1921 saw the arrival in Venice of one of the Palazzo Contarini Polignac's more exotic occasional visitors, the American composer and songwriter, Cole Porter (1891-1964). He and his wife Linda had met Winnaretta in Paris in 1919, shortly after Porter had moved there from New York following the First World War. The Cole Porters quickly became prominent figures on the post-war scene, and there are two important episodes in Cole's early career in which Winnaretta played a background role. His tremendous inherited wealth and easy manner made him a popular if notorious figure in Paris and later Venice. He had unfavourable collisions with both Stravinsky and Serge Diaghilev, but was on very good terms with another of Winnaretta's star protégés, Darius Milhaud, a cordial enough friendship that resulted in an intriguing collaboration.

In popular social histories and articles, Cole's glamorous lifestyle in the twenties has been written up extensively, without overmuch reference to his professional career. As a result, there is a tendency to think that by the early twenties he was already coasting along on a path of unmitigated Broadway triumphs and an inexhaustible stream of royalties. This is very far from the truth, since apart from some 300 songs written for the amusement of his contemporaries at Yale, and an ignominious flop on Broadway in 1916, his great songs and reviews were still very much on the horizon. In his biography of Cole Porter, William McBrien remarks that "the twenties were for Cole a time of uncertainty, self-doubt, and confusion about his musical gifts, which he successfully disguised by assuming the role of a *boulevardier*." It is certainly true that no one can accuse Porter of wallowing in the shallows of self-pity, however insistently the disappointed Muse might have reproached him. However, *boulevardier* is perhaps too restrained a term to do justice to the rackety lifestyle he led in the years immediately following the war. His apartment in Paris, for example, was the scene of a more or less continuous wild party, populated by a gaggle of cross-dressing aristocrats and rent-boys, amply fuelled by cocktails and cocaine. In 1921, his considerable family fortune bolstered still further by an inheritance from his grandfather, he and his heiress wife Linda set off for Venice, chartering an entire train for themselves and their guests. That year he rented the Palazzo Barbaro on the Grand Canal, directly opposite Winnaretta's, though in later years he was to favour the nearby Ca'Rezzonico. On one occasion he enlisted no fewer than fifty gondoliers as footmen, waiters or occasional playmates - and much to the dismay of the locals (and to Serge Diaghilev), he converted an old barge into a mobile nightclub, which was towed merrily around the canals and the lagoon at all hours, with Leslie "Hutch" Hutchinson's all-black cabaret jazz band noisily trumpeting all the latest hits. There are numerous photographs of the boyish hero in Venice, tipsily posing with Sara and Gerald Murphy in the Piazza San Marco, or out on the Lido in shorts, a candy-striped blazer and a floppy sun hat. It is hard not to be captivated by the jaunty air, those large and devilishly mischievous eyes - that "certain something", to use a phrase from one of his own hits. He was to spend the next few summers and autumns Venice, until a scandalous gay liaison in 1927 proved too much for the locals to bear. He reluctantly left the city, rather than bear the ignominy of official expulsion.

At first glance, in the light of Winnaretta's damning remarks about the post-war encroachment on Venice of super-rich vulgarians, all this seems to be just the kind of thing she would have deplored. Nonetheless, Porter remained a welcome guest in her circle, perhaps because he was demonstrably a highly cultured and amusing individual, despite all the frat house hijinx. He was also a fellow traveller in another sense, in that he too had effected a successful marriage of convenience. Linda, some eight years his senior, was beautiful, personable and tolerant, turning a blind eye to his

homosexuality and promiscuity. They were to remain devoted to one another until her death in 1954. Furthermore Linda, like Winnaretta, had endured an unhappy first marriage, blighted by incompatibility and abuse. Her first husband, Edward Russell Thomas, was by all accounts a decidedly aggressive and sporty southern type. Among other lurid claims to fame, he had the distinction of being the first American to kill someone in a motoring accident. All this absorbing trivia aside, there were two significant results of Cole Porter's association with Winnaretta. One was a doomed enterprise in which Cole was to have taken lessons in orchestration from Stravinsky. The other was his one and only ballet, *Within the Quota*, a commission that came about through a chance encounter with Darius Milhaud in Winnaretta's salon. Both are of interest in that they reveal something of the more obscure mechanics of patronage and influence, not to mention serendipity and coincidence.

The idea that Cole might benefit from tuition by Stravinsky was for the most part Linda's. In 1922 she had asked Stravinsky to their place in Antibes to discuss this, an invitation he declined, though whether out of pride or because of a previous engagement it is unclear. It is certainly clear that Linda took a wifely, if not a quasi-motherly, interest in Cole's music, and that she felt his talents might be put to better use in the world of classical music rather than in composing light jingles for the amusement of the well-to-do. It is also said, possibly with some justification, that her interest was partly driven by her social ambitions. She came from an unimpeachable but ultimately rather staid Virginian family (two of her Lee ancestors signed the Declaration), so it may well have seemed appealing to break away from her somewhat Margaret Mitchell origins and attempt to scale the cultural heights dominated by Winnaretta. As to Cole's musical trajectory to date, he had minored in music at Yale and had even written a song for the Yale football team that is still sung today. Later, in Paris, he had enrolled at the Schola Cantorum, where for a while he had studied under Vincent d'Indy, an episode that in later life he recalled with carefully judged pride, implying that his subjection to classical discipline had been a formative part of his musical vision. The truth was that he had been a serial skipper of classes in Paris, much preferring to play hookey in the Café de Flore, a well-known upmarket haunt of artists and intellectuals on the Boulevard Saint-Germain. One listens in vain for any echoes of d'Indy's beloved modernist polyphony in *Let's Do It* or *My Heart Belongs to Daddy*. As to Winnaretta's angle in the proposed musical improvement of the feckless boy genius, it seems to have mainly been driven by a desire to help Stravinsky, who from 1914 onwards was perpetually hard-up having forfeited the income from his substantial family estates in Russia. As he conceded in his extensive conversations with Robert Craft, Winnaretta was always prepared to further his interests, if not through a direct commission like *Renard*, then at least by effecting introductions and suggesting opportunities. The doomed tuition project is well worth relating, since apart from anything else it is a rare and entertaining example of Stravinsky, usually a master-opportunist, being completely outmanoeuvred.

One of Stravinsky's more colourful acquaintances in Paris was a gay Swiss painter, Paul Thévanaz, who deserves to be remembered for the elegant drawings he made of his lover, Jean Cocteau, and of other prominent figures including Anna de Noailles. A regular fixture in Cole's boisterous gay circle, he dabbled in musical composition and also made a tidy if somewhat meretricious living in Europe and America as an interior decorator. When Porter got wind of the Linda-Winnaretta-Stravinsky idea, he asked Thévanaz to organise an introduction. Thévanaz was tremendously excited and gave Stravinsky some extravagant assurances: "He will pay you whatever you want. He's a very nice young man, intelligent and gifted, and a multi-millionaire." Stravinsky had no reason to disbelieve him. Here, after all, was a man who knew how to work the rich. Amongst other professional triumphs, Thévanaz had charged a ransom for decorating James Deering's private

casino in Miami with ceilings in the style of Tiepolo, and had enlivened the walls of Mrs George Blumenfeld's swimming-pool room in New York with a mural of a gigantic underwater scene, complete with a phantom shipwreck and a giant, translucent octopus on the verge of devouring a sea-cherub. It seemed that for an enterprising artist any commission, however *outré*, was there for the asking in this vertiginous American plutocracy. Merely selling a respectable course in orchestration should have been an easy challenge. Stravinsky shot forth a tentacle immediately, sending an extravagant proposal to Cole Porter. Porter's people responded promptly with a draft contract suggesting Stravinsky be paid half the fee proposed, together with a letter of intent inviting him to suggest any amendments he thought fit. When Stravinsky refused to budge on the fee, Porter abandoned the proposal. Stravinsky wrote an aggrieved letter to Winnaretta: "I do not hide to you the fact that I feel hurt by his behaviour and I regret that he troubled you for nothing." Boris Kochno, no stranger to financial misunderstanding and mishap as a result of his work with the *Ballets Russes*, gave a brief summing up: "With the Princesse Edmond de Polignac acting as go-between, Porter had asked Stravinsky to give him lessons in orchestration. Nothing came of it because Stravinsky demanded such an exorbitant fee."

The story of Cole's jazz ballet, *Within the Quota*, is rather more positive and no less entertaining. The piece had its genesis in Winnaretta's salon, jointly conceived by her *protégé*, Darius Milhaud, and by Cole's old friend from Yale, Gerald Murphy, a gifted tearaway from a wealthy family who was beginning to carve out a reasonably successful career in Paris as an artist, writer and set designer. By 1921 Darius Milhaud had come a long way since his first meeting with Winnaretta in Jacques-Émile Blanche's studio in 1913. Both he and Murphy were working with Rolf de Maré, the impresario of the *Ballets suédois*, an influential company that for a time occupied the Théatre des Champs-Élysées where it mounted a series of successful and often radical productions, all of which were closely scrutinised by the ever-jealous Serge Diaghilev. Among the works de Maré had commissioned was a short ballet from Milhaud, *Le Création du monde*, a neoprimitive piece that reflected Milhaud's newfound fascination with jazz and its African antecedents. It was intentionally a short work - by then impresarios were routinely careful not to overestimate the attention span of their audiences - and therefore de Maré asked Murphy if he might consider devising a suitable curtainraiser that would complement Milhaud's offering and bulk out the program. Murphy suggested a jazzy piece touching on the perennially topical and controversial subject of immigration to the United States. He already had an idea for the scenario and knew just the man to write the music. Milhaud was delighted, and formally offered Cole the commission the next time they met at Winnaretta's. Later that year, Cole and Gerald reconvened in Venice to start work on the project, Cole at the Palazzo Barbaro and Gerald in the no less opulent Casa Papadopoli. There, despite their intense dedication to trolling and partying, the former high hopes of Yale's Delta Kappa Epsilon fraternity found time to knock together a respectable offering for Rolf de Maré. Serge Diaghilev was beside himself with jealousy when he came to hear of the commission. "Cole's writing a ballet!" he scribbled to Boris Kochno; "Danger!"

Cole's final score, for four pianos, bears unmistakable traces of his misspent hours in the Café de Flore. Missing sharps and flats and incorrect clefs abound, but after a preview in Paris, Rolf de Maré gave the project the go-ahead. He insisted - and this was a major condition - that the piece be fully orchestrated by the French composer Charles Koechlin who, though he was known for his interest in exotic and unfamiliar idioms, was quite deeply entrenched in the academic tradition. The resulting makeover tidied up the schoolboy errors, but somewhat "Europeanized" the piece, softening or obliterating altogether some of the more viscerally jazzy aspects of Cole's vision. Nothing could really be done to Europeanize the rollicking scenario, very obviously the work of

two humorous, sophisticated and irreverent former Yale men. The general idea is simple enough. A bewildered Swedish immigrant arrives in New York, where he encounters a series of larger-than-life American stereotypes, including an heiress, a "colored gentleman", a "jazz baby" (a Pola Negri-type *femme fatale*), a rugged cowboy and finally a movie star, a Mary Pickford-type universal sweetheart. Throughout the piece the Swedish immigrant and his exotic welcoming committee are accosted by a series of unappealing authoritarian figures, including a Prohibitionist, a preacher, a tax-collector, a sheriff and an "uplifter" (one tasked with reforming errant "jazz babies"). These relentlessly puritanical harbingers were intended to embody what many saw as the draconian and racist anti-immigration laws passed in 1921 during the Warren G. Harding administration. The *dénouement* very much reflects what must have been the hopes and aspirations of many immigrants: love conquers all; the Swede marries the movie star; he eventually becomes a big hit in the motion picture industry himself. Gerald created some striking sets for the piece, making use of huge panels featuring satirical newspaper cuttings, an idea subsequently much copied. The music is highly entertaining. Cole threw in a few acute parodies of silent movie music, together with some very robust numbers rooted in jazz and ragtime. The final number, "*Sweetheart of the World*", is a smoky masterpiece, every bit as beguiling as many of Cole's later hits. The ballet is a remarkable piece, pre-dating Gershwin's "classical" offerings by a long way. It is gratifying to learn, at the time of writing, that it is currently being revived at Princeton by Professor Simon Morrison, head of the music department there, who sees it as a perfect weapon with which to take a swipe at the immigration policies of the Trump administration.