

Témoignages

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Témoignages :

N.D.L.R. — *Nous avons posé à dix-sept compositeurs et critiques canadiens les trois questions suivantes :*

1) *Pourriez-vous nous donner vos impressions d'Edgard Varèse, soit à la suite d'un contact personnel, soit à la suite d'une approche de ses oeuvres?*

2) *Est-ce que ses oeuvres vous ont influencé d'une façon quelconque?*

3) *Si non, croyez-vous, tout de même, que ses recherches soient dans le sens d'une musique de l'avenir?*

Nous publions ici toutes les réponses reçues.

1 — Though I am only acquainted with a few of Edgard Varèse's compositions, these have impressed me because of certain qualities which they possess. The chief of these is their vital essence which gives them their reason for being. The works best known to me are: *Ionisation, Octandre, Integrales* and *Density 21.5*.

All these have in common (1) the use of sound conveying the primitive be it in using one line of sound or several combined; (2) the exploring of wide possibilities in range and sonority giving the music at times a tangible three-dimensional feeling of height, depth and a jagged circumference, broad or slender according to the sound; (3) a certain ruggedness refined by a sound of ease though the workmanship is complicated and highly wrought; (4) a highly developed rhythmic approach be it in strong, driving or restrained passages, which conveys the influence of Bartok.

One is aware of the composer's great skill in handling the materials he uses to weave his musical canvas with some of its unusual colors and his mastery of the instrumental medium. There is also a solidity even if not a new approach in his use of form and a fine sense of balance of the elements used.

2 — No, not so far. I still feel I can draw more from simpler means and aim to achieve with these clear and effective combinations of sound, through my contrapuntal, harmonic, instrumental treat-

ment. Nevertheless avenues opening wider musical scope are to be explored. One is much richer for it.

3 — This cannot be too readily answered. Definitely there is a new trend searching for new sonorities, be it in instrumental combinations or in electronic music. This covers a wide territory, not to mention the effective use of silence in the rhythmic scheme, and explorations into contrapuntal rhythm.

In evaluating Varèse one could mention John Cage and not forget the importance of Stravinsky, whose works cover such a colossal span in the realm of sonorities and rhythm, as well as Bartok, even if they never attempted the spatial feeling in the sense which Varèse has done.

Alongside these one must place the Schoenberg of *Pierrot Lunaire*, Berg in a lesser degree and Webern as the foremost of this group, though in their case new sonorities and rhythmic treatment evolve from the exigencies of the tone-row and not from the search for these elements primarily — even if they do co-exist.

Can we predict how much will be woven into the texture of future music of what these composers have written? It would seem an error of omission not to mention the names of Stravinsky and Bartok. In fact their idiom has already become interwoven in to-day's musical speech. Can one say that Varèse's music might be called newer, or is it simply a limb growing out of what Bartok and Stravinsky have written? Certainly compared to the music of Boulez and Stockhausen and the Cologne electronic school, Varèse's music sounds quite tame and of the present rather than of the future. Perhaps it is easier to evaluate his music if one carefully scans music in a similar territory to his.

Speaking in perspective one may venture to say that perhaps this composer's music and that of others writing in a similar idiom, may become interwoven in our future panorama in the same proportion which the sounds of innovators of the flourishing Italian and French Renaissance and later Monteverde, Gesualdo and Giovanni Gabrieli, have become part of our heritage. It is hard to prophecy which of the musical trends that stand out in sharpest relief now will become a widespread language in years to come, yet it is true that what seems almost an isolated trend can change the concept of an era. It is hard to say if Varèse can tower to that height: however, his work must be given the attention it rightfully deserves so that it may be fully appreciated.

Violet Archer

*Assistant Professor of Music
University of Oklahoma.*

Je pense bien que tous ceux qui s'intéressent le moindrement à la musique ont entendu au moins une fois dans leur vie quelque chose de Varèse. Parler d'étonnement, d'ébahissement, d'éblouissement, d'admiration, de révolution, que sais-je encore, serait donc répéter ce que tout le monde sait.

Varèse n'est naturellement pas le seul à faire des expériences sonores aussi audacieuses. D'autres ont eu autant d'imagination que lui dans les recherches de timbres, dans les combinaisons de sons, dans les transformations de rythme. Mais ce qui nous fait croire en lui, c'est sa faculté, sa volonté de renouvellement et sa crainte, son refus de la répétition. Il y a toujours du nouveau chez Varèse et pourtant tout ce qu'il produit ne sent jamais l'effet.

Claude Gingras

critique à "La Presse".

Montréal

* * *

It must have been in 1936 or 1937 that I have first heard of Edgard Varèse. My first impression is still vividly in my mind. I remembered saying that *Octandre*, *Ionisation* etc, must drive a normal person insane. I also thought that his music must have therapeutical effects on the mentally ill.

I have changed my mind since so completely that I am now influenced by this man in my compositions as far as instrumental recoursefulness is concerned. To me, Varèse is just as important as Webern. Both have contributed to the present day musical language and have influenced many.

The music of Varèse is not the music of the future but that of the present. It might be that the masses *will* understand it in the future, but that is no criterion. Highly specialized art is not for the masses or if it is made digestible for the average man, it ceases to be art.

I am not acquainted with Varèse electronic music such as *Deserts*, but if it comes from a masters hand such as his, it must be valuable.

Otto Joachim.

I am not a Varèse fan, although, like anyone seriously interested in music today, I believe his influence on the special field of electronic music has been of the greatest importance. His work in this field has been over-shadowed by the more imaginative personality of Stockhausen, but I am sure even Stockhausen would admit his debt to Varèse's wide ranging experiments.

In the end, Varèse's explorations may be of greater influence than those of the young German, since they have been of a philosophical nature, affecting the entire intellectual approach to music.

Eric McLean,

Music Editor

"The Montreal Star".

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I had the pleasure of meeting Edgard Varèse during the spring of 1952.

His conversation was most stimulating. Here was a man who was completely aware of what was happening in the world of music.

At that time, he was working on his new score called *Deserts*. Little scraps of music paper were scattered about the room like parts of a jig-saw puzzle. I noticed that these scraps contained only a few notes. I believe they may have been the "cells" of his *Deserts*.

He deplored the fact that most composers do not understand acoustics. They are really not aware of what happens to their written notes in actual performance.

Every composer who has considered a percussion piece must be aware of *Ionisation*. It remains the masterpiece of the percussion repertoire.

In listening to the Varèse album recorded a few years ago, one is very much aware that this music (most of which was written in the twenties) has not dated in the least. There is no doubt that Edgard Varèse is one of the great masters of modern music.

Eldon Rathburn