



Mireille, the "George Gershwin" of Paris musical circles.

IT will come as a surprise to many people to learn that the Gallic queen of song—the one to fashion France's most popular tunes, to which an entire country whistles and dances—is a young Jewess. She is Mireille, a slender, handsome young woman with soft gray eyes and a face at once sensitive and expressive.

Mireille is the most successful composer of light music in present-day France—and she well deserves her triumphs. For the past decade she has been to Paris what George Gershwin has been to New York: composer of its brightest, smartest, most sparkling tunes. Mireille's fame in Paris is enormous. Her songs are featured everywhere: in the grandiose theatres of the Boulevard des Italiens and the Champs Elysées; in the phonograph arcades of Montmartre and Montparnasse; by itinerant musicians who rove the Tuilleries Gardens and the Luxembourg, singing and playing the newest tunes for a couple of centimes. Mireille has an entire city whistling and humming her tunes almost as soon as they are set down on paper. She has actually made Parisians forget that the best jazz tunes come from across the Atlantic!

Began Music Studies Early.

MIREILLE (though that is only her *nom-de-plume*, she is known throughout all of Paris by no other name) was born in the French capital, and has lived there her entire life. She began music studies early, and at first her ambition was to become a serious composer. She absorbed the music of the classics and began playing with sonata and symphonic forms.

Upon completing her studies, however, she shelved her high ideals. The necessity of making a living drove her towards exploiting the only thing she knew thoroughly—music. She decided, therefore, to turn her pen to writing the popular tunes of a nation. From the very first, her songs had an originality all their own; they had a unique colour and spice—charm and taste as well as appeal and "catch." Being a consummate musician, Mireille could not be expected to approach her musical "slummings" without a tongue in the cheek.

The tongue has remained in the cheek ever since. And therein, probably, lies the unique fascination of her popular songs—and the reason why they possess such a unique flavour.

Mireille

Queen of Parisian Song

By DAVID EWEN.

The charming Jewess whom Mr. Ewen describes in the following article as the most celebrated composer of popular tunes in France.

A publisher—Brèton, by name—was not hard to find; and an appreciative public came soon afterwards. Mireille became a phenomenal success in a bewilderingly short time—despite the fact that hers were melodies for adult appetites. Her earliest songs immediately established her reputation—probably because they caught so admirably the spirit and the zest of Paris. That reputation has grown from then on.

Needless to say, her songs have brought Mireille a neat fortune. She lives in the fashionable section of Paris, the Champs Elysées—on the Rue de Colisée—in sumptuous comfort befitting her popularity. But wealth does not mar her industry. Mireille works slavishly over her songs, like a budding composer who has yet to pave a way for herself. Her output is undiminished; her zeal and enthusiasm know no obstacles.

Song that Masses Adore.

THERE is only one thing that wealth has discouraged in Mireille, and that is her erstwhile ideal to become a serious composer. Mireille has discovered that there is as much genuine pleasure in creating a brilliant song that the masses adore as there is in composing a symphony; she has also learned that, in fashioning a popular song, a composer of ingenuity and self-respect need not cheapen his style, but can, on the contrary, raise the standards of the masses. But, perhaps, it is not entirely due to wealth that Mireille is not a serious composer of pretentious music. After all, there was a time in her life when money was not plentiful, and comforts were few. Perhaps the fault lies rather with the fact that Mireille loves to concoct smart tunes, and that her heart is in her work.

Perhaps, too, that is why all of her melodies abound with such intoxicating zest and infectious enthusiasm!

Mireille's tremendous popularity throughout France, which has sold millions of sheets of music and phonograph records of each of her songs, is not easy to explain. For Mireille's songs certainly contain none of the naïveté and adolescent simplicity—the stilted melodic lines, the unvarying rhythms, the complete lack of variety or surprise—which Parisians until recently have demanded in their popular music. Mireille's songs, on the other hand, are intensely smart and adult; they show intelligence and imagination; they are spiced by a sprightly wit, and often by irony and malice.

In the dexterous play of rhythms and in the subtle colouring of the harmonies, they clearly reveal themselves to have been shaped by the hand of a consum-

mate musician. In their unaffected gusto and exuberance, they betoken a musician who feels musical messages keenly and instinctively. Mireille's songs succeed in being "popular" without resorting to musical clichés or slipping into tawdry banality.

"It's a Gardener Who Limp."

MIREILLE'S cleverness and originality are apparent in each of her well-known songs; and there is something original and intelligent to distinguish each one of them. In the *C'est un jardinier qui boîte* ("It's a Gardener Who Limp"), the rhythms halt and limp as a man with a wooden peg might; the music is brilliant and descriptive; the melody has roguish charm and is maliciously ingratiating. *La partie du bridge* ("The Bridge Party") is a humorous skit expressed in tones and rhythms. The dialogue has sprightly accompaniment which adds pepper and salt to the situation. And how subtly Mireille writes for the four voices of the bridge game—a marvellous web of polyphonic writing! *Les trois gendarmes* ("The Three Policemen") also possesses a skilful counterpoint which must have made the musicians of Paris—so long contemptuous of popular music—sit up and take notice. And throughout all of these tunes there flows a sparkling wit which is irresistible.

At present all of Paris is humming *Couché dans le foin* ("Lying in the Hay"), perhaps one of the brightest tunes to have come from its composer's facile pen. Iridescent with a satirical tinge, this melody—like most of Mireille's songs—seems to have been written with tongue in cheek. The composer seems to enjoy plying her tools of composition, and seems to be perpetually poking a tongue at her lyrics. Her rhythms are deft; they seem to chuckle gaily, as they trip along on nimble toes. The harmonies—touched by a dab of dissonance—have a splash of colours which adds considerable spice and flavour to the song. While the melody is by no means extraordinary, it has enough of a snap to impress itself indelibly upon the memory at first hearing; yet it has sufficient originality to set it sharply apart from the hundreds of other songs which one hears in Paris each day.

"The song which steals a nation's heart," an English poet once wrote, "is in itself a deed." Perhaps as great a deed is performed by the songs which refresh a nation's heart, and fill it with sparkling joy. Such songs are those of the Parisian Jewess, Mireille.