

## PIERRE DE MASSOT

(1900–69)

Pierre de Massot was a writer and journalist and a faithful communist friend of Satie's in the 1920s. He was born Pierre de Massot de Lafond and seems to have acted as a go-between, keeping Satie in touch with the latest news in avant-garde literary and artistic circles. He had close links with Picabia, Cendrars and the Dada movement in Paris and contributed to the journal *391*. He and his wife Robbie often entertained Satie to dinner, though Satie seems to have regarded him as a willing 'dogsbody' who needed the prestige he brought him rather than vice versa.

He was the soul of impatience and couldn't bear to have his pleasures postponed. As an example, I remember one evening when we were walking towards the gare d'Austerlitz to have dinner (I loved these long walks, because Satie knew the history of old Paris down to the last detail and his colourful monologue was entrancing), I made apologies for having to go into a shoe shop as the soles of mine were giving up on me. Satie was furious at being interrupted and at the impending delay of that delightful moment when we would all three sit down outside Le Pied du Mouton. His only response was to grumble: 'Keep walking on them, no one will notice . . . ' and I had to give in so as not to exacerbate his fury.

All the same, this sarcastic old man was more charitable than anyone

towards those whom life had treated roughly or unjustly. I'll give just one example, but a significant one. One night, very late, we arrived at the gare de Sceaux in company with 'le bon maître', as we all called him. Once again, the last train had long gone: too much iced beer, too much calvados and too many stories, sitting outside the tabac Denfert-Rochereau! Satie seem unworried at having nearly two hours' walking ahead of him and, seeing we were anxious about him marching off alone into the darkness, stopped and said: 'You know, dear friends, when I leave you at this time of night and go home on foot, I get to Arcueil around dawn. As I go through the woods, with the birds chirruping all round, and see a large tree with its leaves rustling, I go up to it and throw my arms round it, and as I do so I think: what a good sort, he at least has never harmed anyone! . . . '

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'Quelques propos et souvenirs sur Erik Satie', *ReM*, 214, June 1952, pp. 127–8

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Over a period of some years, I saw Satie every evening. He used to come and collect us, Robbie and me, around 7 o'clock from the rue des Petits-Champs where we then lived, and we used to go and have dinner together. Sometimes it was in the Grill-Room Médicis, sometimes at the Nègre de Toulouse on the boulevard du Montparnasse, at Le Pied du Mouton over near the gare d'Austerlitz, or at Le Stryx in the rue Huyghens. The meal would go on late into the evening, because he was a gourmet of meticulous tastes, and afterwards we'd find our way to the café-tabac on the place Denfert-Rochereau (now a site of historic interest for music historians, as this was where he composed *Parade*). Here [at Le Lion] we'd go on with a discussion which had never really been interrupted, sitting behind glasses of beer and calvados which we'd got into the habit of drinking alternately.

When it was nearly time for the last train to Arcueil, we'd go with him as far as the gare de Sceaux. But as often as not he'd miss this last train and set off on foot, his umbrella under his arm, his bowler hat pulled down over his eyes and his hands in their grey cotton gloves crossed over his stomach.

Any reminiscence of Satie has to say something about his often incisive humour. He was a sceptic *par excellence* and he turned on the world a clear, blue, pitiless eye. No failing, no absurdity, no folly escaped him. And he had an absolutely individual way of making fun of people and things, a mixture of benevolence and cruelty. This comes out most clearly in the articles he published from time to time in avant-garde journals; *Mémoires d'un amnésique* and *Cahiers d'un mammifère* which many of us enjoyed enormously. André Suarès once said: 'Not to be taken in: that's the cardinal rule for wit.' Satie was never taken in by anything or anybody, and still less by himself.

\*'Pomme-en-l'air', as opposed to 'pomme de terre' (potato).

I remember the day we were guests of the painter Francis Picabia in the little village of Tremblay-sur-Mauldre, near Montfort-l'Amaury. Satie was writing the score of *Relâche*, the Picabia ballet which was to provoke such a scandal at its première at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées. Before lunch, Satie took my wife and myself off to have the ritual pernod at a bistro, and after that we strolled through the village and came to the monument dedicated to the fallen in the First World War. Satie leant down, read the names engraved on the stone, and then said, in an inimitably serious voice: 'What! Are those all the dead they can muster? . . .'

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'Quelques propos et souvenirs sur Erik Satie', *ReM*, 214, June 1952, pp. 125-7