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MODERN MUSIC

YOUNG GERMANY, 1930

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TEN years ago when artistic relations between the nations,so suddenly and ruthlessly shattered by the war, were again resumed, and the first international music festivals timidly came into existence, there was universal confusion. Not only had the various countries forgotten how to understand each other; members of the same nation seemed no longer to speak the same tongue. The bewildered musician was confronted with a complete chaos of voices. Each man shouted his own, deep, personal anguish into the world, and was astounded to hear how feebly his voice carried.

It is easy to grasp why this anarchy in art should so particularly have afflicted Germany and Austria. On the brink of ruin after the war, for many years completely isolated, they recovered their bearings with the greatest difficulty. Five years of German and Austrian music passed by without leaving a trace. The ideas of Eric Satie and his literary co-worker, Jean Cocteau, which were taking root in France, had not even reached us; the later Debussy and the new Stravinsky were known to us, at best, only by report; and of jazz we had heard little more than the name. The German musician was entirely on his own resources. He clung obstinately to the most extravagant ideas; he followed every path to its end, obscure blind-alley though it might be. Dogmatism in art, always a truly German plague, celebrated its wildest triumph. The madder the music sounded, the more modern it was held to be. Confusion was triumphant.

The political and social revolution was followed by a revolution in music for which, twenty years before, Schönberg had paved the way. The flood of new works was labeled "expressionistic" but we know today that this music, undisciplined and frenzied, was not a new artistic movement but rather the symbol of a last monomaniacal effort to defend the romantic principle in art. Expressionism was the caricature of romanticism. It is only with the reaction against expressionism that the history of present-day German music may be said to begin. Whether we call the new movement "objectivism" or prefer, with Busoni, to call it "neo-classicism," does not matter. The ideals of this new German music are: clarity in composition (as against the diffuseness of later romanticism); freedom from literary content (as against the literary constraint of the symphonic poem); a reestablishment of chamber music (as against the tonal delirium of the giant orchestra); finally, a revival of opera (as against the music-drama).

These tendencies are now so clearly defined and established that it is once again possible to survey the musical situation in Germany or at least to make the attempt.

The new development has not, of course, been along one straight line. There is no standard, no "normal" music today by which each new composition may be measured. But if one is to sketch the musical topography of any country, it is necessary to devise categories in terms of which the relations obtaining between individuals may be indicated. If we call these categories "schools," we can say that there are at present only two men in Germany about whom such groups have formed—Schönberg and young Hindemith.

The music of Schönberg is, however, extremely ill-adapted to the creation of a school. What has attracted the great circle of his worshipping young followers has really been the spiritual force of his personality. Schönberg's art is solitary. He pursued the path of his peculiar genius with such wonderful pertinacity that the average auditor could hardly follow him longer. He drove expressionism in music to the furthest possible point. He so completely unraveled the individual voices, and so shattered the harmonic groundwork that nothing further remained to be accom-

plished in this direction; a radical volte-face was alone possible. This change took place with the introduction of the twelve-tone principle. Inasmuch as tonality had been denied and was no longer conceded to have structural power, it was necessary to discover a new matrix to provide the unity indispensable to a work of art. Schönberg found this in his *Grundgestalt,* which, selected from the unrelated, juxtaposed, twelve half-tones, served for the time being as the core and substance of his work.

The innumerable variations of this "basic form," vastly transcending the older conception of "variation," constitute the new structural principle for the twelve-tone music to which Schönberg has dedicated himself today. One can readily understand that so elaborately intellectual a structural conception is difficult of expression. It represents Schönberg's struggle to stifle the romantic in himself. And he has succeeded, but at the price of a spiritual isolation separating him from all his contemporaries. Schönberg is unique. Even in Germany his following is to be attributed to his personality rather than to his music. The superficial tendencies of his time are indeed visible in his work; he too writes chamber music clear in construction, opposed to confused sonorities and to the music-drama. But consciously he turns against everything we regard as especially characteristic of the present. In one of his satiric choruses, Opus 28, he has even made a parody of Stravinsky. Schönberg may be running ahead of his time, but it is possible also that he will never be overtaken, because, last of the great individualists in music, he may be on a road that does not lead to the future.

The circle of his most productive disciples, those who have achieved recognition, may be quickly described. Of his faithful followers only Alban Berg has made any lasting impression. His *Wozzek,* to be sure, bears the clear impress of the new music; but nevertheless, in the last analysis, it proves to be only a memorial to the past, exactly like the subject matter of his next opera (on which he is now working)—Wedekind's *Erdgeist.*

The rest, and they are not few in number, who took the leap into the abstract with Schönberg, without his capacity for personal fascination, have had to pay for their boldness by incurring the hostility of the public. There are some clever fellows among

them, like the self-absorbed Anton von Webern whose spiritual gift cannot be nullified even by the fearful unintelligibility of his work. But now that musicians are again joining forces, Schönberg has come to serve as a danger signal to the younger men. Many have utilized what they learned from him as stepping stones to more congenial tasks which bring them into relation with the life about them. There is Hans Eisler, for instance, who has associated himself with the Communist Party and regards music as justified only in serving the cause of the proletariat. He writes workmen's choruses with revolutionary texts and simple music, and orchestral scores for Piscator's political theatre. He has even put news items and a diary to music. Young Gronostay, so competent in the sphere of light music, prepares scores for the films and the radio and devotes himself, as director of the phonograph department of the Berlin Broadcasting Company, to the improvement of popular taste in music. Walter Goehr has provided jazz music for Feuchtwanger's *Amerikanisches Liederbuch*. There are many others who have sought to escape isolation if not by servilely following the popular currents of the day, then by seeking to infuse a new vitality into their music, chiefly through increased attention to rhythm, as, for example, young Ullman of Prague.

Hindemith is Schönberg's antipode. He has, of course, felt the influence of Schönberg—for what composer of the younger generation responsive to his own time has not! But Hindemith, perhaps indirectly influenced by Stravinsky, has clearly left the Schönbergian principles far behind him. Against Schönberg's intellectual brilliance he has opposed his own originality. Just as at some time in his life he has played on every instrument, he has likewise paid his respects to every type of composition. He has not been over-fastidious; he has tried everything. After writing an opera with the expressionist, Kokoschka, he later collaborated with the cabaret skit-writer, Schiffer. He has tried his hand at chamber music of every kind and has written concertos for all the usual and many unusual instruments. Liberation from Wagner—for Schönberg and the whole older generation the crucial problem—was no hurdle for Hindemith to leap. He never even gave Wagner a thought. Hindemith derives superficially from

Brahms, but the true sources of his inspiration lie further back, in the eighteenth century, in Bach and his predecessors. A polyphony in which the linear plasticity of the individual voices is more important than their harmonic combination is his clearest characteristic. For a long time he regarded harmony as so definitely secondary in importance that he was almost guilty of complete atonality. After wide experiment he has returned today to a very broadly developed tonality. Nor need this change be regarded as any inconstancy peculiar to him; for it is not at all clear at present why tonality should or should not be regarded as outmoded.

It is impossible to discuss Hindemith further without referring to a very significant extra-musical problem, namely, the sociological function of music. Always characteristically German, this question has never been more acute than it is in the Germany of today. The younger men have come to the conclusion that music—good as well as bad—is futile if it cannot attract an audience. The development of productive individuals is much less important, therefore, than the discovery of some common basis upon which musicians and their public may once more meet. This basis is either completely lacking today or has become so very shaky that it is hopeless to think of building upon it. In other words the purely artistic problem has been superseded, in Germany at least, by an artistic-sociological one. A breach between the public and the art of music is everywhere discernible and it is both frivolous and incorrect to hold the radio and sport alone responsible. A deeper cause lies in the obsolescence of the usual concert and traditional opera as mediums for the presentation of music; the concert, because it condemns the audience to listen in an unresisting stupor to the same, ever the same old programs; and the opera because it doles out material that has become "old hat" to eyes gone to school to the cinema and senses disillusioned by reality. During the nineteenth century music passed definitely into the class of luxuries reserved for the entertainment of the upper classes, and ceased to be an integral part in the life of the people. For the new audience which was ushered into existence and power by the Revolution, the outmoded sociological approach to music, handed down by the previous genera-

tion, has proved unserviceable. Hence the birth of the new "Gebrauchsmusik," the music for everybody, for everyday use, which is to replace the "Luxusmusik." Obviously these new goals can be reached soonest in the fields now just opening up to music —those of the radio and the sound film. But the concert and the opera as well must yield to radical change. And—by no means least important in this program of reform—the auditor is to be roused from his lethargy, stimulated and induced to make music himself, instead of uncomprehendingly following the conductor's baton.

This situation is so typically German that people in other countries have difficulty in even understanding it. A short time ago at a jury meeting of a committee for an international music festival, the German composer, Tiessen, proposed that an evening be set aside for "Gebrauchsmusik," whereupon Maurice Ravel replied that he failed to see its necessity, his countrymen having never written anything other than "Gebrauchsmusik." And in Baden-Baden where annual experiments in these new musical forms are made, I have heard Americans say that the serious treatment of such artistically negligible factors as the film, the radio and the phonograph record is exclusively and eminently German. But that is exactly the point; we cannot minimize their significance, and our results have not been unfruitful.

At all events Hindemith and the circle gathered about him today can only be understood in relation to this problem. Of course Hindemith has written a great deal for the concert hall and has composed operas, but even the latest of these, *Neues vom Tage,* is so thoroughly "everyday" in its content that it can count on a wide hearing. Most recently he has concentrated on "Gebrauchsmusik." He writes instrumental pieces so simple that amateurs can play them, and choruses that amateurs can sing. He prepares scores for the films and waltzes for the mechanical piano. With the poet Brecht who is pursuing similar ends in literature, he created for the Baden-Baden festival, last July, a *Lehrstück,* a modern morality play in musico-dramatic form which employed the unusual and dangerous expedient of calling on the audience to "join in" the performance. The artistic elements of this work were so ruthlessly subjugated to the sociolog-

ical purpose that Hindemith appeared to have far over-shot his mark.

In connection with these activities one must mention the name of Kurt Weill. Though not a disciple of Hindemith, he belongs in the group. A former pupil of Busoni, he no longer places his faith in that master's ideas. This young composer (he is only thirty) has already achieved a popular triumph with his *Dreigroschenoper,* which, he is careful to point out, is no opera at all. In this restoration of the old English *Beggar's Opera,* whose text Brecht has modernized, Weill has developed a singularly happy style suggested by American popular music without the use of its percussive beat. This popular style, based on dance motives, is his chief characteristic. How he will develop it further remains to be seen in his new works for the theatre. Recently he cooperated with Hindemith in writing a *Lindbergh-Flug,* based on a poem by Brecht, an original composition for the radio. Special conditions apply, of course, to works for this medium; absolute clarity in text and music are obviously essential. The theme of the great ocean flight was perfectly adapted to such treatment. Brecht gave it an epic setting for which Weill contributed music, though unpretentious yet of poignant emphasis, which seemed more apt than Hindemith's far grander polyphony.

We are of course only at the beginning of this development, but it is destined to grow. The German Broadcasting Company, a powerful example, regularly commissions composers to write new works, and pays them well. They must of course take into account the peculiar limitations of the radio, but aside from these they are permitted absolute freedom. Musicians are being rapidly attracted to this work and already men like Schreker, Toch and Künnecke have appeared before the microphone with original works. Max Butting also writes for the radio and the films and has just been appointed instructor in radio music at the State Academy.

It is in the nature of categories to be too narrow. There are a number of important young men whom it is difficult to classify, as for example, Ernst Krenek. Krenek started out as the most fanatic of dogmatists; no score was linear enough for him, no cacophony too extravagant. And among the younger musicians

there is not one today who has undergone a more complete metamorphosis. The experience of his years as a conductor inspired him with the conviction that, although the artist should not be the servant of the public, it was unnecessary to set oneself the task of flouting it. Accordingly he attempted a compromise with the public taste for entertainment, first in a short symphony, later in a pot-pourri and other pieces, and finally in his operas, beginning with *Jonny*. This work has been hastily condemned for resorting to jazz, when on the contrary the principal charge against it should be that the jazz has not been utilized radically enough, that its effect is anesthetized by an outmoded lyricism. In his technical resources Krenek is turning increasingly to the music of the past. His latest opera bears evidence of the perils of his great erudition which is driving him back to an unintelligible profundity that means the sure death of opera.

This survey of Germany has taken the form of a black and white drawing. In color it would of course reveal infinite nuances. Standing outside the groups mentioned, and firmly condemning them, are the great men of the past generation, Strauss and Pfitzner, for example. And there are many younger men who have dedicated themselves to a sterile traditionalism, and are associated in a Leipzig and a Munich group. But the more clearly the picture is drawn, the more definitely do the two opposing tendencies emerge—the one leading towards an isolated abstractionism, the other toward a socially stimulated vitality. That a truce may some day be declared between these two hostile camps and a union effected is of course the only hope for Germany, one that is entertained by all seriously interested in its musical future.