

## Auric, Georges (1899-1983): Summary of His Writings

In 1913, at the age of fourteen, Georges Auric (1899-1983) was introduced by his piano teacher, Louis Combes, to the Lyon-based music critic Léon Vallas. Impressed by the musicality and intelligence of the young prodigy, Vallas quickly offered his support. In particular, he helped Auric at the time of his admittance to the Paris Conservatory by introducing him to the Société Nationale de Musique and commissioning two articles for his *Revue française de musique*, one devoted to [Erik Satie](#) and the other to [César Franck](#) (1913).

After World War I, Auric's writings helped solidify his place at the heart of the Parisian avant-garde. Louis Aragon, André Breton, and Philippe Soupault invited him to contribute to the Dadaist newspaper *Littérature* (1919). Later, in the columns that he published in *Les Nouvelles littéraires* (1922-1926), Auric advocated for Guillaume Apollinaire's "*esprit nouveau*" aesthetic. He condemned anybody who he considered to be lacking in originality or who was too influenced by romanticism or impressionism; at the same time, he defended music that was clean, clear, and lucid. During the 1930s, Auric embraced communist ideas and joined some leftist groups, such as the Fédération Musicale Populaire and the Association des Ecrivains et des Artistes Révolutionnaires. In the pages of *Marianne* (1934-1940) and *Paris-Soir* (1936-1939), he continued to deride music that he considered too conventional, while arguing for music that reached the broadest audience possible. The apogee of his career as a critic was during the German Occupation. As a member of the Front National des Musiciens, he edited the clandestine newspaper *Musiciens d'aujourd'hui*, in which he was surely the author of several anonymous articles. In addition, he contributed to several clandestine issues of *Les Lettres Françaises*, a newspaper published by the Front National des Ecrivains; he continued writing a column and occasional articles for that newspaper after the Liberation until 1948. His writings were collected by Carl Schmidt in a four-volume anthology (*Ecrits sur musique de Georges Auric/Writings on Music by Georges Auric*, 2009).

The second half of his career was marked by administrative responsibilities for various institutions. He was elected the president of SNAC (1945), SACD (1950 and 1974-1975), SACEM (vice-president 1945-1953, multiple terms as president between 1954 and 1978), and CISAC (1968-1969). In addition, he was the director of the Réunion des Théâtres Lyriques Nationaux (1962-1968) and dedicated himself to the Académie du Jazz and the Académie du Disque Français. During this period, the demands of his administrative responsibilities and the intensity of his career as a film composer prevented him from writing music criticism. Although he wrote occasional articles for such newspapers as *Arts* (1952), *Combat* (1955), and *Le Journal Musical Français* (1963), most of his writings after 1948 appeared in other

forms. He wrote personal remembrances of Jean Cocteau (1978), Roger Désormière (1966), Max Jacob (1949), Serge Prokofiev (1965), and Manuel Rosenthal (1964). He also contributed several sets of liner notes, most notably for recordings of Shostakovich's Eleventh Symphony (Angel Records) and Berlioz's *Damnation de Faust* (Deutsche Grammophon). A major figure in French music, he was often asked to contribute prefaces for biographies (of René Clair, Claude Debussy, Louis Durey, Louis Laloy, and Maurice Ravel), exhibition catalogues (for works by Jacques Audiberti, Jean Cocteau, and Max Jacob), and so on. Finally, as a member of the Académie des Beaux-Arts from 1962 until his death in 1983, he wrote several discourses that were published.

In 1979, Bernard Grasset published Auric's memoirs under the title *Quand j'étais là*. Originally, this was intended to be an interview with Claude Mauriac, but the book's final form is a monologue. According to Mauriac, who described their interviews in his journal (*Le Temps Immobile 8: Bergère ô Tour Eiffel*, Grasset, 1985), Auric took charge of all the revisions. At one point, Auric envisioned his memoirs in three volumes, of which *Quand j'étais là* would be the first. However, at the time of his death, he had done no work on the other two volumes. As a result, today we have only a single volume dedicated to his memories related to the well-known figures that he counted among his friends during the 1910s and 1920s. The book features writers (Apollinaire, Léon Bloy, Blaise Cendrars, Jean Cocteau, Henri-Pierre Roché, the Dadaists, and the Surrealists), painters (Juan Gris, Amadeo Modigliani, and Pablo Picasso), musicians (Manuel de Falla, Erik Satie, Igor Stravinsky, Ricardo Viñes, and Les Six), and patrons (Etienne and Edith de Beaumont, Serge Diaghilev, Cipa and Ida Godebski, Charles and Marie de Noailles, and Misia Sert).

A passionate reader from his youth, Auric was a colorful, incisive, and polemical author. Throughout his life, he fought for originality rather than derivative work; he loved, for example, Debussy's music, but not the Debussyists. From time to time, he adopted an almost Freudian perspective, demanding that each generation overthrow the ideas of their predecessors—even when he himself was in that role. As one of the last surviving witnesses of Paris in the 1920s and as somebody who so easily moved between all of the avant-garde groups of that time, Auric's writings present us with an invaluable perspective on this period during which Paris was the center of the artistic world.

Colin ROUST

02/10/2017

Translated 22/05/2020

To quote this article: Colin Roust, "Auric, Georges (1899–1983): Summary of His Writings", *Dictionary of Composer's Writings*, Dictéco [online], ed. E. Reibel, last edited: 25/05/2020, <https://dicteco.huma-num.fr/person/12143>.