

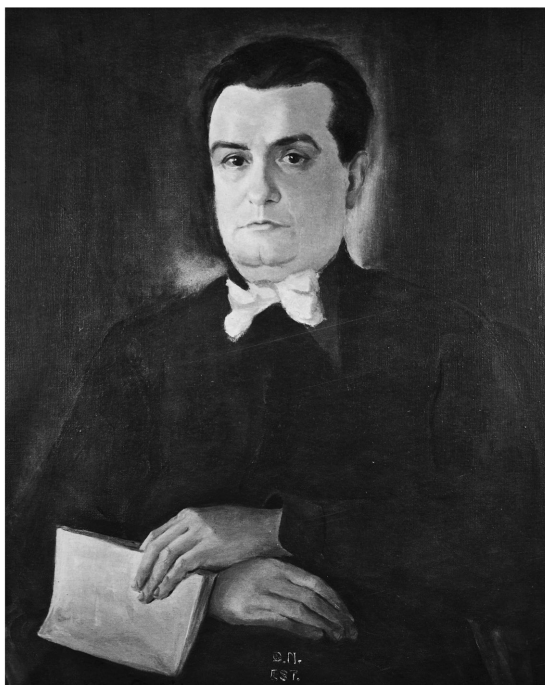


A LIFE
IN MUSIC
AND
POLITICS

GEORGES
AURIC

COLIN ROUST

Georges Auric



Portrait of Georges Auric painted by Nora Auric. Reproduced courtesy of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and the Société Pro Arte Georges Auric.

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To Amy, Eleanor, and Bennett

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Preface

On All Saints' Day in 2005, my wife, Amy, and I walked out of our Parisian apartment on the avenue du Général Leclerc. We turned onto the avenue du Maine, then up the rue Gassendi. Stopping at a flower shop along the way, we eventually arrived at the Cimetière Montparnasse. We picked up a broom, a brush, and a bucket from the Conservation Office. In the shadow of Horace Daillion's 1889 sculpture, *The Angel of Eternal Rest*, we filled the bucket with water and made our way to the smaller, triangular portion of the second division of the cemetery where Auric is buried, near the intersection of the avenue Principale and the allée Lenoir. Bending over the black granite slab bearing his name and dates in gold letters, we scrubbed it clean, replacing several pebbles that had been left by previous visitors. After placing a bouquet of purple flowers at the foot of the tomb, I stood for a few moments and reflected on the research I was doing for my dissertation. Although I am not superstitious, I found myself asking Auric's spirit for permission to tell his story.

In the weeks following our visit to Auric's tomb, I continued to spend my days in the libraries and archives around Paris, but Amy grew tired of walking the dog and exploring Paris under the strict limitations of our meager budget. She needed a purpose. She soon found one by volunteering for FindAGrave.com, a genealogical website that facilitates virtual visits to the graves of loved ones, ancestors, and famous people. As with other volunteers for the site, Amy would often receive requests from people who wanted a photo of a particular grave but who lived too far away to do it themselves. Every day after walking the dog throughout our neighborhood near Alésia and the Porte d'Orléans, she went to one cemetery or another, photographing tombs and documenting them for the website, learning a great deal about the history of Paris in the process. Her photos still grace the pages for Georges and Nora Auric, as well as many other memorial pages on the site.

On February 15, we observed Auric's 107th birthday by visiting his grave again, this time leaving a bright yellow bouquet. My research had been going well, but I had begun to run into roadblocks. At both the Bibliothèque-Littéraire Jacques Doucet and the Bibliothèque Nationale, I needed

permission from Auric's widow to consult and copy certain documents. Although I had written her several letters, I had yet to receive a reply—I would only later learn that I had been writing to an old address from which they were not being forwarded.

One cool day a few weeks later, Amy and I had lunch in the Square Louvois, during a break in my work at the Bibliothèque Nationale. She was tired and did not feel much like going to a cemetery that day. But fortified by our sandwiches she decided to stop by the Cimetière Montparnasse to try to locate a few hard-to-find graves. While she was there, a gentleman walked up to her and asked if she might have a map he could borrow, since the guard had not been at his post. Amy obliged and, since she knew the cemetery so well by this point, asked if she could help him find a grave. "Who are you looking for?" she asked. His reply of "Georges Auric" launched a conversation about me and my dissertation work, which greatly interested this man. As they stood over Auric's grave, exactly where I had stood after cleaning the tomb on All Saints' Day, the man asked Amy if we knew Auric's widow. "No," replied Amy, "Do you know the widow?" His simple reply was, "Yes."

That evening, my cell phone rang as my bus drove down the boulevard Raspail, past Rodin's statue of Honoré Balzac, to which Auric was often compared. Amy was anxiously wondering when I would get home. Over a delicious, candle-lit dinner in our small apartment's main room, she excitedly recounted the story of her encounter in the cemetery. The man turned out to be Claude Sférian, at the time the *Sécrétaire-Général* of Les Amis de Jean Cocteau, an organization that manages Cocteau's estate and for which Auric served as the first president. Mr. Sférian was an old friend of Auric's, but he had never visited his grave until that day. He did so today only because he happened to be in the neighborhood, inspecting an apartment that his son was considering purchasing. Later that week, Mr. Sférian introduced me to Michèle Auric via email, launching a correspondence that, twelve years later, has made all of my continued scholarly work on Auric possible.

As I finish the manuscript of this biography, I find myself continually marveling at the serendipity of that early spring day in 2006. I feel fortunate to be able to share this story and grateful to all those who have helped me do it, including the spirit of Georges Auric, whose help I solicited on that November day. I hope that my telling of this story has done it justice.

Colin Roust
San Antonio, Texas
All Saints' Day, 2018

Acknowledgments

It seems cliché to say that a work of this kind could not be done alone. In the case of Auric, however, this is simply the truth. There is no centralized archive of his papers, so I have relied on a variety of kinds of support in order to finish this work. I am grateful to all who supported and assisted the creation of this book.

My research was supported by grants and awards from Oberlin College and the University of Kansas, as well as a Big XII Faculty Exchange Fellowship from the Big XII Athletic Conference and a Franklin Research Grant from the American Philosophical Society. Kathy Porsch and the staff at the Hall Center for the Humanities were of vital assistance, both in terms of grant writing and the First Book Workshop.

I am grateful to the many librarians and archivists who made my research possible. The library staff at each of my “home” institutions during this project were incredibly helpful. I am especially appreciative of George Gibbs, Jim Smith, Corinne Forstot-Burke, and Chris Bohling of the Gorton Music and Dance Library at the University of Kansas. A sincere thank you to the staffs of the archives listed in the bibliography. In addition, for their direct assistance with my project, I thank Robert Beebe (National Archives–Kansas City), Elizabeth Garver (Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas), Bob Kosovsky and Jonathan Hiam (New York Public Library), Guy Krivopissko and Xavier Aumage (Musée de la Résistance Nationale à Champigny-sur-Marne), Josiane Mas (Fonds Cocteau at the Université de Montpellier III), and William Schurk (Popular Music Collection, Bowling Green State University). I am particularly grateful to Stéphane Boudin of the Villa Noailles and to Louis Diringer, Valérie Cottet, and Nicolas Pribile of SACEM; both institutions offered me an unexpectedly warm welcome and granted me a level of access that was wholly unexpected and deeply appreciated.

I offer my deepest appreciation to Michèle Auric, who was supportive while I worked on my dissertation and who has been unflagging in her encouragement of my subsequent projects that have explored her late husband’s life and work. Without her assistance, this book simply would not have been possible.

I am grateful to colleagues who have invited me to present early versions of this work on lecture series at Oberlin College, the State University of New York at Fredonia, TCU, the University of Buffalo, the University of Iowa, the University of Kansas, the University of Missouri-Kansas City, and the University of Texas.

To my fellow writers who read drafts and offered critical feedback, I am deeply appreciative of the time that you devoted to my work. Many thanks especially to Jacob Dakon, Jack Curtis Dubowsky, Abbey Dvorak, Kendra Leonard, and Heba Mostafa. Thanks are also due to Byron Adams, Julian Jacobson, and Carl Schmidt, whose enthusiasm and support for this project kept me going in the most challenging moments of the process. Thanks also to Dorothy Glick Maglione, Sara McClure, and Justin Sextro, who offered research assistance for this project.

A special note of thanks to Norm Hirschy, editor extraordinaire, whose patience and encouragement allowed my concept for this book to ferment and fully mature. This is a better book because of him. Thanks also to the staff at Oxford University Press and to the anonymous readers who offered words of encouragement and constructive criticism.

This work could not have been done without the patience, support, and encouragement of my family. We have moved twice and on more than a few occasions I have disappeared for multi-week research trips. Their sacrifices are as much a part of this book as mine are.

Introduction

Georges Auric left behind a complicated story. He was a quintessentially Parisian artist, whose identity was far more deeply invested in the volcanic heart of France, the Puy-de-Dome, and, especially, the verdant mountains and coastal plains of the Midi. A fine pianist and gifted composer, he was also a sharp, intellectual critic and one of the most successful music administrators of his generation. His keen literary mind and his eye for art were at least as important to him as his ear for music. His memoirs are a virtual *Who's Who* of the Parisian artistic world in the 1910s and 1920s. And yet to him, they were merely a recollection of “[the] happiness in working, [the] jokes, [the] joys” that he shared with his many friends.¹

The challenge—and the pleasure—of writing this book has been to unravel the knotted strands of Auric’s complicated life. To rediscover, through his story, the richness of French musical life across the bulk of the twentieth century. To see the shifting motivations of a musician across a seventy-year career. From the excitement of meeting his literary and artistic heroes as a child prodigy, to his adoption of an ultramodernist philosophy fueled by nationalist anger and a desire to purify the roots of French music. From the leftist furor of the 1930s to the French Resistance in the 1940s. From his powerful advocacy on behalf of his fellow musicians to his shift into the role of an elder statesman, as he finally opted for retirement in order to find time to compose again. At the heart of it all, what drove him through his career and his life was his desire for friendship and his passion for art. He was never concerned about being detested by certain people—in fact, he usually gave them as good as he got—but his letters also reveal a deep need to feel liked.

As much as I love the pure concert works Auric composed—especially the Piano Sonatina, the Piano Sonata, the Violin Sonata, the late chamber works—these were never his most successful works. Auric was at his best when collaborating with others. Whether setting the poetry of a friend, adding incidental music to a friend’s play, or going through the give-and-take of creating a ballet with several friends, collaboration is where Auric thrived. For this reason, among others, film music became one of his most successful genres. He and Jean Cocteau conceived *Le sang d’un poète* together in Hyères.

During the filming of *A nous, la liberté!*, Auric lived in the studio with René Clair and Georges Périnal. He revised and recomposed the score for *Roman Holiday* over a week in a hotel room with William Wyler. The friendships born of these film collaborations often led to lengthy partnerships: he scored eleven films directed by Jean Delannoy, seven by Marc Allégret, six by Cocteau, six by Charles Crichton, and at last three films by each of another seven directors. The life and career of Auric is thus a lesson in the creative power and potential of friendships.

Auric's story unfolds in two grand arcs. After a chapter dealing with his childhood and his family history, the first arc begins in 1913, with his parents' decision to move to Paris so that he could enroll in the Conservatoire there. Over the next decade or so, Auric actively pursued friendships with those artists who inspired him and whose work he loved. This section of the book reaches a climax in 1925, when certain key friendships fell apart and when he began to retreat from the Parisian music scene. It ends in 1934, at the nadir of Auric's personal and professional life.

Whereas the first arc of Auric's career is richly documented in archives and scholarship, this is less true of the second arc, despite the increased interest over the past decade or so in his work after the 1920s. The second half of this biography shifts somewhat in terms of its narrative mode as Auric's story grows more complicated, following his increasing activity in film and arts administration. This arc reaches its climax in 1968, when Auric was the very personification of the French musical establishment and a driving force in the tide of internationalism that emerged after World War II.

This book cannot say all that there is to be said about Georges Auric. As I finish the manuscript, I am keenly aware of what I was unable to say. Auric's first wife, Nora, had a fascinating life. The child of a petroleum engineer, she studied engineering at the university level in the 1920s, but ultimately opted for a career in painting. She was a model for several years, gracing the pages of *Vogue* (French version), and later designed dresses with Christian Dior. For more than forty years, she painted to the sounds of Georges playing the piano as he composed. In my telling of Georges's life, she fades into the background far more than I had hoped. Also fading into the background are some of his close friends, especially Francis Poulenc and, later in life, Nadia Boulanger. Also missing from the biography is Georges's reputation as a gourmand. In 1928, he was inducted into the Club des Cent, a secret dining club in Paris, after a grueling interview in which leading chefs grilled him about the nuances of cooking an *haute cuisine* dinner. His passion for food was also

reflected in an interview with Ninette Lyon that appeared in her food column in the January 1965 issue of *Vogue* (US version). That article concluded with four of his own takes on his favorite dishes: egg ramekins with caviar, caviar tarte, veal kidneys with mustard sauce, and a caramel apple dessert. While there are several articles published dealing with Auric's film music, nothing has been published about his incidental music, about which there is much more to be said. I have not had access to either the seventy-two surviving letters from Auric to his parents, which were sold on auction in 2012 by the Ader Nordmann house in Paris, nor the thirty-four letters to Jacques Maritain, which are preserved at the Bibliothèque Nationale Universitaire in Strasbourg and which came to my attention too late to be included in this project.

In short, there is much more to be said about Georges Auric. I hope this biography will serve as a catalyst to encourage others to flesh out those parts of his story that are glossed over or omitted here. His story is about not only music but also literature, art, film, politics, arts administration, and much more. Auric's story is vital for understanding both modernism in Paris in the 1910s and 1920s, and the changes in music and culture over the ensuing five decades.

1

Childhood in Lodève and Montpellier

In the late nineteenth century, Lodève was a city of waning significance in France's Languedoc region.¹ The town was perhaps best known for its ancient history. The original inhabitants, the Lutevani, were an independent people in Ancient Gaul prior to the Roman invasion. By the fourth century CE, it was the seat of a diocese of the Roman church and was a bishopric from the days of Saint Flour (martyred in 389 CE) until the French Revolution, during which Lodève was one of the first cities to replace the royalist government with a *comité populaire*. By the end of the nineteenth century, the population had peaked, and the city worked to cultivate a new identity as a tourist destination, promoting the historic sites and natural wonders of the area. The 1899 *Guide de l'Hérault* notes several tourist attractions:

Curiosities, St. Fulcrand Cathedral (historic monument). Cloister and ancient episcopal palace, currently converted into Town Hall and Court. —A pretty promenade in the Park, the former garden of the episcopal palace. —The most important cloth factories of the Midi. —Renowned wool factory and tannery. —Very picturesque area. —Cave of the Jews forming an underground lake.²

Despite a population of only about 8,300 people, the tourism campaign's success sustained six hotels in Lodève. One of these, the Hôtel du Nord (see Figure 1.1) was found at 18 Boulevard de la Paix, on the northern edge of the old town.³

On the night of St. Valentine's Day, 1899, excitement arrived for the Hôtel du Nord's owner, thirty-seven-year-old Emile Auric. His wife, twenty-six-year-old Marie Fayolle, went into labor and, the following morning at about eight o'clock, delivered a son. That afternoon, Emile walked down the rue de la République, turned right onto the Grand' Rue, and went into the town hall. In the office of Honoré Vernet, the First Adjunct Mayor, he declared the birth of a son named Georges Abel Louis Auric.⁴



Figure 1.1 Postcard of the Hôtel du Nord, Lodève. Date uncertain, but probably early twentieth century. From the author's collection.

Georges Auric's Family

Georges's elder half-brother, Marcel, had been born April 25, 1893 in Aubenas (see Appendix 2).⁵ Shortly thereafter, Emile and his first wife, Amélie Françoise Boissier, moved to Lodève. Unfortunately, Amélie died the following spring, on March 14, 1894. Two years later, Emile and Marie Fayolle married, on October 4, 1896. On December 8 the following year, Marie gave birth to twin girls, Germaine Marie Antoinette and Jeanne Marie Elisabeth, but neither survived their first month. Germaine died on December 28 and Jeanne two days later.

Georges and Marcel were scions to a family of hotel-restaurant owners, a career path that Marcel would follow.⁶ Their great-grandfather, Antoine Auric *père*, ran a hotel-restaurant in Montélimar during at least the 1840s and 1850s. After the dissolution of the July Monarchy, he joined the ranks of those seeking to establish the Second Republic and to combat the influence of the *Républicains Montagnards* and the *Démocrates Socialistes*. On April 16, 1849, he was confirmed as a member of the Electoral Committee of Montélimar, which selected nominees for the upcoming election.⁷

The following year, Antoine testified as a victim in the *Affaire Reynaud-Petit*, a sensational fraud trial heard at the Cour d'Appel in Grenoble, from August 12 to 15, 1850. Over the course of several years in the mid- to late-1840s, a city official in Montélimar named Reynaud convinced Louis Petit, a municipal clerk, to help him defraud citizens when they paid various fees. During the protracted police investigation, Reynaud fled, leaving Petit to face the trial alone. In court, the prosecutors brought forth numerous victims. Antoine Auric's testimony was typical: after his wife died on July 6, 1846, Auric went to city hall and paid the usual fee to execute her will, an estate valued at only 19 or 20 francs. The next day, Petit found Auric and asked him to sign a receipt, even though he would have to wait another two or three months to receive the estate. Three years later, when the decennial review of the *état civil* registers was conducted, officials informed Auric that he still needed to pay for the execution of his wife's will. When he complained, an investigation revealed that Petit altered the records to indicate that the estate had been fully paid in her natal village, Pont-Saint-Esprit, forty kilometers south of Montélimar. In fact, Petit and Reynaud pocketed both Auric's fee and his wife's estate.⁸

In 1853, Antoine *père* and his son, Georges and Marcel's grandfather Antoine *filz*, acquired the historic Hôtel des Princes on the Grande-Rue in Montélimar.⁹ The previous owner, Antoine-Eugène Genoud, had died four years earlier and left the hotel to his four sons, who sold it to the Aurics. The hotel was built sometime before 1494 and for much of its history welcomed the city's royal and aristocratic guests, such as Louis de Maugiron, a *mignon* of Henry III in 1578; the Duc de Guise in 1599; the admiral Charles de Montmorency in 1613; Joseph du Bernet, the First President of the Parliament of Provence in 1643; and, in February 1701, both the Dauphin Louis (the future Louis XV) and Antonio I, the newly crowned Sovereign Prince of Monaco.¹⁰ The Aurics, however, would only briefly own the historic hotel. The following year, they filed for bankruptcy, and Thomas-Antoine Arnal, a retired military officer residing in Montélimar, sued them to claim the hotel by eminent domain.¹¹ After a three-month-long trial, the hotel was auctioned. Though the Aurics had bought it for 4,000 francs in 1853, the hotly contested sale ultimately resulted in a price of 37,335 francs.¹² By 1857, the Aurics were back in the Montélimar hotel business after acquiring the Hôtel de la Croix d'Or, located across the rue Pierre Julien from the Hôtel des Princes.¹³

Apart from various land sales, the family would mostly stay out of the public eye until Georges emerged as a child prodigy. The one exception was a distant cousin from a branch of the Auric family in Orange, down the Rhône River from Montélimar and near Pont-Saint-Esprit, where both Antoine *père* and his wife had grown up. Born in 1866, André Joseph Auric pursued a degree in civil engineering. As the leading civil engineer in France, he was hired in 1908, in the wake of the Young Turk Revolution, to Haussmanize Istanbul.¹⁴

Georges's Early Childhood in Montpellier

Emile and Marie moved their small family from Lodève to Montpellier around 1902, when he purchased the Grand Hôtel Maguelone from Cyrille Sausse.¹⁵ A city of approximately seventy-five thousand people, Montpellier was the largest city in the department of Hérault and the principal city in the Languedoc region (see Appendix 3). The University of Montpellier is one of the oldest in France, formally established in 1289 by Pope Nicholas IV. It includes a Faculty of the Arts that claims a connection to the Gallo-Roman schools of late Antiquity, a Faculty of Medicine that began in the early twelfth century and that remains the oldest medical school in Europe today, and a Faculty of Law that was founded in 1160. Montpellier was a hub city for the rail networks that had begun crisscrossing France in earnest a couple of decades earlier. The city was a transfer point for two national train lines: the Paris-Lyon-Méditerranée, serving destinations east and north of Montpellier, and the Midi Line, serving destinations south and west. Since Languedoc produced the majority of French wine, Montpellier also thrived on the industries supporting viticulture.

The western edge of the old city is occupied by the Place Royale du Peyrou, a classic French garden with stunning views and a broad perspective of the city's history. Among its features are a faux Roman temple, an aqueduct, a garden built during Louis XIV's reign, and other buildings dating from the neoclassical revival of the eighteenth century. However, the heart of the city was, and still is, the Place de la Comédie (see Figure 1.2). This plaza was designed for the 1755 opening of the Théâtre de l'Opéra-Comédie. After burning down twice, the current building opened in 1888. The theatre stands at the southern edge of the square, which extends northward to the former Champ de Mars and Citadelle, today the Esplanade Charles de Gaulle. When



Figure 1.2 Place de la Comédie, Montpellier. Photo by the author.

the railroads arrived, the Place de la Comédie became the city's commercial center. The Midi Line built a station southwest of the square, near the current intersection of the avenue Georges Clemenceau, boulevard Renouvier, and the avenue de la Liberté (see Appendix 3). The PLM Line built their station a short distance to the southeast, where the current Montpellier Saint-Roch station stands. In addition, a tramway station on the northern edge of the Place de la Comédie served Palavas-Les-Flots, a beach town on the Mediterranean.

By 1900, the neighborhood surrounding the Place de la Comédie bustled with shops, restaurants, and hotels, serving locals, tourists, and business travelers. Of the twenty-four hotels in Montpellier, twenty were within a five-minute walk of the Place de la Comédie. At 5 rue Maguelone, the Grand Hôtel Maguelone was one of the closest to the plaza, with an ideal location on the main road between the PLM terminal and the Place de la Comédie. Despite stiff competition, with five hotels on just the rue Maguelone, the Aurics were well situated to succeed (see Figure 1.3). The hotel was not a ritzy affair, like the Riche-Hôtel on the Place de la Comédie itself, but rather catered to



Figure 1.3 Advertisement for Emile Auric's Hôtel Maguelone in the 1903 *Guide de l'Hérault*.

budget-minded travelers (see Figure 1.3). Emile advertised “Touring-Club” rooms, that is, “rooms without luxury, but clean and tidy, with an iron or brass bed . . . sober-colored drapes and powdery carpets. The WCs are also equipped with the latest systems.”¹⁶ In Montpellier’s oversaturated market, Emile’s hotel also received a competitive edge from offering a restaurant, electric lights, and a telephone booth. Although no records survive to show whether Emile’s hotel made a profit, it was surely full one particular summer weekend in 1907.

The Viticulture Revolt of 1907

A series of economic crises beginning in 1878 threatened the Languedocian wine industry, climaxing in mass unemployment during the spring of 1907. There were two phylloxera blights. New import laws brought an influx of Italian wines. Many Parisian restaurant owners either watered down or sugared their wines, stretching their wine stocks further and turning a greater profit, despite reducing the quality of the wines. At the same time, large industrial farms drove smaller family-owned vineyards out of business. Bumper crops, particularly in 1905 and 1906, led to a glut in the market, causing wine prices to hit historic lows in 1907. The economy in wine-dependent Languedoc collapsed and mass unemployment led to social unrest.¹⁷

In response, Marceline Albert, a café and vineyard owner in Argeliers, and Elie Bernard, the son of the village baker, formed the Comité de Défense Viticole and organized a series of protests known as the 1907 Viticulture Revolt. Beginning with a march of eighty-seven winemakers to the parliamentary commission in Narbonne on March 11, the protests swelled across the Languedoc region every Sunday for the next three months. 1,000 protesters marched in Ouveillan on April 7; 5,000 in Coursan on April 14; 80,000 in Narbonne on May 5; 120,000 in Béziers on May 12; 127,000 in Perpignan on May 19; 220,000 in Carcassonne on May 26; 300,000 in Nîmes on June 2; and then somewhere between 500,000 and 800,000 in Montpellier on June 9. By the time of the march in Montpellier, many demonstrators had already lost their jobs in vineyards, bottling factories, distribution companies, liquor stores, restaurants, or hotels, encouraging some to dub it the “March of the Beggars.” The Hôtel Maguelone was surely at or beyond full occupancy on that June weekend. As hotels ran out of rooms, churches throughout Montpellier offered space for women and children to spend the night. Despite the full rooms, even Emile Auric and his family felt the troubling economic ripples emanating outward from the vineyards.

By examining photographs and other accounts of the protest, we can reconstruct the events of June 9.¹⁸ That morning, trains on the Midi Line passed through Perpignan, Narbonne, Béziers, and Sète. At the terminal in Sète, passengers switched trains to a smaller branch of the Midi Line or to the larger trains running on the Paris-Lyon-Méditerranée Line. Even with extra trains running on both lines, special reduced fares ensured above-capacity crowds in every coach. When the passengers on the PLM Line trains arrived in Montpellier, they gathered in the Place de l’Embarcadère, outside the Café Sabatier. A marching band led the way up the rue de Maguelone, followed by villagers from Millas and other communes to the south. Along the way, they passed Emile Auric’s Hôtel Maguelone (see Figure 1.4). With so many families watching and marching together, the Aurics could not have been oblivious to what would be the largest protest of Third Republic France (1871–1940). Much more likely, we can imagine Emile Auric and his boys, fourteen-year-old Marcel and eight-year-old Georges, watching from one of the balconies or the stoop of the hotel, perhaps even joining the crowds for the last twenty meters to the Place de la Comédie.

On the Place de la Comédie, in front of the Théâtre, the crowds marching up the rue Maguelone joined other groups arriving from every direction (see Figure 1.5). Those coming on foot and on bicycle from the south merged with



Figure 1.4 Postcard with the text “Montpellier—Viticulture meeting of June 9, 1907—600,000 demonstrators—Rue Maguelonne [*sic*—Marcelin Albert is carried in triumph.” Emile Auric’s Grand Hôtel Maguelone is the third building from the left, with people crowded on all of the balconies. Archives Départementales de l’Hérault, 2 Fi CP 5906 9bis.

those who arrived at the Midi Line train station, marching together up the Avenue de Toulouse. Those coming from the north passed through the medical campus of the University of Montpellier, down the boulevard Pasteur and the boulevard Louis Blanc, where they merged with others streaming past the Citadelle onto the boulevard de l’Espalande. Those coming from the west converged on the Peyrou gardens, then passed on to the rue Nationale, today the rue Foch. There, every shop flew tricolor flags, though none more than Louis Cambon’s shop, Ornaments d’Eglise, which boasted no fewer than thirteen flags and at least a couple dozen meters worth of bunting. A few meters beyond Cambon’s shop, the protestors marched under an arch bearing the text: “To our valiant winemakers, the shopkeepers of the Grande Rue offer their hands and open their hearts in welcome.”¹⁹ As the crowd passed the Bertrand et Auverny candy shop and turned down the rue de la Loge, a half dozen people sat in chairs atop the awning, watching crowds of union members file past; across the street, the balconies held standing-room-only crowds. As demonstrators spilled from the rue de la Loge onto the Place de



Figure 1.5 Crowd of demonstrators amassed on the Place de la Comédie. Some men are perched on the streetlamps to see the demonstrators passing by the Fontaine des Trois Grâces. Photographer unknown. Archives Départementales de l'Hérault, 22 Fi 26.

la Comédie, they passed under a banner proclaiming “Everybody united in justice welcomes our impoverished brothers.”²⁰ The dense crowds prompted people to climb lampposts and the Fountain of the Three Graces to see and hear the rousing speeches delivered that day.

After the June 9 protest in Montpellier, things rapidly came to a head. Marcelin Albert and Elie Bernard were imprisoned. The demonstrations, which had thus far been peaceful, turned violent. On June 17, more than thirty thousand soldiers were dispatched to quell the crowds. Two days later, a majority of Languedocian government officials, including mayors and municipal council members, resigned their posts to protest the national government’s action. On June 20, tensions boiled over. Soldiers fired into a crowd in Narbonne, even training a machine gun on a café, killing six people and wounding dozens more. The Seventeenth Infantry Regiment, stationed in nearby Agde, mutinied. The action would bring together the still new Radical and Radical-Socialist Parties into a unified entity. Soon, President

Georges Clemenceau, himself an elected member of the Radical Party, was forced to meet with and acquiesce to Marcelin Albert's demands.²¹

In Montpellier, sixteen of the thirty-six municipal councilors quit their posts during the mass resignations, prompting a special election the following October. That election would signal the unified Radical Party's transformation into a juggernaut of local politics. Two party coalitions formed, each presenting a slate of sixteen candidates. Those for the conservative Conciliation Républicaine each received between 7% and 10% of the vote. Almost all of the candidates representing the Concentration Radicale Socialiste, however, received between 77% and 81%. The one outlier was Emile Auric; the 4,873 votes cast for him represented a whopping 97% of the 5,024 ballots cast.

Emile, who unsuccessfully ran in the municipal elections in suburban Clignancourt during his short stint in Paris during the early 1890s, would only briefly ride the political tide of the Viticulture Revolt.²² By the time of the general election on May 3, 1908, the Radical-Socialist coalition fell into disarray. Some factions advocated for diverse solutions to the viticulture crisis, while others lamented the impossibility of governmental action. Consequently, the ballot was considerably more complicated this time, with one moderate coalition, the Union des Comités Républicains Progressistes et des Comités Indépendants (the Union of Progressive Republican Parties and of Independent Parties), and three leftist coalitions: the Petite Chapelle, organized by M. Vernière and also referred to as the Action Radicale-Socialiste et Socialiste (Radical-Socialist and Socialist Action Party); the Radicale-Socialiste et Socialiste Indépendante (Radical-Socialist and Independent Socialist Party), organized by Alexandre Laissac; and the Socialiste Unifiée (Unified Socialist Party), organized by Jean-Baptiste Bénézech. Although Emile ran on a Radical-Socialist list organized by Laissac the previous October, he did not appear on the list for the May 1908 election. The reasons for this are unclear, though may perhaps be attributed to the complaints of inaction levied against the Municipal Council after the October special election. Indeed, of the other council members elected with Emile, half of them did not run in May 1908 and the other half lost their seats.²³

Although Georges does not seem to have ever commented on the Viticulture Revolt in his adult life, it is difficult to imagine that it had no influence on him. This episode would have exposed him to mass poverty, the exploitation of the working class, and the power of popular demonstrations. He rarely discussed his personal political beliefs openly, but, as is discussed in

Chapter 6, when he did his opinions veered strongly toward the left. In support of the Popular Front during the late 1930s, he advocated for education, exposing the masses to art, and addressing the social ills of the working class. As President of the Society of Authors, Composers, and Editors of Music (SACEM) from the 1950s through the 1970s, he drove transformations that led the organization to become an active agent for social change in France (discussed further in Chapter 8). Although this is perhaps too much weight to place on a single event witnessed by an impressionable eight-year-old, it seems to have been one moment that contributed to the crystallization of Auric's political beliefs.

Georges Auric's First Music Lessons

As the turbulent summer wound down, Emile and Marie enrolled young Georges in the Montpellier Conservatoire de Musique.²⁴ The curriculum included instruction in solfège, harmony, voice, and various instruments.²⁵ Initially, he acquiesced to his mother and took violin lessons, though he quickly begged to quit. He later noted in his memoirs:

My mother adored music and, a violinist herself, wanted me to learn the violin. When she took me to a teacher (I must have been eight years old), I nearly threw a tantrum at the end of my lesson. The study of such an instrument seemed to me atrocious: the violin, with its strings on which one had to, without weakness, draw a bow, seemed to me at the time horribly grating and complicated. "I will never be a musician," I once thought in the street.

But after discovering the piano, I suddenly felt that my future was brightening, that I was undoubtedly going to make my living by playing it. And yet I was very, very young.²⁶

Piano indeed proved a remarkable fit and he improved quickly under the guidance of Louis Combes, who taught advanced piano students at his home studio, at 14 rue du Plan d'Agde, just down the street from the historic Eglise Saint-Roch. For Georges, this meant a short, five-minute walk from the Auric's hotel, passing through the Place de la Comédie (see Appendix 3). In their lessons, Combes introduced Georges to standard works of the classical tradition, but also to the latest music from Paris. In his memoirs, Auric notes

that he sight-read—“rather badly, probably”—works by Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel.²⁷ At Combes’s home, he encountered fragments of *Pelléas et Mélisande* in a music journal. Though he played the pieces on the piano, he could only imagine what they sounded like with an orchestra, a particular frustration as he read articles praising the orchestrations of Debussy and Ravel, as well as Igor Stravinsky’s *The Firebird* and *Petrushka*. While perusing Combes’s journals, Auric also discovered an early *Sarabande* by Erik Satie, a composer whose music would fascinate him as he acquired newly published works between 1911 and 1913: the *Morceaux en forme de poire*, *Véritables préludes flasques*, and the *Croquis et agaceries d’un gros bonhomme en bois*. In addition, Combes introduced Auric to Déodat de Sévérac, a fellow Languedocian who found musical success in Paris before returning to the Midi in 1907.²⁸

This exposure to new music was unusual in early twentieth-century Montpellier. Although the city boasted a Conservatoire and more than sixty private teachers, public performances were limited in both number and repertoire. There were only three large halls, all within a two-minute walk of the Aurics’ hotel: the Grand-Théâtre, a 1,650-seat opera theatre that performed nineteenth-century operas; the Salle des Concerts, a 700-seat hall that regularly featured touring virtuosos (though Auric noted that they were of “widely varying quality” and their programs were “mercilessly alike”²⁹), and the Eldorado, a popular music venue featuring touring acts. There were also a dozen musical societies, including choruses, youth orchestras, student ensembles (including a gypsy band), and a drum and bugle corps. The concert experiences Auric describes in his memoirs include a touring Viennese orchestra performing Berlioz’s *Symphonie fantastique* and the regular concerts of Jannequin’s and Palestrina’s music given by the local Schola Cantorum, founded by Charles Bordes in 1905.³⁰

Beyond just introducing the young Auric to new music, Combes also exposed him to avant-garde literature. He owned a significant collection of modernist books and allowed Auric free rein in it. By the time he turned twelve, Auric was already collecting books, perhaps from Gustave Fournier’s shop, a few doors down from the family’s hotel. Turning again to his memoirs, we learn that as a child he read works by Francis Vielé-Griffin, Saint-Pol Roux, and Max Elskamp. He owned the two-volume anthology *Poètes d’aujourd’hui*, edited by Adolphe van Bever and Paul Léautaud, in which he read poetry by Paul Fort, Fernand Gregh, Francis Jammes, Pierre Louÿs, Maurice Maeterlinck, Anna de Noailles, and Paul Valéry—all of whom he

would later meet.³¹ He cites specifically *Les serres chaudes* by Maeterlinck and *Les chants de Maldoror* by the Comte de Lautréamont (pseudonym for Isidore-Lucien Ducasse); both volumes of poetry strongly influenced the adolescent Auric. In the 1920s, Auric would find several kindred spirits in the Parisian avant-garde who were similarly influenced by these collections.³²

Even as a young man, Auric recognized 1911 and 1912 as a turning point. Not only was Louis Combes expanding his musical and literary horizons, but he was already recognized as a child prodigy. Reflecting back on this time about eight years later, he wrote a short note for his future children:

Georges Auric began composing one day when he heard a nightingale singing in a garden. Georges was twelve years old. He needed to go see it in his little sailor suit, a beret posed on his not-so-straight hair. (“You will never please the ladies,” his classmates had already told him.) Georges was, at this very moment when he had the desire to make music, in the alley.³³

That year, he earned top honors at the Montpellier Conservatoire in solfège and the piano preparatory division (see Figure 1.6). Edouard Perrin, writing in the January 1912 issue of the *Revue Musicale du Société Internationale de la Musique*, noted that Auric had grown into a young man since the last time he had encountered the young musician. He wrote, “already we are discovering an unusual vivacity of intelligence.” Continuing, he added:

A grand memory, an abundance of ideas, a marvelous lucidity constitute the principal aspects of his personality. The instinct for imitation has become in him a curious need for invention, or rather for contradiction; one needs only play a work for him once and he immediately starts writing a counterpart. His cerebral activity is such that he composes in an instant, establishing his musical orchestration, a bit summarily, but not illogically, in a single vision, and writing without drafts what he had conceived. . . .

His cerebral activity was already applied to drawing, in his childhood, and to literature more recently. Mallarmé’s glosses hold no secrets from him, and the works by contemporary Poets are more familiar to him than to an academic. . . .

After careful consideration I believe that we really must follow the name of Georges Auric. I have searched thoroughly among all kinds of precocious musical temperaments, but I have not seen any like his.³⁴