

## VINCENT D'INDY — *MUSICIEN FRANCAIS* — AN ACCOUNT OF A SIGNIFICANT FRENCH/AUSTRALIAN LINK

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My purpose is to give an account of an attempt that commenced, some years ago, to bring to the attention of music lovers, and lovers of culture generally, the life and work of a great French musician who, since his death in 1931, has suffered quite a strange and unmerited eclipse. This notable son of France is Vincent d'Indy.

In the final decade of the last century, and the first two or three decades of the present, d'Indy was a great figure in European music. The foremost of the many gifted pupils of César Franck, d'Indy was born a nobleman. Now, I can assure you that this would not be an advantage for one destined to become a fully professional musician, in France or, for that matter, anywhere else. (D'Indy, in fact, rarely, if ever, used his title of Vicomte.) By lifelong, unremitting effort, he became a completely equipped musician — an erudite scholar — an idealist who was, ever, a seeker after truth. Apart from his status as a composer, he ranks as one of the great teachers.

During his long career, interrupted by active service in the Franco-Prussian War, d'Indy carried within himself a burning faith, an idealism, — strangely at war with the growing cynicism of the times in which he lived. This may partly explain his "eclipse", especially when we consider the direction music took in the 1930s.

His first work remains, now, virtually unexplored — a strange and unworthy fate to have befallen one so gifted, and so filled with integrity. D'Indy is not, however, the only example in music of this surprising neglect. The prime example, oddly enough, is that of the greatest, arguably, among all composers — J.S. Bach, whose music was virtually buried, after his death, for a period of 80 years, — until that priceless treasure, the Saint Matthew Passion, was exhumed, and performed in triumph by Mendelssohn in 1829.

In the remaining space available, I must confine myself to a brief account of what has taken place, in Melbourne, in recent years, to further the understanding and the recognition of the contributions made by Vincent d'Indy to our beloved art of music.

In 1920, a young Melbourne musician, Bernard Heinze, after successfully completing a course of study at the Royal College of Music, in London, went to Paris to broaden his studies further, and enrolled at the Schola Cantorum — the famous school of music founded by Vincent d'Indy at the turn of the century.

There, under d'Indy's guidance, he obtained a view of music, theoretical and practical, that was touched by a high idealism, and which was to influence his own career greatly, in later years, as Ormond Professor of Music in the

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Heinze, among other things, was responsible for the first performances, in Australia, of a number of d'Indy's compositions. One in particular is held in great love and admiration by many music lovers today: the "Symphony , for piano and orchestra, on a French Mountaineer's Song". It was my good fortune to study under Sir Bernard (as he later became) in the years just following World War 2 – and it was due to him, really, that I became imbued with the idea of doing something towards the cause of d'Indy.

Before I refer to this in more detail, let me return, in time, to the year 1927, when Mrs Louise Dyer of Melbourne – one of the world's great patrons of music ) left Australia for the United Kingdom, to settle (a few years later) in Paris, and to found there the Lyre-Bird Press (Editions l'Oiseau-Lyre). (The Lyre-Bird has given to the world many other things in addition to its incomparable voice.)

Mrs Dyer had in previous years visited Europe on several occasions and had met d'Indy, as well as other notable French musicians, for example Roussel, Milhaud, and Jacques Ibert. Her specific contribution towards the cause of d'Indy was the issue, in 1951, of a remarkable volume – written as a tribute to d'Indy's life and work – by a former pupil, Joseph Canteloube.

I return, now, to my own modest part. Aided and encouraged by Professor Heinze, I commenced, in 1960, some detailed research on the subject of Vincent d'Indy. Owing to the fact that, after my graduation, I had the good fortune to obtain a position with the Australian Broadcasting Commission, I was able, in time, to initiate some broadcast performances of d'Indy's music during the ensuing years – and the A.B.C. deserves great credit for the expenditure of time and effort, particularly in the acquisition of scores and orchestral material – some of which were unprocurable in Australia.

Some fine performances of certain of the bigger orchestral works eventuated (not only on the part of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, but also the Queensland Symphony Orchestra,) and under such conductors as Clive Douglas, Patrick Thomas, and Leonard Dommatt. I must mention, in addition, the contribution of a very distinguished artist, the pianist Raymond Lambert, who prepared for broadcast over the A.B.C. several of d'Indy's finest works for piano. We are fortunate that one of these, the splendid Sonata for piano, has been preserved on disc.

I have spoken earlier, of d'Indy's great idealism. Let me read to you some of his own words:

L'artiste doit avant tout avoir la Foi, la foi en Dieu, la foi en l'Art [...].

L'artiste doit pratiquer l'Espérance, car il n'attend rien du temps présent; il sait que sa mission est de servir [...].

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L'artiste doit être touché de la sublime Charité, "la plus grande des trois"; aimer est son but, car l'unique principe de toute création c'est le grand, le divin, le charitable Amour.

I would like to read you a comment, in regard to these words of d'Indy, by the French writer and humanist, Romain Rolland:

Who speaks like this? Is it the monk, Denys, in his cell at Mount Athos? – or Cennini, who spread the pious teachings of the School of Giotto? – or one of the old painters of Siena who, in their profession of faith, called themselves; – "by the grace of God, those who manifest marvellous things to common and unlettered men –"

– No; – it is the Director of the Schola Cantorum, addressing his students on the subject of Musical Composition.

It would be interesting to conjecture how this kind of purity and fervour would be received by students of composition today – Not too well, I fear, – and more's the pity!

I return now, to the year 1960, when I wrote to d'Indy's nephew – M. Guy de Lioncourt, – himself a distinguished musician, and Director of the Ecole César Franck, in Paris. I had written to M. Lioncourt telling him of my aims, and of the progress I had so far made. I cannot do better than to include, here, his brief but most touching letter in reply.

Your letter moves me profoundly, and it is with the utmost pleasure that I see a stranger from afar (in terms of distance) fully appreciate at his true value my own Master – often now forgotten, or insufficiently appreciated.

I am sending to you a book I have written, entitled "Un Témoignage", which is aimed at remedying these very faults. I am qualified to write it – because I was a pupil of d'Indy, secretary of his Schola Cantorum during 18 years, his successor there, and editor of the final volume of his great Treatise on Musical Composition – finally, the husband of his niece and, because of this I spent (with my wife) many holidays in intimate association with him. My book will tell you all that I would be able to say regarding the personality of my Master.

(The letter continues with some specific references to matters of research raised in my letter.)

Then, finally:

Excuse my brevity – due to the fact that I am in poor health at present and am, in fact, confined to bed – but please believe, monsieur, that your letter has brought a most sincere understanding and response from me.

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In the two years of life remaining to him, M. Lioncourt was wonderfully helpful to me, in many ways that I could never repay — although I am quite sure that he would never have thought of it like that. His family, and members of the fine College that he directed have, since, continued to encourage my work.

What then, has resulted from the various activities I have outlined above and that were commenced long ago by Sir Bernard Heinze, aided so materially by Mrs Louise Dyer, Raymond Lambert, the A.B.C. and, now, carried on by myself? Well, there has been over the years following the death of Vincent d'Indy a gradual but sure growth, here, in the recognition of his life and work where, elsewhere in the world, even in most of Europe and in the United Kingdom, there has been virtually, a sad eclipse.

The record of performances of the music of d'Indy in this country, and also the knowledge and appreciation, here, of his life and work, have been the cause of happiness, not to say surprise and gratitude, to his admirers in France. My association with this cause has resulted, now, in the completion of a quite substantial book — written as a tribute to d'Indy, the man, the composer, the scholar, and the educator. This book still awaits publication — and I must be honest and say that the prospects for this do not, at present, appear very bright. Extracts from it have, however, been copied and have been very favourably received in a number of places, both here and overseas.

We have reason to feel that the cause of this great musician of France has not been undertaken here in vain and that, providing interest can be maintained, it will continue to bear fruit.

*Melbourne*