

## 42. Georges Auric

### Passport to Pimlico: The Siege of Burgundy (for Unit 6: Further Musical Understanding)

#### Background Information and Performance Circumstances

Auric composed this music in 1948 for a film made by the Ealing Studios, known principally for their comedies. The plot concerns the discovery of buried treasure in Pimlico, an area of Central London. The treasure belonged to the long dead Duke of Burgundy. A document found with it announces that Pimlico is part of Burgundy. The local inhabitants promptly declare an independent dukedom in the middle of London. The British authorities close the 'border' with barbed wire. At the point at which the musical score is used, sympathisers are throwing in food parcels to break the blockade.

Georges Auric (1899-1983) was a French pianist and composer, known in his early years as a child prodigy. By the age of 15 he had met many of the greatest artists and musicians of the age, including Picasso and the Russian composer Stravinsky. He is often grouped with five other French composers of the time, including Milhaud and Poulenc, as a member of *Les Six*. To a certain extent they were united in their sense of humour and anti-Romantic, avant-garde ideas. There was an element of nationalism in their desire to distance themselves from German dominated music styles. Not only did they move away from Romanticism but also from the post-Romantic expressionism of central European composers like Schoenberg. Their influences came more from the world of circus music and jazz.

#### Performing Forces and their Handling

- Auric uses a standard sized symphony orchestra with extra tuned percussion.
- The tuned percussion instruments are often used to double melody lines e.g. celeste (bar 55) doubling piccolo. A glockenspiel doubles flutes in bar 5.
- Tubular bells are used to represent church bells in bar 31.
- Timpani and clash cymbals are reserved for climax points, e.g. bar 49.
- Full use is made of strings, typical more of this period than recent times, e.g. bar 7, violins, 'cellos and basses.

- Strings are often used for 'chugging' chords e.g. bar 31, or repeated octave notes, e.g. bar 13.
- Pizzicato (plucked) strings are used in bar 11.
- A divided viola section plays a low tremolo at bar 52.
- Brass instruments often alternate with strings, e.g. trombones answered antiphonally by strings in bars 36-7.
- He often misses out lower instruments e.g. bar 31 and sometimes uses lower instruments on their own, e.g. bar 15.
- There are woodwind and string trills in bar 1 and woodwind grace notes in bar 9.
- There are trumpet fanfare figures in bar 1 and muted trumpet is used in bar 41.

## Texture

- The texture often changes rapidly. There are several different main textures on the first page of the score alone:
  - Bars 1-4: Brass fanfares with trills in strings and woodwind, and descending scale figures in horns, in 3rds from bar 2.
  - Bars 5-8: Theme in consecutive 5ths and 8ths in flutes and glockenspiel with 3rds continuing in the strings below, later replaced by octaves in bar 7 and contrary motion scales in bar 8, with parallel 6ths at the top of the homophonic texture.
  - Bars 9-10: Ostinato-like figures in 'cellos with octave leaps and trills in the clarinets in conjunction with two melodic lines in flutes and piccolo produce a polyphonic texture.
- Auric often misses out lower instruments to give a high pitched texture, e.g. bar 11.
- He sometimes uses only lower instruments e.g. bar 15 to give a low pitched texture.
- There is bass dominated homophony at bars 21-2 with the tune in bassoon and pizzicato 'cellos and basses accompanied by repeated chords in upper strings.
- More conventional melody dominated homophony is used at bar 55.

- The tutti music at the end is clearly homophonic.
- There is antiphonal writing at bar 27 with brass alternating with upper strings and woodwind.

## Tonality

- The music is tonal – mainly in the major key.
- There are frequent abrupt changes of key. These keys are often tertiary related (keys a 3<sup>rd</sup> apart), so the music begins in E major and then in bar 9 moves suddenly (without any sense of modulation) to G major (tonally, a minor 3<sup>rd</sup> distance away).
- At bar 15 there is a brief appearance of minor key music (B minor) before the 3<sup>rd</sup> of the scale is raised a bar later to move the music to B major, after which there is a return to E major in bar 21.
- A further tertiary relationship is established in bar 33 when the key changes to C major (tonally down a major 3<sup>rd</sup> from E). Notice the many chromatic notes here and elsewhere.
- In bar 39 we have the music from bar 9, now in the key of E flat (another tertiary connection); at the end of bar 42 we are in E major and in bars 55 to the end in C.

## Structure

The structure of the music is governed by the events on screen in an episodic manner. The short sections each describe a new occurrence in the story.

- Important sounding fanfares and trills in bar 1 are used to announce the newspaper headline: Burgundy bombarded with buns. This acts like an introduction.
- The first thematic material is heard in E at bar 5.
- The theme is then repeated in G major in bar 9 with new accompaniments and countermelodies.
- More loud fanfare like music in bar 13 accompanies another newspaper headline.

- A new 2<sup>nd</sup> theme, based on scalar material heard earlier starts in bar 15, its low bass texture used to illustrate the seriousness of the political meetings.
- A third idea, again in the bass instruments starts at the upbeat to bar 22 in pizzicato strings and bassoon.
- After a dramatic forte chordal intervention at bar 27, a new version of the bassoon tune starts in bar 33.
- The chordal music returns briefly at the upbeat to bar 37.
- At bar 39 the music from bar 9 returns, this time in E flat major before abruptly side-stepping into E major.
- This leads to a dramatic, fanfare-like fortissimo at bar 49, interrupted in bar 52 with 'suspense music' with trills and tremolos and an altered version of the motif from bar 5 in the bass.
- Finally a jaunty tune in piccolo and celeste over pizzicato strings leads to the conclusion of the episode.

## Harmony

- There is some straightforward tonal harmony, such as the G major root position tonic chords in bar 9.
- These are quickly complicated by dissonant notes in the next bar, such as the C appoggiatura at the beginning of the bar.
- The chromatic notes in the semiquaver bassoon and clarinet accompaniment in bars 10 and 11 further cloud the harmony.
- Parallel 5ths and octaves are a feature of much of the music, as at bar 5 in the flutes and glockenspiel.
- Added note harmony is also a feature of the style. The chords in bar 7 show this technique, e.g. the added B in the first chord.
- Added note chords of 7<sup>ths</sup> and 9<sup>ths</sup> are used. The powerful main chords in bar 49 are essentially 9<sup>th</sup> chords, with an A added to the G<sup>7</sup> chord.
- There are occasional perfect cadences, as at the end of bar 8.

- The final perfect cadence is complicated by the addition of the dissonant F# in what might otherwise have been the dominant G chord.
- There is an inverted tonic pedal at bars 13 to 14.
- Whole tone harmony is used in bar 27.
- There is an augmented 6<sup>th</sup> chord in bar 26.

## Melody

- Most of the melodic ideas are in the major key, e.g. bars 5-8. Only the phrase in bar 15 briefly hints at the minor.
- There is occasional chromaticism, as in the bassoon and pizzicato `cello idea from the end of bar 21. There are chromatic F double sharp and A sharp appoggiaturas here.
- Some melody lines are purely diatonic, e.g. the piccolo and celeste melody in C from bar 55 to the end.
- The four note, bell-chime motif from the upbeat to bar 7 is repeated in descending sequence.
- This motif like many of the others is essentially triadic in style, with the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> notes outlining chords.
- Phrases are often 2 or 4 bars in length.
- The opening phrase at bar 5 outlines the notes of the chord of E, filling in with passing notes and upper and lower auxiliary notes.
- Scalic music is found frequently, e.g. bar 1 in the horns.
- The final tune from bar 55 is ornamental in character with many trills and grace notes.

## Rhythm and Metre

- The music opens in typical fanfare style with long dotted notes followed by pairs of demisemi-quavers.
- Most of the melodic lines are based on series of quavers and semi-quavers.

- Semiquavers frequently produce a pulsating effect described as a motor rhythm.
- Auric presents the opening descending scale in rhythmic diminution in bar 3.
- In bar 48, in the build-up to the main climax there is a brief passage of triplet rhythm.
- Many of the melodies begin on the first beat of the bar, e.g. bar 15, though some begin on the anacrusis, e.g. upbeat to 22.
- Rests are sometimes added to produce a staccato feel, as at bar 35.
- The metre is 4/4 quadruple time with a single bar of  $\frac{3}{4}$  triple time at bar 51, timed to fit in with the events on screen.