

## Chapter 5

### REYNALDO HAHN, HIS FAMILY AND HIS CAREER

Reynaldo Hahn (1874-1947) was born in Caracas, Venezuela to Carlos Hahn-Dellevie, a Jewish businessman from Hamburg, Germany, and Elena Maria Echenagucia-Ellis, a woman of Spanish descent whose family had been established in Venezuela since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Carlos Hahn immigrated to Caracas in the 1840s, and soon rose to wealth through his mercantile business. The family bore twelve children: five sons, five daughters and the other two resulting in infantile deaths. Reynaldo was the youngest of all.<sup>86</sup>

Carlos Hahn became a close friend of Venezuelan President Antonio Guzmán-Blanco, who presided in the office between 1870 and 1877, and served as a financial advisor for the president.<sup>87</sup>

When the Hahn family left Venezuela in 1878, a year after Guzmán-Blanco's resignation from the office, the former president was able to extend his influence to Paris as Hahn's family settled down in the new city. Reynaldo was merely three years old. In the same year, the family settled down in Paris, France in a good neighborhood of the

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<sup>86</sup>Bernard Gavoty, *Reynaldo Hahn, Le Musicien de La Belle Epoque* (Paris: Buchet Chastel, 1997), 19; Mario Milanca Guzmán, *Reynaldo Hahn, Caraqueño: Contribución a La Biografía Caraqueña de Reynaldo Hahn Echenagucia* (Caracas: Academia Nacional de la Historia, 1989), 19; Patrick O'Connor. "Hahn, Reynaldo." In *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/12169> (accessed December 26, 2010).

<sup>87</sup>Milanca, 54-61.

Champs-Élysée.<sup>88</sup> The future composer had already displayed his inclination to music in Caracas, and once the family settled well enough in Paris, his father Carlos took his 6-year-old son to *Opéra-Comique* every night, where Reynaldo rode on his father's shoulder to eagerly catch glimpses of the show. He made his debut in France at a musical soirée hosted by the Princess Mathilde, niece of Napoleon the First and cousin of Napoleon the Third.<sup>89</sup>

In October 1885, Hahn, at age ten, was admitted to Paris Conservatoire where he studied solfège with Lucien Grandjany, harmony with Albert Lavignac and Theodore Dubois, piano with Emil Descombes and composition with Jules Massenet.<sup>90</sup> Under the tutelage of Emil Descombes, Hahn was among the elite class of the then up-and-coming composer Maurice Ravel as well as virtuosos such as Alfred Cortot and Eduardo Risler. Hahn's love for composition was nurtured by Jules Massenet, who significantly influenced young Reynaldo's musical development including his penchant for vocal music.<sup>91</sup>

Hahn initially became acquainted with Saint-Saëns through their mutual friend Massenet, and he began studying privately with Saint-Saëns in 1895.<sup>92</sup> Hahn also wrote a journal entry about him after discussing a wide range of subjects with Saint-Saëns.<sup>93</sup> He

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<sup>88</sup>Milanca, 81.

<sup>89</sup>Gavoty, 19, 26; Gusman, 81; O'Connor, *Grove Music Online*.

<sup>90</sup>Gavoty, 36; O'Connor, *Grove Music Online*.

<sup>91</sup>Debra Lea Spurgeon, "A Study of the Solo Vocal Works of Reynaldo Hahn with Analysis of Selected Melodies," (D.M.A. Essay; University of Oklahoma, 1988), 23.

<sup>92</sup>James Harding, *Saint-Saëns and his Circle* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1965), 201.

<sup>93</sup>Reynaldo Hahn, *Notes: Journal d'un Musicien* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1933), 28.

also worked for Saint-Saëns as an editor for the complete works of Rameau.<sup>94</sup> According to Stephen Studd, the author of *Saint-Saëns, a Critical Biography*, Saint-Saëns “was certainly fond of the company of talented and personable young men, many of whom were glad to be associated with his prestige and influence, and among those with whom he formed close relations were his one-time pupil Reynaldo Hahn.”<sup>95</sup>

Following Massenet’s footsteps, Hahn’s compositions were predominantly music for voice and piano, and he earned his early recognition by a work in this genre. *Si mes vers avaient des ailes!* [If my verses have wings] of 1888 became a song of choice for salon performance.<sup>96</sup> During 1887-1890, Hahn worked on his song cycle, *Chansons grises*, which would later lead to his long-term relationship with the publisher Henri Heugel.

The manuscripts for his early works for piano were destined to be unduly neglected due to his success in the vocal genre. What remains of this category consists of chamber pieces for four-hands and/or two-pianos. Such examples include *Scherzo lent* (1891) and *Caprice mélancolique* (1897). Many of his earliest solo-piano works have been lost, except *L’inspiration* (1883), which was published by an unidentified publisher, and *Juvenilia: Petites pieces pour piano* (1890-93) and *Au conte de lune, conte en musique* (1892), both of which were published through Heugel.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup>Brian Rees, *Camille Saint-Saëns, A Life* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1999, 317.

<sup>95</sup>Stephen Studd, *Saint-Saëns, a Critical Biography* (London: Cynus Arts, 1999), 252.

<sup>96</sup>O’Connor; Thea Sikora Engelson, “The Melodies of Reynaldo Hahn”, (Ph.D Essay, University of Illinois, 2006), 13.

<sup>97</sup>“Sortable List of Works by Reynaldo Hahn” *International Music Score Library Project – Petrucci Music Library*, [http://imslp.org/wiki/Sortable\\_list\\_of\\_works\\_by\\_Reynaldo\\_Hahn](http://imslp.org/wiki/Sortable_list_of_works_by_Reynaldo_Hahn) (accessed December 3, 2011).

Considered to be his first mature piano composition, *Portraits de peintres, d'après Marcel Proust* (1894), is a set of four piano pieces with narrations in between, and is dedicated to his close friend and poet, Marcel Proust. Fashioned as a musical portrait, this four-movement composition depicts important society people of the time: Albert Cuyp, Paulus Potter, Anton Van Dyck and Jean Antoine Watteau in order of composition.

His next publication was *Première Valses* (1898), collection of 10 waltzes and one piece that serves as precursor to the set. Next follows *Rossignol Éperdu* (1902-1910), 53 character pieces grouped into four-themed series. Hahn's first attempt to write in a larger form resulted in *Sonatine* in C-Major (1907), a three-movement work based on fast-slow-fast movement schemes with the second movement being a theme and variations.<sup>98</sup> It is unknown if Hahn's *Sonatine* was influenced by that of Ravel, which was written between 1903 and 1905 and was premiered in 1906.<sup>99</sup> Both *sonatines* contain neo-classical components, although Ravel's *sonatine* is richer in harmonic language while Hahn's *sonatine* is characteristically more Mozartian.

In 1909, Hahn made the decision to call France his home, and began his legal process of becoming a naturalized French citizen.<sup>100</sup> The following year, Hahn's piano work *Thème varié sur le Nom de Haydn* (Variations on the name of Haydn) was featured in the January 15<sup>th</sup>, 1910 edition of *Revue de la Société Internationale de Musique* (The Journal of International Music Society).<sup>101</sup> Paying homage to Haydn was no new

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<sup>98</sup>Reynaldo Hahn, *Sonatina en ut majeur*, (Paris: Heugel & Co, 1907), 1-19.

<sup>99</sup>John Spier, "Sonatine," *Maurice Ravel Net*. <http://www.maurice-ravel.net/sonatine.htm>. (Accessed February 19, 2012).

<sup>100</sup>Gavoty, 223.

<sup>101</sup>Reynaldo Hahn "Thème Varié par Reynaldo Hahn", *Revue Musicale S.I.M* (Paris: Société Internationale de Musique, 1910), 7-10.

practice, in fact, the same magazine included other similar works by composers such as Claude Debussy, Paul Dukas, Vincent d'Indy and Maurice Ravel, whose works paying homage to Haydn were also featured in the same magazine. The melodies of aforementioned pieces are all based on pitch-levels H-A-Y-D-N (si-la-ré-ré-sol), but Hahn is the only one who imitated Haydn's style of composition. As a result, Hahn's *Thème varié sur le Nom de Haydn* is full of early Classicism, characterized by simple tonal harmony and a clear structure. The rest of the composers who paid homage to Haydn did not go as far as stylistic imitation in their homage pieces. Debussy and Ravel especially took more individualistic approaches in their style of composition while still managed to earnestly incorporate the name of the honoree as pitches in their motives.<sup>102</sup>

In 1912, he was granted a French citizenship, and began his military training in July 1913.<sup>103</sup> Two years later, he finished composing his new piano piece, *Les Jeunes Lauriers, marche militaire*. In contrast to previous two works that are written in a lighthearted early Classicism, this composition reflected Hahn's responsibility as a composer to relate to the sentiments of the time to come, the First World War.<sup>104</sup>

On August 1, 1914, Hahn was called to active military duty, which took him out of Paris. Initially, he was stationed in the rural areas of France, but eventually he received an order to transfer to Mauritius, an island nation off the southeast coast of Africa, where he remained during the remainder of the year. In the Spring of 1915, he was finally called

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<sup>102</sup>Jean-Christophe Etienne, "Thème varié sur le nom de Haydn (1910)," *Reynaldo-Hahn.Website*. <http://www.reynaldo-hahn.net> (accessed March 5, 2009).

<sup>103</sup>Engelson, 31.

<sup>104</sup>Gavoty, 223. Jean-Christophe Etienne, "Les Jeunes Lauriers, marche militaire(1915)," *Reynaldo Hahn Website*.

back to northern French city, Clermont-en-Argonne, where he wrote a song cycle *Five Little Songs*.<sup>105</sup>

His life as a French military personnel continued for the next two years. In 1917, he was promoted to corporal, and a concert honoring his musical works was held in Paris in the same year. In 1918, he returned to Paris when he was assigned to work at the Ministry of War<sup>106</sup>

Upon returning to Paris in 1918, he realized the salon culture, his former social circle and an outlet to his vocal music, no longer existed. The musical trend had changed, yet Hahn remained a defender of Romanticism despite the criticism from the avant-garde artists. Realizing that he would need to change the direction in his career to maintain his popularity, he shifted focus on writing opera, operetta and musical comedy and stopped writing for piano. This explains the gap in his output for piano pieces between 1916 to 1926.<sup>107</sup>

Hahn's effort to switch his gears to focus on operatic and vocal arenas seemed successful. In 1919, he was appointed as the winter director of the opera in Cannes, where he subsequently premiered his opera *Nausicca*, the work he had written during the war.<sup>108</sup> In 1920, he prepared his lectures on singing for a publication *Du Chant*, and he conducted the premiere of *La Colombe de Bouddah*, a Japanese lyric in one act based on a poem by Andre Alexander. A continuous series of his vocal compositions, *Deuxième volume de vingt melodies* was published in 1921, and had a successful premiere of his

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<sup>105</sup>*Ibid.*, 32-33.

<sup>106</sup>*Ibid.*, 34

<sup>107</sup>*Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>108</sup>*Ibid.*, 34.

operetta *Ciboulette* in April of 1923<sup>109</sup> Hahn also collaborated with playwright Sacha Guitry, and they co-produced *Mozart*, a musical comedy that portrays the adolescent Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. The premiere of *Mozart* in Paris was a popular success, and the following year, Guitry took the production to the U.S.. The New York premiere of *Mozart* took place at Chanin's Forty-sixth Street Theatre in December 1926, and received a favorable review.<sup>110</sup> In the same year, Hahn continued to work for the stage and produced three stage productions: *La reine de Sheba*, *Un revue*, and *L'temps d'aimer*.

His first solo piano works after the First World War were Two Etudes, published in 1927. Unfortunately, Two Etudes became his last solo piano composition, as he became more active in composing for theater stage.<sup>111</sup>

In the late 1920s, he conceived his first and only piano concerto and eventually the music was published in 1931.<sup>112</sup> Then during the 1930s, Hahn's output was principally for the stage. His two operettas, *Brummel* and *Malvina*, had their premieres in 1931 and 1935 respectively. In addition to his collaborations with Guitry for musical comedy *O mon bel inconnu*, which premiered in 1933. In 1935, he returned to Paris Opéra to premiere his more serious and more upscale opera, *Le Marchand de Venise*, a production that features Mozartean gracefulness and French harmony and coloration. He continued to write for the Paris Opéra, which resulted in a premiere of Shakespeare's *Beaucoup de*

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<sup>109</sup>*Ibid.* 34-35.

<sup>110</sup>J. Brook Atkinson, "The Play: Guitry et Femme," review of *Mozart*, a comedy by Sacha Guitry with music by Reynaldo Hahn, Chanin's Forty-sixth Street Theatre, *The New York Times*, 28 December 1926.

<sup>111</sup>The music for Deux Etudes is not available in the United States; However, According to *Reynaldo Hahn Website*, the first study is similar to Chopin Etude Op. 10 No. 1 in C-Major, with right-hand purely based on three-octave arpeggios. The left-hand figure moves in contrary motion with emphasis of three beats per measure creates a sense of superimposed rhythms. The second *étude* is a less technical but more interpretive study that contains aria-style melody, similar to the concept of Chopin Etude, Op. 10 No. 3 in E-flat Major.

<sup>112</sup>O'Connor, *Grove Music Dictionary*.

*bruit pour rien* (Much Ado about Nothing) in 1936, and *Aux bosquets d'Idalie* 1937-1938.<sup>113</sup>

After France surrendered to Germany on June 22, 1940, Germany gained control of the northern part of France, while its southern counterpart was left under French control. Hahn, being Jewish by patrilineal heritage, left Paris for southern France, and continued to do radio shows and lectures on musical subjects.<sup>114</sup>

One of Reynaldo Hahn's sisters, Olga, lived in Hamburg, Germany after marrying a German Jew. Tragically, Olga, her husband and her kids were killed in a gas chamber. In November 1942, he exiled to Monaco, a country whose neutrality was respected by the Axis force.<sup>115</sup>

When the war ended in 1945, the composer returned to Paris and soon became a musical celebrity. In the same year, he was appointed director of the Paris Opéra, where he conducted revival of Méhul's *Joseph* the following year.<sup>116</sup>

While conducting a performance of *Die Zauberflöte* at Paris Opéra, Hahn became ill during the first act.<sup>117</sup> Although he managed to conduct the entire production, he immediately lost consciousness after the performance in his dressing room. A doctor diagnosed with a cerebral tumor.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>113</sup>Engelson, 36-38.

<sup>114</sup>*Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>115</sup>*Ibid.*, 38-39.

<sup>116</sup>O'Connor, *Grove Music Dictionary Online*; Etienne, "chronologie," *Reynaldo-Hahn.Website*.

<sup>117</sup>Engelson, 40.

<sup>118</sup>*Ibid.*



He died in his apartment on January 28<sup>th</sup>, 1947. On the next day, *Le Figaro* featured Hahn's obituary on its front page.<sup>119</sup> His funeral was held at the Madeleine Church in Paris on February 3, where musicians from the Paris Opera performed Fauré's *Requiem* and the *De Profundis* from Hahn's opera *La Carmélite*.<sup>120</sup>

### **Salon Culture and Belle-Époque**

Reynaldo Hahn's music is rooted in the salon tradition that was culturally fueled by the Belle-Époque. Belle-Époque is generally perceived to have begun in 1885, the year known for the unfortunate passing of a romantic poet, Victor Hugo.<sup>121</sup> The politics during the Belle-Époque was stable, allowing Parisian arts to develop. Two Universal Expositions and the building of the Eiffel Tower inspired Parisian performers to be more productive and creative. Especially in performing arts, Paris was filled with performance venues that were catered to different social classes: music halls and *café* in the Montmartre area served the working classes, while opera and the *salons* were for upper classes.<sup>122</sup>

While *salons* being primarily a formalized social setting catered to aristocrats in which music performance functioned as an evening activity preceded by a dinner, *cafés* and their open atmosphere, allowed more artistic experimentation, and became a nest for new schools of thought, including symbolism, impressionism, cubism and primitivism.

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<sup>119</sup>Reynaldo Hahn est mort, *Le Figaro*, January 29, 1941.

<sup>120</sup>Les obsèques de Reynaldo Hahn auront lieu lundi, *Le Figaro*, January 31, 1947.

<sup>121</sup>Spurgeon, 25-27.

<sup>122</sup>*Ibid.*

As the time progressed, performers gradually migrated from salons to *café* for artistic freedom.<sup>123</sup>

For Hahn, *salons* were the main performance venues for his vocal works *Mélodies*. He understood the refinement of musical quality expected of the venue and appreciated the settings. He made the best of the *salon* culture for his artistic merit: Striving for the musical refinement to suit and not to succumbing to let flattery influence his work.

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<sup>123</sup>*Ibid.*