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Music and Society — the forgotten relationship*

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I am rather worried — and have been ever since I first entered the university musical world as an undergraduate. I am disturbed about how we see talk about when we discuss music, and those things that we somehow never find a place for in our discussions; about precisely what we teach and those things that we manage to leave out of our teaching, our researches and our scholarly writing.

In a word, I am concerned about the highly selective nature of our preconceptions about music — all those notions that are part of our musical scenery and that we simply take for granted, and that therefore deeply influence that quality of our musical understanding. This is by no means a local problem: I think it occurs in most parts of the world with which we are familiar.

Let me begin by stating some of the simplest manifestations of the problem. One of the things that for most of us is 'obvious' and taken for granted is that music is an art of personal expression. We talk about a piece of music as expressing feelings, which have been put into it by the composer: we expect him to be somebody really out of the ordinary and certainly more than a mere craftsman. If he is great we say that he has genius. That means that he will be blessed with the gift of true originality: he will be a creator. His work will proceed less from calculation than from flashes of inspiration. To most of us, all this is so self-evident as to be trite. It is 'obvious'; it is 'true'. I am bound to point out that hardly any of this would be either obvious or true to anybody but ourselves: that for most of the time during the history of the West, and nearly all of the time in most other cultures, all of my definitions would have been rejected as utterly false and meaningless and would probably have led to my being regarded as something of a subversive. To take the example of the Middle Ages: music then was regarded as a mathematical discipline, and it very happily took its place alongside arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy as one of the four arts of the *quadrivium*. The different components of music — melody, harmony, rhythm — were hardly to be considered in terms of anything so human and subjective as inspiration; on the contrary, they were to be discussed in the precise terms of mathematical proportions. Cassiodorus, the great sixth-century writer on music, characteristically described music as *disciplina vel scientia quae de numeris loquitur*: the discipline or science that deals with numbers. And what about the composer as 'creative genius'? In the first place, the concept of genius as such did not exist. The composer was a craftsman, and his job was to follow the rules of his craft. Certainly there was nothing special about him: he was seldom discussed in medieval writings, and hardly ever mentioned by name. Above all, he was *not* a creator — medieval theology, which said that only God could create, made sure of that. A view that is surprising to us was perfectly obvious to people in the Middle Ages; and composers then showed their humble dependence on already created material by basing their new compositions on pre-existing ones.

Only when we approach the Renaissance do things begin to change; only then do we find the beginnings of the notion of genius, and a clear separation of craftsman and genius. The craftsman *reproduces*, in terms of the rules; the genius *transgresses*, in order to create. Simultaneously we find the beginnings of the idea of music as a medium for expressing human emotions. What was formerly taboo now becomes not only permissible but even necessary, as society enters a new era with new potentialities and new demands: an order orientated towards man, discovery, individual achievement, great personalities and careers, and industrial and colonial conquest.

You will notice that in my attempt to go beyond the 'obvious', I have had to look at more than the 'obvious' facts themselves: I have had to see these facts in their proper context, and only by exploring these relationships — and particularly those that reach down to the *social* situation — have I been able to understand the facts and see why something that is unthinkable at one time is perfectly obvious at another. Perhaps it will seem that by picking on such notions as genius, personal expression, and creativity I have picked on what might be termed a 'popular' confusion: no self-respecting music-lover or musical scholar or practitioner would make that sort of error. If that is so, I would like to take the other extreme, and examine very briefly one of the most zealously cherished habits of university music departments: the cult of disinterested research. There is scarcely anything of which a musicologist is more proud than the methods and the achievements of historical musicology: no procedure in musical studies seems to him to be more obvious and correct, more independent of fluctuations in taste or outlook. For him, disinterested research — in the natural as well as the human sciences — came into being because we 'hit upon it'; that is all.

On closer inspection, however, the matter turns out to be rather more complex, and not quite so obvious. Modern scientific research came into being in the 16th and 17th centuries. But from the start a fierce theological and social battle was waged against it on many fronts. Science offended established interests: for this very reason science had of necessity to stress that research should be *disinterested*. So this criterion came to be built into its foundations, as it were — and precisely because of the social circumstances in the 16th and 17th centuries. The consequences of this were enormous. In particular, it came to be believed that all research and all knowledge were *valuable for their own sake*, and even more, that the *highest aim* of research was disinterested knowledge for its own sake. From this it followed that research which was undertaken for a practical end, such as the satisfaction of human needs,

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was regarded as being of a rather lower order.

And so we have the situation today where vast quantities of research are done in the most obscure corners of countless fields — including music — with no particular purpose except the accumulation of still greater quantities of partial and atomised knowledge. I need hardly remind you of how vigorously this state of affairs has been attacked in recent years.

I said I would begin by stating some of our simpler preconceptions — they might even be called prejudices — about music. In the process of doing that I have drawn atention to the necessity for us to think particularly about the social context if we wish to understand or see through these preconceptions. Now the fact that I feel obliged to point this out and to argue that the method I have used is indispensable, is itself a highly significant pointer to another of our preconceptions.

This time it is a much more serious one: I would say even that it is fundamental.

Underlying nearly all our writing about music, all our talking about it and teaching of it, is the taken-for-granted assumption that music has very little to do with society; or alternatively, that if it is related somehow to society, the nature of this connection need not concern us very much, and that it is far more important to talk about skills and techniques, and to keep to what we call the 'facts'. The orientations we are most used to, and that therefore seem to us perfectly natural and 'obvious', are invariably the ones we are least conscious of; and I admit that it was not until many years after I had begun to study music that I became aware of this particular orientation in our musical thinking. Once I noticed it, however, I saw it everywhere — in all our discussions about music at all levels, from the most erudite musicological treatise or scholarly textbook, to programme notes, casual conversations, and newspaper criticism. If I had not started to question this assumption, I would forever have regarded as 'obvious' that music is more or less abstract from life, that it develops in history pretty much according to its own immanent laws, or that the direction of its development is controlled 'from above' by composers of genius; I would forever have believed that music, being what we call an abstract art, is concerned aesthetically only with itself, and that its values are wholly internal to itself. I began to question these assumptions at the moment that I began to suspect them to be rationalizations. As I investigated, it struck me that such views had not always been held — in fact, they were of quite recent origin. And I saw that they came into being when and where they did — in the industrialized western countries in the late nineteenth century — because the middle classes then *needed* to hold such views, even though they ran contrary to what had been believed up to half a century earlier. Exactly why this was, can here be stated only very briefly.

The French Revolution had promised a better future for all human beings. If that future was to be indefinitely postponed — and the entrenchment of the bourgeoisie during the nineteenth century made that inevitable — then all forms of bourgeois thought, including aesthetics, would need to show a similar turning away from the great problems of the age, a similar flight from reality and a movement towards abstraction. The connection, then, between Europe in the age of imperialism and an aesthetician such as Worringer with his 'theory of abstraction' and his rejection of realism, is not in the least fortuitous.

For this way of viewing the matter, I am indebted to certain developments in the sociology of ideas. Since this is not primarily a paper on sociology, I cannot now give a full theoretical account of precisely how one must proceed if one wishes to de-hoax social phenomena so that the real web of interrelations, as well as the deceits and rationalizations, is revealed. I want simply to say that as a practising musician I find this kind of insight indispensable to my practical and theoretical involvement with music every day at every level. For social theorists have shown us that very often the views men have of themselves, their world, and their place in it, are far removed from what is actually and demonstrably the case.

As one philosopher has pointed out, it is true of social groups just as it is true of individuals, that if you want to form an opinion of someone you don't go about it merely by asking him his own opinion of himself. Now if this is the case, we can hardly claim that our views about music are exempt from these limitations. Our attitudes to music, the categories we impose on it, the analytical structures we bring to bear upon it, the way we explain it — all these are subject to the same laws: they too are a complex mixture of truths, half-truths, confusions and total falsehood. The reality we have to come to terms with is that our 'unreflected-upon' attitudes to music — those attitudes that we take for granted, and that seem to us most obvious, with all their implicit assumptions — are very largely *ideology*. That is to say, they have come into being at a specific moment in history, as part and parcel of the way certain classes of men have come to see their world and their place and activities in it, all of which have been more or less a function of the way society has been organized at that time, and particularly of the way it has shared — or rather denied the sharing of — its benefits. Such views are the products of certain societies in certain social and historical conditions, and of the men in them: men who by virtue of their place in the social structure are to greater or lesser degree cut off from seeing it *as a whole*, as it really is.

This has a very special, and uniquely troubling, significance for us today. As many social philosophers have pointed out, it is today quite remarkably difficult for ordinary men and women to *see* the whole, to grasp the social reality behind the ideological veil — in some respects it is more difficult now than it has been at any time in the last hundred years. This is partly, but not only, because of the increasing complexity of Western societies; there are in addition at least four further interrelated reasons for this predicament.

Firstly, there is the continuing contraction of man's consciousness through the increasingly specialized nature of his disciplines and occupations. One of the most disastrous products of this tendency is the man who is at one and the same time illiterate and a graduate of a university. 'This is a man' comments the French-speaking

philosopher Goldmann, 'who is very familiar with one field of production and has high professional qualifications to carry out in a satisfactory and even remarkable manner the tasks which are assigned to him, but who is increasingly losing all contact with the rest of human life, and whose personality is thus being deformed and narrowed to an extreme degree.'[1] Secondly, there is the steady erosion — and even total disappearance — of responsibility in social life. One of the differences, for the middle-class man, between the so-called liberal capitalism of one-hundred years ago and the centralized mass-production society of today, is that he finds fewer and fewer areas where he can act in a way that makes any difference, or can hold views that will *matter*. The real decisions are always taken *elsewhere*: he merely carries them out. Thirdly — and this is the payoff — because Western societies offer increasing material rewards, they also seem to offer their own self-justification. The fetishization of consumer goods stifles criticism before it can even be formulated. And fourthly, because of the centralization, the all-pervasiveness, and the insidiously sophisticated techniques of the communications industry, the consciousness of people today is dominated and administered to an alarming extent.

The picture is bleak; but the implication, I think, is clear. It is that today — as a matter of urgency — one of our very few lifelines is to use every resource at our command to be on our guard against the disfigured consciousness that I have described as ideology. We have to be exceedingly vigilant about not submitting passively to what seems most 'obvious'; we have vigorously to question the values, the categories, the responses, that we unconsciously pick up — no matter whether these concern life, or politics, or art in general, or (and this is what I am preoccupied with here) music. Only through a special kind of effort, and a profound concern, not for the immediate and superficial rewards offered by the present order, but for the real interests of humanity in the long term and on the broadest conceivable base: only in this way will we be able to make a start at comprehending the *whole*, and clearing our minds and senses of the encrustations of ideology. But it will only be a start; serious moral concern is not in itself enough. What I mean by this I shall attempt to make clear later on.

I must now say that I think that our task as musicians and music-lovers is today complicated in still another dimension, which I have so far not touched on. This only increases my concern that I mentioned at the beginning, and convinces me that the sort of criticisms I am making of the quality of our musical understanding are now more urgently necessary than they have ever been. This further complication — it is a horrifying one, though I think the other arts are affected in an almost identical way — is that music today has itself entered into partnership with ideology. Mass produced, and turned into a commodity like everything else, music now serves a very special function: it is the perfumed balm to tranquillize and lubricate a system geared to profits. In this gutted and predigested form we meet music everywhere: it is the gentle ooze that welcomes us in supermarkets, anaesthetizes frayed nerves in offices and factories, exhales over us in lifts and aeroplanes, screams at us from ice-cream vans, sings radio and TV commercials at us with mind-deadening regularity and leaves us humming to the tune of Coca-Cola, American cigarettes and beauty soap. And although this applies most obviously to what we call 'popular' musical styles, there is hardly a sphere of contemporary music or of the 'classical' music of the past that is immune to this sort of expropriation. When Beethoven's Fifth Symphony accompanies a summons to buy this or that brand of washing powder; when Mozart's G minor symphony is tarted up and truncated into a three-minute marketable commodity that can be heard fifteen times a day, every day; when Bach booms from the transistor radio to add to the noise of the floor polisher, and Berlioz introduces the latest Stock Exchange report: then it is questionable whether we can ever really *hear* Beethoven, Mozart, Bach or Berlioz again. What such associations, and such listening habits, actually do to our ability to *hear* — by which, as a musician, I must mean our ability to be quickened and enlightened by a profound musical utterance — is something we have scarcely begun to consider. Nor, I fear, is it something we worry very much about. We take it for granted, along with so much else. And anyway, it is part and parcel of our way of life and our standard of living, and that, we are told, is getting better all the time. So, in the words of a well-known song of the communications industry, why worry? The line of thought is impenetrably circular.

But that is only part of what I mean by saying that music has become entangled with ideology. I also mean something else. For the last century-and-a-half, ever since Beethoven virtually, it has been getting more and more difficult for composers — even the most serious composers — to write music that is both very good and very popular. This seems somewhat paradoxical, since it was of course precisely during the last century-and-a-half that audiences for 'classical' music grew so tremendously. But I think these two things are linked, and that therefore the paradox is a necessary one. What undoubtedly happened during the last one-and-a-half centuries was that the demands of good or great music, and the demands of popular music, tended to pull in diametrically opposite directions, so that it was progressively more difficult to write good music if one wanted also to be popular, or to write popular music if one wanted to be great. And notice that I said progressively more difficult: I do not want to deny that there were some composers who managed, at times, to come close to both greatness and popularity. The reason for this difficulty, I want to suggest, is that music — indeed the very language of 'classical' music itself — fell victim to commercialization. In a so-called free-enterprise economy where the man who did best was the one who geared himself most ruthlessly to the biggest turnover, and where the composer like everybody else had to come to terms with this principle, or perish; in this society the composer who did 'best' (in financial terms) was the one who had his eye most firmly on the box office.

But the box office of course has no standards, except quantitative ones. And so the language of Wes-

tern 'classical' music by turns adapted itself to the box office — not only in the work of composers whose names we've forgotten, but also to a marked degree in the music of many serious composers. Think for example of late 19th century piano music, to mention just one area. However fine much of this music is, and whatever its positive contributions to musical and pianistic technique, it remains nevertheless true that one often wants to apply to it such epithets as 'cheap', 'showy', 'superficial', 'slushy'; one frequently wants to say that it strives for a sort of brilliant glitter for its own sake, that it strikes attitudes that don't ring true, that it strives for immediate effect, that it tries to ingratiate itself. It hardly needs pointing out that these are the very same terms some of us would use to describe many of the consumer goods that we are asked to buy every day of our lives. Much music has unknowingly taken on the very character of a society it should be helping us to become critically aware of: much music blindly reproduces the values of the established way of life, instead of refusing these values. It is here that I see music entangled with ideology.

This kind of corruption of language, as I have hinted, is by no means peculiar to music: it afflicts the other arts as well. John Berger, for example, has incisively documented the assimilation of painting to property;[2] and Richard Hoggart, while Professor of English in the University of Birmingham, wrote as follows about the problems of writing in the English language today:

> I wonder whether in any previous period so many words were being used, as we might say, *inorganically* — not because the writers had something to say about their experience, *but on behalf of the particular concerns of others;* when so much language was used not as exploration but as persuasion and manipulation; when so much prose had its eye only slightly on the object and almost wholly on the audience, when so many words proclaimed, if you listened to them carefully within their contexts, not 'I touch and illuminate experience' but 'this will roll them in the aisles.'
>
> More important: in such circumstances it becomes more difficult to write *decently* about any thoughts and feelings. It would be very easy to compile a black list of words which are not usable until they have been redefined by each writer within each particular context. Not the old words we are all used to laughing about — 'tragedy' for the popular press, or 'magnificent' for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. The process goes on quickly and becomes more sophisticated all the time. The newer men have quieter voices. So words like 'sincere', 'creative', 'vital', 'homely' and 'love' go out of decent use . . .
>
> That is why, we say, a writer finds his tools going blunt in his hands.[3]

The French structuralist Barthès has written rather more cryptically about the same issue. 'In the present state of history,' he says, 'all political writing can only confirm a police-universe, just as all intellectual writing can only produce a paraliterature which does not dare any longer to tell its name.'

I have said that one of the most serious and fundamental of our taken-for-granted assumptions— serious and fundamental not only because it is heinous and unscholarly in itself, but also because it blinds us to the falsehood of many of our other assumptions — is the belief that the connexion between music and society, if we ever concede that such a connexion exists at all, can safely be ignored or dismissed in a few vague platitudes about the *Zeitgeist*. We ought to remind ourselves that it was not always so. Until relatively recent times, composers, performers, theorists, were a highly unified and integrated group: the boundaries between who composed, who performed and who theorised were hardly significant. Much the same was true of the other arts — for example, literature. And as happened also in those other arts, such men saw music as immersed in life: not only deriving from society, but returning to it and affecting the quality of life in a most profound way. These were men who had universal and inseparable social, artistic, human and political interests. Such concerns formed a dynamic unified system; they had not yet split off and hardened into narrow, specialized disciplines. We tend too easily to forget that this atomization of perspective is neither natural nor given: it is something we have brought about, and it fundamentally distinguishes the modern period from the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and indeed all eras up to the so-called heroic period of the bourgeoisie.

Literature, by virtue of its explicitness, provides a particularly vivid insight into the kind of universality that characterized artistic endeavour in the days before such activity fragmented into specialised fields. *Hamlet* is only the most famous example of a literary work that includes within itself a substantial and representative discourse on the relationship of art to reality; other examples are to be found throughout literature, from Aristophanes to Goethe and Balzac. All the most influential philosophers of art stressed this relationship: Aristotle and Hegel, for instance, methodically developed the idea that art existed in a systematic relationship with reality; and Hegel showed that the ascent and decline of artistic forms could be understood only as arising from the socio-historical evolution of mankind.

Indeed, the significance of such philosophers for the theory of art derives precisely from the fact that they were important social theoreticians as well as aestheticians. Now in historical practice, this whole line of thought has been carried to a logical and radical conclusion. Great artists in every field have based their work on the presumption that by working in and on the present, they could contribute to the realization of a better future. Schiller, for example, said that the political problem of a better society 'must take the path through the aesthetic realm, because it is through beauty that one arrives at freedom.' In his poem *The Artists* he wrote:

> What we have here perceived as beauty,
> We shall someday encounter as truth.

Balzac saw his task in even more active and concrete terms. 'What Napoleon began with the

sword', he said, 'I shall complete with the pen'. And in similar vein, listen to Handel. After a performance of the *Messiah,* an aristocratic admirer thanked Handel for the 'noble entertainment' which he had recently given the town. 'My Lord', replied Handel, 'I should be sorry if I only entertained them; *I wish to make them better.*'

These are some of the things that by and large we in the musical world don't talk about today, or worry about. Or if ever we do talk about them, too often we do so with the uncomfortable sense that what we are doing is not quite legitimate. Our universe of discourse is circumscribed by technical matters. We talk about wrong notes in performance, criticise parallel fifths in a student's harmony exercise, discriminate between different musical styles, analyse the formal and technical aspects of a musical work, comment on the relationship between two conflicting editions of the same work, and so on. I do not want to deny that each of these things may in its proper place be valid and important; but I am worried that such concerns are for the most part *all* we talk about.

The consequence of this, it seems to me, is that in most parts of the world at the present time musicians have very little of interest to say about their own art. I search each month with growing fatigue through the musical and musicological journals, the newly published books, the lists of forthcoming publications — including abstracts of such works in many languages — in a quest for evidence of any attempts to see music in relation to the larger social contexts I have been discussing, and thereby to account objectively and concretely for the specifics of the musical culture of which we are a part. I assure you that this monthly search is a most depressing undertaking.

Our approach to musical history, for instance, seems to be about on a par with the level of development of general academic history in the nineteenth century — and that, as Eric Hobsbawm has pointed out, was 'an extremely, one might almost say deliberately, backward discipline'.[4] The music historian's job, we think, following Leopold von Ranke, is 'simply to show how it really was' — in other words, to get to the facts.

The facts of music history, we assume, are like the facts of natural science: isolated, there for the taking, and discoverable by means of philology, textual criticism and archaeological spade-work.

Such an attitude, although it has undeniably given us a number of empirical techniques for verifying certain types of documentary evidence, is premissed upon an old, naive, positivistic view of history. The Oxford historian, Gareth Stedman Jones, has spelt out the implications of such a view, and pointed to its fundamental error.

According to this view, he writes,

> history was an objective thing. It was physically recorded in myriad bundles of archives from the Public Record Office to the local parish church. The task of the historian was to write it up. Theory would come, like steam from a kettle when it reached boiling point. The initial illusion is evident. Those who tried to create theory out of facts, never understood that it was only theory that could constitute them as facts in the first place. Similarly, those who focused history upon the event, failed to realize that events are only meaningful in terms of a structure which will establish them as such.[5]

I have been sketching for you a picture of contemporary musical studies, of popular attitudes to music, and of music itself, and have argued that all of these are subject to ideological distortions of various kinds. I have tried to suggest that these distortions consist in our habit of seeing music in an atomized way, as so many facts and techniques, cut off from a fundamental structural intimacy with its social order. Now in opposition to this somewhat dismal state of affairs a few voices have been raised: they are, I am afraid, lone voices, and they are heard but rarely, and hardly ever at any length. Yet what is significant is that they are the voices of some of the most eminent musical thinkers of our time. Though I would not presume that all of these scholars would agree either with everything I have said, or with each other, they are nevertheless clearly very worried about many of these same basic issues. I do not care much for catalogues, but since the views of these scholars lend weight to my own, I should like very briefly to recount a few of them for you.

The German musical scholar George Knepler argues that perhaps there is no such thing as 'music history'. 'When we deal with our subject', he says, 'we are, whether we know it or not, concerned with the history of man.' In making a plea for the history, sociology, psychology, analysis, and aethetics of music (and other disciplines) 'to ask one another more exact questions', he is insisting that what we do *not* need is still more blind piling up of data, uninformed by theory. 'We have a store of knowledge and we don't know what to do with it', he says. 'The *theory* of historiography and the *theory* of musicology are much less developed than the accumulation of even more knowledge. . . . I only wish to emphasize how important it is to take a more universal view of all facets of our discipline'.[6]

F L Harrison, the English scholar, evidently concurs. For him, the aim of the academic study of music is the study of men in society, through the music they use. This means, incidentally, that one has no right to ignore popular music. Harrison maintains that 'it is the function of all musicology to be in fact ethnomusicology, that is, to take its range of research to include material that is termed "sociological".' Thus musicology should have what he calls a 'social aim': namely, to enlarge man's knowledge of himself and of his social development.[7] In Yugoslavia, Ivo Supicic approvingly quotes[8] Robert Erich Wolf's criticism of the usual narrow academic approach to music; the criticism goes as follows:

> . . . well furnished as it is with knowledge and techniques of the past, musicology still largely ignores past attitudes, the psycho-philosophical climate which made use of those techniques for an aesthetic end. Neither literary nor art historians are so indifferent to this significant tool; musicologists lag far behind their colleagues in parallel disciplines, and while the latter have . . . the advantage of dealing with — apparently — more 'con-

> crete' materials, musicologists need not abandon the quest because of the more 'abstract' nature of their art.

A similar fresh wind blows from several places in America. If we study music in order to study man in society, then we ought to guard against being too ethnocentric. Mantle Hood reminds us that art history and criticism are based on the assumption of a world of art. He goes on: 'Music history and criticism have remained insular in their promulgation of Western theories and tradition. Any kind of insularity is hardly compatible with the demands of the last half of the twentieth century.'[10]

For Edward A Lippman, the problem is that musical research is 'too positivistic, too preoccupied with the collection of data and the determination of detail.'[11] Gilbert Chase would agree; we have reached an impasse, and the major breakthrough, he believes, 'will occupy only through the fusion of the two disciplines — historical musicology and ethnomusicology — under the more impelling impact of the social sciences, to which we must necessarily look for an understanding of the forces that are even now changing the shape of society in the post-industrial era'.[12] This would seem to imply that some sort of synthesis, and the formulation of adequate theoretical methods, is necessary if our musical understanding is to develop; and these, significantly, are precisely the terms of Charles Seeger's criticism. Seeger writes:

> In comparison with the most admired scholarly disciplines of the twentieth-century Western World, musicology has only tardily formed concepts of its total field, or universe, and of its lowest common denominator. And these concepts, such as they are, have not yet made a dent upon the 'excessive historicism' still entrenched in academic fortresses. Meanwhile, the natural and social sciences have advanced from positions of main reliance upon analytical techniques to bold syntheses of universal proportions, while in musicology, even mention of synthesis is not quite respectable.[13]

Implicit in many of these writings is one further theme, and one that I have harped on throughout this paper. It is that if we see music in isolation from society, we shall not only distort its meaning, but what we say will be subject to serious factual error. Paul Henry Lang, doyen of American musicologists, bolsters his attack with an example of such an error. He observes that

> the Baroque started out as an expression of the *Ecclesia militans,* of the Counter Reformation, but as it spread from the Latin-Catholic south to the German-Protestant north the original motive gave way to a different set of ideas. Yet musicology persists in dealing with Baroque music in elaborate isolation, expecting to explain it by purely stylistic research and elucidation, but producing only a good picture of formal and technical developments without accounting for the underlying meaning . . . (The researchers), by restricting themselves to chronology, paleography, morphology, typology, and general *Fachlehre* . . . lost sight of the idea and missed its mutation.[14]

All these writings are raids on the 'obvious', as transmitted from teacher to pupil in music-teaching institutions in most parts of the world.

As such, they may seem rather academic, and a little remote from the immediate concerns of anybody not actually involved in the business of teaching, or studying music. This is not the conclusion I should like you to draw. As I have implied from the outset, if our attitudes to music urgently need spring-cleaning, up-dating, rebuilding, and a number of other even more radical operations, it is not only in university music departments that such revisions have to be made, but everywhere music of any description is played, talked about, talked over, bought, sold, ignored, or sensitively listened to. This of course is not to deny that music departments may have a special responsibility for reducing the amount of noxious academic dust that is produced in lecture rooms and libraries, inhaled by students, and exhaled for years to come in classrooms, concert halls, homes, and the columns of the daily press.

If this suggests the idea of a sort of academic pollution, I don't think the image will be gratuitous. The situation is, after all, rather a desperate one. Lang — to quote him again — speaks of the 'pitiful state of our popular literature on music' and laments the total non-existence of 'an intelligent reading public comparable to that interested in the visual arts'; the blame for both, he believes, rests with the music-teaching institutions. He argues that musical education at university level is by and large 'not an integral part of what is considered a "liberal" education; it does not aim at training the intellect, and bears little resemblance to the studies pursued in the other humanistic disciplines'. He points to the existence of 'a marked gulf between cultural patterns prevailing in the other divisions of the university's school of arts and letters, and the music department.'[15] This undoubtedly has some bearing on what F L Harrison means in his apocalyptic statement that 'there appears to be a near-breakdown of the dissemination of knowledge of one of the central arts of Western society.'[16]

I don't know whether it is more shocking to register such serious criticisms or to admit that they are almost never made.

At this stage I don't want us to lose sight of what I, and the scholars I've quoted, see as being basic to this shrivelling and ossification of the musical mentality of our culture: namely, the shrinking of the legitimate area for musical pursuits to a narrow field of technical and 'factual' matters, a field that excludes the plenitude of music's extra-musical relationships and, most disastrously of all, excludes the social and human context that gives music its meaning. Before I attempt to suggest how we might go about liberating our minds from this predicament, I should like to point out what I think is a rather nice contradiction between the way we think and the way we act in this regard. If a sense of the essential relationship between music and society has dropped out of our consciousness, then it may surprise us to discover that our musical behaviour belies our avowed theory and confirms the very truth of

this music-society relationship. I think this can be shown very quickly. It's often lamented that we *really* like only the music of the period from Bach to World War I, at the outer limits. Usually it's assumed that this is so *merely* because we aren't sufficiently exposed to earlier, or more recent music. Doubtless this is true to a degree.

But it seems to me that there is a much more fundamental reason why we love the music of this historical period above all others. It is that this music speaks to us of the life-style we are so busy living and so earnestly involved in trying to preserve. To put it rather bluntly, as members of the bourgeoisie we like affirmative bourgeois music.

From this it follows, of course, that we could discover a great deal about ourselves if we learnt to 'read the character' of this music — an enterprise that presupposes, but goes beyond, mere technical analysis. My own methodical attempts at this kind of musical 'character analysis' have convinced me that, paradoxically, we applaud in such music not only values which coincide with the way we live, but also values that run quite opposite to it. When we speak about the 'great composers' as being those who were most *creative* and most *original*, we are applauding precisely the kind of achievements that have opened the options for human progress and freedom in the bourgeois era — even though in discussing such composers we may think we are talking *only* about technical categories. Conversely, part of our admiration for 'the great composers' depends upon their music transcending — even negating — the present order. My own work on Beethoven,[17] for example, has shown that Beethoven remains one of our very greatest composers because his music *enacts* the most radical ideals of the French Revolution, which appeal to us precisely to the extent that a happy and liberated life for all human beings has *not* been realized in the present social order. It would be perfectly legitimate to ask why we cherish some values in music that we are content to see trodden underfoot in society. You might want to answer by saying that we applaud such values in art because there they are relegated to the category of idealistic fantasy. This argument has the familiar ring: 'It would be nice if . . . but human nature being what it is . . .,' etc. But this is not good enough. The *reverence* with which we treat music, and all art, defies our relegating it to the category of make-believe: I think we have to say that music embodies aspirations which are the real aspirations of all of us *in spite of ourselves*.

Marcuse, in 1937, coined a memorable term for these aspirations in art: he called them 'a remembrance of what could be'. 'Only in art', he went on to say, 'has bourgeois society tolerated its own ideals and taken them seriously.'[18]

This has been in the way of a short digression, but I hope it has helped to make my earlier point: namely, that although we forget that a profound relationship exists between music and society, our musical behaviour nevertheless confirms that relationship. Our actions belie our beliefs. But the corollary is also true; our beliefs are far from being able to comprehend or explain our practice — and especially those aspects of our practice that reflect most deeply on our intimate musical preferences. Given these beliefs, we cannot account for our deepest likes and dislikes.

Mere technical analysis of the musical work, incidentally, cannot do this for us either — as the most honest and intelligent technical analysts freely admit. A leading American musical analyst, Edward T Cone, for example, has written that 'it would be tempting to state that analysis can demonstrate the quality of the work'; there is, however, he says, 'a final step that is completely beyond the confines of analysis'.[19]

I have taken a considerable but I think necessary length of time to arrive at the crucial question that I wish now to formulate. It is this. If our taken-for-granted assumptions about music lead us so promptly into the dead-ends of ideology, factual error, false hypothesis, self-contradiction, helplessness before the facts, and a rampant popular ignorance about music, what are we to do about it? How are we to escape from these crippling limitations? How do we evolve a theory that comprehends our practice, and how do we become critically sensitive to the distorting ideology that is built into our musical consciousness, institutions, textbooks, and mass media? In proposing an answer, I want to be a bit more systematic than my colleagues, those lone voices from far-off places whom I quoted earlier. I believe that the answer — to put it in rather philosophical language — is to recover the category of the dynamic totality; that is to say, to grasp the concept of the whole — understood as being in a process of change — and to situate it at the centre of all our discussions, all our thinking and doingin regard to our art. This is a very difficult matter and we shall not achieve it overnight. But before we can even begin, we shall of course need to know what it is that I am talking about. What then is this category of the totality?

Very briefly, it is a view of human activity as belonging to a greater whole, which extends both spatially and in time and which thus embraces the totality of man's social, physical, economic, historical, and cultural world. It is an insistence therefore that no part of man's activity can be understood by wrenching it out of the whole that gives it its meaning, and trying to understand it in isolation. The part belongs inseparably to the whole: to understand either the part, or the whole, one has therefore to meet two essential conditions: one has to consider both the part and the whole together; and one has to realize that these are not *static* entitties, but rather aspects of a social system in a process of *historical change*. It is impossible to divorce the spiritual side of life — including music and the arts — from the material side, or to divorce either of these from their history. If one wishes to acquire a scientific understanding of social life, this bifocal — or rather multi-focal — view is the only way to do it. The method which Descartes urged — namely, 'to divide each of the difficulties . . . into as many parts as possible, as might be required for an easier solution' — may be valid to a degree in the natural sciences; but in the human sciences it is almost completely useless. In the human sciences one has to be what is sometimes called 'dialectical'. This is obviously not the place to go fully into the pros and cons of the dialectical method: I want now merely to assert this as an

approach I believe we in the arts ought to take very seriously indeed. *How* correct and *how* important it is, is a question that has been answered by, among others, the important twentieth-century thinker Lucien Goldmann. To ask, he says,

> whether the social sciences ought to be dialectical or not means purely and simply to ask if they ought to understand reality or to distort and obscure it: in spite of its different and, *apparently even contrary*, aspect, it is the same battle which, in the seventeenth century, the physicists fought against the particular interests of forces bound to the past and to the Church, the struggle against particular ideologies for a free, objective and human knowledge.[20]

The point I want to stress is that we need this dynamic, and ultimately critical concept of the whole in order to save ourselves from the related scourges of error, ignorance, and ideology. Honest immediacy and innocent intuition are not enough; all the faith and goodwill in the world are insufficient to provide an objective basis for reflection about music. In a splintered and reified world where the real relationships that constitute the whole are not immediately apparent, theory alone can reveal these connections, including those that bear upon music. I have already mentioned the view, held by many sociologists, that today the basic truths about our society and the way we live are remarkably inaccessible to ordinary consciousness; and I have suggested that neither music nor our attitude to it can automatically be exempt from the resultant 'false consciousness'. What all this means is that today musical discussions of any kind will tend to get hopelessly lost if the talk is *only* about music: composers will get lost if they talk only about composing, sponsors only about sponsoring, musicologists only about musicology, music teachers only about music teaching, and so on. All of these must orient themselves towards the concept of the dynamic totality, which is the one procedure that has even the possibility of guaranteeing that these become critically aware not only of themselves, their goals, methods, and techniques, but also of the social and historical reality within which they operate. I have no wish to pretend that this is not very difficult; or to pretend that the odds are not loaded against it by the entire present structure of our musical life. But before we throw up our hands in despair, let us take note of the fact that great advances have been made in the other arts, and even, in one virtually unique instance, in music itself — in the work of T W Adorno.

Since, however, such developments have met with much more general approval in the other arts than in music, I should like very briefly to mention a few of the significant features of these other achievements. Ever since the early years of the century art historians have been learning that the great works of painting and sculpture, and the stylistic and technical changes in art, can be properly understood and assessed only in relation to the social totality of which they are a part. One of the starting-points of this development was the year 1904 when a scholar in Vienna noted that nobody had been able to explain the sudden emergence of the art of the Van Eycks, and went on to show that the wellsprings of their art could only be found in — of all places! — books of economic history. Since then the achievements of art history — including the correcting of errors — have been impressive. Art historians have discovered for example, that a purely formalistic approach to medieval architecture obscures precisely what was most important to medieval men and women: namely the *content* of the architecture, its religious implications. They have discovered that because (say) Romanesque art, or the art of the Italian Renaissance, is so deeply rooted in the social and political conditions of its time, it is a falsification of the style to treat it in isolation from such conditions. In a discussion of some of the achievements of this method — which has very largely changed the character of art history — Frederick Antal has pointed out that such art historians have also learnt one other vital lesson: namely, that 'there is no contradiction between a picture as a work of art and as a document of its time, since the two are complementary'.[21]

But probably the greatest strides of all have been made in the field of literature — and there largely as a result of the lifelong efforts of George Lukács, the great Hungarian literary critic, philosopher, and sociologist. It seems to me quite evident that serious musical studies will make no further significant advance until they have — *as a first step* — assimilated the work of a thinker such as Lukács, and that of his school. Needless to say, it will not be a simple matter of taking over and then mechanically applying the concepts which Lukács has worked out with such astonishing rigour, profundity and subtlety in relation to the literary work of art. All of these concepts, although some may *appear* to turn upon purely literary questions, have, in Lukács's formulations, an inescapable relation to the totality, to the social and historical whole within which the work of art comes to life. But because of obvious and fundamental differences between music and literature, we shall need to do a lot of work on these concepts before we know how — or even whether — we can apply them to music, or whether, guided by Lukács's *concerns*, we need to look for different concepts which may be more fitting to the musical works of art.

An example might help to illustrate what I mean.

One of Lukács's key categories is the concept of realism. This idea is inseparable from the view that I have already touched on, that the way the world immediately appears to be, is not the way it 'really' is. Its surface appearances are mystifying: they are rationizations that hide from view the dynamics that actually govern the social world.

Lukács himself summarizes this view by availing himself of a famous quotation: 'Science', he recalls, 'would be superfluous if there were an immediate coincidence of the appearance and reality of things'. Now realism in art exists precisely in order to bridge this gulf between the way things seem to be and the way they truly are. Lukács puts it as follows:

> The goal for all great art is to provide a picture of reality in which the contradiction be-

> tween appearance and reality, the particular and the general, the immediate and the conceptual, etc., is so resolved that the two converge into a spontaneous integrity in the direct impression of the work of art and provide a sense of an inseparable integrity. The universal appears as a quality of the individual and the particular, reality becomes manifest and can be experienced within appearance, the general principle is exposed as the specific impelling cause for the individual case being specifically depicted.[22]

Lukács explains that *how* this contradiction of appearance and reality is overcome in art is the achievement of *form*. Form, he says, raises content to objectivity in art; it is 'a specific mode of reflection of reality'; it is 'the shortest way to the top'. In art, content must *become* form; and in the same way, form must *become* content. The unity of form and content *makes possible* the unity of appearance and reality, of the particular and the universal, of the individual and the typical. And with this theory, Lukács can quite easily account for the *effect* of the work of art. The effect of art, he says,

> results from the fact that the work by its nature offers a truer, more complete, more vivid and more dynamic reflection of reality than the recipient otherwise possesses, that it conducts him . . . beyond the bounds of his experiences toward a more concrete insight into reality.[23]

The obvious question is, of course: How could we apply some of these concepts to music? Is there any musical equivalent for realism — for discovering the reality behind the appearance, and making it manifest *in* the appearance? What, if anything, is the musical equivalent of objectivity?

I don't think these questions are as unanswerable as they may at first seem. It seems likely that we can say something about the 'content' of various musical genres. Sonata would seem to have duality or even conflict — of keys, themes and so on — as one of its primary contents. The content of a Gothic motet might possibly be the harmonious accord into which the brilliant scholastic mind can bring the most diverse and independent components — notably, characteristic melodies and texts from opposing sacred and secular realms.

Another aspect of the content of a musical work is surely the logic and the principles according to which it operates. What, in other words, are its own internal laws? These laws change in music from time to time — in fact, they change constantly. For instance, at a certain time in history, equality and unity of the simultaneous lines in a musical work is expected; at another time it is not: thus the great age of polyphony gives way to a more homophonic period. In the Baroque, music moves by a process of, so to speak, unravelling its *given* implications; in the Classical era, a piece of music leads itself beyond the given, and so discovers the unexpected. Once we have conceptualized such laws, or such contents, we can then ask to what extent they are objective, in Lukács's sense.

How far do they succeed in giving us an auditory image of the real, objective dynamics of their own particular historical age? Or, to use different words, how far do these musical laws reflect the real inherent laws of their social contexts? And — just as important — how far are these laws realized in a form that allows them adequate expression? When we have answered such questions, incidentally, we shall also be in a position to see music as a way of *knowing*, and shall therefore be able to judge objectively whether a given piece is 'true' or 'false'.

Lukács's work — in its entirety undoubtedly one of the greatest intellectual achievements of the last hundred years — is full of formulations whose possible application to music need urgently to be explored. Another of these, closely related to those I have already mentioned, is his outline of a theory of genres. In discussing a genre, one is discussing a specific and concrete relationship between form, content, and theme. Lukács explains that an artist can of course treat his subect matter in any way he wishes — but not all treatments will be equally successful. He gives the example of Zola trying to extend a short story by Balzac into a full-length novel: Zola's novel failed where Balzac's story on the same subject succeeded, not because Balzac was talented and Zola was not, but because with Balzac 'the short-story form grows out of the essential quality of the theme and subject matter'. Zola *could* have written a novel on Balzac's theme — the tragic plight of the modern artist — but to do so he would have had to find 'entirely different subject matter and an entirely different plot'. When we obtain a theory of genres, says Lukács, 'we will then be able to see that every genre has its own specific objective laws which no artist can ignore without peril'.[24]

All these notions — appearance and reality, objectivity in art, form and content, the theory of genres — are intrinsically inter-related: not because Lukács wishes them to be, but because they too are aspects of the whole, the totality that encompasses man in all his material and spiritual relations. They are therefore an essential aspect of man's history as well, and they change — both in themselves and in relation to each other — as and when man's history changes. A number of profound and simple truths emerge from this realization, with obvious significance for music.

There can, for example, be no such thing as a musical form to suit all of history's occasions: musical forms are justified by history, not by composers, and still less by writers of textbooks. Even more dramatic is the logical inference that therefore no composer — no artist in any sphere — if he wishes to produce art of relevance and integrity, is free to do just as he pleases. For art to be seen to be great, it must also be seen to be necessary.

I have discussed Lukács because he seems to me to be the most important and influential of those thinkers about art who deal with what I have called the category of the dynamic totality. Moreover, because of the clarity, cogency and number of his theoretical concepts, he is perhaps the one whose work is most suggestive to musicians. But there are many other writers in this tradition — at least one of whom, Theodor Adorno, I particularly regret not having had time to discuss. In recommending the work of these thinkers as correct in method, I do not want it to be thought that I am claiming infallibility for them. What I am

arguing is that they have brought into being a mode of discourse that posits the notion of a *dynamic, dialectial whole,* and thus certainly meets the first prerequisite of making explicit once again that unity between art and society that was so fundamental to all artistic activity before the bourgeois era.

Only within the perspective of such a method shall we begin to be fully conscious of, for example, the choices, evaluations, and discriminations that we make about music, and obectively of why we make them; only then can we intervene in these choices, and where necessary rescue them from ideology. At the moment, most of the discussions we have about music are abstract, because they fail to recognize that the question — both now and in the past — about what kind of *music* we want is dependent upon the prior question about what kind of *world* we want. Our need today is to see that most of our agreements and disagreements about 'good' or 'bad' music are in fact disputes *not* (as we suppose) about 'aesthetic value' as some mystical or abstract category, a self-enclosed system remote from the concerns of ordinary life, and with terms that have meaning and reference only within the system. On the contrary, we need to understand that these agreements or disagreements revolve around values that we hold to be important, or that are repugnant to us, or that fall somewhere between; and that such values are both social and historical.

This is not to say that such discussions are in no sense whatever aesthetic; rather, it is to insist that the aesthetic is not an autonomous category, but that we have to invoke it only when we begin to consider in what way music differs from life.

Our need then, is to see that the apprently autonomous and absolute questions about music are not — and never have been — autonomous at all; we need to strip them of the self-sufficiency that they have in recent history acquired, and reduce them again to their *real* content. Once we are able to do that, we shall be on the way to taking music truly seriously. And that, I believe, can only help us to take the totality of life seriously. For me the two realms are inseparable. By elevating this relationship to full consciousness we may not only become better musicians; we may also, to paraphrase Handel, become better people.

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