

# Germaine Tailleferre's *Concerto pour Piano et 12 Instruments*

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Germaine Tailleferre (1892-1983), distinguished not merely as the only woman in the circle of composers known as *Les Six*, but as a twentieth-century French composer who "builds a bridge between the contemporary mode and classical tradition,"<sup>1</sup> dedicated her "Concerto pour Piano et 12 Instruments" to the great Parisian patroness of avant-garde music, Princess Edmond of Polignac, whose husband was a composer of some note. Tailleferre participated in the musical evenings at the salon of the princess where one could hear the pianist Artur Schnabel and the music of Igor Stravinsky. On various occasions she performed piano reductions of Stravinsky's *Petrushka*, *Rite of Spring*, and *Firebird*.

At the end of 1923 the princess commissioned Tailleferre to write the concerto. The composition was begun at the Polignac's family residence and completed on January 26, 1924, in Bouzaréah, Algeria. Premiered on December 3, 1924, in London by the British Women's Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Gwynneth Kimpton, with Alfred Cortot as soloist, the concerto was well received, and Tailleferre, who was present at the premiere, was hailed as progressive by the critics. Subsequent performances were directed by Serge Koussevitzky.

The manuscript consists of seventy-nine pages (seventy-seven pages of music), each measuring 24 cm. by 32 cm. The dedication to Princess Edmond of Polignac appears on the second page. On the cover of the manuscript is the remark "pour Monsieur Cortot," written in Tailleferre's hand. It is certain that the manuscript was once part of the Alfred Cortot collection. In fact, a letter from Tailleferre to Cortot states that the concerto was being sent to him via the publisher Heugel. Cortot's green monogram is stamped throughout the manuscript.

Cortot was a champion of the new French piano music of his day, as well as a systematic collector. He meticulously cataloged his substantial musical library. The autograph manuscripts in the collection were acquired by Robert Owen Lehman in the spring of

1962.<sup>2</sup> Many of these were placed on deposit at the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York. Tailleferre's concerto was subsequently sold for Lehman by the manuscript dealer J. A. Stargardt. Ultimately the piece found its home in the Moldenhauer Archives.



In her memoirs Tailleferre included the following comment by Stravinsky concerning the concerto: "It is virtuous music!" Tailleferre added that his evaluation was extraordinary praise, considering it came from a person who abhorred the music of others.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Claude Rostand, *La musique française contemporaine* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1952), p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> See Albi Rosenthal, "Alfred Cortot as Collector of Music," *Music and Bibliography: Essays in Honour of Alec Hyatt King*, ed. Oliver Neighbour (New York: K. G. Saur, 1980), pp. 206-14.

<sup>3</sup> "'C'est de la musique honnête!' Une telle appréciation, venant de lui qui détestait la musique des autres, constituait un encouragement fabuleux." See Brigitta Duhme-Hildebrand, *Die französische Musikerin Germaine Tailleferre (1892-1983): Leben und Werk unter dem Aspekt des Vergnügens an der Musik* (Ph.D. diss., University of Köln, 1991), p. 53.