

"It is likewise idealism, and of the worst kind, to end up by handling all action and all truth on a meaning of history that is not implicit in events and that, in any case, implies a mythical aim."

The Artist and His Time  
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# HISTORY • TRADITION RESPONSIBILITY

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TO MAKE the observation that the arts today live in an age of words seems commonplace. Many examples of vociferous verbiage can be cited even in past cultural history. That today's music world is embroiled in word battles not only dissecting linguistics but pleading for a point of view which asks to be equated with a philosophy of life justifying creative acts, seems however, to do past artistic disputes one better. Yet from one standpoint, verbal defense should not be necessary today. Our century's search for a common musical practice has at last, many believe, codified into a cosmopolitan, or at least international, musical style. Technical practices certainly have been leveled at similar notches. In comparing musical developments of various centuries, one can no longer seriously speak of neo-classic, nationalistic, or any other "istic" trends. Though one may lament the obliteration of what were once considered highly prized indi-

vidual earmarks, even nationalism, disarmingly flaunted through musical style, has taught world history a lesson.

Many have observed that within the past decade, composers the world over are facing and dealing with the same musical problems. Also, according to many respected sources, music has been granted a new lease on life not only through technical procedures, but by virtue of a new historical dispensation. One might infer from all this (which no one seems to have done) that music may well be entering a new common-practice period. Anyone acquainted with newer music knows however that, paradoxically, matters are not quite so simple. Studied historical fact, dialectical reconstruction, and a rolling of dice *a la* Cage, to give chance a greater chance in choosing the proper note (or avoiding the improper note if you will), are not necessarily musically reconcilable.

To describe a situation in terms of

crisis suggests upheaval and disruption; actually, 'crisis' denotes an advanced state of affairs which have reached a decisive moment, a turning point. While it has been asked if the crisis be musical or social, no answer has been given and no succinct answer is possible. That a crisis exists in the materials of music should not bother us. Technical crisis has plagued music since the third was considered a cadential dissonance. Yet, the major triad emerged. Similarly, after Gluck abandoned the zink, the orchestra was deprived of a soprano brass instrument able to play a diatonic scale. Yet we have the *Tromba ventile* of *Otello*. The Gluck-Piccini squabbles of eighteenth-century French versus Italian opera are forgotten except for eighteenth-century French and Italian opera. Examples are not hard to come by. If an answer to the crisis of new music is not to be found in the quest for technique and procedure, what is the real nature of today's crisis?

Many critics and theorists consider the difficulties acutely circumscribed by the problems of twelve-tone harmony or Webern's linear development; they overlook the fact that Webern's polyphony is already one answer to the harmonic problem. If the Webern solution is available to all who would so choose, the vertical harmonic problem can be side-stepped by a horizontal approach. This seems implicit in explanations of twelve-tone origin. Again, one sees that no crisis need exist.

In reviewing recent analytical articles and essays on new music, one may suspect that many musicians possibly, though unintentionally, are obscuring basic issues. It is always difficult to verbalize about music and the following may illustrate the pitfalls and dissection of language referred to earlier.

A claim, for example, couched in technical jargon, that the Vienna School's major pre-occupation were with frequency, intensity and timbre, might seem to provide a truth on which to build. At best it is a not fully interpreted clinical observation, as misleading as a claim implying Shakespeare's prime dramatic concerns were with rhyme, alliteration, and syntax. In this light it is a strange notion to assert that Webern's music does not arrive at a point of 'absolute organization.' Criticism of this sort falls short of the mark. Perhaps we

growth cannot be forced and accelerated beyond what he can reasonably be expected to accomplish. The expectation of constant, rapid, and continued improvement is, in most cases, unrealistic. Frequently a plateau will be reached when there will be little or no noticeable improvement for quite some time. It must be remembered that the more advanced an instrumentalist becomes the slower and less obvious is his progress.

The teacher should have a thorough knowledge of the instrument (or instruments) he teaches and be able to perform quasi-professionally on at least one of them. His musical horizons, however, should be broad and extensive and not limited to the repertoire of his principal medium (or mediums) of musical expression. It would seem of cardinal importance that the teacher have high musical ideals and strive to develop them in his students. Working toward these ideals should be a lifetime goal — a goal that is never consummated. As the late Fritz Kreisler said of his career: "I have achieved only a medium approach to my ideal in music. I got only fairly near."<sup>6</sup>

The studio teacher's load must be light enough for him to function effectively. Rolland states, "In the professional schools of the Eastern countries, students receive two one-hour lessons each week from a teacher whose normal load is six students, or only twelve hours per week."<sup>7</sup> Krebs states that "the teaching staffs of the conservatories (in Russia) are large and impressive. The ratio of teaching personnel to students is as favorable as one to three at the Leningrad and Moscow conservatories."<sup>8</sup> On the other extreme many American studio teachers carry as many as forty or more students per week. This excessive load probably tends to militate against effective learning as well as efficient teaching.

#### Importance of Intelligent Practicing

One of the most important things a teacher should instill in his students is the ability to practice intelligently and to use practice time wisely. Professor Ruth Strang has said that the student is the center of ever-widening circles of influence.<sup>9</sup> The ever-increasing myriad of activities of modern day living as well as full academic schedules compete keenly for the student's time and energy. The era seems to be gone when most instrumental music students could, as Klosé advocated

well over one hundred years ago, practice a minimum of four hours each day.<sup>10</sup> In short, the instrumental student of today usually has a limited amount of time available for practice. Unfortunate, also, is the probability that much of the practicing now being done does not achieve the optimum results it should. Galamian has stated that "there is nothing more precious to an instrumentalist than the ability to work efficiently — to know how to accomplish the maximum in beneficial results while using the minimum of time to do so."<sup>11</sup> The road to the mastery of any instrument is long and arduous at best and much application as well as perseverance are required of every instrumental music student. It is true that talent helps to make the way easier than it otherwise would be, but even talent cannot be substituted for the hard work of intelligent practicing. Perhaps it should be made clear at this point that a case is not trying to be made for less practice. It is submitted, however, that much better musical results can be achieved through thoughtful and intelligent use of what practice time one does have. It is obvious that some students get less from three hours of practicing than a more analytical player gets from but one hour of concentrated practice toward clearly defined and understood objectives. It would seem absolutely essential therefore that the teacher show his students how to practice and what to practice for.

#### The Teaching of Interpretation.

Galamian terms interpretation "the final goal of all instrumental study, its only *raison d'être*."<sup>12</sup> Teaching according to rigid and inflexible rules, using the same material for every student, and demanding that the student attempt to emulate one "correct" interpretation are all open to a great deal of question. The material used in teaching must all be adapted to the individual needs of each student. The student must understand the meaning of the music thoroughly. He must have creative imagination and a personal-emotional approach to the work if his performance is to be lifted above the dry and the pedantic.<sup>13</sup>

All too many teachers tend to be quite rigid and dogmatic when the question of interpretation arises. Most appear to be firmly convinced of the correctness of their interpretative ideas and seem to have little or no sympathy with other interpretations. However, the possibility of many widely differing

yet very acceptable musical interpretations has been brought out by a number of eminent authorities. Aaron Copland has pointed out: "A composition is, after all, an organism. It is a living, not a static, thing. That is why it is capable of being seen in a different light and from different angles by various interpreters or even by the same interpreter at different times."<sup>14</sup>

Ferguson suggests: "While a given figure may have an elemental or intrinsic value of suggestion, the possibility of appropriate musical variation is as great as the variety of mood that demands expression."<sup>15</sup>

Mursell comments: "It is very valuable for a mature artist to hear how other performers deal with a work that he himself is studying, even though he may not follow their interpretation."<sup>16</sup>

Lussy states: "The pupil will emancipate himself by gaining a knowledge of the notes which generate expression, and of the modes of execution adopted by the great artists to express their sensations. He will no longer depend solely and blindly on his own, enlightened by reason and study, and will discover for himself how to give life and poetry to the works which he executes."<sup>17</sup>

Other performers and teachers rely entirely on the notation as the ultimate guide and final authority for the correct interpretation. Mursell points out: "Although the constant tendency of notation is to indicate more and more the composer's intention, it can only feature the high points of the musical structure. The notation can only give the performer certain cues. To make a proper use of these cues, he must rely on his musical understanding."<sup>18</sup>

Pound states: "Our system of notation is adequate only to a degree. Beyond a certain point it is a matter of artistic interpretation on the part of the performer."<sup>19</sup>

Palmer cites: "The soloist must realize that tempo markings and expression markings are just guideposts from which he can begin an interpretative analysis of the piece being studied."<sup>20</sup> Thus, the study of interpretation should broaden and extend the student's musical understanding and present him with some ideas to aid in the development or alteration of his own interpretation. Mursell has stated: "Instead of slavish copying there should be musical understanding, and

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