

Hahn, Reynaldo (1874-1947): brief presentation of his writings

According to his friend Marcel Proust, Reynaldo Hahn (1874-1947) has a “temper of a literary musician” (letter to Suzette Lemaire, [mi-November 1894]). He began writing around 1890 by keeping his diary and through his correspondence. His regular exchange of letters with Edouard Risler, his friend at the conservatory - who until 1893 frequently stays in Germany to master his piano with several of Liszt's students - is of great importance. Aesthetic exchanges around Wagnerism and the value of French music (Saint-Saëns, Massenet, Fauré) dominate the two young men's discourse and testify to their mutual passion for probing the future of musical creation at the very end of the 19th century.

In 1897, this literary expression became public with Hahn's first music reviews in *Le Gaulois*. Under the title “Journée parisienne” (Parisian Day), he reported in November and December on the series of “intimate concerts” organized by Édouard Colonne at the Nouveau-Théâtre. From 1907 onwards, this journalistic activity was supplemented by his work as a lecturer, which took on its full scope in November 1913 with his lectures on singing at the Université des Annales, first published as a review and then in volume form. We should also mention both of his functions as a translator with the “literal translation in prose” of the Italian libretto *Don Giovanni* of Da Ponte (Paris : Nouvelle Imprimerie, Thivet, [1903-1912]) and the English translation of the novel *The Coward* written by Robert-Hugh Benson (*Le Poltron*, in *La Revue hebdomadaire*, 7 June-6 September 1919, then in volume, Paris : Fayard, 1922).

Music criticism occupies a central place in the Hahnian corpus, since it is practised throughout his career, with periods of interruption during the two World Wars and the 1920s, the latter corresponding to his musical direction of the Cannes and Deauville casino theatres. After his early days at the *Gaulois* (November-December 1897), extended in *La Presse* (May-December 1899), he regularly collaborated, with specific reference to his critical activity, at *La Flèche* (November 1904-January 1905), *Femina* (April 1908-July 1910), *Nouvelles* (December 1908-May 1909), *Journal* (June 1909-July 1914), *Excelsior* (May 1919-December 1921), *Radio-magazine* (December 1931-January 1932) and at the *Figaro* (June 1934-September 1939, March-June 1945). He could also, from time to time, be asked to cover certain concerts, as it was the case in 1912 by the *S. I. M. : revue musicale*. About half of his chronicles in the *Figaro* are reissued in two works, according to a thematic arrangement : in 1937 at Gallimard, under the title [*L'Oreille au guet*](#), and in 1946 at J.-B. Janin, under the label [*Thèmes variés*](#) (completed in December 1945).

As Vincent Giroud expressed it, Hahn's criticism is characterised by eclecticism. If vocal music and ballet dominate, all the performing arts, even the most popular ones, are treated there, as well as all media (cinema, radio, record). Attached to tradition, classical writing and style, he castigates the schools and the spirit of the system, the avant-garde which seeks originality only for itself and believes in progress in art, and mocks amateurism often linked to snobbery. Stylistically, Giroud sees in him the influence of Sainte-Beuve in his rejection of hyperbole, his taste for the tone of conversation and certain rhetorical devices such as understatement, preterition, ironic antiphrases and prosopopeia. Enamelled with numerous literary references and always tempered by humour, Hahn's judgements reflect a cosmopolitan spirit, resistant to overestimations of principle.

Other intermittent collaborations at *Annales politiques et littéraires*, *Marianne*, *Ménestrel*, *Monde musical*, *Musica*, or the *Nouvelle Revue française*, etc., have more to do with journalism, musical popularisation, artistic testimony or profession of faith. Related to this are the numerous lectures published, including those delivered at the Université des Annales, between November 1913 and March 1946, which constitute the subject of 39 articles. Those dedicated to the vocal art, published in 1914-1915, are gathered in the volume *Du chant* by the Éditions Pierre Lafitte in 1920. The other covered themes are mainly about the lied and the melody (from Schubert to Ravel), lyrical art (Lully, Gluck, Offenbach, Gounod, Bizet, Massenet) and Mozart's work.

Another notable part of the Hahnian bibliography comes from his journal; it is mainly made of two works. In *La Grande Sarah : souvenirs* (Paris : Hachette, 1930), the composer delivers the notes taken on a daily basis between 1895 and the 1910s in Sarah Bernhardt's intimacy. Ethel Thompson's English translation is the only one mentioning the dates of the episodes presented. It follows the actress in her Parisian home and theatre, during one of her trip to Belle-Île, and to her tours in the provinces, in London and Brussels. Beyond the daily portrait of the performer, Hahn acutely observes the development of her theatrical play in its deepening and its inventiveness. In *Notes (journal d'un musicien)* (Paris : Librairie Plon, 1933), he proposes a selection of other intimate records, made up of accounts of encounters (Gustave Moreau, Pauline Viardot, Hortense Schneider, etc.), incisive narratives on his social life, impressions from his travels, and aesthetic judgements relating to all the arts, but excluding the modern ones. Preceded by "Fragments d'un journal" (on Rome and Venice) in *La Revue hebdomadaire*, October 1928, and supplemented by "new unpublished souvenirs" in *Candide*, August and September 1935, these notes testify to the storytelling qualities, the finesse of spirit and the immense culture of one who considered himself, not without affectation, as "a second-hand writer" whose "French [was] not even [his] mother tongue" ("Avant-propos", *Notes*).

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01/10/2017

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For further information :

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To quote this article: Philippe Blay, "Hahn, Reynaldo (1874-1947): brief presentation of his writings", Dictionary of Composer's Writings, Dictéco [online], ed. E. Reibel, last edited: 05/06/2020, <https://preprod.dicteco2.ihrim.fr/person/24778>.