

Henri Sauguet: La musique, ma vie (1990)

This hefty volume of memoirs, published one year after Henri Sauguet's death, comprises a preface by his adopted son Raphaël Cluzel (1931-96), entitled "Huit cahiers d'écolier" ("Eight School Notebooks", p. 7-10); the memoirs proper (p. 11-372); a chronology of Sauguet's works, edited by Cluzel from a catalogue made by the composer; (p. 373-418); and an epilogue by Jean Roy (1916-2011), "Un regard sur l'œuvre d'Henri Sauguet" (p. 419-429). There is also an insert of black-and-white illustrations showing photographs, letters, and posters.

The preface explains that Sauguet had been determined to publish these memoirs, written between 1976 and 1987, but was prevented from finishing them by the illness that afflicted him from 1987 and ultimately claimed his life. The composer nevertheless felt that he had conveyed "the main things" (p. 8) in the present account, which ends in 1945 with the composition of his ballet *Les Forains*.

In the course of some 360 pages, Sauguet retraces his journey as a musician, from his childhood in a modest Bordeaux family to his middle age in Paris immediately after the War. He reconstructs the major stages of his career: his childhood and musical training, interrupted by the Great War (Chapters 1 to 3); his move to Paris in 1922 and the death of Erik Satie in 1925 (Chapter 4); his collaboration with Diaghilev's Ballets russes for *La Chatte* (Chapters 5 and 6); his growing notoriety and professional network (Chapter 7); his life from 1931 to the premiere of *La Chartreuse de Parme* at the Paris Opera in 1939 (Chapter 8); and finally his life during the Phoney War (during which he was mobilised), the Occupation (which he spent in Paris), and the Liberation (Chapter 9).

Sauguet looks back on the moments and encounters that were most important to him personally and professionally. From his youth, these standouts include his discovery of Claude Debussy's music, the formation of a "Group of Three" in Bordeaux, the crucial support of Milhaud (whom he met in 1920), and, in Paris, the influence of Satie (the mentor of the "École d'Arcueil", which Sauguet joined in 1923) and of his teacher Charles Koechlin. Starting with Chapter 4, the memoirs resemble a chronicle of Parisian musical life as seen by a composer of the generation of Les Six. Sauguet recounts numerous events and anecdotes but says little of music *stricto sensu* - at most, he presents some of his works and shares his tastes without seeking to define precisely his aesthetic or musical language. The value of these memoirs is therefore primarily historical, lying in the narrative of how a composer built his network of colleagues, friends, and supporters (including private patrons) in interwar Paris.

In a romantic turn of phrase Sauguet declares: "My music is my life, and my life is my music", adding that every event had an "emotional, spiritual, and musical" significance for him (p. 212). One learns subsequently that music helped him to

“endure sorrows and pains” (p. 266) and that events, conversely, could inspire composition (“What life gave me, I transformed into music”, p. 352). But he does not delve deeply into these ideas. He occasionally mentions his royalist sympathies, to which he remained faithful without any explicit political engagement. He frequently discusses his relationships with his family, which was very important to him, but is more reserved regarding his romantic life - though hinting at the significance of his meeting with the set designer Jacques Dupont, who would become his companion.

Sauguet also speaks about his extensive correspondence and mentions the newspapers for which he wrote music and theatre reviews: *L'Europe nouvelle*, *Le Jour*, *La Bataille*, and *La Revue hebdomadaire* (p. 306).

The text by Jean Roy included as an afterword sheds light on the fundamentally choreographic and theatrical nature of Sauguet's aesthetic and comments on his major works, including those composed after 1945.

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21/12/2023

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To quote this article: Cécile Quesney, "Henri Sauguet: La musique, ma vie (1990)", Dictionary of Composer's Writings, Dictéco [online], ed. E. Reibel, last edited: 03/03/2025, <https://dicteco.huma-num.fr/book/63667>.