

## WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

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RECENTLY, in the wilds of northern Maine, I was catapulted over a primitive road in a car which shot through the night like some fabulous monster. A brilliant beam of steel-blue sped before us, projecting a twisting path of light into the forest. The pulsating engine seemed to sense the exhilaration of the crisp mountain air. The car was a master product of a thousand master mechanics. On and on we rushed, miles rhythmically dropping behind us into the darkness. Suddenly our searchlight slid upwards; we climbed a steep grade, and at the top, our efficient brakes brought us to a quick and definite halt. Before us and below us glistened a shimmering disk, silvered by our luminous shaft. A dim lake lay there surrounded by tall firs. "And where do we go from here?" I asked my companion. He was a child of the period, his accurately functioning brain as nicely synchronized as his powerful motor. "No further on this road. Nothing to do but go back the way we came," was his response.

In somewhat the same dilemma the composer of radical tendencies finds himself today. He has utilized the finest tools with consummate skill; he has built himself an almost perfect machine which has carried him swiftly into regions strange, if not always beautiful; and now he is looking upon the lake of illusion, the bright beam of his intelligence illuminating but a small spot on the waters before him,—discovering that he is at the end of the road, literally with no place to go—unless he turns back upon the course he has traversed. Undoubtedly intensive radicals will advise him to travel on steel rails, swung along by the massive locomotive; or suggest that he let the swifter wings of the aeroplane carry him through space. Arthur Honegger

made a trial journey on his *Pacific 231*. But he was so bemused by the roar of his unpacific creature of steam that he failed to see the charming countryside *en route*. Some of us have whirred above the earth in aeroplanes—I myself have essayed one such musical flight—but the cacophony of the motors so benumbed our sensory faculties that we were hardly conscious of the gorgeous regions over which we flew.

“Where do we go from here?” This interrogation has caused serious thinking for all creators of music who have not been content to move in vehicles of the Victorian era. Strawinsky, Schoenberg, Honegger, Milhaud, Hindemith, Casella and many others have sought their individual paths. Strawinsky, that master technician of them all, has attempted to instal his 1924 twelve-cylinder motor in a post chaise built when Bach was cantor at Leipsic. The experiment has produced a hybrid, the child of a misalliance that has touched our humor by its naively ridiculous perambulations. Schoenberg has administered to his ego an anaesthetic, and is still holding the mask to his face, creating what appear to him real and fascinating vistas. He quite forgets, however, that we can see only his ears protruding from behind the ugly mask, as we are on the wrong side of it for the proper reaction. Respecting, as we do, much that he has given us, we trust that he may soon “come out from under.”

It is apparent that a crisis has been reached. Mechanical and revolutionary methods will provide no satisfactory solution. George Santayana, who incidentally despises the chaos and haste of modern life, has a pungent word for the consideration of the professional, self-exalted revolutionary. He summarizes thus: “Revolutions are ambiguous things. Their success is generally proportionate to their power of adaptation and the reabsorption within them of what they rebelled against.” A similar thought must have penetrated the mind of the contemporary composer; hence Strawinsky’s latter-day affection for Tchaikowsky, Milhaud’s vibrant praise of Gounod, and the recent resuscitation of Purcell by some of our British confreres. One evening last summer—it was at an *al fresco* concert at the Stadium in New York—I was astonished to discover one of our resident revolutionaries of Latin birth consciously absorbing so

un-revolutionary a work as the third symphony of Brahms. Surely it was not the orchestral timbre he was studying, still less the form and structure. Just such phenomena as I have cited show the direction of the winds of Aeolus. Let it not be thought that I am sitting back, gleefully observing the present embarrassment of my colleagues. Indeed this scrivening is done with the hope that it may assist in indexing my conclusion on a subject vital to us all.

We cannot bid the creative impulse to remain quiescent. Strong in its urge, it is a martinet. Neither audiences of semi-somnolent cabbages—there are such—nor the highly literate vaporings of the highest-browed critics divert it even slightly in its progress towards its objective. Authentic genius will create, and take its chance with the world we live in. The semi-somnolent cabbages and the highest-browed critics may trail on behind; they usually do about twelve years after the event.



We may here consider the extent of contemporary creative achievement in music. Rhythm has undergone a prodigious development during the last two decades. Strawinsky alone has contributed more to enrich our rhythmic repertoire than the whole generation of composers preceding him. Subtly organized rhythmic patterns are now an integral part of the equipment of all well bred young authors of music. Our new and rich harmonic fabric, woven of warp and woof ranging from palest hues to colors most vivid, was urgently needed. Too long had we cumbrously moved with pedestrian tread up hill and down dale, encased in our heavy mail of tonic and dominant, occasionally stimulated by wind and storm wailing the intervalic minor thirds of the diminished seventh chord. And what of our modern instrumental technic, as complicated in its working mechanism as the finest "straight-eight?" Entirely new combinations of orchestral sound have been evolved. They also were needed. Moussorgsky, Rimsky-Korsakow, Scriabin, Strawinsky,

Bartok, Debussy, Dukas, Ravel, and others too numerous to name have all helped build what is an almost faultless machine for the production of musical sound in all its permutations.

With intention melodic developments have been left for present appraisal. There are some who will admit no horizontal tone series that does not have in its entity something of the luscious, the saccharine, or the sentimental. Melodies of formal contour, of serious import, are not acceptable to them. There are others who contend that without the long mellifluous line *there can be no satisfactory emotional stimulus*. These latter may be referred to their respected classics where will be found innumerable melodies of emotional quality without length to recommend them. The modernists have not favored the extended sinuous line. They have epitomized rather than elaborated; they have leaned toward the rugged, the grotesque, the exotic, rather than toward the smooth, the sophisticated, the romantic. In stressing the objective they may have too completely eschewed the subjective. And yet this reaction against the sentimentality of the period preceding has been healthy. It must be admitted that melody has not experienced such radical innovations as rhythm, harmony, and instrumentation. There are a number of causes to which this may be attributed. The world conflict was a primary factor. It ravaged men's souls, stultifying all that was lyric and tender in them. So tremendous a cataclysm brought in its train a more abject worship of the machine, whether typified by engines of death or by engines of speed; and the machine is essentially a thing of rhythm, of great sound-clusters, but never of melody. Then there was an antagonistic struggle to break the bonds of the classic major and minor scales, to cleave the walls of the circle of keys and key relations. The pentatonic, hexatonic, and variations of the occidental and oriental scales became the vogue, were overworked, and finally largely discarded. Melodic experimentation with these media could not be immediately successful except in rare instances. Time was required to sift their potentialities. Finally, romanticism and her paler sister impressionism fitted ill into the war and post-war periods. The day of revolutions was with us, revolutions in the arts as well as within the boundaries

of nations. And in the art of music melody was the first to lose her diadem.



I should be courageous indeed to offer a panacea that would be universally acceptable in this hour of need. I shall indicate merely certain courses that may be followed. Perhaps some brother composer, native or otherwise, will be sufficiently altruistic to share with us any more efficacious formulae he may discover. Nothing that we have gained rhythmically, harmonically, orchestrally, or melodically should be cast aside. Where we have striven for complexity we should now seek simplicity, but not a sophisticated simplicity bordering on the banal. We have left behind us that phase; also, I trust, that much-prized humor at all costs, with its trivial connotations of boulevard ballads, salads, jazzed sobbing blues, and hysterical sensual rhythms. That field is best left to men whose mental calibre is on the same plane as that of their audiences, thus constraining them to no condescension in addressing their public.

During the last decade we have so glorified the machine that it has almost enslaved us. Now we should cease to be its puppet and become its master. Let it serve us merely, mayhap carry us in the direction we wish to go; yet should we suddenly find ourselves before a dark lake we need not hesitate to make the crossing in such rude skiff as we find upon its shores. Stunned by the sledges of materialism and destruction we have now to attain a normal state, that our souls may again stand in a poised relationship to life, that we may again chant songs of the spirit. Out-moded also is the grotesque, at best the child of cleverness and some soulless mate. It may show itself from time to time, but must no more be put forward, like the precocious infant, to impress the assembled multitude. There has been a sort of fetish-worship of ugliness *per se*. It would be wise to neglect this idol somewhat and make obeisance to more propitious gods. There remains melody, whose crown was forfeited in the maelstrom. Why should our allegiance be withheld from one

so radiant? Do we, by chance, fear the piping of those anarchistic ones who noisily croak like frogs in small and stagnant pools—green pools which to their amphibian eyes seem vast and turbulent oceans?

I believe our music of the twentieth century has dealt too much with mutable things as opposed to eternal things. We have put too much faith in intelligence alone, mistaking cerebral commotion for inspiration. The intellect has its important function, but for creation is required, plus intellect, will or choice, direct perception or intuition, and spirit—that which resides in the most sacred precincts of the unconscious. It is for us to keep contact with life, drawing from it all that is useful to us, and yet in solitude to plumb deep into that vital essence we call our soul. Thus shall great music be made by the music-makers.