

CECILE CHAMINADE

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I do not know why I have been invited to write an article on Cécile Louise Stephanie Chaminade who was born in Paris on 8 August 1857. Her music is not of great stature and is often very poor and of no real purpose. In fact she is often misguided as with her inept Piano Concerto, sometimes known as a Concertstucke, and many of her solo piano works sound like pretty tunes and nothing else. Her attempts at large scale works were all unsuccessful.

She studied at first with her mother, then with Félix Le Couppey with regard to the piano with, Marie Gabriel Augustin Savard, Martin Pierre Marsick for the violin, and Benjamin Godard in music composition, but not officially, since her father disapproved of her musical education.

Her first experiments in composition took place in very early days, and in her eighth year she played some of her sacred music to Georges Bizet, who was polite with her talents and to encourage the young girl. She gave her first concert when she was eighteen, and, from that time on, her work as a composer gained steadily in favour among those who enjoyed salon music. She wrote mostly character pieces for piano, and salon songs, almost all of which were published.

It has been rightly said that her music is nothing but melodies and tunes and some say that without melodies and tunes music is not music. This is a frequent and nonsensical remarks. Music does not need melodies and tunes and much of the greatest music does not have these.

She toured France several times in those earlier days, and, in 1892, made her debut in England, where her work was initially popular because it was lightweight and never profound.. Isidor Philipp, head of the piano department of the Paris Conservatory, championed her works. She repeatedly returned to England during the 1890s and made premieres there with singers such as Blanche Marchesi and Pol Plançon, though this activity decreased after 1899 due to bad critical reviews. Her work is lightweight and superficial.

Chaminade married a music publisher from Marseilles, Louis-Mathieu Carbonel, in 1901, and on account of his advanced age the marriage was rumoured to be one of convenience. He died in 1907, and Chaminade did not remarry.

In 1908, she visited the United States, and was accorded a very hearty welcome from her admirers there. Her compositions were favourites with the American public who welcomed easy listening music, and such pieces as the Scarf Dance or the Ballet No. 1 were to be found in the music libraries of many lovers of piano music of the time. She composed a Konzertstück for piano and orchestra, the ballet music to Callirhoé and other orchestral works. Her songs, such as The Silver Ring and Ritournelle, were originally popular. Ambroise Thomas once said of Chaminade: "This is not a woman who composes, but a composer who is a woman".. In 1913, she was awarded the Légion d'Honneur, a first for a female composer of which there were very few at this time. In London in 1903, she made gramophone recordings of seven of her compositions for the Gramophone and Typewriter Company; these are among the most sought-after piano recordings by collectors, though they have been reissued

on compact disk. Before and after World War I, Chaminade recorded many piano rolls, but as she grew older, she composed less and less, dying in Monte Carlo on 13 April 1944.

Chaminade was relegated to obscurity for the second half of the 20th century, her piano pieces and songs mostly forgotten, apart from the Flute Concertino in D major, Op. 107, composed for the 1902 Paris Conservatoire Concours, her most popular piece today.

Chaminade's sister married Moritz Moszkowski, also a well-known composer and pianist like Cécile.

Though many of Chaminade's piano compositions received a few good reviews from critics, many of her other endeavours and more serious works did not, though, some say, this may have been due to gender prejudices. whereas the truth is that her music had no depth or purpose. Most of her compositions were published during her lifetime and were financially successful. They were purchased by people who could not cope with the developed style of Beethoven and the great composers.

Chaminade's music has been described as tuneful, highly accessible and mildly chromatic, and typically follows most aspects of late-Romantic French music but, in the main, it is anemic. It is the work of an amateur. Music which is just melody and tunes is impoverished. Music needs more.

Works include

- Op. 11 Piano Trio No. 1 in G minor (1880)
- Op. 19 La Sévillane, comic opera (1882)
- Op. 20 Suite d'Orchestre (1881)
- Op. 21 Piano Sonata in C minor (1893)
- Op. 26 Symphonie Dramatique 'Les Amazones' (1884)
- Op. 34 Piano Trio No. 2 in A minor (1886)
- Op. 35 Six Études de Concert (Enoch) (1886)
- Op. 37 Callirhoë. Ballet symphonique (1888)
- Op. 40 Concertstück in C sharp minor for piano and orchestra 1888
- Lolita (Caprice espagnol) Op. 54
- Op. 107 Concertino for flute and orchestra in D major (1902)
- Op. 117 Duo Symphonique for 2 pianos (1905)
- Op. 120 Variations sur un Thème original (1906)

Songs:

- Les rêves (1891)
- Te souviens-tu? (1878)
- Auprès de ma mie (1888)
- Voisinage (1888)
- Nice la belle (1889)
- Rosemonde (1878)
- L'anneau d'argent (1891)
- Plaintes d'amour (1891)
- Viens, mon bien-aimé (1892)
- L'Amour captif (1893)
- Ma première lettre (1893)

Malgré nous (1893)
Si j' étais jardinier (1893)
L'Été (1894)
Mignonne (1894)
Sombbrero (1894)
Villanelle (1894)
Espoir (1895)
Ronde d' amour (1895)
Chanson triste (1898)
Mots d' amour (1898)
Alléluia (1901)
Écrin (1902)
Bonne humeur! (1903)
Menuet (1904)
La lune paresseuse (1905)
Je voudrais (1912)
Attente (Au pays de provence) (1914)

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