Les Six. Into this vessel he poured the considerable range of his musical and stylistic development. The percussion plays a predominant role, with each scene seeming to have its characteristic rhythm, yet this dramatic side co-exists with Milhaud's Mediterranean lyricism, Latin American dance rhythms, and an often light-hearted way with religious music.

That champion is Jacques Karpo, who has shrewdly and sensitively been guiding the artistic course of the Marseille Opera for a decade. In 1968 he was a production assistant at the San Francisco Opera, when that company staged a one-act, one-hour version of the opera, and Karpo filed away in his head the long-range ambition to stage the full work one day.

The piece opens with the poor and aged Columbus in an inn in Valladolid, then proceeds by flashback to tell the explorer's story from the beginning, and with the aged Columbus watching the progress of his young alter-ego. The first part ends powerfully with Columbus's refusal to turn back and the discovery of land, while the second is the story of opposition, controversy and despair.

Karpo and his designers devised a unit set capable of rapid transformation, with a semicircular balcony holding the ever-present chorus, backed by a brocade cyclorama and enclosing a domed-surfaced central playing area. The domed area sighted at a vast global atlas for Columbus to move on, but it could be rapidly covered with rich fabric for the royal court, or a few pieces of wood could be rapidly assembled to suggest the bridge of a ship.

Some of the scenic effects were particularly striking, such as the quadrilles of Envy, Ignorance, Vanity and Avarice at the Spanish court, splendidly robed and accompanied by Latin dance music, and who are then dispersed by the invasion of a cloud of doves. (The symbolism of Christopher Columbus's name, "bearer of Christ" and "dove," weighs heavily in the work.) The scene of the American Indian deities and the protective turbulence of the sea they invoke was ingeniously managed, while the scene of discovery mingled dramatic impact, religious fervor and an evocation of unspoiled nature.

Karpo . . . wrestled with the structure of the work, which had tangled history, taking the order of the Claudel play as a guide, and developed a short final scene . . . to accompany words of Claudel apostrophizing Columbus as a colossus astride the ocean, which satisfactorily completed the grand design of the opera . . .
EXCERPT FROM REVIEW by Jean Roy in Diapason, November 1984, translation by Ursula Korneitcheouk — On October 5, 1984, the Marseille Opera created a superbly staged Christopher Columbus. Indeed, 54 years after its world premiere in Berlin, May 5, 1930, the French production of this work — which, in France, had up to now been presented only as an oratorio — finally became a reality.

Christopher Columbus was composed in 1928. It is an opera in two acts and 27 scenes, based on a libretto written especially for Darius Milhaud by Paul Claudel. To bring the story of Columbus to life, Paul Claudel had chosen a dramatic device akin to the one he used for his Joan at the Stake, namely that of a book being read to a group of people, and their reactions.

But it is not simply a reading. The events are actually shown on the stage and prompt comment from those in the room. In short, the drama issues from the scene, from Columbus, prey to his lofty vocation, whom we follow through some 20 episodes, and on the other hand from the audience, now contained, now unbridled, now ecstatic. From the somber dooms and shrill contestations of the beginning to the outburst of the final hallelujah, the audience generates a kind of collective, anonymous roaring, as if from an ocean: the voices of the generations who watch and listen.

The opera requires two singers to share the role of Columbus, a narrator (the “Explainer”), 37 sung and seven spoken parts, and several choruses; it calls for 27 scenes and therefore numerous set changes (not to mention the images projected on a screen in the background).

Because of its baroque expansiveness, lack of unity, and stylistic changes, a work like this is fraught with risks. Jacques Karpe, the producer, has avoided these pitfalls by finding a flexible set device that lends itself to all the necessary transformations, and by adhering to a rigorous style without striving for needless picturesque details. Above all, he had the wisdom to restore the original structure of the work.

For although the first act — which focuses on the discovery of America — ends with a solemn Te Deum, it is really the second act which, transcending all images, retraces the true drama: the suffering of a man of genius who ends his life in toil and misery, who knows why his conscience torments him, yet who also knows that he himself called to another world, another America, the universe of the spirit (“the spiritual universe of the hereafter”).

Inverting the two acts, while superficially advantageous, alters the meaning of Milhaud’s Christopher Columbus. The Marseille production proved that the return to its original version by no means diminishes the impact of the work.

The Marseille Opera deserves our praise for having let us discover this Milhaud masterpiece, and for having restored its integrity.

MILHAUD STRING QUARTETS NEWLY RECORDED — Nine of Milhaud’s 18 string quartets were recorded by Quatuor Arcana in 1982 and 1983. They have been issued in two volumes by Cybélia, Volume 1 (CYB 551/2) contains the Quartets Nos. 3, 4, 9, 12, 14, and 17. In Volume 2 (CYB 351) are Nos. 2, 6, and 15. These records are available from Qualiton Imports, Ltd., 39-28 Crescent Street, Long Island City, NY 11101. In April 1985, the Quatuor Auratine recorded Quartets Nos. 10, 11, and 16. In June 1985, they will record three more quartets. These records are scheduled for future release by Cybélia.

MILHAUD STAMP ISSUED IN FRANCE — The Europa stamp in France for 1985 features a 3.00-franc stamp with the portrait of Darius Milhaud. The date of issue was April 29, 1985, and on the same date a 2.10-franc stamp with a picture of Adam de la Halle also appeared. This stamp also relates to Milhaud, since his work Le Jeu de Robin et Marion, commissioned by the Juilliard School of Music in 1948, is based on the play by Adam de la Halle. If you are interested in having a Milhaud stamp, send a self-addressed stamped envelope and $5.00 for each stamp ordered, to the Darius Milhaud Society. The supply is limited.

MADELEINE MILHAUD INVITED TO MILLS COLLEGE — Mme Madeleine Milhaud has received an official invitation from Mills College to be present on Monday, October 14, 1985, for the dedication and celebration of the opening of the new theater in Orthez, which includes a meeting room to be called Hall Darius Milhaud.

Milaud, accompanied by his good friend Léopold Latil, first visited the poet Francis Jammes in Orthez in the summer of 1912, before he was 20 years old. Milhaud’s first opera, La Bérézis Égarée, written to Jammes’ text, was in process, and the young composer introduced the first act to Jammes and his family by playing the piano and singing all the parts himself.

Jammes was responsible for arranging Milhaud’s introduction to Paul Claudel, and Jammes’ poetry was used by Milhaud in Suite de Quatrains, Fontaines et Sources, and Tristesses, as well as in some unpublished vocal works. Milhaud also wrote a very beautiful melody to a Jammes text entitled “Notre Dame de Sarrance,” which refers to a small roadside church near Orthez. The melody was sung, unaccompanied, to 21 verses. Here Milhaud gave proof to his important conviction that melody is the most important element of music.

MILHAUD RECORDING WINS FRENCH “OSCAR” — The Orphée recording award, which is the French equivalent to the well-known American Oscar or, literally speaking, the Grammy, was given recently to the Adès record release of Le Retour de l’Enfant Prodigue. This work is a cantata which Milhaud describes in his autobiography as one he had previously heard in his head as a young adolescent and which he recognized, when he wrote it down, as that indescribable music he had earlier imagined. The recording features French singers with the Orchestra of the Paris Opera, directed by Darius Milhaud. Adès 380. If you want a copy of this record and cannot obtain it, please inform the Darius Milhaud Society.
PLAQUE PLACED AT 10 BOULEVARD DE CLICHY
On November 9, 1984, a plaque was put into place at the Milhauds' Paris home to commemorate it as the dwelling place of Darius Milhaud. The ceremony included three speeches: by Maurice Fleuret, Director of Music at the Ministry of Fine Arts; Henri Sauguet, composer, long-time friend of the Milhauds, the President of the Association des Amis de la Musique de Darius Milhaud; and Claude Roy, writer and also long-time Milhaud friend. The invitations were issued by the office of the Mayor of Paris, and a reception followed the ceremony.

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DARIUS MILHAUD PRIZE ANNOUNCED — On the opening night of the 1984-85 season of the Marseille Opera, public announcement was made of the establishment of the Prix Darius Milhaud, to be awarded for the first time in November 1985. This prize will be given for the best performance of a designated Milhaud work, and for the first competition the categories of eligibility will include piano, violin, viola, and violoncello. Instrumentalists between the ages of 15 and 30 enrolled in conservatories or advanced schools of music in France are eligible to compete, and there will be first-, second-, and third-place awards of 20,000, 15,000, and 5000 French francs.

The Prix Darius Milhaud, under the honorary presidency of Mme Madeleine Milhaud, is sponsored by the Association of the Marseillaize Credit Society for the Development of Regional Culture, which is affiliated with the largest bank in Provence, in southern France.

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ENTRETIENS AVEC CLAUDE ROSTAND — This series of interviews with Darius Milhaud, published in 1952 by Julliard, Paris, is being broadcast by Radio France during May 1985. The interviews are being heard every few days by listeners in Paris and wherever Paris stations are received.

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The Society welcomes your comments in regard to this publication and any aspect of its work. If you would like to receive all mailings from the Society, subscribe to the newsletter ($14.00). Although the Society would like to continue to inform you, the rising costs of assembling, printing, and mailing prohibit the ongoing free distribution of the newsletter. If you would like to become a Friend of the Darius Milhaud Society ($15.00 - $50.00) or to help support even more generously the work to make the beautiful music of Darius Milhaud better known throughout the United States, your tax-deductible gift will be accepted with the warmest gratitude.

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