

# Spiritual Currents in Music

By

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ALTHOUGH music has undergone, in the past eight hundred years, changes as severe as those in the other arts, it does not always reflect the outward spiritual climate of its times with the obviousness of painting, architecture, or literature. This is due to the "inwardness" of music: less than any other art, perhaps, does it seem to the perceiver to be "out there". It lends itself, therefore, far less to the description of objects and events in the world of visual space, which are as it were the symbolic accidents of the inward history of the race. Frithjof Schuon has written of this:

The reason for this disproportion between the arts is that intellectual decadence—decadence of contemplative, not of inventive intelligence—is far more directly manifested in the visual arts, in which elements of intellectuality are strongly involved, than in auditive or "iterative" arts, which chiefly exteriorize the many and various states—and so in the event the beauties—of that plastic substance which is the soul.<sup>1</sup>

We cannot expect to find in music, then, the more obvious signs either of piety or of spiritual decadence. So much of its meaning is in the ear of the beholder.

The composition of music is moreover often a less conscious act than that of other artworks. A composer has of course to wield his technique and follow his chosen forms consciously, but of the meaning of his music he will often have but a vague, even a mistaken idea; vague, because the meaning is above the precision of words or pictures, and perhaps on a level where his thoughts do not habitually dwell. Wagner is a case in point: his use of traditional legend, and the power with which his music conveys the drama, were not necessarily matched by any "esoteric" understanding; and his personal conduct was not always such as to inspire confidence in his own realization.<sup>2</sup> Music can be closer to the Ideas which beget all art; and by a peculiar gift of Grace, the Ideas may make their appearance through one who does not himself behold them. This "sacerdotal" function of the composer is especially strong, in another way, in a case like Mozart: a whole symphony would come to him, he avowed, in a moment of time, in all its plenitude, and he would merely have to write it down. But not all composers know the archetypes of their music. Usually their experience is limited to its temporal aspect, in which the archetypes are manifested in a language: for music is as much a language as English, or mathematics. It is just another way for formulating knowledge which, on another and a truer level, is informal. But the composer, or the listener, may become so involved with the linguistics of music that the informal aspect of it escapes him, despite the fact that he may manipulate or appreciate the language in a very interesting way. Nowadays most of the professional writing about music is on this level, reflecting as does academic philosophy an obsession with grammar and the illusion that meaning is to be found there, and nowhere else. Such people are reducing the sciences of the Quadrivium to the more elementary level of the Trivium.

We have to look back to the early Middle Ages to find a situation in music which can in any sense be described as "traditional", maintaining an equilibrium as against development and change. The traditional sacred music of the Christian West is Gregorian Chant, that body of unharmonized liturgical melody which was reputedly codified under Saint Gregory in the latter part of the sixth century, and added to sporadically during the following six hundred years. Since no musical notation survives from the era of the Saint, it is reasonable to assume that the communication of the repertory was largely if not exclusively oral, and that ecclesiastical singers possessed the capacious memories of the "illiterate". We may also suppose that the chant was subject to the minor changes, regional and individual, which the solidification of writing prohibits. It is hard for musicians nowadays to imagine a state in which the notes were wholly internal, so dependent are we on the printed page which inevitably interposes yet another barrier between our consciousness and the musical idea.

An instrument, compared to a voice, also mediates the experience for the performer: but it is probable that little place was given to instruments in the earliest church music. Without notes, without instruments, Man was as it were naked, singing before his God: music was in a kind of primordial state. Not that instruments were unknown, by any means: the organ was certainly used in cathedrals and from all accounts it was, in its mediaeval infancy, exceedingly cumbersome and awesomely loud: an instrument for special occasions on which it must have given to the chant the massiveness and the incontrovertibility of the Romanesque architecture through which it echoed.

In so far as the chant was harmonized, this was done only in "parallel organum", all the voices singing the same melody a fourth, a fifth, or an octave apart. It is with the beginning of the Gothic era in architecture that real polyphony, or music in parts, begins.<sup>3</sup> Just as the Abbé Suger's windows at St. Denis let in the light, so the earliest polyphonic music, in the same (12th) century, gives both a color and a luminosity to the somber chant. Typical of this music is the addition to the chant, which is sung or played in very long notes, of a florid melody for a solo singer, piercing the traditional form as it were with multi-colored windows, replacing Romanesque fixity with Gothic fantasy.

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Traditional secular music consists of dances and songs: the music of diversion and of "art for art's sake". Both kinds existed, naturally, in the early Middle Ages, but little is known of them before the songs of the Troubadours and Trouvères, the poet-composers who flourished in Provence and Northern France, respectively, from about 1100 onwards. Their chief subject was courtly love, ever the favorite topic of the emancipated aristocrat. Popular music, in its turn, probably resembled the later songs and dances which we find notated: simple melodies, for the most part in a swinging triple meter, demanding a rhythmic accompaniment rather than harmonization. Up to the era of polyphonic music, the two realms of sacred and secular each kept their places, as is necessary in a civilization where profane tendencies exist. In an ideal society, of course, there would be no secular art as such: all of life would be permeated with sacredness. But in the more decadent conditions of Mediaeval Europe, certain divisions had to be made to preserve the purity of the sacred domain.

When the possibility of polyphony was taken up by secular music, it retained at first its foundations upon the traditional plainsong chants. In the French motets of the late 13th century,

a plainsong theme is accompanied by one or more parts, freely composed to non-liturgical texts. Often two added parts will have texts which differ in words but accord in sentiments. Sometimes one text is in Latin, and sacred, while the other is a secular French poem, and the tenor part performs a plainsong melody whose words, if not actually sung, were probably well known. But this kind of confusion of domains shows that the two worlds were not so far apart as they were later to become. As plainsong permeated the secular music of the 13th century, so "ordinary life" was still lived *sub specie aeternitatis*. It was not until the influence flowed in the other direction, and the church adopted ideas which had their birth in the secular domain, that the service of music to the Tradition was weakened. Even so, religious music has always tended to keep somewhat aloof from secular developments: the alternative is to "keep up with the times", yet the times and their music are such that they fit ill with the Divine Service. Composers of church music are consequently tempted to antiquarianism, which imposes an unfortunate restriction on their ideas unless, like J. S. Bach, they are natural "throwbacks" to the spiritual style of another time. In their antiquarianism, moreover, they often revert to a style which is no more appropriate than that of their contemporaries. When music written in the Classical or Romantic styles is used in church, the effect is generally unhappy: the religious music of Mozart, for example, transports the style of the opera house into the cathedral, as does the church architecture of his time.<sup>4</sup> Each has its place, yet ecclesiastical authorities do not always recognize the fact. Even ecclesiastics move with the times, as is only too obvious today.

The growth of harmonized music was an occurrence comparable to the contemporaneous beginnings of realistic perspective in painting. This addition of as it were a third dimension to music (considering the others as melody and rhythm) is peculiar to the West, at least in the great emphasis consequently placed upon it. Similarly, and very generally speaking, perspective and realism in painting are equally foreign to the East. Without wishing to be unduly speculative, we might say that, whereas realistic painting seeks to reproduce only the physical world, polyphonic music imitates the Harmony of the Spheres: and the difference is obvious in its results. The sounding-together of several parts, each a melody but all harmonious with one another, is a most beautiful image of the planets as they each sing of their travels through the Zodiac, and of their combined influences, concordant or otherwise. Further interpretations have been suggested by Marco Pallas:

I think Christian polyphonic music, with its contrapuntal dovetailing of parts expressing a unanimous intention across a difference of timing and placing, was a vehicle that lent itself particularly to the idea of the "heavenly chorus", as also of the diversity of peoples and persons all striving to express the praises of God and their assent to the truths revealed in and through Christ. A homophonic structure, telling in its own place, cannot illustrate this dynamic concordance as did the polyphonic schools of Europe at their best.<sup>5</sup>

It may very well be that polyphony became necessary when men lost the capacity to hear, and to appreciate, the harmonies inherent in a single note.<sup>6</sup>

The period of polyphonic music, say from 1200 to 1600, is from this point of view a unity. It was founded, as is all music that deserves the name, on the Chord of Nature: that phenomenon of vibration from which are derived the basic intervals and consequently our modes and scales.<sup>7</sup> The Mediaeval period was a time of joyous experimentation with this new dimension; and naturally some experiments were more successful than others.

The Middle Ages had their musical "revolution" in the change from "Ar Antiqua" to "Ars Nova". Achieved mainly through the improvements in notation suggested in the treatise "Ars Novae Musicae" by Philippe de Vitry (1292-1361), Bishop of Meaux, the Ars Nova saw, from about 1320 onwards, a slackening of the previously almost exclusive adherence to ternary

rhythms and to a plainsong basis. Rhythm was released from certain stereotyped formulae, all triple in form and therefore, like the Holy Trinity, "perfect", to include also duple, or "imperfect" groupings. An equivalent movement in painting was initiated by Giotto at about the same time: he likewise extended the range of possibilities open to the artist by relinquishing traditionally-based models. From this period onwards we begin to find more and more compositions attributed to individuals, rather than anonymous as was the rule in the 13th century. When the limits of a traditional art are expanded or abandoned, the opportunities for self-expression allure artists, drawing them away from expression of the Self which has little place for names and individualities. But despite these tendencies, the period which for the other arts constituted a Renaissance was for music rather one of consolidation. An harmonic language with clear distinctions of consonance and dissonance was forged during the 15th century, and held good throughout the 16th. Naturally, expansions of means and alterations of habit took place, but apart from the appearance of composers of increasing individuality and undisputed genius the tenets of the art remained unchanged: music was still ideally the mirror of celestial harmonies, represented with an ever-increasing wealth of invention.

The polyphonic period saw the obliteration of distinctions between sacred and secular music, beyond the obvious one of text. Church music was founded less and less upon the melodies of Gregorian chant, until by 1600 it had virtually cut loose from its moorings in the traditional plainsong. The Church had given the world polyphony, like a Divine dispensation: but with a certain loss of dignity, she now chose to follow in the wake of the World, as it explored this new gift in its "horizontal" direction.

It is known that much Mediaeval music, such as the works of Guillaume de Machaut (1300-1372), is structured by means of arithmetical patterns. As in the space of Gothic architecture, so in time the proportions of the music are arranged so as to form patterns, often based on triplicities. Little research has been done into the reasons behind this; and the consensus among musicologists is that it was the result merely of a Mediaeval liking for neatness and order. Other, more profound ideas have been put forward by the editor of two Masses by the Netherlandish Renaissance composer, Jacob Obrecht (1450-1505), M. van Crevel, in a most thorough and illuminating analysis which he justifiably calls the possible "Rosetta Stone" of future researches in Mediaeval and Renaissance music.<sup>8</sup> Van Crevel found that Obrecht used an extraordinary numerological symbolism as a framework for these Masses, which apart from connections with "the Fibonacci and other arithmetical series, included references to the numbers of Plato's *Timaeus*, to the Kabbalistic numbers, and to Christian numerology. All this was applied to music—and, let it be said, to beautiful music—in a conscious attempt to "imitate Nature in her manner of operation": in a marriage of fantasy and rigor which, to the uninformed listener, appears merely as fantasy. These findings naturally made little impact on the scholarly world, which is averse to such "mysticism". But a more sympathetic approach to musical esoterism may now be detected, as the wisdom of our fore-fathers is forced upon us by the very weight of evidence. It would, after all, have been surprising if music had not reflected Renaissance interests in Hermeticism and Platonism.

Music in the Renaissance remained essentially Mediaeval in spirit, and its sacred domain. While not traditional in a strict sense, was still generally fitted for its purpose. But it was not free from the censure of authority: Pope Marcellus, on the accession in 1555 to his brief papacy, censured polyphonic music in which the words of the liturgy are obscured (because all the parts are singing them at different times). Nevertheless, if the letter of the liturgy was occasionally lost, few would deny that its spirit was expressed by this music: if it mirrors its period, and depicts "states of the soul", then perhaps we may conclude that the human soul did not move quite so

quickly as did the human mind. There is in the church music of Palestrina and his contemporaries a kind of splendid nostalgia: it fits better with Gothic arches than with Renaissance domes and pediments: indeed, between it and the paintings that simultaneously adorned the Sistine Chapel there was absolutely no common measure. Perhaps it provided a certain inner repose for the people of that restless and confusing time.

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The real "Renaissance" of music began in about 1600. The most profound change that came over the art was that, from depicting states of being, it lent itself more and more to the delineation of the processes of becoming. Charles Williams said that "all the aural arts aspired to escape from recollection into the immediate condition of the visual", but composers have given little indication of such aspiration in recent centuries. An art which is inescapably in time might be thought incapable simply of "being", but this is not so: it is the triumph of the art that it can make its perpetual movement the mirror of the timeless state whence its Ideas were born. (This is, of course, as much the work of the listener as of the composer). We find this ideal particularly in the more static Mass, movements—the Kyrie, Sanctus and Agnus Dei, which describe single affects, rather than a series of images—of Byrd, Palestrina and Vittoria, and in some of the earlier Flemish composers, notably Josquin des Pres and Ockeghem. But the temptation of contrast, of succumbing to the versatility of the musical material, became ever stronger. In the Credo, for instance, of a plainsong or of an early 15th century Mass, the story is told in an objective way: the affect "Credo" is more important than the enumeration of the subjects which are to be believed, and no attempt is made at musical description of them. But from the 16th century onwards we find a more dramatic rendering of this movement (and of the Gloria): at "Et incarnatus" there will be a sudden hush; the "Crucifixus" reaches the depths of despair; and "Et resurrexit" bursts in with an effect whose power is undeniable but which is disturbing to the unity both of mood and of music. The piece is no longer the depiction of a state, but of a process: a kind of sacred drama. A parallel in painting is to be seen in the evolution of the Crucifix from the early Mediaeval picture of God incarnate, eyes open and conscious of His deity, arms stretched out willingly upon the Cross of Matter, to the realistic Renaissance Christ, a mere man hanging on a gallows. A metaphysical truth becomes a human tragedy, more moving, perhaps, to the emotions, but no more true for that.

In music, then, an increase in cleverness brought with it an enthusiasm for difference, for change, and for excitement. The later madrigals evince especially a delight in word-painting, and in the picturesque and extreme treatment of affects: the music follows the letter of the text. "The notes are the body of music, but the words are the soul", wrote the madrigalist Marc Antonio Mazzone in 1569.<sup>9</sup> This tendency was hampered at the best of times by polyphony, and found its real flowering in the opera, which may be regarded as the essential form of the musical "Renaissance", or in common terminology the Baroque era (here about 1600-1750). As in the visual arts, the Renaissance impulse came from Antiquity, in this case from the speculations thereupon of the Camerata, a group of Florentine dilettanti. There is no satisfactory way, even now, of deciphering the surviving fragments of Greek notation, nor of knowing exactly how the words and music of the Greek drama were delivered; but in emulation of the way in which they imagined the drama to have been performed, the Camerata opted for a monophonic setting of the words, using a single voice with a simple chordal accompaniment for instruments. This gives the solo singer great freedom for emotional expression, unhampered by the presence of other, polyphonic parts; polyphony, in fact, was roundly condemned as destructive to the sense of the words. "The music of our times has two divisions—one which is called counterpoint and another which we shall call the art of good singing", as Giovanni de Bardi, host to the Camerata, has it.<sup>10</sup>

While the art of counterpoint was regarded as a product of Mediaeval obscurantism, the excesses of word-painting in contemporary madrigals were equally ridiculed.<sup>11</sup> What emerged at first was an art for purists and antiquaries: an opera which consisted largely of declamation interrupted by a few homophonic choruses in which all the voices sang the same words together.

The establishment of the monodic style in the opera was one of the turning-points of Western music. The ideas of the Camerata, though not their practice, opened up fleetingly a possibility which, had it been taken, would have caused a very different course of development: had they used a truly monodic style, i.e., without any accompaniment, they would have approached more nearly the music of the Greeks; they might have healed the immense rift which already separated European music from that of the rest of the world, and they might have rediscovered plainchant as a source of inspiration, that being the Western music which most nearly approached their own. A few centuries of harmonized music, however, had closed men's ears to the possibilities of monophony, and the monodies were from the very beginning dualistic: there was a melody and a chordal accompaniment. It soon turned out that polyphony had not been slain: what had happened was that the harmonies which were formerly the result of the interweavings of melodies could henceforth be achieved by a short cut, namely by chords specified in type but not in actual notes. There was no further need, in the Baroque era, for a composer diligently to manipulate his lines so as to produce the desired concords and discords: the harpsichord, organ, or lute player, given a bass line and certain figures, would look after that. The convenience was considerable, but the symbolism of polyphony was virtually lost: our music had taken a step away from that of the Spheres.

The rapid growth of opera showed that the perfect profane form had been created: in Monteverdi's *Orfeo* of 1607, all the familiar features of recitative, arioso, aria, duet, chorus, and instrumental interlude are present; and by mid-century the music had regained its ascendancy over the words, while the opera was well on its way to being the principal public entertainment of all Europe. Before this time, the only place where the people regularly heard music performed by professionals was in church; for all but the wealthier nobility, who could afford to keep musicians in their households, good music must have been associated almost exclusively with religion. One might say that with the advent of opera, the Vaishyas found their own music, and no longer depended upon that of the Brahmins.

When taste is not dictated by higher authority, it tends to find its own level, which is one of ease and entertainment. Musically speaking, standards were kept high by the example of the nobility; but in modern Europe, noble taste often meant a frivolity and a shallowness, tempered by virtuosity and a certain pompousness. The subjects of opera were generally classical, and often fatuously treated, with happy endings virtually *de rigueur*. Various attempts were made to reform it, usually in the direction of a greater emphasis on the words, and French opera was on the whole more balanced in this respect than Italian: indeed, in the former there remained some vestiges of the old contrapuntal art, which prompted Jean-Jacques Rousseau to condemn it as "a relic of barbarism and of bad taste, that only survives like the doorways of our Gothic churches, to perpetuate the shame of those who had the patience to make it".<sup>12</sup> Opera was nevertheless the source of much beauty, and a memorable chapter in man's exploration of worldly possibilities. We look back on it now as one of the splendors of the past: a modern revival of a baroque opera is always a moving experience, as we recreate even without the "machines" (from which the Gods descended), the sumptuous scenery, and the unworldly voices of the castrati, the courtly pleasures of a vanished age.

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The excesses of opera, as much as those of the palaces, sculptures, and tapestries of the Baroque, were part of a cult of the gigantic and the splendid: a natural reaction to the fact that art had been as it were cut down to human size. But at the opposite extreme there was a tendency towards minute and frivolous decoration, manifested as much in music as in the visual arts with the difference that in the former it was usually left to the spontaneous invention of the performer, to whom it gave an opportunity for display as well as the responsibility of "dressing" musical fare that was often extremely jejune. Within a narrow emotional range, Rococo decoration makes ordinary things seem special. A chair, or a teacup, becomes full of interest, for the eyes can follow the patterns of its ormolu or painting, while the mind becomes lost in the fantasy of its shapes. But this experience takes place on the same level as that of ordinary life (assuming that "ordinary life" is unspiritual): the arabesques are the play of the artist's fancy, metaphysically meaningless. In any case, anything looked at with the requisite attention, will become equally fascinating, like Leonardo's blank wall. In the heavily decorated arts of traditional societies, on the other hand, there is more than just an imitation of Nature's outward complexity and interest: the curlicues of Han bronzes, the geometrical patterns of Mughal art, and the multifarious sculptures of Indian temples are much more than mere embellishment: they are symbolic of the cyclic forces of nature, the geometry of God's universe, and the omnipresence of Deity. Another comparison may be made with the attitude to everyday objects of Zen Buddhism. Here, too, a teacup, or the melody of a flute, can be the means towards an intensification of experience, but in the far higher sense of the realization of the essence which permeates existence. To this end, the elegance of Zen is one of simplicity, honesty, and fitness for purpose. Modern European decoration glorifies man's creative genius, but forgets that this is but a symbol of God's inexhaustible yet orderly imagination; at best, it is a manifestation of *rajas*, the expansive tendency.

"Sattvic" tendencies were also present at the time, however, The German Protestant tradition of which J. S. Bach was a product had preserved some continuity and fitness in its sacred music by means of the chorale repertory, a body of melody on which composers could draw for inspiration as in former centuries they would have used Gregorian chant. Moreover, the art of counterpoint was livelier in Germany than elsewhere, with the result that Bach arrived in a corner of the world whose musical habits were somewhat old-fashioned, when they were not imported or imitated from the Latin countries. It was his task, so it seems, to join the most fruitful features of the French and Italian styles with German seriousness and Protestant piety. His is the last true polyphony: the "envoy" of the period initiated half a millenium before him. Fugues were certainly written after Bach's: but dare one say that they are for ever after pastiches of his, or of 16th century music? For no composer since has polyphony been the natural mode of thought, as it was for Bach. A merely quantitative view of his output forces one to conclude that his music came to him already in contrapuntal form, virtually without cerebration on his part. His popularity is probably due to his stylistic "updating" of polyphony regarded as a symbol of higher things: the latter aspect being perceived unconsciously by the majority, who are nonetheless subject to the *musica humana* of their bodies and souls, which polyphony symbolizes no less than *musica mundana*. Earlier polyphonic music often seems, to the ordinary listener, to lack the regular rhythm which is so strong in Bach and in baroque music generally, and which is necessary to his enjoyment. He does not appreciate that in early polyphonic music each part has its own patterns of strong and weak beats, subject to the underlying *tactus* but otherwise independent. For this reason there is something even more miraculous in the harmony of the earlier music than in that marshaled by Bach's inexorable beat; a parallel might be drawn, moreover, with poetry such as that of *Beowulf* which uses a free rhythm within a "tactus", with

assonance provided by alliteration, and the more regularly metered verse with terminal rhyme. In both arts, apparent discipline is achieved at the expense of fluidity: a certain solidification sets in which removes them a stage further from the natural rhythms of chant and of prose. Nevertheless, the importance of regular rhythm in music and poetry is not to be denied, both in its aesthetic and symbolic aspects.

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Music histories commonly make a division between the so-called "Classic" period of Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven and Schubert, and the Romantic one that followed. This is merely for the sake of convenience, for actually there is perfect continuity between the two epochs, in the person of Beethoven. Classicism provided the materials: the musical forms, especially sonata; the constitution of the orchestra; the idiomatic use of instruments (which in the Baroque era had been largely interchangeable); the variety in texture which the abandonment of the *basso continuo* offered. The real contribution of the Romantic era was the concept of individuality, both for the composer and for the musical work. This was as it were the fructifying power which worked on the passive substance of Classicism. The ideas, stronger still today, which took root in Romanticism were all directed towards individualism: a composer had to have a recognizable "style" unlike anyone else's; he had to make innovations, rather than follow well-tried paths; he should strive to write masterpieces, rather than simply to produce music according to his capabilities: whereas Haydn wrote 104 symphonies, some good, some indifferent, Beethoven only wrote nine, and all were magnificent. The composer's purpose, moreover, was no longer to practice the craft of musical composition, but to express himself in his work: he was to be not a "Komponist", a putter-together, but a "Tondichter", a poet in tone. All these criteria were drawn from what the greatest composers had always done: yet when they were applied to lesser men, they failed. Here as elsewhere, the craft tradition gave way to the concept of "art for art's sake", a banner to which all, whether craftsmen or inspired poets, were to flock, in the attempt to sell to the wide-eyed public the supposed outpourings of their inmost souls.

This is the reason why second-rate Romantic music is so much less satisfactory than the productions of lesser composers of previous eras. When a competent artist, somewhat short of genius, works within a traditional framework—the Renaissance motet or the Baroque concerto, for example—he is assured of good results, and his work will give us pleasure as it did to those who demanded and paid for it. But a second-rate Romantic composer will try to create the form and style for his music, as well as filling the form with substance which is the only part of the operation for which his gifts qualify him. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries are littered with the debris of such attempts.<sup>13</sup> It is unnecessary to emphasize the degree to which this situation reflects the ideas which were permeating all departments of human life during this time.

The most radically new formal idea of the era seems to have been that of contrasting affects within a single piece, which is the basis of sonata form. Contrasts there was in plenty in earlier times: the concerto grosso, for instance, the principal orchestral form of the Baroque, was founded on the contrast between soloists and full orchestra, and the "da capo" aria of the opera contained two contrasted sections, in different affects, performed in the order ABA. But in all of these the predominant affect was maintained during a section, and not mixed with others, as occurs in the development of a sonata movement. The mood of a Baroque piece is predictable—and was meant to be—from its first bars, whereas a sonata movement is supposed to be an unpredictable adventure, often being the story of two different characters and their interrelationships. This is an anthropomorphic form: a drama of human emotions set to music. In Beethoven's music, contrasts appear in great profusion on a smaller level: he delights in sudden



shocks, sudden rises to *forte* or falls to *piano*. There is little repose in music of this sort, though the nobility of the sentiments expressed in it is not in question. In slow movements and cheerful rondo finales, the effects would be more consistent, but these were in spirit legacies from a former time.

It seldom occurs to the listener to question the basis of the music with which he is so familiar: he happily becomes absorbed in the drama and swayed by the composers expression of changing emotions. Only occasionally will he wonder, as perhaps in some of Schubert's slow movements, why the composer feels obliged to shatter a heavenly calm with a contrasted section of violent music. No doubt this is the way Schubert felt: his life was hard, his contemplations perhaps repeatedly cut short by worldly worries. But one regrets that the spirit of his times encouraged him to tell us so.

Beethoven's genius lay in the wealth and nobility of emotional states which he could express, and in the structural logic, the sense of inevitability, which he could impose upon his arguments (and most of his pieces are arguments, too). But perhaps he was too much the master of his music: he would not always let it follow its innate tendencies. In a work such as the little piano sonata, Op. 75, of which he was reputedly very fond, he begins with a heart-melting melody which lasts but four bars and then dissolves in an embarrassing wealth of new ideas, none of them similar in mood or equal in inspiration. "Yes", some will say, "that represents the ephemeral quality of our life on earth: no sooner do we taste our pleasures than they are seized from us." "We are perfectly well aware of that, we reply, and that is precisely why we do not need Beethoven to inform us of the fact." This is of course the real argument against anthropomorphic or realistic art in general: it tells us what we already know. We can gain nothing from it that an unbiased and intelligent view of everyday life will not reveal, except possibly the advantages of "armchair traveling" to places and feelings which we have not visited in person. Religious art, on the contrary, shows us what most of us do not know, and so opens our minds to more-than-human possibilities, giving a hint of what we might become (or of what we unwittingly are).

Schuon writes in the article already cited: "At the start of the nineteenth century the plane of music changed so that it became in fact a kind of substitute for religion or mysticism;<sup>14</sup> more than in the profane music of the preceding periods musical emotion came to assume the function of an irrational excuse for every human frailty..." We would add that music begins at this time to express negative, even evil things. Grief, indeed, was within the scope of musical expression from the earliest times, but not cruelty or impiety; no matter what words were sometimes set in Baroque opera, the music was a kind of benediction over them, refusing to descend to the same depths. (The most horrible musical sound in the eighteenth century seems to have been the diminished seventh: its inevitable recurrence at points of the highest tension seems to us little short of laughable, having heard such things expressed so much more realistically of late). But if music became a substitute for religion, it was better than nothing at all: Beethoven's message of compassion, stoicism, and brother-hood was of immense value, and necessary to men of his time and ours, for the loss of a spiritual impulse for these feelings required at least a humanistic one. His Ninth Symphony has become a sort of religion to many, and there are worse gods by far. The creations of his last years, moreover, stand out in an epoch virtually devoid of real religious feeling as an amazing movement of the soul towards God, achieved under most adverse conditions. He shared with his contemporaries, the Romantic poets, in "intimations of immortality"; yet the constrictions of art and of his own mind prevented him from making a wholly committed leap in that direction.<sup>15</sup> Few men of that era dared do so, and those who did, like William Blake and Thomas Taylor, were generally reckoned mad, a condition in which no musician could hope to make a living. A few other madmen read Blake and Taylor, but music is

harder to present to the public than literature.

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For the ordinary listener of today, "music" generally means Romantic music. In the compositions of this period he finds that which answers best to his desires: modern music sounds cacophonous to him, and early music monotonous and "geometrical", although there are those who prefer these qualities. The nineteenth century was the last period of consensus between composers' impulses and listeners' predilections: and so its music, and later music in its idiom, is the nearest in time that is readily accepted by the public today.

In the Classical era, and during the first half of the century, perceptible form was still a dominant element in music. We must assume that anyone in Beethoven's time who was at all familiar with music could and did follow the basic forms and the tonalities which structure them, and that this gave him an intellectual frame within which to enjoy the sensuous content. If polyphonic music is woven, like embroidery, from many strands, classical music is put together like a house, from blocks. The qualities of change and of contrast are thus more clear-cut in the later music. The form of a classical piece fulfilled a function similar to that of the predominant affects of Baroque music: both gave the listener an idea, on the most fundamental level, of what was going on. Already in Beethoven's music, however, forms became freer and key-changes less predictable, and this served to disorient the listener. At the start of a classical sonata or symphony, the listener knows exactly what to expect, and to this degree the music is external to him: he can at any point take a figurative step backwards, and survey the work as a whole. But in a tone-poem, or an unconventional symphonic movement, the listener is at sea, at the mercy of the music; unless he already knows it, he must wait passively to be swayed as the composer dictates. He cannot survey the work, but only his own internal states. Form is no longer there as an unchanging reference point, and the experience is all. The idea of flux, or continual change, is the radical one of the nineteenth century; and although it has never commanded universal loyalty among composers, by any means, most people nowadays are so conditioned by it that they tend to hear even strictly formalized music as a formless process.

The opening up of possibilities during the last century, achieved largely through the abandonment of formal conventions, enabled instrumental music at last to be wholly committed to the depiction of states of becoming. The audience became clay in the composers' hands, the absence of any incitement to intellectual effort allowing their emotions and fantasies full rein. It should be said that musically trained people will always be able to intellectualize about music, however emotional and formless, and that romantic composers are often more intellectual in intention than in effect. But we are speaking of the untrained majority of music Lovers: and this is why they love Romantic music.

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As if in revolt against the industrialization, the growing ugliness, and the materialism of the nineteenth century, composers often sought to depict a better world. By the Grace of the Spirit, music was on occasion allowed to convey, perhaps more explicitly than ever before, a glimpse of its world, seen under that aspect of Becoming which affects humans as emotion. In response to the growing obscurity of human perceptions, these things were made clearer, as they were also in Romantic poetry, and perhaps in some Impressionist painting. Some late Romantic music is pure mysticism—which can scarcely be said of Monteverdi, Handel or Mozart even at their most sublime. Just as much formerly esoteric knowledge was, and still is, disseminated for the benefit of those who need it, so music was permitted to describe, as far as was possible with the means

available, the aspirations and states of the soul in search of God. The tortured and yearning qualities in Franck's and Mahler's music, for instance, or the ecstasies of Bruckner and Scriabin, are obviously descriptions of spiritual quests which the composers themselves may or may not have pursued.

These possibilities reached their peak in the early part of the present century, by which time the technical means available to composers were entirely adequate to their desires. The range of harmonic possibilities—and it is the power of harmony, more than of melody and rhythm, that moves us in this way—had been expanded to the verge of atonality, the point at which they become meaningless, yet that the simplest means could also be used is shown by Mahler, perhaps the last really great soul of music. The orchestra had reached its acme as an instrument with an inexhaustible range of dynamics and colors. It was no wonder that the idea was current of musical history as "progress": as a series of "improvements" leading to present "perfection"; and evolutionary beliefs, so strong at the time, served to foster this view. But with so much material at their disposal, most composers were more interested in expressing their egos with the greatest possible "originality". The temptation to experiment, rather than to consolidate, was extremely strong. As far as one can mention a road that "could have been", but was not taken, music had the opportunity, for the first time since 1600, to cease its "progress" and by self-examination to isolate those of its possibilities which could lead to a real spiritualization.<sup>16</sup> It might have become a true servant of mankind again, but instead, through the isolationism and egotism of composers, caught in the grip of their age, it moved abruptly in the opposite direction. The brink had been reached; and instead of looking back to assess the path which had led thither, in order to integrate the experience thus gained, artists of all kinds demanded the freedom even of the abyss which lay beyond. "*Flectere si nequeo nuperos, Acheronta movebo*".

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<sup>1</sup> *Language of the Self*, p. 133. Translated by Marco Pallis and Macleod Matheson.

<sup>2</sup> See Robert Donington's illuminating study, *Wagner's Ring and its Symbols* (London: Taber, 1963), which apart from its general context of Jungian psychology also touches on more metaphysical questions.

<sup>3</sup> The actual beginnings of polyphony, in the strictest sense, are rather earlier and remain shrouded in obscurity. For normal purposes the late 12th century school of Notre-Dame in Paris may be regarded as the starting-point. For a full exposition, see G. Reese, *Music in the Middle Ages*, ch. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Mozart's most "religious" work is really *The Magic Flute*, whose widely misunderstood plot is a depiction of a spiritual path, using Masonic symbolism. For an account of this, see Jacques Chailley's *The Magic Flute; Masonic Opera* (English edition, New York: Knopf, 1971).

<sup>5</sup> Letter to the author, 1st April 1971; quoted by kind permission of Mr. Pallis. For an account of a late fifteenth-century musical description of the "heavenly chorus", see Edward Lowinsky's article, "Ockeghem's Canon for 36 Voices", in *Essays in Musicology in Honor of Dragon Plamenac*, ed. Reese and Snow (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1969).

<sup>6</sup> For further ideas on this subject, and for much else of mixed value, see Elsie Hamilton's "The Nature of Musical Experience in the Light of Anthroposophy" and Ferdinand Rauter's "The Fall of Music", both in *Music; its Occult Basis and Healing Value*, compiled by Lionel Stebbing, New Knowledge Books, 1961—2nd edn.).

<sup>7</sup> A string or air column vibrates at many simultaneous frequencies, related to each other in arithmetical progression: thus, if tuned to a certain note, a string will also produce, softly but more or less perceptibly, the notes of twice, 3x, 4x, 5x... that basic frequency. This gives to the resultant intervals of the octave, fifth, fourth and third their familiarity and "concordance": they are heard unconsciously every time a single note is sounded, but are usually thought of as tone-color rather than as separate notes.

<sup>8</sup> Jacob Obrecht, *Missa Sub Tuum Praesidium* and *Missa Maria Zart*, ed. M. van Crevel, Amsterdam, 1959, 1964.

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<sup>9</sup> Quoted in G. Reese, *Music in the Renaissance*, p. 400.

<sup>10</sup> From Oliver Strunk, *Source Readings in Music History*, p. 293.

<sup>11</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 316f.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in *The Oxford Companion to Music*, article: "Bouffons".

<sup>13</sup> People will gladly attend a concert of early music whose composers are quite unknown to them, confident that most of the music will be good. Imagine, on the other hand, the attraction of a concert of music by unknown composers of the nineteenth century.

<sup>14</sup> For a well-documented description of this process, see H. G. Koenigsberger's "Music and Religion in Modern European History", in *The Diversity of History* (Essays in honor of Sir Herbert Butterfield); London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970.

<sup>15</sup> Whereas earlier music incarnated archetypes of a general or racial type, Beethoven expressed the totality of his own personality, in all its variety. This is the reason both for his restrictions and his magnificence.

<sup>16</sup> Similarly, the comparative political peace of the forty years preceding the First World War could have led to a more permanent peace; for the inevitabilities of collective karmic tendencies still permit a certain choice in the manner of their working out.