

## BOOK REVIEW

**Kerry Murphy and Jennifer Hill, eds. *Pursuit of the New: Louise Hanson-Dyer, Publisher and Collector***

Melbourne: Lyrebird Press, 2023

ISBN: 9780734038012 (pbk). ISSN: 1325 5266. 283pp., 60 ills

**Reviewed by Sylvia Kahan**

*Pursuit of the New: Louise Hanson-Dyer, Publisher and Collector* is an outgrowth of a 2018 conference hosted by the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music at the University of Melbourne on the occasion of the arrival in Australia of the archives of the Éditions de l'Oiseau-Lyre (henceforth, EOL); this important collection subsequently was incorporated into the holdings of the University of Melbourne Library. Edited by Kerry Murphy and Jennifer Hill, the conference organisers, this rich, informative collection of essays details the artistic and philanthropic activities in Australia and France of Melbourne-born Louise Hanson-Dyer (1884–1962). Hanson-Dyer's remarkable forty-year career as an art collector, music publisher, and supporter of early and modern music deserves more recognition, and one hopes that this volume will inspire further research.

In Chapter 1, which opens the first ('Melbourne to Paris') of four parts, Kerry Murphy provides a succinct overview of Hanson-Dyer's significance in Australian cultural history. After her first marriage in 1911 to the much older James Dyer, a wealthy industrialist and arts-lover, the young woman quickly established herself in Melbourne as a formidable and benevolent arts patron and salon hostess. In 1928, the Dyers moved to Paris, where Louise Dyer established the EOL for which she is known today. Murphy outlines the overarching themes that recur throughout the volume: the significance of transnationalism; the importance of networking; female patronage and concomitant gender issues; and what Murphy dubs 'the pursuit of the new' (p. 6). Chapter 2, by art historian Gerard Vaughan, outlines the passion of Louise Dyer's parents for collecting art, both Australian and international, which served both to mould the young woman's tastes in her early years. Vaughan emphasises that the art works to which she was exposed during this period were of high quality but of a conservative bent. She began to broaden her tastes in the early years of her marriage, when she became a prime mover in

Melbourne's social and cultural milieu, but it was only after the couple's move to Paris that Louise Dyer expanded her tastes and interests to include modernist art. 'There is a parallel,' writes Vaughan, 'between the kind of artists she naturally gravitated towards in both Melbourne and Paris—those whose concept of artistic expression was all-embracing, ranging from picture making to print making and design (including fashion), to dance and, above all, music' (p. 27).

Sarah Kirby takes up this theme of eclecticism and internationalism in Chapter 3, which focuses on Dyer's involvement with the Victorian branch of the British Music Society (BMS). Under Dyer's influence, the programming of the BMS reflected the desire to foster music 'of all nations and of every period' (p. 40). Thus, while works by British contemporary composers (Bridge, Delius, Bax, etc.) formed the backbone of many programmes, the BMS also presented concerts devoted exclusively to self-identifying Australian composers, allowing them to develop a distinct ethnic and cultural identity distinct from 'British' concerts. A further aim of the BMS was 'to foster the spirit of International Music.' Thus, guided by Dyer's desire to present music in 'a comparative, educational manner,' a string quintet by Elgar might be programmed alongside a quartet by Beethoven. Early music—especially early English music—was given pride of place as well; in programmes, it was usually juxtaposed with new music: the Britishness of scenes from Purcell's *King Arthur* was contrasted with that of Vaughan Williams's *The Lark Ascending*. With its 'focus on both early and contemporary music stretching far beyond Britain[,] the BMS acted as a microcosm of the global reach of Dyer's future ambitions, which would fully come to fruition in Editions de l'Oiseau-Lyre' (p. 35).

Part II, 'Publisher of Monumental Editions', provides a fascinating narrative of the work for which Louise Dyer is best known: the creation of the EOL. After the move with her husband to Paris in 1928, Dyer pledged to 'devote all her time, all her fortune to the glory of the music of *our country*' (p. 57, italics mine). In effect, according to Kerry Murphy, in Chapter 4, 'she was clearly looking for a way to channel her energy; she was busy, but also restless' (p. 57). She quickly attached herself to esteemed musicologist and critic Henry Prunières. Prunières, who was also publisher of *La revue musicale*, was planning a complete edition of the music of Baroque composer Jean-Baptiste Lully, and Dyer agreed to subsidise the publication. In Melbourne, Dyer had been manager-in-chief of every aspect of her cultural and musical activities: impresario, concert programmer, designer of the printed programs, and so forth; in the portrait painted by Murphy (and others, in subsequent chapters), Dyer was a music patron who served as her own best counsel and brooked no opposition in her artistic decision-making. In Paris, however, Dyer soon came up against the entrenched Gallic gender biases of the men who dominated Paris's cultural institutions, including publishing. In the Lully project, Dyer viewed herself as the publisher; Prunières viewed her solely as the benefactor: 'It is not so clear that he understood the scope of her ambitions. But nor did Dyer comprehend the complexities of producing such a monumental edition' (p. 61). Complications and misunderstandings ensued. Ultimately, Dyer's frustrations at being treated like a subordinate was the driving force behind her decision to found her own music press and to give other women positions of prominence in the preparation and production of the volumes. Her first project was a complete edition of the works of François Couperin and she learned quickly how much relentless, detail-oriented work went into the preparation of a monumental edition. She was a demanding and fussy overseer who erupted when production was delayed or was not up to her exacting standards.

In Chapter 5, Catherine Massip provides the backstory of the musicological issues and discussions that went into the decision-making for the Couperin edition. Originally, esteemed scholar André Tessier was to have led the musicological team (comprised largely of members of the Société française de musicologie) and the fundraising efforts for the Couperin volumes, but Tessier's sudden death in 1931 led to the creation of a second team, some of whose approaches were found controversial by the original group of scholars. Subsequently, the music press added fuel to the fire. However, by dint of nonstop work, the twelve volumes of the Couperin edition were produced by the EOL within a scant two years. In Chapter 6, Susan Daniels examines the difficulties encountered by Dyer—a 'non-French female, and from the new world'—through a feminist lens. Her binarist approach to gender seems a bit dated, especially given Judith Butler's new approaches to gender construction and her influence on third-wave feminism: we do not need to be reminded that early twentieth-century women who were mavericks were considered 'transgressors' (p. 97). And, while the chapter is informative and impressively researched, Daniels does not really prove her thesis that Dyer used traditional French attitudes about femininity (grace, charm, elegance) to argue for the cementing of Couperin's place in the French musical canon—and, consequently, for the necessity of a new, scholarly edition of the composer's complete works. Dyer's audacious solicitation of French president Albert Lebrun's support for the project and her shrewd choices in building its patronage committee is a compelling enough story on its own, and Daniels is most successful when she sticks to the narrative. The recompense for Dyer's herculean efforts are detailed in Chapter 7, by Rachel Orzech, which summarizes the laudatory press accounts of the new Couperin edition; Orzech offers the delightfully wry observation that 'Dyer's emphasis on her engagement of French expertise and craftsmanship [...] allowed her to suggest that the French could be proud of the edition while also being slightly embarrassed that they had not instigated it themselves' (p. 119).

Part III, 'Visual Arts', details the integral part that artistic images, graphic arts, design layout, and other production values played in the success of the EOL. Chapter 8, by Thalia Laughlin and Carina Nandlal, focuses on the pivotal role played by decorative artist Rose Adler, who was responsible for the distinctive and attractively modernist covers designs of the EOL's publications, starting with the Couperin edition and continuing with instructional materials, works by other composers, and record covers. Even in reproduction, the power and imagination of these designs jump off the page. In Chapter 9, Gerard Vaughan expands on his thesis, introduced in Chapter 2, that Dyer 'placed great emphasis on art and design as if seeking to create a connection, almost a synthesis, between music and visual culture' (p. 149). Vaughan provides a you-are-there tour of the Dyers' Paris residence on Rue Franklin and their small but impressive art collection, comprising, among others, works by Zadkine, Ernst, and Picasso, as well as a previously unidentified sculpture by the Martel Brothers that renders homage to Claude Debussy. As Vaughan recounts in Chapter 10, during one of Dyer's sojourns in Melbourne, a fruitful patronage relationship with Australian modernist painter and designer Sam Atyeo led to a commission to design fanciful music covers for EOL, including a cover for a new Couperin publication (p. 180). The next part of the chapter examines Dyer's involvement as a 'senior organizer' of an exhibition of modern and avant-garde art, comprised of works brought specially to Australia for the occasion. After the death of her husband James Dyer in 1938, Louise became involved with—and was later married to—Jeff Hanson, whom she married just before the outbreak of World War II.

Part IV, 'New and the Old', opens with a chapter by Kerry Murphy and Madeline Roycroft that examines Dyer's patronage of French modernist composers, whose music she presented in Australia through the auspices of the BMS 'as an almost moral imperative' (p. 198). In Paris, Dyer became involved with the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM) and Le Triton, a Paris-based chamber music society. In the 1930s, EOL undertook to publish contemporary French music. Its first publication was *Pipeaux, melodies* (1934), a collection of short pieces for bamboo pipe, an instrument viewed at the time as an 'accessible, democratic vehicl[e] for introducing children and amateurs to the rudiments of music making' (p. 201). The names of the composers whose works appear in the collection are listed on page 202: it is unfortunate that those names were not also listed in the caption of Figure 8.7, where an image of the cover, designed by Rose Adler, first appears. EOL also championed, through recordings and publications, French music for reed trio. Chapter 12, by Isabelle Ragnaud, discusses Dyer's relationship with French musicologist and librarian Yvonne Rokseth, who served as an editor and advisor for EOL's major medieval-music project: the publication of *Polyphonies du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, which produced scores (based on the Montpellier manuscript), discs, and concerts. Rokseth's impressive scholarly career is examined in detail. Although the collaboration between the publisher and the musicologist was largely fruitful, both Dyer and Rokseth were strong, hardworking, opinionated women, and frictions arose. When Dyer decided to give a *faux*-medieval title to a forthcoming publication of *Six 13<sup>th</sup>-Century Chansons*, Rokseth deemed the decision 'deplorable'; Dyer, in turn was angry that a musicologist should try to overstep her prerogative as a publisher (p. 225). Rokseth died in 1948 of a cerebral hemorrhage, thus ending a productive collaboration. The chapter is followed by an appendix, assembled by Isabelle Ragnaud, of all the medieval and early Renaissance music 78 rpm discs released by EOL.

The one shortcoming of this wonderful volume is the near-total absence of images of any pages of music from the Couperin publications to complement the wealth of reproductions of album covers. The reproduction of a single, poorly printed page from the *Pièces de clavecin* (p. 99) does not serve as a satisfying representative of the whole collection. It would have been instructive to know more about the design and layout of these scores and to see what performing musicians would have seen in the 1930s. This caveat notwithstanding, *Pursuit of the New* is an illuminating portrait of an important and influential women who left a musical and artistic legacy that broke new ground, and continues to influence those interested in modernism in all its forms, right up to the present day.

#### **About the Author**

Sylvia Kahan is Professor of Music at the Graduate Center and College of Staten Island, City University of New York. Author of the award-winning *Winnaretta Singer-Polignac: Princesse, mécène et musicienne* (Les Presses du réel, 2018), her research focuses on musical salon culture, the role of women as music patrons and 'influencers' in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century France, and French press coverage of musical activity, both public and private. She is currently completing an annotated edition of the diaries of Marie-Blanche de Polignac.