

A Hymn in Praise of the Critics

*Those Whistling Bell-Buoys Who Indicate the
Reefs on the Shores of the Human Spirit*

By Eric Satie

LADIES, young ladies, gentlemen,
It is not chance which has led me to choose this subject.

It is grateful recognition, . . . for I am almost as ready to offer recognition as to be recognized.

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Last year I gave a long lecture on:

Intelligence and Musical Qualities among the Animals.

To-day I will speak to you about:

Intelligence and Musical Qualities among the Critics.

. . . Approximately the same theme—with, naturally, a few modifications.



ERIK SATIE

DRAWING BY PABLO PICASSO

In his music, Satie is a satiric clown, a fantastic juggler, a serious mixer of nonsense. In the present series of articles—this is the first—Satie uses words with only a slightly less mordant humor

THE world does not know the Critics well enough;—it is ignorant of what they have done of what they may yet do.

They are not only the Creators of Criticism—that master of all the Arts—but they are the freest thinkers in our modern society—social free thinkers, if I may so express myself.

It was a Critic who posed for Rodin's *Thinker*—

Rodin had a weakness for the Critics—a great weakness—

Their advice was dear to him—very dear—too dear, most expensive, in fact—

There are three kinds of Critics:—those who have importance;—those who have less importance;—those who have no importance at all—

The last two kinds do not exist:—all Critics have IMPORTANCE.

* * *

The Critic, physically, has a serious aspect: He is a sort of mental and physical double-bass 'cello.

He is a center in himself—a center of gravity——

If he laughs, he does so only on one side of his face—either the right side, or the wrong side——

Always very amiable with the Ladies, he calmly keeps Gentlemen at a distance——

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Mediocrity or incapacity are not encountered among Critics—A mediocre or incapable Critic would be the laughing stock of his comrades; it would be impossible for him to exercise his profession—his mission, I mean; he would be obliged to leave his country—All doors would be closed to him.—His life would be a long martyrdom.

THE Artist is only a dreamer,—after all.—The Critic has the consciousness of Reality—and of his own importance.

An Artist can be imitated;—the Critic is inimitable—and priceless——

How could one imitate a Critic?—I ask myself that.—Well, at any rate, the interest in so doing would be rather thin—very thin: We have the original—HE IS SUFFICIENT.

Whoever said that Criticism is easy, did not say anything worth saying.

It is really a shameful thing to have said.—The man who wrote down such a sentiment should be pursued—for at least a mile—or two.—Possibly, however, he regrets his remark.—It is possible; it is likely—IT IS CERTAIN!

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The mind of a Critic is a store—a department store.

One finds in it a little of everything—science;—bedding;—the arts;—travelling rugs;—writing paper—foreign and domestic;—history;—smokers' outfits;—languages;—umbrellas;—belles-lettres;—woolen goods;—sporting apparel;—humour;—eyeglasses;—perfumery,—etc.

The Critic knows everything,—sees everything,—tells everything,—hears everything,—touches everything,—investigates everything,—eats everything,—confuses everything.

What a man!!!

* * *

The Critic is also a lookout,—a bell-buoy, as it were——

He indicates the reefs which border the shores of the Human Spirit;—near these shores—the Critic watches with superb clairvoyance——

From a distance he looks a little like a log—a sympathetic and intelligent log, of course.

* * *

How does he reach that high position—the situation of bell-buoy, or floating log?

* * *

By his merit—his personal merit——

WE have now reached a delicate point——

* * *

It is the Editor of a paper, a re-

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view, or any other periodical—who discovers the Critic.

He discovers him after severe examination——

This examination is very long and very painful,—as well for the Critic as for the Editor——

One asks questions;—the other is on his guard.—It is an agonizing conflict,—full of surprises — all sorts of strategy are employed by both parties.—Finally the Editor is vanquished. The Editor is absorbed—by the Critic——

It is extremely rare that the Editor recovers——

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The true critical sense consists, not in criticising oneself but in criticising others;—and the beam in one's own eye does not in the least prevent a clear view of the straw in one's neighbor's eye;—in such a case, the beam becomes a telescope which enlarges the afore- in an amazing manner——

WE cannot too profoundly admire the courage of the first Critic who ever appeared in the world——

* * *

The brutal denizens of the Dawn of History must have received him with blows and insults, not realizing that he was a Precursor, a man worthy of the utmost reverence——

In his way, he was a hero.

The second, third, fourth, and fifth Critics were probably no better received,—but they helped to create a precedent:——

Then the Critics began propagating themselves.

Later on,—these Benefactors of Humanity learned how to organize themselves;—they founded Critical Unions in all the great capitals.——

Critics thus became personages,—which proves that Virtue is always rewarded——

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Let us thank the Critics for the sacrifices they make daily for our good.—Let us ask a kind Providence to protect them against sickness;—to spare them all worries;—to give them large quantities of children of all kinds—who will continue their noble breed.



Satie by Picasso

(image added)