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As I have formulated the title of this address, it seems to imply that there exists a mutually exclusive or perhaps even adversary relationship between music and life, which appears to be at variance with the commonly shared assumption that these two are closely related. We like to think of music as a particularly social form of art, designed to permeate life in many situations and on many occasions: assisting at baptism, wedding and funeral and setting the proper mood at beerdrinking parties, stimulating the physical workout at discotheques and filling elevators and doctors' offices with soothing aural mist. However, it is in opera that music meets life in a particularly tight embrace, which reveals that their relationships are *not* so naturally harmonious as they appear at prima vista.

Opera is the meeting place of two apparently quite heterogeneous art forms: on the one hand, the stage action, by subject-matter and method of presentation immediately related to the reality of life - on the other hand, music, most abstract of arts, a self-sustained system of auditory symbols, in no tangible way related to any subject-matter outside ~~of~~ itself.

The manifold aesthetic problems arising from this challenging combination of elements have been subject to ~~constant~~ continuous analyses, but rarely have they been examined on the grounds of the rather obvious observation that opera has a peculiar time of its own, different from that of ordinary life, and also different from that of the stage play without music.

The linguistic substructure of an opera is called a libretto, a term that carries a somewhat belittling connotation, and not surprisingly so, for it is a diminutive derived from the Italian word for book: libro. A libretto is just a little booklet, a minor preparation that does not quite live up to the specifications of literature, which tacitly implies that a self-respecting littérateur would hardly consider writing librettos, unless driven to it.

It seems that music, in the process of assimilating a text in order to produce an opera somehow brings it down from the lofty levels of literature. How, and exactly why does this happen?

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Everybody who has to do with opera knows that the application of music to a text, as it is usual in the operatic style, extends the duration of the text to approximately the triple of the duration of the same text, if spoken without music. This is a very simple rule of the thumb that serves composers as well as librettists and does not seem to be in need of particular elucidation. It is, however, interesting to investigate for a moment the far reaching aesthetical implications of this condition.

52 We know that opera very early developed a tendency towards discriminating sharply between two types of setting the words: the recitative, and the integrated musical form, such as aria, duet, or other kinds of ensemble singing. As far as the time factor is concerned, the recitative approaches most closely the natural speed of the spoken word, so that the action carried on in the recitative sections is hardly slower than it would be without music. In the integrated musical forms, however, action comes frequently to an almost complete standstill when the singers are not even communicating with each other, but presenting simultaneous monologues, a stylistic convention of opera which audiences have learned to accept without questioning its obvious absurdity.]

Discrepancy between the time of ordinary life and the time inherent to the work of art is very conspicuous in opera; it is, however, observable in any dramatic presentation, though less obvious in the spoken play than in the musical drama. Gertrude Stein, in one of her "Lectures in America", makes the following remarks: "The thing that is fundamental about plays is that the scene as depicted on the stage is more often than not one might say it is almost always in syncopated time in relation to the emotion of anybody in the audience." (1)

(1) Gertrude Stein, Lectures in America, New York, 1935. 3. Plays. p. 93

And further: "Then gradually there came the beginning of really realizing the great difficulty of having my emotion accompany the scene and then moreover I became fairly consciously troubled by the things over which one stumbles over which one stumbled to such an extent that the time of one's emotion in relation to the scene was always interrupted." (2)

(2) G. Stein, op. cit., p. 114.

Whether one experiences this state of affairs as a difficulty, or recognizes in it the source of the peculiar aesthetic values of dramatic performances, it is true at any rate that the stylization of action necessary in any dramatic presentation, though in different degrees, depends mainly on the autonomous fashion in which the dramatic action

progresses in time. Opera, in establishing relationships of a most intimate nature between action and music, is a particularly stylized form of dramatic presentation precisely for the reason that it coordinates two time-mechanisms of entirely different properties.

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[Speaking in a rather generalizing way, we may say that music acts upon time exactly in the manner of a clock, that is to say, music measures time. Any musical process consists of a certain amount of tones each of which begins to sound and stops sounding at appointed moments, reckoning from the beginning of the process. By these occurrences the time span taken up by the process in question is subdivided in a number of time units. Time is divested of its character of a continuum and is imparted a sort of granulated texture. This explanation seems a little startling, because nobody appears to experience music in such a manner. And not even the admission that the acoustical occurrences in a musical process are far more involved and diversified than the ticking of a clock-work would account for the essential difference between hearing time cut to little pieces by an intricate machinery and listening to an Adagio by Beethoven. The essential point is that we are sure to experience motion floating between, and connecting intimately, the single elements of the musical process, while no such motion seems to take place between the time units carved out of the continuum by a mechanical contrivance. We speak of a melody as moving through different pitches, of a harmonic progression as moving from degree to degree, we speak of rhythmic drive, and use freely a great deal of kinetic terms in discussing music. Actually it is these kinetic concepts that make music something different from a succession of premeditated noises. But it is just as well to know that we are fully responsible for this interpretation of what we hear, because actually in a melody nothing whatever moves: one tone stops sounding, and another tone begins to sound. Even the most primitive listener, without knowing it, supplies something behind and underneath the tones of the melody: a kind of silent, streaming energy, a sort of primordial psychic force whose subtle and immensely rich motion can be estimated in its beauty by correlating those points at which it bursts forth onto the surface of audibility, these points being the tones of the melody which we actually hear. In other words, it is our mental powers that invest the process with the idea of a continuum of motion after the process by its very nature had divested time of its continuity. Thus the new, artistic continuity of motion, as represented in music, takes place in time spans which are, in a manner of speaking, lifted out of their original context ~~thereby~~ within the natural continuity of ordinary life.

As compared to these conditions the dramatic action is much closer related to the continuum experienced in real life, since the dramatic action represents the manifestations of biological and psychological energies without the intervention of an artificial medium. If a person on stage lifts a glass of water, it is more or less exactly the same action as if he would lift the glass in his sitting room. The stage, ^{action} may have, and of course ought to have, an entirely different significance due to its symbolic qualities within the context of the drama. But we know of this special significance only through the information which we have received by watching the whole

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drama and taking in its particular poetic assumptions. We do not conceive of the stage action as a mechanism dividing and measuring time and we do not need to imagine a spiritual agency behind the action which would put the single elements together into a new form of continuum as we do in listening to music; we rather accept the stage action as a peculiarly significant replica of the familiar continuity of life processes.

It is necessary now to contemplate what happens when two processes of so different characteristics are brought together as it occurs in opera.

But before doing so it may be useful to dwell for a minute on the history of the origin of opera. We know that it is tied up with the introduction into music of the concept of expression. In the medieval treatises on music we do not find any reference to this concept. All the medieval theorists demand of music is perfection since they derive their Ideas on music from the ancient philosophers who saw in music the mundane reflection of the harmony of the universe. Among the seven liberal arts music was listed in the quadrivium, together with arithmetic, geometry and astronomy, all of which are concerned with measurement and proportion - not in the trivium which contained grammar, rhetoric and logic, the arts concerned with human communication. It is typical that in modern times we would instinctively place music within this group. The oldest type of occidental music, Plain Chant, is closely associated with language, but it does not have the purpose of expressing any of the conceptual meaning of the words. It derives from them at best the duration patterns of two or three units, which later was carried over into the musica mensurabilis, the organization of polyphonic music. In the Ars Nova of the fourteenth century the idea of premeditating models of duration sequences was generated, a ghostlike anticipation of our present day serial technique. Later the proportional system was developed - a fiendishly tricky device for having independent musical processes run simultaneously at different speeds - another forerunner of very recent conceits. Incidentally, one may also not infrequently find in polyphonic settings of secular chansons that the various voices are assigned texts in different languages, a practice apparently just as disrespectful of common sense as the arrangements in operatic ensembles that I had mentioned before.

During the period of the Renaissance the concept of expression was awakened from its hibernation, the human being with his subjective emotional life was discovered and music was interpreted as providing expression to these emotions. Even in sacred music we find occasionally traces of the rising eminence of the individual, so for instance when we hear in one of Orlando Lasso's Penitential Psalms the chorus break out

with special emphasis on the words "et ego (sicut foenum arui)" ("and I have withered like hay".) Soon enough secularized art music in its new ambition to meet life in opera adopts the principles governing folk music during the middle ages.

[The modest musico-dramatic attempts of those earlier times, such as Adam de la Hale's Robin et Marion, are all based on the clockwork type of music, that is, on the regular distribution of accents in symmetrical periods. It is interesting to notice that the artistically trained composers who made the first attempts in real opera writing tried to avoid this influence which obviously contradicted the continuity of dramatic action. Orazio Vecchi, in his curious Amfiparnasso, tried with great ingenuity to derive whatever he could of continuity from a flexible handling of the madrigal style, that is, technically speaking, he mastered whatever was left in the madrigal style of free accent distribution in order to match the quick pace of the comedy. Peri's and Caccini's experiments and much in Monteverdi's Orfeo come closest to a kind of grafting principles of Gregorian declamation on the new harmonic style, and it is precisely in this respect that these composers come also closest to the diction of the Greek tragedy which they strove to revive. However, the future of opera lay elsewhere. It was the same Monteverdi who, apparently against his own repeatedly professed doctrine, introduced more and more metrically bound elements into his dramatic style and established the division be-

tween recitative and integrated musical form. And we have to admit that the tremendous attraction exerted by opera ever since rests not upon the expeditious parts of the music which are best adapted to follow the continuity of the action, but on those sections which are musically most elaborate and bring the action virtually to a standstill. /

Looking more closely into the interrelation between the various types of operatic music, we discover that only the external action is stopped, or slowed down, by the circumscribed musical structures. During arias, or ensembles, the visible progress of the dramatic vehicle is interrupted to a great extent, however, the stream of emotion pervading the whole is intensified, which in many cases amounts to an internal acceleration of the action, setting off its external retardation. The reason is that the peculiar faculty of music of throwing emotional forces into relief grows in straight proportion with the amount of freedom granted to music in order to develop logical structures according to its own, inherent laws. In other words, the most autonomous, most concentrated and intrinsically coherent musical structure is the most efficient carrier and the most eloquent messenger of emotional energies. Therefore it is possible in the musically most fully organized operatic forms, which appear ~~rather~~ most anti-naturalistic in their breaking-up the continuity of ordinary time, to depict with surprising brevity emotional movements the magnitude of which in a medium consistent with ordinary time would require lengthy psychological preparation. An emotional about-face, for instance, which might appear dangerously on the verge of the ludicrous in a spoken dialogue, or even in recitative musical treatment, can be made entirely convincing in a coherent musical structure in which the decisive turning point is presented as inevitable crisis brought about through the stringent logic of the musical process. Thus opera proceeds in richly variegated relationships to actual time inasmuch as it has various speeds according to the varying degrees of compactness of the musical construction. The secco recitative of the classical opera is to be considered fairly synchronized with the progress of ordinary time. However, ascending gradually to higher organized musical structures, we arrive at a state of things comparable to those astounding motion pictures which show an imperceptibly slow process, such as the growth of a tree, in a few minutes, by projecting in rapid succession a sequence of pictures taken at far distant moments of the process. P. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100

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From all this it will appear fairly obvious that the expectations a composer entertains toward his libretto are highly specific and in many respects different from the working principles of the playwright so that he eventually turns to a specialist who will adapt existing plays or make new ones according to specifications. Many professional librettists were hackwriters who would produce librettos by the ream although some of them were imaginative dramatists, as, for instance, Busenello who wrote the extraordinary text for Monteverdi's great opera L'incoronazione di Poppea, which he derived from Seneca, or Daponte and Metastasio, who worked for Mozart. The treasures of dramatic literature from Sophocles through Shakespeare, Goethe and Schiller up to Strindberg and Wedekind were exploited for opera in adaptations made by librettists or, in recent times, by the composers themselves. Ever since Richard Wagner composers have become more and more enticed to write their own librettos, which is interesting enough, be it only because it was Wagner who did away with the routine division of old opera in secco recitative and integrated musical forms so that the mechanics of time perception that I discussed earlier were not so conspicuous any longer. Since music was freed of the obligatory periodical patterns, versification, heretofore deemed indispensable, also became optional. It is perhaps these circumstances that in modern times have encouraged even some writers and poets of literary fame, such as Hoffmannsthal, Auden and others, to turn out librettos for composers of stature. But even a libretto with freely fluctuating diction requires such subtleties of timing that many composers feel

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that only they can control them to full satisfaction.

Another point is that composers eventually have become more aware of having their own ideas about the content of their operas so ^{that} they wanted to be sure of seeing them articulated in their librettos. Frequently we hear a criticism of this trend to the effect that opera is no place for expressing ideas because the words can not be understood anyway. To some extent this argument applies to certain developments of the operatic style in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when under the influence of bel canto aficionados opera was reduced to glorified ^{rified} entertainment and nobody cared about the text - that is: nobody except the composer who even to this day, among conductors, stage directors, singers and audiences, seems to be the only one who consistently takes the text seriously. We only have to remember the arguments that Mozart and Verdi had with their librettists. And, of course, phonetic perceptibility of the words is a purely technical matter, depending on sensible and judicious orchestration on the part of the composer and patience and relentless insistence on the part of the conductor.

It has been tried to turn the calamity upside down and to write an opera with a libretto consisting of nonsense syllables while the music would suggest the conventional expressive clichés for hope, despair, desire, joy, love, hate, disappointment, anger, grief and what not. The experiment, called "abstract ^{trast} opera", predictably failed inasmuch as the audience took it for a hoax. It could have had any validity at all only if the public had not been told that the text was nonsense and had reacted as if it had listened to a normal opera with, as expected, unintelligible words.

It is true that in exceptional cases one may, to a certain extent, enjoy an operatic performance without partaking of the pragmatic details of the dramatic context. Apparently the presentation of emotional intensities through the vocal and histrionic activities of singers in interesting costumes and colorful stage settings may be sufficient to arouse the participation of the viewer even if he does not know what this is all about. We can see and hear how an old man in grim selfcastigation tortures himself to death and finally fades away in resigned agony, and we may be deeply moved by the spectacle without knowing anything about the political problems of Russia in the sixteenth century. On those grounds it was possible for an American opera house to present to its audience a performance of Boris Godunoff simultaneously in Italian and Russian, but not in English.

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For a normal opera-text to be understood as clearly as it may be possible under prevailing circumstances,

a necessary condition, of course, is that operas be produced in the language of the presumptive audience. It has been a prejudice of long standing, fostered by the attitudes of mainly Italian voice teachers, that operatic music is so identified with the sounds of the original language - especially as long as this language is Italian (on the assumption that worthwhile operas could not be written in any other language) that any translation would destroy the unique charm of the work. Obviously this argument has no merits whatever. It has prevailed in this country for a long time because it appealed to the dominating puritanic mentality that regarded opera as a morally dubious product imported for the entertainment of the jaded wealthy that could be tolerated at least as long as one could not understand what those clowns were singing about. Fortunately this has rapidly changed in our time while, ~~curiously~~ curiously enough, in Europe the fad of opera in the original languages has gained some, although insignificant ground. Of course, an aversion for opera in translation could well be ~~de~~

defended by exhibiting the perfectly atrocious translations that have littered opera houses all through the nineteenth century up to our own time. Obviously this would not have to be so, and it happened only because competent people found the task below their dignity. Fortunately, this too has changed, and more respectable writers have come to the rescue of this neglected field.]

Let us contemplate now for a minute how the evolution of opera was influenced by the status of the technical devices necessary for putting it on stage.

It is obvious that the staging of opera, as of any theatrical production, and thus the overall style of the entire project, is decisively determined by the sources and disposition of the light available. Before the invention of electric, or at least gas light it was impossible to create on stage any illusion of reality. The great stage designers of the Baroque, such as Galli Bibiena, were virtuosos in engineering dazzling trompe l'oeils through setting perspectives ad infinitum, and machinery suggesting the most outlandish goings-on in heaven, earth and underground. But atmospheric shadings and, what in German is called Stimmung, remained elusive as long as the light was static and the orchestra sitting on stage. Opera was a spectacle arranged for the entertainment of the audience, and its artificiality was not camouflaged.

Aided by the innovations in illumination, Richard Wagner changed all this. The new technology made it possible to create atmospheric nuances and to represent even miraculous happenings as real. The orchestra disappeared into a partly covered pit so that the reflection of its lights would not disturb the scenery (apart from acoustical considerations.) The Gesamtkunstwerk was designed to transport the viewer, at least as long as he was under its spell, into the world of gods and heroes, and make him feel that this world was real, far above his humdrum every day's life. There is a certain irony in that just when advanced technology allowed Wagner's most extravagant sleights of hand to be performed with ease and elegance, his grand-son did away with all of it and put his shows on a bare and pitch-dark stage.

Apparently, he must have sensed the new trend that questioned the validity of total illusion. We are again aware that all of this is just pretense, that the show is put together for our enlightenment or entertainment, and we do not mind witnessing how it is put together.

This mental attitude reflects the fact that we have developed a new angle in viewing the age-old question of expression in music, or that we rather are re-approaching the medieval type of indifference toward this problem. The idea that music does not express anything was not entirely lost during the Romantic period when emotional expressiveness was held to be the very essence of music. Richard Wagner's famous adversary, the Viennese musicologist Eduard Hanslick, maintained that music was "toenend bewegte Form" (sounding animated form) expressing nothing outside itself, and started a vociferous and persistent controversy. In recent years Susanne Langer, in her book Philosophy in a new key came to the conclusion that music is different from language in that it has no denotation, meaning that musical sounds are not associated with concepts like words in a language, but they have connotations inasmuch as their flow ^{may} delineate the fluctuation of emotions and thus direct the listener's powers of association. Richard Wagner wrote in 1841, seemingly contradicting some of his more fanatic prophets: "What music expresses, is eternal, infinite and ideal: it does not ex-

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press the passion, love or longing of such-and-such an individual on such-and-such an occasion, but passion, love or longing in itself, and this it presents in that unlimited variety of motivations, which is the exclusive and particular characteristic of music, foreign and inexpressible to any other language", and with such a statement even Hanslick might have agreed. Igor Stravinsky, in 1935, goes one or several steps further, saying categorically: "I consider that music, by its very nature, is essentially powerless to express anything at all, neither an attitude, a psychological mood, a phenomenon of nature, etc. Expression has never been an inherent property of music. The phenomenon of music is given to us with the sole purpose of establishing an order in things, including particularly the coordination between man and time. To put it in practice, its indispensable and single requirement is construction." In one word: back to the Quadrivium!

While this statement clearly foreshadows the later development of serialism, the skeptical and pluralistic philosophy of

our time has promoted theatrical conceits in which the action is presented and discussed and commented upon at the same time. Contemporary operas that were written with this view in mind are, for instance, Oedipus Rex by Stravinsky, Christophe Colomb by Darius Milhaud (after the play by Paul Claudel) and my own Charles V. This opera, or, as I called it, stage work with music, deals with the history of the emperor who lived from 1500 to 1558 and came to rule not only over Germany and Austria, but also parts of Italy, over Spain, the Netherlands and the newly discovered Western hemisphere, only to abdicate and retire to the faraway monastery of San Yuste in the Spanish province of Estremadura. In his room was a painting that he had commissioned from Titian, representing the emperor after his death in the hereafter, praying to God for mercy. My opera starts when the emperor, feeling death approaching him, imagines hearing the voice of God calling him, out of Titian's painting, whether he was justified in giving away his power, whether he had accomplished his assignment of uniting the world under Jesus Christ. In his anxiety he calls for his father confessor, a young monk of the monastery, and starts reciting the story of his agitated reign, his struggle with France, with Luther and rising German nationalism, with the Pope, with the Turks and other adversaries. But since the young monk does not understand the far flung implications of imperial politics he has to interrupt the emperor's story with many questions so that the numerous

flashbacks can be shortened by necessity. Only thus was it possible to condense the immense, overflowing material into the space of a single opera session of reasonable length. At the same time the monk is the mouthpiece of the modern audience, asking the questions the public might be tempted to ask. Thus the drama is acted out and discussed at the same time.

This vision of dramatic processes taking place simultaneously on various planes and levels and their integration with complex musical processes requires very accurate coordinating and synchronizing all parameters, which again recommends to some composers taking control of all aspects of such a project and writing their own librettos.

Summing up the various aspects of my disquisition one might arrive at the conclusion that opera is a fairly nonsensical contrivance of the human mind, and this may not be far from correct. Just the same, opera is an ever enchanting and irresistibly seductive medium - very tricky to handle and full of pitfalls. But whoever has tried it once, will yearn to get at it again.