

# PAULET THEVENAS, PAINTER AND RYTHMATIST

*Whose Cult Proclaims a Relation Between Sculpture, Painting and Dancing*

BY MARIE LOUISE VAN SAANEN

**T**HAT a painter should be a dancer is not strange in these days when everybody dances. But Paulet Thévenas, the Paris painter, is spoken of as a "Rhythmician," in the serious way that another might be called a Swedenborgian or a Theosophist. The word expresses, in the case of himself and his very serious followers, a practice based on a definite theory. To put it as simply as possible, the Rhythmicians believe that there is a necessary relation between music, or rather dance music, and sculpture and painting, and that all are very necessary to each other.

It was some time before the Great War that some of the friends of Jacques Delcroze started the systematic cultivation of the *Gymnastique Rhythmique*, in a big room of an old house opposite the Luxembourg Gardens. Thévenas was soon recognized as the leader of the "movement," and being a Swiss—he comes from Geneva and so is a neutral—has been able to give his attention to it, which would not have been the case if he had had to go to the front like most of his associates.



PORTRAIT OF LA COMTESSE MATHIEU DE NOAILLES



IGOR STRAVINSKY, THE RUSSIAN COMPOSER



PAUL THEVENAS

And some examples of his style in portraiture

**S**HELLEY said that most wretched poets "learned in suffering what they taught in song." Thévenas believes that an artist should try to express in paint what he has learned in dancing, and, conversely, try to express in dancing what he has learned in painting. To him dancing must have an actually spiritual or intellectual side; must express precise thought and governed imagination. He finds fault with much of the dancing of the theater, because it is lacking in this respect. He has converted the Paris Opera authorities to his views, for he has been allowed to form a class for the instruction of members of the Ballet, to improve the relations between the dancers and the orchestra. Thus he is the first to apply the Delcroze methods to the operatic stage.

**I**T is only in the matter of the views on the subject of the relation of dancing to painting that Thévenas consents to wear a label. As far as this is concerned he is a Rhythmatist. As a painter he refuses to admit that he belongs to any "school," or follows any master.

When asked once what was the symbol of his vision, as an artist, he answered "Crystal!" The word is illuminating. It expresses clarity, harmony of form, precision, concentration, mass, mystery of design and brightness. All these things his admirers find in the painter's work.

Thévenas works in water colors, because in that medium he finds, rather than in oils, the transparency and precision for which he seeks. There is a great variety in his portraits, showing that

his procedure in each case has been influenced by the physical and intellectual qualities of his subject. The qualities to be found in his portraits of the Comtesse de Noailles and of Igor Stravinski are also to be discovered in his landscapes. Each picture has its own personality, its own radiant life. His drawings of figures rendering the dance, as realized by the *Gymnastique Rhythmique*, are spirited studies of free movement, but free movement showing a consciousness of the exact relation between musical notes and controlled muscular obedience.



COMTESSE E. DE BEAUMONT



JEAN COCTEAU, THE FUTURIST POET