

Address given at the University of California in Los Angeles,
August 1, 1944, by Ernst Krenek, seemingly

Contemporary music offers so contradictory and confusing a picture that many people are wont to give up listening to it, excusing their attitude by saying that they are not well enough trained to understand the complicated processes of such music, and that for the rest they are not prepared to expend the required intellectual effort to penetrate a phenomenon that, according to normal viewpoints, is meant to be enjoyed spontaneously rather than studied laboriously. The musician who wishes to remedy the situation and help his potential listeners finds himself in a difficult situation. Although he is confident that a technical analysis of the various contemporary creations will reveal basic similarities and differences, he also knows that by doing so he will make the picture only more complex, apart from the fact that this approach entails precisely the kind of effort that layman is least ready to make.

(the uninitiated)

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Interpretations of the dominant trends in contemporary music getting along without technical details and simple enough to give a convincing overall picture are very rare. One of the few which I have encountered recently was put forward by Igor Stravinsky in the record of ~~his~~ ^{the} lectures ^{he gave} in 1939 and 40 at Harvard University, published under the title "Poétique Musicale". The clue to Stravinsky's distinctions is the relation of music and time. Referring to the ideas of a Russian philosopher and friend of his, Mr. Sorokhinsky, Stravinsky says the following:

3/ Chacun sait que le temps s'écoule de façon variable selon les dispositions intimes du sujet et les événements qui viennent affecter sa conscience. L'attente, l'ennui, l'anxiété, le plaisir et la douleur, la contemplation apparaissent ainsi comme des catégories différentes, au milieu desquelles notre vie s'écoule et qui commandent chacune un processus psychologique spécial, un temps particulier. Les variations du temps psychologique ne sont perceptibles que par rapport à la sensation primaire, consciente ou non, du temps réel, du temps autologique.

Ce qui marque le caractère spécifique de la notion musicale de temps, c'est que cette notion naît et se développe soit en dehors des catégories du temps psychologique, soit simultanément avec elles.

M. Tournitchinsky fait ~~un~~ apparaître ... deux espèces de musique : l'une évolue parallèlement au processus du temps autologique, l'épouse et le pénètre, faisant naître dans l'esprit de

4/ l'auditeur un sentiment d'euphorie
et nous ainsi dire de "calme dynamique".
L'autre devance ou contrarie ce processus.
Elle n'adhère pas à l'instant sonore.
Elle déplace les centres d'attraction et
de gravité et s'établit dans l'instable,
ce qui la rend propre à traduire les
impulsions émotives de son auteur.

Toute musique où domine la volonté
d'expression appartient à ce second
type.

La musique liée au temps auto-
logique est généralement dominée
par le principe de similitude. Elle qui
épouse le temps psychologique procède
volontiers par contraste.

5// Everybody says that time elapses in various fashions, according to the intimate disposition of the observer and to the events that are affecting his consciousness.

Thus expectation, boredom, anxiety, pleasure and pain, contemplation appear as so many different categories in the midst of which our life passes by, each of them commanding a special psychological process, a time quality of its own. The varieties of psychological time ~~are~~ can not be perceived but by referring ~~to~~ consciously or unconsciously to the basic experience of real time, that is, ontological time.

The specific character of the musical conception of time consists in that ^{this} conception ~~is~~ being generated and developed either outside of the category of psychological time, or simultaneously with it.

Mr. Louvtchinsky points out two species of music: one of them evolves parallel to the process of ontological time, it embraces and penetrates the latter, thus creating in the listener a feeling of euphony and so-to-speak of 'dynamic calm'. The other progresses in contrast to that process. It does not abide by the

6/ instantaneous fact of sound. It dis-
locates the centres of attraction ~~at~~ and
gravity and ^{unfolds} ~~establishes itself~~ in the
realm of instability, which makes it a
proper instrument for conveying the
emotional impulses of its author. All
music ~~in which~~ the will of expression
(is dominated by)
belongs to this second Type.

Music related to ontological time
is generally governed by the principle
of similarity. Music that associates
with psychological time progresses
preferably by way of contrast.

7// In slightly more technical terms the last paragraph could be ^{interpreted as meaning} ~~expressed by saying~~ that ~~music~~ ^{music} related to ontological time proceeds by repetition, while the other one progresses by development.

Stravinsky does not conceal his preference for the ontological type of music and implicitly wants us to understand that his own music largely follows the ontological pattern. Very important is his statement that the psychological ^{type of} music transmits emotional impulses and is dominated by the will to express such impulses, for this in turn implies that the opposite type is free from such intentions.

Assuming that these two types actually exist and by and large cover the field of contemporary creation, we have to note a very interesting paradox. It is undoubtedly true that ~~the~~ contemporary music falling into line with the stylistic characteristics ~~(Stravinsky is far more popular and set up by)~~ successful than the opposite type, represented vaguely by Schönberg and other composers who have written in the so-called atonal style, even if they have not adopted some of Schönberg's more

8/ special techniques. It is likewise obvious that an infinitely greater number of composers belong to the first group than to the second. The objection which we may hear brought forward most frequently against the Schönberg type of music is that it is perhaps admirably thought out and constructed, but for this very reason one-sidedly intellectual and devoid of emotional expressiveness.

On the other hand, we have Stravinsky's own word to the effect that his music, associated as it is to ontological time, is free from those psychological and emotional factors that would disturb that association. The "dynamic calm" which this music is supposed to create in the listener results from the fact that the music acts much in the way of a very elaborate ^(and fanciful) clock-work, through its rhythmic incisiveness and insistence marking divisions of the continuum of time, and nothing else. It would seem logical that music lovers craving ~~for~~ emotional expressiveness would be rather disappointed by such a type of music. However, it seems that

9/ the blissful sensation of 'euphony' that Stravinsky claims as being caused by that music prevails over the lack of emotional intensity. At any rate it is clear that this music is intellectually much easier to grasp than the other type, for it is as a rule of a very simple construction. A certain rhythmic pattern, usually pounded out in bold relief, is repeated several times almost without change, in order to be replaced by another such pattern that is treated in the same manner. Not only is rhythm, that is characteristic distribution of time values, the most immediately graspable element of music,

but also repetition ^{Basic} is the ~~most~~ safest device to make ^(the organization of) a large span unmistakably clear ^{even} to a primitive or distracted mind. Thus the ^{relative} popularity of that type of music may be explained by assuming that its intellectual modesty suggests to the listener a total absence of intellectual factors and that ^{agreeable} impressions, in turn, ~~causes~~ ^{causes} him to forget to look further for those emo-

10// tional factors in which he had pro-
fessed so strong an interest.

As I pointed out before, the essen-
tial technical device of the ~~other~~^{opposite} type
of music is known as development,
meaning the evolution of one musical
idea out of the other, in a subtle process
of variation, in which certain elements of
an idea are retained, certain others gra-
dually so modified, that a new idea ~~is~~
with a characteristic shape ^{of its own eventually} emerges,
though still strongly related to the original
one. This procedure has been characteris-
tic of nearly all outstanding works created
in Western music ever since the time of the
Gregorian chant, and it has culminated
in the musical structures erected by
Beethoven, and more recently, Schönberg.
The dominating factor in the technique of
development is not repetition, but variation,
and in order to appreciate variation,
one has to apply sustained attention to
the unfolding musical process, making
constantly mental reference to what
went before. Development can be fol-
lowed only by accumulating and ^{living}
actively

11// Through progressing musical experience as one goes along. For it is quite true, as Stravinsky says, that this music does not abide by the instantaneous fact of sound. It does not in the first place rely on the momentary sensation caused by the sound at any given instant, but it depends on the relationships of meaning

any of its sounding elements to all other such elements, in other words, it derives its aesthetic sense from the context. I don't think that people who nowadays through radio and movie are conditioned to considering music a more or less pleasant background noise from which isolated and irrelevant patches occasionally and casually emerge ~~in their~~ ~~interest~~ when chat and clatter ~~stop~~ for a brief moment, I don't think that such people are to be blamed for not liking a music that requires concentration and application. But I also think that they ought to be fair enough so as not to blame the music for being intellectual and unemotional, for it

12// is precisely the ~~amount~~ of emotional intensity of most music that requires the dense and accurate construction which so unnecessarily frightens the half-educated amateur rather than the totally unprepared layman.

It is incidentally interesting to notice that one of the most articulate ~~promoters~~ ~~of the~~ streamlined and emotionless type of music, that brilliant ^{the-} wit-writer of French literature, Jean Cocteau, had an inkling of the nature of development, when back in 1918 he wrote in his ~~very~~ lucid though frequently ^{flippant and superficial} ~~shallow~~ collection of aphorisms, *Le cog et l'arlequin*, the following:

"Beethoven est fastidieux lorsqu'il développe, Bach pas, parceque Beethoven fait du développement de forme, et Bach du développement d'idée. La plupart des gens croient le contraire.

Beethoven dit: « Ce porte-plume a une plume neuve - il y a une plume neuve à ce porte-plume - neuve est la plume de cette porte-plume »... »

Bach dit: « Ce porte-plume a une plume neuve pour que je la trempe dans l'encre et que j'écrive etc... »

Voilà toute la différence."

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"Beethoven is tiresome ~~when~~ ^{in this} manner of development, Bach is not, for Beethoven's developments concern the form, while Bach's concern the idea. Most people think the opposite is true.

Beethoven says: "This penholder has a new pen — there is a new pen on this penholder — new is the pen of this penholder"

Bach says: "This penholder has a new pen so that I may dip it into the ink and write, etc."

There you have the whole difference."

This is quite nice ^{and} brilliant enough ^{point} for a non-musician, but nevertheless it is not true. In the first place, it is very unfair to Beethoven, as ~~Mr. Cocteau~~ ~~states~~ for as everybody can see, his technique of development is far more subtle than the repetitious babble about the new pen indicates. In fact, it is much more similar to Bach's procedure than Cocteau thinks. If Cocteau's funny description of "development of form" applies to anything musical at all, it may have a certain superficial

148/ similarity with the crude and rudimentary efforts of some of the early Mannheim composers. In fact it does not really symbolize any development at all, and in this respect ~~the~~ Cocteau's shuffling around the words in the penholder phrase without getting anywhere ~~is~~ rather of some of the processes reminds one taking place in the music associated with ontological time, and this is another ^{little} paradox, for Cocteau's theories have greatly served ~~the promotion of~~ ^{to promote} that type of music, although in Le coq et l'arlequin he obviously seems to prefer the other one.

As to my own music, it will not be hard for you to guess that I would classify it as associated with psychological time. According to my intention, it very definitely carries emotional expression and ~~it is~~ has a very carefully organized construction in terms of classical development technique. During the past ten years, commencing with the opera "Charles V", I have in many of my works ~~used~~ applied the principles of the twelve-tone technique ~~to~~ with which some of you probably are acquainted. More

15// recently I have devoted much time to a study of mediaeval music and of the principles governing the so-called modal idiom. A large choral work "Lausatio Sereimiae Prophetae" written four years ago ^{shows} the first attempts toward integrating the basic ideas of the twelve-tone technique with those mediaeval principles of musical organization. I approached this integration in various ways in other compositions, such as the orchestral Variations on the American folk-tune "I Wonder as I Wander," in my Cantata for Vartine on words by Herman Melville, and in my Seventh Quartet, to be played next season by the Budapest String Quartet. I do not think that this interest in mediaeval music is a vain intellectual pastime, for I believe that great music of all periods ~~shows~~ embodies the same basic artistic ideas, ~~and~~ regardless of the idiom in which they are expressed.

The Piano Sonata which I am going to play now was written during the winter of 1943 in St. Paul, Minnesota. It is in four movements. The first movement follows a type of sonata form which ~~is~~ ^{is} indicated in several of Beethoven's late quartets and sonatas. The thematic material, established in the Additional

16// three characters - first, second and concluding theme - and brought to completion by a characteristic diatonic codetta - is ~~run~~ through four times, which corresponds to the classical scheme of exposition, development, recapitulation and coda. However, these four sections are not so much different from each other in regard to their structural functions, they are rather like four aspects of the same thing, like four stanzas of a ballad. Students of Beethoven will know that he applied a similar procedure in his A minor Quartet opus 132.

The second movement is called, Theme, Variations and Canons. ~~The theme is followed~~ Each of the four variations is introduced by a brief canon, all canons beginning with a very characteristic trill motif. The last variation, leading back into the theme, incorporates the trill element previously reserved for the canons.

The third movement is a ^{brief and} rugged scherzo, with a slightly lyrical middle section.

The last movement is a broad Adagio, which in regard to form does not offer any particular problems. It is meant to be the emotional climax of the whole composition.