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## MUSIC OF THE PAST

influence of the  
musical changes  
of the 19th  
century

*SOME BORZOI BOOKS*

RED

PAPERS ON MUSICAL SUBJECTS

*Carl Van Vechten*

MY MUSICAL LIFE

*N. A. Rimsky-Korsakoff*

WAGNER

AS MAN AND ARTIST

*Ernest Newman*





Vertical Piano belonging to Marie Louise  
(*Conservatoire de Paris*)



WANDA LANDOWSKA

# Music of the Past

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY

WILLIAM ASPENWALL BRADLEY



NEW YORK

MCMXXIV

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PUBLISHED, NOVEMBER, 1924 · SET UP, ELECTRO-  
TYPED, PRINTED AND BOUND BY THE PLIMPTON  
PRESS, NORWOOD, MASS. · ESPARTO PAPER MANU-  
FACTURED IN SCOTLAND AND FURNISHED BY  
W. F. ETHERINGTON & CO., NEW YORK ·

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# MUSIC OF THE PAST





## I

# “MUSIC IS PRE-EMINENTLY A MODERN ART”

*“It is a sign of the times! Now, I have found, nine times out of ten, the same facts, with analogous circumstances, in old memoirs, or in old histories.”* ANATOLE FRANCE

WE too often hear it said in our day that music is pre-eminently a modern art. Born obscurely at a not very distant date, it has, during the last two centuries, made magnificent progress, and we are witnessing its glory.

Towards the middle of the eighteenth century, a musical writer of Lyons read, at an academy meeting, a memoir on music which begins thus: “It may truthfully be said that the arts have made considerable progress since two centuries ago. The moderns have surpassed the old masters.” Frederick the Great’s famous flutist, Quantz,<sup>1</sup> in his treatise on the flute, draws the darkest sort of picture of music in Germany in the seventeenth century. According to him, the great evolution dated from only a little while before.

“There are to-day,” said Voltaire, “a thousand people who know music for one who knew it in the time of Louis XIII, and the art has improved in this advance. . . . Under Louis XIV music was still in the cradle.”

Now, scarcely half a century earlier, Bonnet, after

<sup>1</sup> J. J. Quantz, *Versuch einer Anweisung die Flöte traversiere zu spielen*. Berlin, 1752.

insisting in his turn upon the two centuries of progress, declared that, during the reign of Louis XIV, musical art, like the other arts, had achieved such a triumph "that France is as flourishing as was Rome at the time of Augustus."<sup>1</sup>

For Berlioz, real music began with Gluck only; and Brossard, about 1725, congratulates himself on having seen this art reach perfection.

I am persuaded that, ascending the stream of time, each generation would be found proud of having attained its apogee after one or two centuries of progress. Fortunately for the reader, I shall be unable to weary him further with my citations, my own modest knowledge not going much beyond the two obligatory centuries.

How I regret not knowing the Greek and Latin authors better! I find in an old book, *Sur le Beau*, an extract from Seneca's eighty-fourth letter. After insisting upon the progress accomplished in his time, he writes:

"We now have more musicians in our solemn concerts than the ancients had spectators in their theatres."

The cradle of music might thus be established a century or two before Seneca. However, we are taught that the first philosophers of antiquity were great musicians. We are even told that when words were discovered men already possessed songs.

It must be believed that each epoch still possesses vague notions concerning the music of a few preceding generations; and, at the point where knowledge begins to fail, one places the cradle and names a father at random. Josquin des Prés was considered the crea-

<sup>1</sup> Bonnet, *Histoire de la Musique*. Paris, 1715.

tor of musical art. Jacques Mauduit also bore the title of *Père de la musique*.

Heinrich Schutz was regarded as the Father of German Music.

Puissant Palestrina, vieuz maître, vieux génie,  
Je vous salue ici, *père de l'harmonie!*  
Car ainsi qu'un grand fleuve où boivent les humains  
Toute cette musique a coulé de vos mains,

wrote Victor Hugo.

Bach too is often called the Father of Music.

And all the other circumstances are practically analogous.

The young threaten us with masterpieces which will cause all that has been written up to the present to be forgotten. The old composers, prophets of disaster, cry out at the corruption of taste. In their time, everything was better; but the public — “that voice of God which is never mistaken” — far from the exaggerations of both, celebrates the two or three composers, dead twenty or thirty years ago, whose obituary notices remain deeply engraved in the common memory.

“It is a fugitive art destroyed by fashion,” Auber said of music.

## II

### MUSICAL PROGRESS

*"Beauty, for the toad, is his she-toad."* VOLTAIRE

THE idea that music, from day to day, makes miraculous bounds towards progress does not date from the present. Voltaire, Rousseau and all the great writers of the eighteenth century, with the possible exception of d'Alembert, regale us with it to the point of satiety. Cahuzac, in his articles published in the *Dictionnaire des Sciences et des Arts*, even goes so far as to state it with a certain precision:

"Just as the compositions of Pergolese, of Handel, of Leo, etc., are infinitely above Carissimi's and Corelli's, so our good French masters to-day are very superior to those admired at the end of the last century."

Cahuzac's favourite composer was Mondoville who would thus be infinitely superior to Handel, Corelli, Lully and Palestrina.

You see here the value of these classifications and of this appreciation in the name of progress.

Bach's great admirer, Forkel, finds several of the cantor's works old-fashioned and antiquated, and believes them unworthy to survive.

For Zelter, Mozart sums up all by himself J. S. Bach, Philipp Emanuel and Haydn. "I remember perfectly," he writes to Goethe, "that the music of J. S. Bach of Leipzig and that of his son Emanuel, of Hamburg, both very original and spontaneous, appeared to me almost incomprehensible, although the

basic originality attracted me. Then came Haydn. At the end appeared Mozart who sums up all three."

Fétis regards Palestrina as the author of instructive studies and concedes that the Palestrina style is *still* excellent in church music.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the amiable composer, Adolphe Adam, prides himself upon being a great amateur and connoisseur of old music. However, after Candeille's revival of *Castor et Polux*, he wrote:

"It will, doubtless, be the last of this masterpiece, reduced to a library ornament. . . . Now that better systems have prevailed, who will ever dream of reading Rameau's didactic works? Who will go to seek in his plays the melodies which made their success?"

Fifty years before, Rameau in his turn represented the future and claimed to throw off the ancient yoke; and Adolphe Adam would be greatly surprised to see us more indulgent for the defects of the author of *Hippolyte et Aricie* than for the better systems which had prevailed in his time.

About 1860, Mozart was found childish and Beethoven rococo — both very antiquated and inferior to the heroes of the day.

Meyerbeer's music, it was said with the greatest seriousness, moves us by accents which penetrate and explore the most remote recesses of the soul! What musical nature could contain its emotion at certain passages of *Les Huguenots*?

These examples could be continued indefinitely. In all times, not only the mediocre minds, but sometimes the cultivated musicians as well, have imagined that their art had surpassed that of their predecessors.

It is the music of to-day and of yesterday which

was always right; that of day before yesterday, always wrong.

Under the title, *Is There a Progressive Party in Music?* Richard Strauss launched some years ago a sort of encyclical which has been pompously called the *Fontainebleau Manifesto*.

The celebrated composer is not only persuaded that music walks — nay, runs — gasping and breathless along the path of progress, but that the best works of times past were created merely to serve as stepping-stones.

“Even a perfect work of art,” he says, “should be regarded merely as the seed deposited in the soul of posterity for it to continue to produce *greater and more perfect things*.”

Why the modern works are greater and more perfect than those of Bach, Palestrina, Beethoven, M. Strauss is very careful not to tell us.

Nor has Cahuzac, either, told us why Palestrina, Bach, Handel were infinitely inferior to Mondoville!

Who knows whether the assurance of our superiority and of our famous progress over the old masters will not also be a fertile source of mirth for future generations?



### III

## THE CRIME OF LESE-PROGRESS

“THE natural, straight instinct of the artless crowd must, however,” continues the author of *Salome*, “be defended against the eternal party of retrogression ever seeking to stifle in the people its living bent for progress.”

I shall take good care not to discuss the question whether, for the artless crowd, the new turns in music are so particularly attractive: I believe the public prefers repetitions, the things well known and thoroughly familiar. I do not wish to insist upon this point; but on what ground are we going to exterminate the party of retrogression?

Have we forbidden Mendelssohn to propagate Bach's works? Bach to copy Frescobaldi's and Couperin's? Couperin to write apotheoses on Lully and Corelli? Have we protested against Wagner's ecstatic writings on Beethoven? and against the latter's admiration for Handel? and against Berlioz's deification of Gluck? and against Rossini's zeal to make Mozart loved in his country where people persisted in finding him too complicated?

All the great musicians have committed this dreadful crime of lese-progress.

Did not Mozart admit that he himself was less new than Bach?

“Seated at my worm-eaten harpsichord,” wrote Haydn, “I did not envy the lot of monarchs. . . . I did not stir from the harpsichord until I had played

them from one end to the other [the first six sonatas by Ph. Em. Bach]. Anyone who really knows me will see that I am under great obligations to Emanuel, that I have grasped his style and that I have studied it with care. That writer himself complimented me upon it formerly."

Even Meyerbeer, one day when his admirers said in his presence that, after the fourth act of *Les Huguenots*, it was no longer possible to listen to *Don Juan*, replied: "So much the worse for the fourth act of *Les Huguenots*!"

Contrary to the sorry legislators of taste, all the great musicians were filled with respect and with tenderness for their predecessors and they did not manifest the least pretension to absorb all the past in their radiant glory.

Liszt, the Romantic musician *par excellence*, claimed to be but a faithful descendant of the classics and to seek in the past the origins of the tradition he wished to represent and continue.

"Every day," said Schumann, "I prostrate myself before that great musical savant, I confess myself to that incommensurable, incomparable genius intercourse with whom purifies and fortifies me. . . . If Bach rose from his tomb to-day, after he had perhaps begun by fulminating a little against the present state of music, he would surely rejoice in the end that there had sprung up at least a few stray flowers in the field where he had planted such gigantic oak forests."

And this enthusiasm for their predecessors has prevented no genius from creating new works of art.

There is, to my knowledge, but a single exception. The composer Porta, highly esteemed by his contemporaries, remained for many years without producing



anything, deeming with a touching modesty that it would be idle on his part to compose new works. "I think," he wrote, "that my one rôle is to save from an unjust oblivion the remarkable works which the great composers have left to posterity."

Let us not forget that Porta lived in the century where we place the cradle of music — nay, where we scarcely catch a glimpse of the first symptoms which were to render a cradle necessary. Yet he speaks to us of the remarkable works of the past fallen into an unjust oblivion.

Why fear so far the seduction of the past? Should we, like Ulysses, bind ourselves to the mainmast and stop our ears with wax so as not to succumb to the charms of the ancient sirens?

The Renaissance, which was but a return to antiquity, does not however seem to have been disastrous for the arts.

What should we say of the poets, of the painters and of the sculptors who demanded, they too, that Homer, Phidias and Raphael be hidden from the artless crowd in the name of an imaginary evolution? They would have greater reason than the musicians, moreover, since the scaffolding of their past is immense and may appear crushing for geniuses of average scope.

They sometimes voice their complaints, without however that haughty presumption of having surpassed antiquity. No, their only desire would be to have the sun and the stars extinguished, that their mediocrity might shine like a glow-worm in the shades.

Analysing Abbé Dubos' ideas on the dance, Cahuzac said: "What was believed (before Lully) to be

*la Danse noble*, has been replaced by what has been called a *Baladinage*. This *Baladinage* became in its turn the sole *Danse noble*. Later was substituted for it a more animated dance which the fulsome praisers of the past have judged *excessive* or in *bad taste*.”<sup>1</sup>

Cahuzac, although right, was wrong in seeing here the proofs of a constant progress.

In the name of Chambonnières, the critics refused to admit Lully. Once Lully was imposed, Rameau was despised, but at the same time Chambonnières. Once Rameau was imposed, Gluck was held in contempt with, simultaneously, Lully and Chambonnières; and so on.

The progressives, as well as the reactionaries, lack historic sense. Our sons will be good-for-nothings, say the latter. Our ancestors were good-for-nothings, say the former.

Out of a thousand musicians, you will at present find scarcely ten capable of telling apart compositions by Lully, by Rameau and by Gluck, and even then they would have difficulty in agreeing which of these three was superior to the others. It is, thus, a question of taste, not of progress.

In vain is the eternally beautiful “immutable.” Fortunately it changes a little each season, after all, without following a trail blazed in advance towards an absolute ideal. That would lack charm and surprise.

<sup>1</sup> Cahuzac, *La Danse ancienne et moderne*. The Hague, 1754.

## IV

### CONTEMPT FOR THE OLD MASTERS

It is incredible how little we know of the history of our art, in comparison with what poets, painters and sculptors know of theirs.

The Greeks have left us nothing, but what are the mediæval works with which we are familiar? Where do we hear the marvels of the Renaissance? And do we know the works of the seventeenth century? Yet this does not prevent us from affecting a deep disdain for all the unknown past.

We have raised a ladder and we make each successive generation mount a round; and what more logical than that we dare-devils who have reached the very top should regard with pity all those who have remained below?

The natives of the Fiji Islands kill their parents when these are old. This is precisely the morality which governs music. We deem that the ancient works have fallen into a merited oblivion because they did not possess the great qualities necessary to resist the sharp tooth of time. With regard to the beautiful, to the true, we must trust to time, we say. As if time were not ourselves but a sort of infallible judge sent by Heaven! When Bach had fallen into oblivion, it was also deemed, for a whole century after his death, that his works had not a sufficiently vigorous constitution to stand the test of time and to save themselves from the shipwreck which overwhelms mediocrity.

It is, however, ourselves who cast aside the greatest works of art, like clothing worn out and no longer fashionable. Time is merely our aid to make them moulder, and its chance choice does not reveal a very enlightened judge.

Now and then, indeed, on the occasion of a jubilee, we unearth a work with which we had lost every species of contact for centuries; and when, mangled, disfigured and mutilated, it nevertheless reveals beauty and makes our heart beat, we are greatly astonished. What, beautiful music at that epoch? Three centuries ago! And even in England? Incredible! Yes, it existed. I should be unable to say whether it is superior or inferior to that of to-day, but it filled hearts quite as worthy as our own with tenderness.

Shakespeare deified it.

Yet, although touched, and our eyes wet with tears, we never forget our superiority.

“What charming artlessness in these pieces of Couperin’s!” write his modern admirers. Now, there is just as much artlessness in Couperin’s pieces as in Voltaire’s *contes*. Indeed, in the eighteenth century, Couperin was considered a profound composer.

After a concert where I had played works of consummate beauty by Bach, by Handel, by Purcell and by Frescobaldi, a brave provincial composer who afterwards sent me his compositions — and what compositions! — came to congratulate me. He seemed sincerely moved. “How beautiful it is, how beautiful it is!” he repeated. “Wouldn’t you really say, Madame, that those men had forseen us?”

\* \* \*

I am far from decrying the present day. Nor have

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I any idea of associating myself with certain panegyrist of the past who at every turn descry signs of decadence in the art of their epoch and predict for it an imminent death.

They probably find a sort of consolation in telling themselves that "the universe culminates in them and will not survive them," as Anatole France says in *Le Jardin d'Epicure*.

"May the reason," writes Voltaire, "which sometimes weakens in old age, preserve me from that ordinary defect of exalting the past at the expense of the present."

And, to give himself perhaps an air of youth, he prefers to fall into the opposite exaggeration:

"In the century of Louis XIV," he says, "music was in the cradle: a few languishing songs, some airs for the violin, for the guitar and for the theorbo — the majority of these composed in Spain — are all that were known."<sup>1</sup>

"Melody, until Lully, consisted merely in a cold, lagging, lugubrious vocal music or in a few vaudevilles, like the airs of our Christmas carols, and harmony was but a rather coarse counterpoint.

"We have arrived late in all categories. There is scarcely a nation which has more vivacity and less invention than ours."<sup>2</sup>

And, with several strokes of his pen, Voltaire strikes out Lassus, Josquin des Prés, Goudimel, Jeannequin, all the masters of the French Renaissance and all the beauties of that popular music whose tenderness, whose archness and whose charm are irresistible. Fearing to exalt the past at the expense of the present,

<sup>1</sup> *Le Siècle de Louis XIV.*

<sup>2</sup> Voltaire, *Lettres à Mme. la Marquise du Deffand.*



the most serious musicians and writers have often let themselves be carried away by the opposite error. Ignorance has done the rest. Whence that disdain for the pretended artlessness and unconsciousness of the first masters as compared with our splendour and magnificence. Whence that general faith that it is we who witness the true flowering of music and who bear the good seed of the future. "What," we are asked repeatedly, "does the wrinkled art of our ancestors, swallowed up by the coffin, matter to us? What good does it do to look back, to seek to know it and to understand it?"

Useless to encourage ignorance. It adapts itself easily, requiring no long preliminary exercises. Not content with propagating it, people go so far as to want to erect it into a dogma in the name of a pretended evolution, continual and indefinite.

The religion of progress is very wide-spread in our day and numbers fanatical adepts.

I see the faces of some friends who have professed these ideas too long for my feeble demonstrations to have the least influence upon their opinion; and I am sincerely distressed to have shocked their beliefs. For while loving, without prudery, the most naked truth, I place it below affection, the nude being sometimes ugly, friendship always beautiful.

I am quite willing to believe that progress exists in science, in mechanics, in industry; but who will kindly explain to me wherein consists real musical progress and whereby the most modern composer is necessarily superior to Bach, to Mozart, to Palestrina?

To avoid being excommunicated by the believers in progress, I am delighted to be able to fall back upon the authority of one of their greatest pioneers:

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"The beauty of art lies in its not being susceptible of improvement," wrote Victor Hugo. "Art as art, and taken in itself, goes neither forward nor backward. The transformations of poetry are only *undulations of the beautiful*, useful to human movement.

"Art is not susceptible of intrinsic progress. From Phidias to Rembrandt, there is movement, not progress. Go back as far as you will, from the Palace of Versailles to the Heidelberg Schloss, from the Heidelberg Schloss to Notre-Dame de Paris, from Notre-Dame de Paris to the Alhambra, from the Alhambra to Saint Sophia, from Saint Sophia to the Coliseum, from the Coliseum to the Propylæa, from the Propylæa to the Pyramids, you can in time, you cannot go back in art. . . .

" . . . Art depends upon no future improvement, upon no transformation of language, upon no death and no birth of idiom.

"It is as pure, as complete, as divine in absolute barbarism as in full civilization.

"Such is the *little known* law of art!"

And the strictly ascendant line, drawn by the adepts of progress, which ought to lead us soberly from station to station towards the ideal, like a parvenu towards wealth and honours, is metamorphosed into a series of fluctuations, of capricious undulations, of different beauties each of which is, however, perfect in itself, each unsurpassable and incapable of being equalled.

Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* cannot be surpassed. A little piece by Couperin cannot be surpassed. Bach tries it in his *French Suites* without success, though creating new beauties. There are works before which there is nothing left for us but to fall prostrate, for

they have attained their supreme perfection; and those who set out to go beyond are ignorant or tasteless. They do not suspect that, above the *very well*, as Théophile Gautier says, there is the *too well* which is nearer the bad than is thought. If we put on a new skin every spring, our new skin is not necessarily more beautiful than the old. "After Mozart came Beethoven. The new Mozart will be succeeded by a new Beethoven," says Schumann.

Life is always rich in beauties the manifestations of which vary; and, envisaged in a certain way, they may appear to us superior or inferior, but without ever following a determinate path towards continual progress or towards the opposite. Taste may *become* purified or corrupted and correct itself afterwards by its own efforts. Simplicity is sought, it is found. Some begin, others carry on the fine traditions, a third tries to go beyond and, finally, this excessive form is repudiated.

We may prefer one artistic epoch to another, we may find that such a generation has given a greater flowering of genius; but to maintain that a Palestrina evolved would give us a Kuhnau, that a Kuhnau evolved would give us a Bach, that a Bach evolved would give us a Meyerbeer and that all together evolved would give us a Richard Strauss, is pure nonsense.

Music is not a schoolgirl who passes sedately from one class to another and who, in our day only, has just obtained her diploma.

Each form, each genre, each style may have its rise and its decline; and when a musician says that Rameau's harpsichord compositions seem to him inferior to Couperin's, he may be right, the genre, the



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form, the character being close enough to make it possible to frame an objective judgment more easily than if it were a question of Palestrina and of Brahms; but what would you say if, asking to have defined the difference between Homer and Dumas *fils*, someone answered you, without taking the trouble to reflect: "Dumas *fils* is much superior, for he came several centuries later"?

What would you say?

I should say: "He's a musician!"

Progress, I am often told, is the greatest spur for artists. For what would be the use of their creating if they had not absolute faith in perfectibility?

People will soon try to make us believe that we smell flowers simply and solely to exercise our sense of smell and that our one end in loving is to surpass our grandmothers in tenderness, to attain perfection. We love because we love, we make art because we love it; and happily all the speculative reasons, even the highest, count for nothing here. The peasants of our Polish country-sides sing admirable old songs and create new ones. They make art without being poisoned by the pride of progress.

"However, everything advances, everything progresses in life. The earth itself does not remain immutable."

"Yes, but happily it does not rush with giant stride in the direction of the sun. It appears to turn about it, approaching or retreating, then coming back to the same place. Similarly, art does not run in the direction of the pretended unique ideal. Each generation has its own ideal and attains it more or less. Whence the full richness of perfect beauties, complete and entirely different, which we can enjoy in each

of the arts. Homer and Shakespeare, Sophocles and Molière, Phidias and Michelangelo, Fra Angelico and Raphael, Watteau and Rodin. Only in music do they want to make us believe that the one *raison d'être* for the old masters was to serve as a germ for our romantics — for these in their turn to produce new geniuses.

“However, Beethoven and Wagner,” they affirm, “will never fall into oblivion, like their predecessors.”

“Why?”

“Because they have created immortal works.”

Exactly the same thing has been said of all the great masters in the past. Immortality was predicted for them, not only in their obituaries but often during their lifetime; and if our religion of musical progress continues, followed by ignorance, it will be read in two centuries: “Ravel may be considered the father of music. The composers who preceded him, like Beethoven and Wagner, were still in the embryonic state and have fallen into a just oblivion.”

## V

### GRANDEUR AND PATHOS

OLD music thought only of charming the ears. It lacked grandeur, pathos," people never tire of repeating to us.

"And Bach?" . . . "Bach is an exception. He is the precursor, the prophet who foresaw our epoch and our own tastes."

The idea that the Cantor of Eisenach, although dedicating his works to Frederick the Great and the princes of his time, composed them uniquely with a view to our concert public, is so consecrated a commonplace that I scarcely dare dream of combatting it.

Did he not, in his *Chromatic Fantasy*, foreshadow our Romanticism? we are asked. Do not this form — a free and fugitive improvisation — this nonchalant writing, these unexpected and frequent modulations, this tempestuous, stormy character announce Beethoven and the whole Pleiade of geniuses who followed him?

Bülow affirmed it, other great musicians have said it also, and it is now repeated practically everywhere.

If we wished, at any price, to see a happy message in the *Chromatic Fantasy*, it is neither Beethoven, nor Chopin, nor Schumann it would announce to us, but composers newer still, because less known, Frescobaldi, Buxtehude, the lutenists and others.

Why should Bach have taken the trouble to seek to divine the tastes which might reign several centu-

ries after his death, when it would have been so easy for him to derive from the works of his predecessors all those forms which appear Romantic?

Kuhnau says in his preface that he had applied himself, following the example of the celebrated masters, to the expressly *negligent* style (*mit Fleiss negligent*), that is to say to dropping one voice and seizing a new one.

This was, moreover, precisely the writing of the lutenists.

Frescobaldi, in his *Toccatas*, advises players to submit the interpretation of his pieces to no rigorous measure, but to abandon themselves freely to the movement, as in the madrigals.

Certain of Louis Couperin's pieces approach the *Chromatic Fantasy* in character; and Frohberger's *Plainte* for example or certain of his *Toccatas* shine with all its qualities of emotion and of writing.

The old Cantor knew marvellously well the works of his predecessors, just as he knew those of the seventeenth century and of the Middle Ages, and copied them with the greatest piety. For, let us make no mistake, not only did Bach not seek to divine the tastes of future generations, he did not even follow all the ideas, considered advanced, of his century. He was rather a conservative.

At the moment when, in Germany, began the passion for the opera, he preferred to remain faithful to his learned counterpoint and to the tastes of the masters of the preceding century.

That is perhaps the explanation of the simple *succès d'estime* he enjoyed during his lifetime, and even his own sons called him "old big-wig."

Later, the Romantics enjoyed Bach's works more

than they did those of Haydn and Mozart (the French composers were absolutely disdained), because they found therein the qualities dearest to them: grandeur and pathos.

They could have found them also, however, with less genius perhaps, in nearly all the composers of the seventeenth century and earlier, those qualities not being a modern invention.

If Josquin des Prés' contemporaries said "that no one better than he could excite the affections of the soul by song," it must be believed that his music was not a vain jumble of sounds to affect the eardrum. Lully's contemporaries also seemed to find in his operas something besides an agreeable sonorous display.

"Did he wish to depict Love, what heart is not melted! . . . And what melody! What naturalness! What harmony in his duets! . . . Did he wish to express Grief, do not the rocks groan with him? Did he wish to depict fury, vengeance, what heart does not feel secret shudderings? When he wishes to create some enchantment or evoke the shades of Hell, horror and fright take possession of our soul," etc.<sup>1</sup>

M. Romain Rolland,<sup>2</sup> in his *Notes sur Lully*, cites a story, told in 1779, by François Le Prevost d'Exmes, after an account of Louis Racine's:

"Lully," said he, "mortified at hearing it said that he owed all his success to Quinault's sweetness and that he was incapable of making good music to vigorous words, sat down one day at the harpsichord and sang impromptu, to his own accompaniment, these verses from *Iphigénie*:

<sup>1</sup> Bonnet, *Histoire de la Musique*.

<sup>2</sup> *Mercure musical*, 1907.



Un prêtre environné d'une foule cruelle  
Portera sur ma fille une main criminelle,  
Déchirera son sein et d'un oeil curieux  
Dans son coeur palpitant consultera les dieux.

He adds that "the auditors all believed they saw the frightful spectacle and that the tones which Lully added to the words made their hair stand on end."

And Palestrina, in whom the astonishing technical skill did not at all impair the beauty and the majesty of the sentiment? And the masters of the Renaissance?

Non pas toy, Costeley, qui, entre les meilleurs,  
Exerces le doux art d'une musique élue,  
Qui sçais par beaux acors acoiser l'âme émue,  
L'exciter assoupie, exprimer ses douleurs.

(J.-A. LE BAIF to GUILLAUME COSTELEY)

And the Troubadours, to whose influence is attributed the perfection of the works of Dante, of Petrarch, of Ariosto and of Tasso?

We read that the bards who marched at the head of the Gallic armies, harp in hand, or the psalterion or the viol, sang canticles and hymns "to fire the army when it was ready to fight or else to subdue its ardour by inspiring it with sentiments which excited it to enjoy the sweetness of peace through new alliances; in such wise that these armies often separated without fighting, leaving the drafting of the peace treaties to those bards who were so skilled in conciliating minds through the effect of music and of poetry, with the result that the two armies often withdrew with as much satisfaction as if they had won a victory." <sup>1</sup>

And when we read, concerning the surprising effects

<sup>1</sup> Fouchet's *Antiquités*.

of Greek music, that one with his melody made Ulysses weep, that another obliged Alexander to take up his arms and

Qu'aux accents dont Orphée emplît les monts de Thrace  
Les tigres amollis dépouillent leur audace,

we must believe that its sole end was not to tickle the auditory nerves agreeably.

It is true that the conception itself has changed, above all with reference to the seventeenth and more especially the eighteenth century. At present an emphatic, insistent vehemence is demanded of the pathetic to captivate the attention and strike it despotically without relaxing its hold.

Now, this language was regarded as plebeian and forensic. Quantz, Philipp Emanuel and above all the French ceaselessly advised its avoidance. A composer seems, they said, to fear the auditor may fall asleep and to seek to keep him awake at any price.

A combative critic of the second half of the last century, Azevedo, was accustomed to say of a score which failed to please him: "This score lacks gendarmes, it does not collar me."

In old music, it was bad taste to make excessive use of gendarmes.

## VI

# THE AESTHETIC CONCEPTIONS OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

*No one knows all there is in a minuet.*

MARCEL, Eighteenth Century ballet-master

WHEN the public and even the musicians say "old music," they think especially of that of the eighteenth century and above all of some minuet, gavotte or operatic air. Thus their reproach that the old composers were superficial is, in part, justified.<sup>1</sup>

It is interesting to note that the French addressed the same reproaches to the Italians at the beginning of the eighteenth century:

"Italian music resembles a coquette amiable, though much made up, vivacious, always forward, seeking to shine everywhere without rhyme and without reason, like a giddy pate who goes into transports over every subject she can talk of. When tender love is the theme, she usually makes it dance the gavotte or the *gigue*. Would you not say that what is serious becomes comic in her hands and that she is better fitted for ariettes and chansonnettes than for treating great subjects? It must be admitted that most French music treats heroic themes with greater nobility and is more adapted to the sock and the stage; whereas, in Italian music, all the passions appear uniform. Everything — joy, anger, grief, happy love, the lover who fears or who hopes — here seems de-

<sup>1</sup> Bonnet, *Histoire de la Musique*.



picted with the same strokes and the same character. It is a continual *gigue*, ever sparkling.”<sup>1</sup>

They were indeed superficial, those eighteenth century composers, but it was through refinement.

Instead of paddling in the muddy water of the depths, they preferred to flutter about on the surface.

“Seriousness is never gracious,” said Voltaire. “It does not attract. It is too much like severity, which repels.”

To the excesses of sublimity, they preferred pale, fugitive visions which gently entwine the heart, soft elegances, pretty nothings with a piquant turn and sweet, laughing sounds which coax the ears.

They consented to be captives but without being too conscious of their chains, unless these were garlands of flowers. To the tempests of the human heart, they preferred the sprightliness of life, the laughing lightness of beauty or solemn, majestic spectacles.

“Sorrow, thou art not an ill,” say the Stoics. “Or a great good, either!” seem to respond the men of the eighteenth century. “Let us avoid it. Let us not weary the world with our sorrows and our sadness.”

Gluck was reproached with his harshness, his lack of lightness and elegance and above all his abuse of vehement accents and transports of grief.

The object of the arts is not merely emotion but the pleasure accompanying it. It is not enough for emotion to be strong. It must also be agreeable.

The Laocoön suffers but does not grimace.

Mozart’s ideas were in perfect harmony with this. Delacroix quotes the extract from one of his letters which is, in a way, a programme:

<sup>1</sup> Bonnet, *Histoire de la Musique*.

"Violent passions should never be expressed to the point of provoking disgust. Even in horrible situations, music should never wound the ears or cease to be music."

In a letter addressed to his father (April 4, 1787), Mozart writes: "And yet none of those who know me can say I am dour or sad in my attitude. I thank my creator every day for this felicity . . . and I wish it with all my heart to my neighbour."

Brutal facts, violent passions, cries, death agonies should be concealed, thrust aside, like, moreover, everything that could shock the senses of those reared to put a brake upon external forms.

"Then don't take the baroque for the expressive," says Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "or harshness for energy or give a hideous picture of the passions you wish to render or, in a word, do as at the Opéra Français where the impassioned tone resembles colicky cries rather than love transports."<sup>1</sup>

They avoided what was called *imitation vicieuse* — that is to say giving what is merely great a gigantic aspect, forcing what should have simply a virile character to the point of rudeness.

The moderation and serene nobility of Greek art — that was the basis of French taste in the eighteenth century.

M. Romain Rolland was absolutely right, in *L'Opéra populaire à Venice*, when he said that "the majority of musical discussions: Ramists against Gluckists, Debussysts against Wagnerites, come back at bottom to this great question of aristocratic art versus popular art."<sup>2</sup> The principal merit of this music, cul-

<sup>1</sup> *Dictionnaire de la Musique*. V. "Expression."

<sup>2</sup> *Le Mercure Musical*, 15 January 1906.

tivated at the court of kings, polished in a society ceaselessly attentive to the conventions and to courtesy, had to consist in elegance, suppleness, pureness of taste, in order to avoid everything that might have offended delicate minds. Thence its light, divinely frivolous gait, sometimes majestic and always sparkling with grace and with wit.

It lacked grandeur and masculine accents? . . . Let us not ask the queen whose beauty is so simple and so artificial to surprise us by the strength of her muscles and by the heaviness of her tread. Let us be grateful to her for having trailed through music a little of her majesty and of her divine grace.

## VII

### ROMANTICISM

*J'aime mieux un ruisseau qui sur la molle arène  
Dans un pré plein de fleurs lentement se promène  
Qu'un torrent débordé qui d'un cours orageux  
Roule, plein de gravier, sur un terrain fangeux.*

BOILEAU

“THE gentle affections,” says Schiller, “the emotions which are merely touching, belong to the domain of the agreeable where the fine arts have nothing to do. They simply caress the sensibility and they relate to external nature only, in no wise to intimate nature.”

We are at the end of the eighteenth century.

Every soil becomes exhausted at last, when too long cultivated in the same fashion. It must be believed that people began to grow tired of this eternal warbling of birds, of these restrained emotions, of these amiable choruses.

The public still remained faithful to them and preferred to be agreeably tickled by everything laughing or sweetly melancholy, rather than gripped or deeply moved.

At least Schiller declares it to be so, giving us a description of the concert hall of his time — a description conceived in an extravagantly romantic style:

“Thus we see preferred everything that is tender; and, however noisy a concert hall, silence falls again suddenly and everyone becomes all attention the moment a sentimental passage is executed. Then an ex-

pression, sensual to the point of bestiality, is commonly visible on every face, eyes swim with rapture, gaping mouths are all desire. A voluptuous trembling takes possession of the whole body. The breathing is weak and hurried. In a word, all the symptoms of intoxication."

To those slight swoonings which are treated as abominable drunkenness and which merely brushed the soul, to those caresses and shivers, are about to be opposed violent, insistent, passionate accents shocking the senses and straining the nerves. To justness, to measure and to prudence, are about to be preferred excessive, extravagant, gigantic strokes, unchecked outbursts, floods of admiration and transports of hatred — always excess, always paroxysm. There is no longer any fear of that formidable step which separates the sublime from the ridiculous. It is taken boldly and sometimes it is even overpassed. To lose one's head in a stormy delirium and to make others lose theirs, overwhelming the heart and the imagination!

The air is respirable only on the heights. Everything meant to charm or seduce — grace, pleasure, wit, serenity — is proscribed. On the other hand, the explosive style is affected with the perpetual presence of the idea of grandeur and suffering. A mysterious happiness is experienced in displaying one's scars and in recounting one's wounds; and whereas the "*galants musqués*" run to the battle as to a ball, the least particle of dust is a source of suffering to these males with royal names who repel everything tender and effeminate to swear only by the impetuous ardour of virility. It was in good taste to exaggerate and to fill the world with cries of distress.

The refined inveigh against the corruption of taste.



The wits rally those poets who "in a happy calm compose tempests and who with their pens have a hundred times reared mountains of foam."

"I do not come," writes, among others, La Harpe, after the production of Gluck's *Armide*, "to hear the cry of a man who suffers. I expect from the musician's art that I shall find accents grief-stricken without being disagreeable. I want to have it flatter my ear while penetrating my heart and the charm of the melody mingle with the impression I am experiencing. I want to bear away in my memory a harmonious complaint which shall long echo in my ear and leave the wish to hear it again . . . Yet if I have heard only the clamours of despair, convulsive groans, I may find it very true, but so true that I shall not return to it again."<sup>1</sup>

And even later still, and in Germany, where the style had less difficulty in taking root, refined minds, like Goethe's, did not readily submit to this tyranny of grief.

"My little musical institution," he wrote Zelter, "is doing very well; but the young people, you know, love to leave the habitual paths and each believes himself better when he can sing solo a doleful burial tune or another made up of sorrowful accents on lost love. I give in to them willingly towards the end of the session, even though I curse Mattheson, Salis, Fiedge and the clerical writers who in their *lieder* show us heavy Germans the road beyond the world which, without them, we shall quit quite rapidly enough in any event. As a result, it happens that the musicians are often stricken with hypochondria and that even gay music incites to melancholy."

<sup>1</sup> *Lettres de Gluck et de Weber*, Paris, 1870.

In another letter addressed to Zelter, we read:

"I made Beethoven's acquaintance at Teplitz. His talent astonished me. He has however, unfortunately, an indomitable nature which is not wrong in finding the world detestable but which certainly in this way does not render it any the more agreeable, either for himself or for others."

Weber also rails at the emphatic language which was becoming the fashion in his time:

"Do you by any chance believe that in our progressive age, when so many things happen, a composer should for your sake cease to suppress his divine, gigantic ideas? God forbid! It is now no longer possible to talk of clearness, of neatness as in the time of Gluck, of Handel and of Mozart."

But the children sated with the amiable, sprightly tales which had lulled them too long, seemed not to reject these stories full of phantoms and of terror. Children are very fond of stories which frighten them.

And the women, impatient of everything which saddens, are perhaps the first to seek these tragic, lacerating emotions.<sup>1</sup>

And, encouraged, these new-comers not only do not respect the most sacred laws of the beautiful, they threaten to break all the traditions and even undertake to reverse them.

There was ground for alarm.

\* \* \*

The abundance of masterpieces and of marvels left us by Romanticism has once more demonstrated the

<sup>1</sup> "There is but one thing in the world," writes Mlle. de Lespinasse, "which does me good, and that is music; but it is a good which another would call grief. I should like to hear ten times a day that air which rends me and which makes me enjoy all I regret: '*J'ai perdu mon Eurydice!*'"



vanity of those authoritative precepts of the beautiful which the aestheticians wish to impose upon us in the name of tradition or in the name of progress.

\* \* \*

I often hear this exasperating exclamation: "If the old masters had known our music!" and faces gleam with pride and with self-satisfaction. It makes you think of a nurse dressed up in her Sunday best who thinks, as she looks at herself in the glass: "Ah! if the country folks saw me in this rig!"

Like real plebeians, we regard ourselves as kings who have slaves for ancestors. We are convinced that, without taking the least exception in the world to the rôle we assign them, they would be infinitely flattered at the progress made by their children.

Whence this certainty that our music surpasses that of past centuries? Who can tell us whether Beethoven, Schumann, Chopin, Wagner, Liszt are superior to Bach, Handel, Mozart, Couperin, Haydn, Rameau? For that we should need to know all the music of to-day, which seems easy; but, what is less easy, we should need to know also all the music of the past. We should need to have sufficient perspective to embrace it all in a single glance, which is unrealizable; and we could confide such a mission to men of an infallible taste only. It is true that of such we should find but too many . . .

Certainly Romanticism possesses incomparable virtues; but, like every other movement, it sins by the defects of its qualities. The magnifying glass it offers to make us appear altogether great and sublime, just as, a century earlier, we were shown only the fine and the delicate, ends by tiring us. Everything becomes

blunted. A leaden sky, ever more somber, oppresses our soul and we seek at times to recruit ourselves with serenity, to soothe ourselves with playful tenderness; but these qualities are never displayed without stirrings of remorse, proscribed at the same time as grace, charm, sweetness, wit. Even elegance is regarded as an affectation unworthy of our gravity.

Frederick the Great, after the battle of Colin, wrote a minuet in his tent. Socrates, not content with praising dancing, wished also to learn it. Now, the least manufacturer of sonatas and quartettes is too grave, too serious, to write real dance music. He composes *la grande musique*, and this grandeur often reminds us of the magnificence of the grottoes and rockeries before suburban villas.

The greatest things and the suavest lose their beauty by becoming common.

Too complete acceptance of the prejudice of the grandiose and the powerful must eventually produce the opposite effect. The increasingly terrifying stories told us every day end by no longer making us afraid as at first. By dint of seeing the same plaything too long, the child grasps its mechanism, and we begin to lose a little of our illusion on perceiving

Que le brillant soleil, quand il paraît le soir,  
Est l'effet d'un quinquet que seconde un miroir;  
Que la lune est l'effet d'un gros trou dans la toile;  
Qu'il n'en coûte pas plus pour avoir une étoile;  
Que tous les mauvais temps, les brouillards, les nuages  
Arrivent sur la terre à force de cordages;  
Que les grâces, l'amour descendent des greniers;  
Qu'enfin les sales mains de quelques charpentiers  
Du haut de l'échafaud où l'échelle les grimpe  
Suspendent dans les airs tous les Dieux d'Olympe.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Berchoux, *La Danse*, 1808.

I have not the least desire to diminish the greatness of Romanticism. We do not ask of Raphael Michelangelo's power or the majesty of Veronese's draperies. Wagner has other virtues and other defects than Mozart or Couperin.

David's pupils who threw pellets of bread at Watteau's figurines would be astonished at our ecstasy over these works of art which they deemed affected and lacking in grandeur.

Whence this certainty that the old masters would prostrate themselves before our progress?

Why seek far? At the height of Romanticism, a Romantic of aristocratic tendencies, Chopin, found Beethoven too noisy, Schubert too *terre à terre*.

Berlioz himself wrote one day concerning a scene from *Orphée*:

"And how marvellous the music of the Elysian Fields! Those vaporous harmonies, those melodies as melancholy as happiness, that sweet, feeble instrumentation expressing so well the idea of infinite peace! . . . It all caresses and fascinates. You begin to detest the coarse sensations of life, to wish to die in order to hear that divine murmur eternally."

And in our day, the leader of the modern French school writes:

"Why not regret that charming way of writing music which we have lost so completely that it is impossible to discover the trace of Couperin? It avoided all redundancy and was witty. We hardly dare be witty nowadays, for fear we may lack that grandeur we struggle to attain without succeeding, very often."<sup>1</sup>

French taste is reviving? Perhaps; but before

<sup>1</sup> Claude Debussy, *A propos d'Hippolyte et Aricie* (*Le Figaro* 7 Mrs 1908.)

Debussy, one of the greatest Germans of the past century, Friedrich Nietzsche wrote:

“How the cry of theatrical passion hurts our ears to-day. How all that Romantic disorder has become foreign to our taste, that confusion of the senses dear to the cultivated populace, without forgetting its aspirations after the sublime, the elevated, the con-torted! No! If we convalescents need an art, it will be a very different art — an art arch, light, fluid, divinely artificial, an art which leaps like a clear flame in a cloudless sky! We know better, at present, what this needs: first of all serenity, every sort of serenity, my friends!<sup>1</sup>

If I am not mistaken, Romanticism seems to bid us noisy farewells in the person of several pontiffs of progress who continue to exaggerate the Wagnerian style, which, I am quite willing to believe, will not prevent them from creating masterpieces.

Let us strive not to resemble those fashionable hosts who disdainfully “speed the parting guest.” Bow down to it low very low! It has given us powerful emotions, unforgettable ecstasies. It has awakened in us immoderate ideas, supreme flights. It has flattered our palate with sharp, acid fruits which seemed good to us after the excess of sweets before, and it has assuaged us with coarse, savage caresses.

Let all the centuries to come cast looks full of respect and of envy upon its grandeur which still soars sovereignly.

Let us say to it not *adieu* but *au revoir*. For very shortly it will return to us adorned with some new, insignificant attraction and under another name.

<sup>1</sup> Fr. Nietzsche, *La Gaya Scienza*.

Some will prate of evolution' with giant stride, others of the corruption of taste; but the crowd will continue, until further orders, to prostrate itself before the genius of yesterday.

## VIII

### SONOROUS FORCE

*A man with a powerful voice in his throat is almost incapable of thinking subtly.* NIETZSCHE

AN historian of music said to me one day:

"In every age, we encounter the reproach addressed to innovators that they make excessive use of heavy sonorities. The panegyrists of the past do not suspect that, in the *gradual upward movement of force* resides one of the greatest elements, if not the essential element, of musical progress."

I was long familiar with these theories, fairly widespread moreover, but it was the first time I had heard them formulated with such clearness and precision. I admit I was struck by them.

In reality we too often hear the same hosannas over the delicacy of yesterday's music and lamentations over the violence of to-day's.

La Fontaine reproached Lully with the noisiness of his operas. The Ramists would see in Gluck nothing but a German who had come to France to harden ears with his continual racket.

"Since the fall of the Bastille," complains Grétry, "music is no longer made save with cannon."<sup>1</sup>

Berlioz who was himself regarded as a prodigal son and who, so to speak, hurled thunder-bolts through the windows, protested in his turn against the abuses of singers and composers. He even went so far as

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoires sur la Musique.*



to demand the promulgation of an ancient Chinese law imposing the death penalty for all exaggerated use of the tam-tam.

"The good makes no noise and noise produces no good," said Gounod.

In spite of the perpetual hostility to increasing sonorousness, we see our modern music going still farther in this respect than that of past centuries.

The idea so clearly formulated by my historian might have a capital importance for all those who devote themselves seriously to the interpretation of old music.

Sonorous force thus being recognized as one of the essential elements of our evolution, what good is it for us to shrink back into the narrow precincts of the past? Let us forget our humble origin and pay the old masters the homage of our progress and our advantages.

If, however, for the purpose of historic reconstitution, we wished absolutely to maintain the authentic sonority, the difficulties which beset us but a little while ago would also, at the present moment, be completely abolished. Once the upward movement of sonorous power is noted and established, we have but to diminish sonority gradually, according to the distance of the work executed from our epoch. We should then play a piece of the beginning of the last century less vigorously than a modern work. In a piece written a century earlier, we should employ a century less of force proportionately, and so on.

You see the great advantages thus to be derived by every executant and above all by conductors and choir-masters.

Unfortunately . . . nothing is perfect on our earth.



This theory, so easy to adopt, so useful and so flattering for our civilization, has one little defect: although it is apparently correct, it is essentially false.

Is Mozart's and Haydn's music more powerful than that of their predecessors, Bach and Handel? Is eighteenth century music noisier than seventeenth century music? Quite the contrary.

In courses on musical history, we are given a table of instruments which also presents this upward movement:

"The clavichord more powerful than the lute, the spinet more powerful than the clavichord, the harpsichord more powerful than the spinet, the square piano more powerful than the harpsichord, the grand piano more powerful than the square piano."

I cannot judge the sonority of the lute, but all the other instruments enumerated are known to me. I have played them for years and can affirm that the spinet is not necessarily more powerful than the clavichord and that the square piano has always been much weaker than the harpsichord. It is not difficult to prove it. Besides here is what Ph. Em. Bach says in his *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu Spielen*:<sup>1</sup>

"The two best-known key-board instruments are the harpsichord and the clavichord. The first for strong music (*Zu starcken Musicken*), the second for solo-playing. The new *forte-pianos*, if well constructed, can serve for playing solo, or with a few instruments only."

Now, here again, instead of an ascending line described by progress, we see undulations.

The idea that sonority is a sort of perennial plant

<sup>1</sup> Berlin, 1753.

which, very weak at the beginning, has developed monstrously and has, in our time, reached a power unknown in past centuries, is an error—very fortunately for our sense of hearing.

Without speaking of the legendary accounts of the concerts in Solomon's temple where as many as ten thousand performers took part, we see in the mid-eighteenth century the famous concerts of Catherine's favorite, Potemkin. Suffering from neurasthenia, he caused the bells of all the churches to be rung and had performed works composed to suit his taste by Italian musicians.

They were a sort of symphony for full orchestra in which salvoes of artillery replaced the "*agréments*."

At the monster concert given in 1615 at Dresden by the command of the Elector of Saxony, one of my compatriots, a certain Raposki, of Cracow, had brought from the Low Countries, on a wagon drawn by eight mules, a counter-bass more than eight yards tall. To it had been fitted a little ladder which made it possible to reach the neck of the instrument; and, across the strings of this giant counter-bass, was drawn by many arms an enormous bow. This machine however seemed not to suffice. The grandiose idea was then conceived of improvising a counter-bass by means of a wind-mill stretched with heavy cables which four men were employed to vibrate by means of a heavy piece of notched wood. On one side of the orchestra was a great organ on which Father Serapion worked hands and feet with might and main. A battery of mortars replaced the kettledrums.

The execution was worthy of this fine preparation. The prima donna Bigozzi, of Milan, sang so well and so long that she died of it three days later. G. Scop-

pio, of Cremona, one of the most skilful violonists of the time, executed the hardest pieces of his repertory holding his violin behind his back. The success of the day was a double fugue representing the battle between the Assyrians and the Israelites. It was executed with such ardour that the foreign singers who played the Assyrians started to quarrel with the Dresden choristers who took the part of the Jews, and the chorus ended in a real battle.<sup>1</sup>

In the *Currus Triumphalis*, dedicated by Rauch to the Emperors of Germany (1648), the voices were supported by trumpets, violins, trombones and cornets. He employed, furthermore, noisy war-machines, and the finale of his last motet was written for cannon and musketry. The frontispiece of the original edition represents a symphony of angels executing the work, and the thirteen trumpeters and the cymbal-player grouped about the organist disappear in the cloud of smoke vomited from three cannon fired by an angel. Emperor Ferdinand hovers majestically above the orchestra, in the midst of a dazzling light.

And to think that, a century later, Wagner, in *Tristan und Ysolt*, wrote but five entries for cymbals and six for the triangle, and that is all.

Nero, going to Greece to compete for the music prize, took with him five thousand persons who, trained to applaud, mingled with the crowd to stimulate it. The applause of a hundred thousand spectators encouraged by several thousand Roman athletes . . . no, let us not flatter ourselves — it is not we who have invented loud noise.

And the bedlam bands of the past:

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Lavoix, *L'Histoire de l'Instrumentation*. Paris, 1878.

Ecoutez le sacré cantique,  
Accourons, hurlons,  
Charivarissons.  
Résonnez, poêlons, marmites et chaudrons,  
Populaire musique.

Northern peoples always had a marked predilection for noisy instruments. There was no fine festival without drums and trumpets. England excelled in this respect. During Queen Elizabeth's meals, a band of twelve trumpets and two tympani with fifes and drums made the hall resound.

A manuscript in the British Museum includes among the crown officers at the court of Elizabeth in 1587:

Ten trumpeters, two flute-players,  
Lutenists, harpists, singers,  
A chief lutenist,  
A chief harpist,  
A bagpiper, a rebeck-player,  
Six trombones, eight viols,  
Three virginal players (the queen's favorite instrument),  
Three drummers, a lute-maker,  
An organ-maker, a regal-maker.

Henri VIII and Edward VI possessed a number of players only slightly inferior.

\* \* \*

If we rarely encounter in the eighteenth century — and especially in France and in Italy — those sonorous avalanches to which our ears have since become accustomed, the cause is not, as we are asked to believe, the rudimentary state or the impotence of the authors, but the refinement of taste which rejected

all violence, all emphatic disturbance. "The strong," it was then said, "enters our soul like a conqueror and, as it were, through the breach. The tender presents itself before the city like a debonair king who has but to show himself for the doors to open."

Too delicate to be violently agitated without suffering, they admitted vigor only when tempered with grace.

The avoidance of excessive sonority was the first advice great musicians gave their pupils.

"Music is meant to touch the heart and the harpsichord player will not succeed in so doing if he is intent only upon making a noise," says Ph. Em. Bach, in his *Versuch*.

"Experience has taught me," says François Couperin, "that vigorous hands, capable of executing the quickest passages, are not always those most successful in the tender, sentimental pieces . . . Women's hands are generally better. I have already said that muscular suppleness contributes much more than strength to good playing."

Baron de Trémont tells in his memoirs that Haydn summed up in a single word, *piano*, the ideal of musical execution. Also, when he gave his compositions, and especially his quartettes, he continually repeated to his performers: "Chut! Chut!"

And the praters of progress are profoundly convinced that Haydn and Mozart and all the old masters would be infinitely flattered to hear their works enhanced with tempestuous sonorities, fruit of our incommensurable evolution!

Sonority is not a wine which, as it grows old, becomes headier.

The vocal concerts of the ancient Germans which



inspired their enemies with such terror, must certainly have been more violent than those of the most dishevelled German Romantics.

We have only to examine music in Germany in the course of the eighteenth century to see that sonority became more and more refined rather than swollen with power.

It is only towards the end of the eighteenth century that we remark a certain change of taste in this respect.

The anecdote concerning Cherubini is well known. Some one announced to him the death of one of his musicians. "Little sound!" he replied disdainfully.

Once however he heard himself roughly handled, on the occasion of the performance of one of his excessively noisy compositions, *La Pompe funèbre du Général Hoche*. "You make too much noise," Bonaparte said to him. "Real grief is monotonous!"

And later, in the midst of the Romantic epoch, we find Chopin who, like a resurrected Couperin, rejected every tonal violence, all pianistic din. He was even unwilling to admit sonority as a source of sensations. "His *piano* is so delicate," relates Moscheles, "that, to obtain desired contrasts, he has no need of a powerful *forte*."

"They are so habituated here," Chopin wrote from Vienna, "to the racket of the virtuosi . . . I foresee the reproaches the papers will make me, and all the more because the daughter of one of the editors pounds pitilessly . . ."

In a letter to Clara, Schumann wrote, speaking of Liszt:

"I would not give art, such as you practice it and I, too, often, at the piano, while composing — that

fine intimate tenderness—for all his splendor, in which there is sometimes too much tinsel.”

Sonorous strength is neither a merit nor a defect, for the simple reason that the quantity of sound in music is an entirely secondary consideration. It is its quality which counts, and its correct employment.

The most delicate sounds, which strike our ear opportunely, are but the thousandth part of those we listen to within; while the most violent sounds, without harmony, may merely scratch our ears without in the least thrilling our soul.

To find our music superior because it is more powerful sonorously is like saying that certain modern paintings are superior to those of Watteau or Raphael whose colors are less violent.

No, sonorous power is neither a sign of progress nor a sign of decadence. It is intimately allied to the taste and to the aesthetic conceptions of a generation—in a word, to the style of an epoch.

The one general idea the analysis of this subject might suggest to us would be the following: every time an author addresses the larger public he raises his voice, he resorts to noisy effects in order to be heard.

That is what Chopin said to Liszt who encouraged him to play in the big halls: “No,” he replied, “a big crowd bothers me; but you are predestined to it, for if you don’t succeed in seducing your public, you always have something to overwhelm it with.”

In his defence of the tender viol against the vulgar violin, Hubert le Blanc says that, in their efforts to get so much power from their instrument, the violinists may well exclaim: “Ah! If only I were half a league away to hear myself with pleasure!”



Leopold Mozart, looking one day at a new work by his son, said to him: "My son, all this is very well; but, truly, what an imprudence you have committed! You have forgotten to add something for the long ears!"

Big ears need a sonority proportioned to them.

## IX

### INNOVATIONS

*There is nothing wise or witty which has not already been thought by some one. The whole secret is to rethink it.*

GOETHE

I ATTENDED recently, in another country, a lecture on Beethoven. The lecturer dwelt upon the innovations made by Beethoven in music. "He was the first who dared, like a torrent, break down the dikes opposed to him. He dominated all the forms. He created the symphony, enlarged the domain of the sonata, invented new forms. He was the first to introduce the descriptive style, in the *Pastoral*, giving us a foretaste of Wagner," etc.

The orator almost forgot to tell us that Beethoven was an immense musical genius and an incomparable poet, so accustomed was he to presenting him as a sort of inventor whose first concern had been the discovery of some novelty, his sole aim to break every bond, every mould of the past.

Fortunately, this genius has other titles to glory. For, relatively, he broke very few things, usually accepting with indifference the formulas leagued him by tradition.

He renewed the form of the sonata which had already exasperated Fontenelle: "Sonata, what do you wish of me?"

Did he completely modify it? No. The principal modifications are due to Ph. Em. Bach.

He added a new part, it is said.

The beauty of Beethoven's sonatas resides in their content, not in the pretended novelty of their art or in their having accomplished "the evolution of the *minuetto into scherzo*." In his first sonatas and even in the *Pathetic*, the compass is only five octaves. Yet *pianofortes* of five and a half and six octaves were already in use. Beethoven could not have been ignorant of it. He preferred to do with the instrument he had at his disposal and condensed his inspiration into the space of five octaves, sometimes doubling back a phrase, which is not without a particular charm. Later, he conformed to the new instruments; and at no moment of his life do we find in him that strained pursuit of novelty for which he is praised at every turn.<sup>1</sup>

He indulged in modifications and innovations through inspirational necessity and not to satisfy a premeditated plan of formal revolution.

Palestrina was an innovator in no genre, conforming to all the traditions of the past, a fact which did not prevent his being profoundly original; and the greatest of reformers, Wagner, knelt down before his sublimity and his expressive richness.

The apotheosis of innovation in the domain of form has, in our day, reached its zenith and every great composer is presented to us as a breaker of moulds, as the creator of a new genre.

In past centuries, composers took good care not to parade their innovations. Bach did not seek to inno-

<sup>1</sup> The following anecdote has certainly contributed a little to this opinion: One day while at his organ he played several consecutive fifths. "It's false, it's false," cried the cantor, Keller . . . Beethoven repeated the musical phrase and turned to Ries, crying: "Doesn't that sound well?" "Evidently," replied the choirmaster, "but successions of fifths are forbidden by the most elementary rules!" All the others said the same . . . "Well, I allow them," cried the young man.



Seventeenth Century Clavichord  
belonging to Wanda Landowska



vate and even Gluck, regarded as a great reformer, claimed, in the dedicatory epistle to the Grand Duke of Tuscany, "to have attached no importance to the discovery of a novelty unless it was naturally indicated by the situation and connected with the expression."

It was, on the contrary, considered good taste not to attempt to profit by the rich effects of the unexpected and to make use of forms which had been honored by the preceding great masters <sup>1</sup> from whom was often borrowed not only the form but even the theme. Twenty masses were written to the words of a popular song, *L'Homme armé*, and afterwards Palestrina wrote two of the greatest beauty on the same subject.

In Anasthasias Kircher's *Musurgia* (1650), a theoretical work held in high esteem by J. S. Bach, the author deems it absurd that the directors of the precentorships at Rome and in other cities should esteem and execute their own music only; and he adds: "Who will ever realize anything honorable in poetry, though born a poet, if he has never read and learned to imitate those excellent poetic *coryphées*, Virgil, Ovid, etc.? What variety can be expected of our musicians if, neglecting imitation, they stop short at their own discoveries?"

"None of the Italian poets," he continues, "can ever hope to achieve exceptional poetic skill in the vulgar tongue if he has not first fixed in his mind and in his memory the famous writings of Petrarch, of Dante, of Tasso, of Ariosto, of Sanazarro and of innumerable other poets. No one can pretend to a cer-

<sup>1</sup> It was said of La Mothe, who boasted of imitating no one: "Will he be imitated?"



tain perfection in painting who has not trained himself by imitating, with all his might, the works left by Albrecht Dürer, Raphael of Urbino, Michelangelo Buonarroti, Guido Reni, Rubens and the other princes of art.

“Who to-day attains the talent and skill of Josquin des Prés, of Hobrecht, of Cyprien de Rose? Who among the moderns succeeds in weaving harmonies with the ingenuity of Orlando, of Morales, of Palestrina?”

Kuhnau's great merit, we are told, is having invented the primitive sonata. Now, the author of the *Bible Story Sonatas* not only does not pride himself upon them but declares in his preface that the invention of programme music is not his, “since the illustrious Frohberger and other excellent composers had employed it previously and that he had himself heard a sonata in the same style entitled *La Medica*, by a great composer believed to be Kerl.”

The composers of the past never conceal their preference for the formulas of their predecessors and seem little eager to discover new ones.

Possibly, as Anatole France says, they found the old prejudices less disastrous than the new: time has polished them in wearing them down; or perhaps, according to Jean d'Udine, “all forms are equally good for expressing our emotions. It is our emotions which are not all equally vital and profound.”

\* \* \*

Jean-Jacques Rousseau predicted that the rather artificial mode of the sonata would not last and that it would not take long to be rid of all that rubbish. Still another prophecy unfulfilled. This rubbish, pre-



cisely, had just taken a new lease of life; and in our day not only do we not seek to be rid of the sonata, which was called the appanage of musical prose, but we consider it — I cannot say why — the profoundest and sublimest of forms. On the other hand, the concerto, even Beethoven's or Mozart's, is thrown down from its pedestal.

Why? Because, we are told, the concerto, instead of being a collective manifestation, is but an accompaniment intended to show off the soloist.

Let us then suppress *Manfred*, *Hamlet*, all Shakespeare's dramas, where a hero is surrounded with persons meant to serve him as a foil. Let us suppress all plays with music. For the concerto is a little opera, without settings, without devices, without action and, sometimes even, without music.

The beautiful is too fragile to suffer being too strictly subjected to the principles of everyday logic.

There are no higher or lower forms. They are all higher in the hands of a genius. Innovation is of little interest in itself.<sup>1</sup>

What difference does it make whether it was Camargo who executed the first *entrechats* and executed them in fours only, and whether thirty years later they were executed in sixes, or whether the pirouette was not shown in France until 1766?

The innovator introduces a change and not always a progress or an improvement of taste. The nineteenth century introduced relatively few forms.

<sup>1</sup> Superficial intelligences, minds with a pedantic turn, take for renaissance or decadence effects of juxtaposition, optical mirages, linguistic events, ebbs and flows, the whole vast movement of ideas, whence results universal art. VICTOR HUGO.

"Taste may be ruined in a nation. This misfortune arrives ordinarily after centuries of perfection. Artists, afraid of being imitators, seek out of the way routes." VOLTAIRE.

The protests against Wagner's reforms which, all told, but followed the national taste have created belief in a revolution after which the world would crumble or soar to the skies. Musical painting? but it existed before Palestrina. The leit-motif but it is found, in a more modest form it is true, in the harpsichord pieces of the seventeenth century. The forms which previously had been too timid, too petty, were enlarged and strengthened. This is true, especially as compared with the eighteenth century; but the "great," the "spacious," the "colossal," the "strong" were not then aesthetic terms. Works were required only to be "noble," "gracious," "sweet." Brevity was regarded as a condition of beauty. No one was sufficiently hostile to taste to demand voluminous productions from an elegant pen, though this did not prevent the enjoyment of spectacles which lasted more than four hours, provided the isolated pieces did not sin through excessive extent. There was no relish for those interminable compositions which awake the sentiment of the infinite by their length.

"From our great sorrows let us make little songs," said Heine, who was never a real Romantic.

Couperin's miniatures often contain more music and more beauty than certain symphonies.<sup>1</sup>

Quantz is never tired of counselling brevity in composition. It is preferable, he says, for the audi-

<sup>1</sup> "When a thing is well organized, the bigness is in the model, not in the dimensions. If you photographed the Eiffel Tower and a Tanagra statuette, and if you showed the two proofs to a person who knew neither of these objects, he would certainly declare the statuette to be bigger than the tower. A pear, an apple are, from the point of view of the model, as big as the celestial sphere. Truth, harmony, the proportion of the planes and of the volumes are essential notions which abolish questions of bigness and littleness. Thus, this refulgency of truth is such that, finding no word to render it, we have called it the ideal. Camille Mauclair, *Trois crises de l'art actuel*. (*Les Idées et le Symbolisme de Rodin*.)

tors to find your work too short rather than too long. A *concerto grosso* should never exceed the *maximum* duration of a quarter of an hour: the first part five minutes, the *adagio* from five to six minutes and the last part from three to four minutes.

\* \* \*

The old masters did not know the opera, whence our music is often accorded a superiority over that of the past.

It is to be noted that in every age superior minds showed little enthusiasm for music with stage devices. La Fontaine preferred, to these spectacles *for clerks*, "la Certain's <sup>1</sup> lone harpsichord." Newton went but once to the Opera. "The first act charmed me. I had the patience to listen to the second; and at the third I left." <sup>2</sup>

Saint-Evremond thought that a "foolish thing laden with music, with dances, with stage devices, with decorations, is a magnificently foolish thing: it is a wretched affair finely tricked out, which I penetrate with a good deal of displeasure." <sup>3</sup>

Leibnitz regarded the opera as at least a powerful means of dominating the common herd (*ein kraftiges Instrument zur Regierung des gemeinen Mannes.*)

Victor Hugo compares the opera "to a Venus de' Medici in colored wax revolving in a hair dresser's window, to the Panthéon in the best chocolate, to the sculptures of Phidias with false hair and opera hats."

Tolstoy regards the opera as the grossest counterfeit of art, in which the author profits by everything

<sup>1</sup> Mlle. Marie-Françoise Certain, celebrated harpsichord player.

<sup>2</sup> *Les Caractères* of Theophrastus and of La Bruyère. Note by M. Coste, new edition, Vol. II 1759, pp. 38-383.

<sup>3</sup> *Oeuvres mêlées.* Vol. III.

considered poetic: sleeping beauties, naiads, subterranean fires, gnomes, battles, swords, loves, monstrous insects, bird-songs — and in which dramatic art encroaches upon musical art and vice-versa. Rubinstein who nevertheless wrote many (much too many, say spiteful tongues), deemed the opera an inferior form.

It must be recognized that in the opera the music is diluted by the action, by the scenery. It is as if you watered the champagne served a great connoisseur of wines.

The opera is a form in which the supreme geniuses have displayed their talents. It would thus perhaps be idle to speak of its defects and to see in them a reason for our superiority over the old masters.

\* \* \*

Goethe admitted but two sorts of music: grave for the church, gay for profane art. Had he shown as much genius in music as in literature, musicians would probably have adopted his artistic formula.

Likewise, had Rousseau left us masterpieces written in cipher, we should perhaps have adopted his system and we should have prated of evolution, just as we now consider modern writing progressive as compared with that of the past.

The bar-lines of which we are so proud represent, however, not a refinement but a simplification in view of the ever increasing number of amateurs. It was to render reading easier for them that the effort was made to cut the finest music up into little squares and to confine the most capricious phrase therein by force, to the great triumph of the monotony of the down-beat, or accent.

The absence of bar-lines thus came near being regarded by Brossard — and was indeed so regarded by less learned writers — as a sign of the state of infancy and of barbarism in which it was claimed the art still lingered before the reign of the opera. “Like the Gregorian melody,” says Michel Brenet, in his *Palestrina*, “the Palestrinian melody unfurled itself in supple volutes the undulations of which, in the superimposed voices, could follow each other, unite, blend, without any of them abdicating its individual development. A ‘hidden’ measure constituted the discreet, invisible bond ruling the harmonious unity of the movement. We shall never know all the delicacy, all the musical ruses to which a Palestrina may have resorted in order to transform a theme like that of the mass of *L’Homme armé*, unless we have, at least superficially, compared his original graphic disposition with that presented by a modern reprinting.”

M. Maurice Emmanuel has devoted a very learned study to this accursed bar-line which engendered the down-beat. “In spite,” he says, “of the ravages which the *carrure* has caused in the art, it is certain that, if the great masters since the sixteenth century, have often submitted to it, they have at least rebelled against the down-beats which stake it out. Seek equi-distant down-beats in certain of Bach’s fugues, in Beethoven’s last quartettes, in Wagner’s works, after *Tristan*: you will not find them any more than in Josquin, Lassus or Palestrina . . .

“The rhythm, in modern art,” continues M. Emmanuel, “has less dignity. See the place conceded it, the rank assigned it by the theoretical pedagogues in scholastic treatises. The effort of our professors



practically reduces itself to the decomposition of the measure, to the inept distinction between 'simple' measures and 'composite' measures. If all the poet-composers of Hellas — Pindar, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes — had known such treatises, they would have conceived a certain contempt for so childish an art." <sup>1</sup>

I have also found in Ph. Em. Bach's *Versuch* chapters where he praises improvisation without *measure*, "as offering more liberty and sincerity to the expression not tyrannized by measure." (Vol. I, sec. 15).

"Cadences," he says in paragraph 30, "should be executed according to their content, with complete liberty, without paying the least attention to the bar-lines." Our new writing, this rigidly symmetrical "*mise au carreau*," could boast of a certain practical value only, having reduced us to indigence from the rhythmical point of view.

On the other hand, the increased compass of our system may present an enrichment of means. In Palestrina the total compass rarely exceeded two octaves and a fifth. The old masters, in general, liked to work in a restricted compass, all music exceeding average limits being considered strained. It is evident that our system has aerated the too stuffy system of limited compass, offering us at the same time new combinations and effects formerly unknown.

"I do not know, however, whether we have so much cause for congratulation on this score," writes d'Alembert. (*Encyclopédie*, V. *Musique*): "Was it then so great a misfortune for old music to have to furnish only full, harmonious sounds in a happy

<sup>1</sup> Maurice Emmanuel, *Le Temps Fort dans le rythme*, (Extract from the *Dictionnaire du Conservatoire S. I. M.* 1908)

medium? The voices sang without effort, the instruments did not mew ceaselessly near the bridge. Are the false, dull sounds produced by shifting, the squealing of a straining voice, calculated to move the heart?"<sup>1</sup>

Timid attempts were, however, already made in the sixteenth century to extend the range of the voice.

"I doubt not that your lordships," wrote Guillaume Costeley, "find it strange that, in several of my songs, I have exceeded the precise and most usual limits of the Tones observed by rules of which I am not ignorant; to which I reply I have done so in order not to leave unemployed the exceptional compass of the fine voices which our very Christian, very magnanimous and very high born King of France has the pleasure of employing in his chamber, while they have the happiness of reaching his ears; the which I have always done without losing the tone and in order to render music airier."

The Italian violinists very often exceeded the average compass and they were continually reproached with making "the violin hiss close up to the bridge, with resembling wall-scaling somnambulists, taking advantage of the ignorance and bad taste of the public which applauds these disorders."

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to compare d'Alembert's opinion with what Seneca says of the music of his time:

"Do you see this multitude of voices composing our great choirs? They unite so perfectly they seem to offer the ear but a single, unique sound. Among these voices, there are high, there are low, there are medium voices of every degree. You hear the men's with the women's, both mingled with the sound of the accompanying flutes. Each of these voices is, so to speak, hidden in the multitude, and yet they all appear with their distinguishing character . . . Over and above this great number of voices, our amphitheatres are environed with trumpets and our orchestras full of an infinite variety of instruments of all sorts, wind and strings. You have a multitude which seems to menace you with a horrible discordance. Fear nothing, it forms a concert. (*Essay on the Beautiful.*)



Handel, Bach and the classic masters generally did not exceed, for the violin, the three octaves, (the highest note, *F*) — or with very rare exceptions. For, in the sonata which serves as overture to Handel's *Trionfo del Tiempo*, the violin climbs to the *A* above the fourth supplementary line.

Even Haydn and Mozart evolve in the domain of this compass in their orchestral works.

## X

### ORCHESTRAL MUSIC

I FOUND on the *quais* a big old book entitled *Progrès des Allemands*. The author, a very cultivated German, after speaking with enthusiasm of the poets and musicians of his country — omitting Bach naturally — ends thus:

“If the Germans carried their pride so far as to believe themselves on a par with the Italians, or even the French, in the perfection of the fine arts, they would require more presumption and less discernment than are in fact theirs.”<sup>1</sup>

This opinion was general in Germany in the eighteenth century. The composers, men of no little talent, followed French and Italian models and did their best not to deserve the habitual reproach of being pedants and lacking in lightness. Quantz justified the surname of *gusto barbaro* which the Italians gave German music but thought that taste was completely changed after the composers went abroad and returned influenced by outside art. This permitted them to create a composite style (*Vermischter Geschmack*) which he did his best to recommend. After drawing a picture as sombre as it was inexact of German music in the past, he spoke with very moderate enthusiasm of that of his own time. Let us not forget that this book appeared at the moment of the greatest flowering of German music. Bach,

<sup>1</sup> The fame of the Germans is not great in music, writes Lecerf de la Viéville.

dead scarcely two years, Handel, Mattheson and Telemann already old, had written their great works. Among the young were Ph. Em. Bach, Hasse, Rust, Haydn.

About the same epoch, Ph. Em. Bach apostrophized the musicians who undertook to abandon the rules of French taste so dear to his ancestors, and Mattheson advised German musicians to follow French models rather than Italian.

Fifty years later, Forkel wrote in his *Joh.-Seb. Bach's Leben, Kunst und Kunstwerke für patriotische Verehrer* (1801): "Bach never neglected to study with the greatest attention the works of Frescobaldi, Froberger, Kerl, Pachelbel, Fischer, Strunck, Buxtehude, Reincken, Bruhns, Bochetdem, *several old French organists who, according to current prejudice, were all held to be great masters of harmony and fugue.*"

A century later, Wagner was to write: "... The Italian has the instinct of song, the Frenchman the vanity of the virtuoso; but to the German belongs the real sentiment of music. The German, in fact, alone has the right to claim the title of musician. For it is incontestable that he loves musical art for the art itself, because of its divine essence, and not as a vulgar means of exciting the passions or as an instrument of fortune and of consideration."<sup>1</sup>

If Wagner exaggerated, it would be impossible to reproach him with it.

Much too modest formerly, the Germans have now the right to take their revenge.

"Thus," continues Wagner, "the German composer who took a fancy to write an opera had to begin by learning the language, then familiarizing himself with

<sup>1</sup> *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. I, 1873.

the Italian method and composition, and there was no chance of his winning a welcome until he had absolutely abjured the national art and character."

And Germany in its turn imposed the supremacy of its taste and still continues to-day to teach the world music, as the Italians had done previously and the Flemings before them.

At the beginning of the last century, a celebrated French composer, of German origin, had taken an Italian Christian name to associate himself, at least remotely, with the country of music which at that very moment was beginning to lose its prestige. Thirty years later, another celebrated French composer added the German "er" to his name. Giacomo Meyerbeer had two and was unable to appreciate them.

Every nation has its day.

The influence of Germany throughout the nineteenth century and in our time is immense and entirely deserved.

The incomparable geniuses she has given us could not help making her the center of admiration for the whole world. The real reverence she professes for her masters, the profusion of schools and of all sorts of symphonic societies could not but attract to her all the real devotees of music.

"The Germans will never have such good schools as have long existed in Italy," says Quantz in his *Ver-such*.

Musicians are ordinarily bad prophets. They know their past too ill to be successful in predicting the future.

Instrumental music has made enormous progress. This is undeniable. We are to-day more sensitive to the shades of timbre, we know better the value of the instruments, and these are employed with a facility heretofore unknown.

Orchestral music has developed prodigiously. This is incontestable. We are told however — and this is an extremely widespread opinion — that the symphony, with instrumental music in general, is the sublimest manifestation of art.

Formerly, the same was said of vocal music.

“No instrumental music,” writes Byrd, “can compare with that of the human voice.” This notion is not peculiar to the great English virginalist. It was popular and went back even to the middle ages. *Musica id est ars cantandi*. The fine human voice was considered to penetrate the soul more directly and more naturally than the sounds produced by organs, viols or lutes.

The old sacred music of which Wagner recognized the sublimity, the wealth and the inexpressible beauty has, as its sole sonorous source, the ensemble of the human voices.

Use was sometimes made of instruments merely to support the voices or to replace them when they were wanting.

We find an instrumental music in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries but this was vocal music executed by instruments.

It was only towards the end of the seventeenth century that it acquired equal rights and its true character.

We know the adoration of the Italians for vocal music. As for the Germans, the voice has always been

their weak side. Without going back to Tacitus, Wagner clearly recognized this when he wrote: ". . . Nature has denied the German that aptitude for song, or rather that vocalization full of flexibility and grace the Italian is endowed with at birth."

What more natural than that, the day when the Germans could no longer bend their genius to the exigencies of a foreign taste, they should have given free scope to their national character? For the taste for instrumental music was always very strong in Germany.

Speaking of the *ritournelle* which we find in Bach, M. Albert Schweitzer<sup>1</sup> says:

"Unconsciously, the master rendered himself guilty towards the genius of German music . . . Bach, siding with Italian art, arrested German art on the road which would have led it to the music destined to be realized by Wagner."

The principle of which we are so proud nowadays and which consists in centering the interest first of all in the orchestra, not in the singing, is opposed to the aesthetic conception of Lully's time. Then it was the voice which had always and in every instance to be the first instrument of the passions.

"Your hero is going to die of love and of sorrow," writes Lecerf de la Viéville. "He says so and what he sings does not say so, is not touching. I shall take no interest in his grief . . . but the accompaniment would rend the rocks . . . Pretty compensation! Is it the orchestra which is the hero? No, it is the singer. Well then, let the singer touch me himself. Let an expressive, tender song depict for me what he suffers, and let him not abandon the task of arousing my

<sup>1</sup> *J. S. Bach.* Paris, 1905.



sympathy for him to the orchestra which is there only by grace and by accident.”<sup>1</sup>

Doni defines this idea clearly when he says that the orchestra should suffice to support the voice, without being big enough to distract the auditor and prevent him from devoting his whole attention to the singer.

This question gives rise to discussions upon which those interminable quarrels of melody-lovers graft themselves.

Towards the end of the seventeenth century, the accompaniment and the orchestra of the Italians were deemed too noisy and too complicated.

Fifty years later, the world was in ecstasy over Italy where, without the aid of a noisy orchestra, a voice — even a weak voice — supported by several chords brought the soul every sentiment.

“What!” wrote d’Alembert, (*Encyclopédie*) “this chaos, this confusion of the parts, this multitude of different instruments which seem insulting each other, this noisy accompaniment which stifles the voice without sustaining it, do all these things constitute then veritable musical beauties? Let us consider the Italians, our contemporaries . . . See what sobriety in the accords, what choice in the harmony! Properly speaking, their operas consist only of duets, and all Europe admires and imitates them.”

Rameau was then reproached with drowning the *bel canto* “in too heavy a burden of harmonies and of ornaments,” Gluck with not excelling in the song and with making the trumpets blare, the strings snore and the voices roar to cover the defects of his Teutonic modulations with the noise of the orchestra.

In his response which is a witty masterpiece, Gluck

<sup>1</sup> Romain Rolland, *Notes sur Lully*.

promised to remake all his operas. "I shall," he wrote La Harpe, "scrupulously banish all the noisy instruments like the cymbals and the trumpet. I shall have heard in my orchestra only the oboes, the flutes, the French horns and the violins, muted, naturally . . . I shall have her (Armide), in her despair, sing you an air so 'regular,' so periodic and, at the same time, so tender, that the most vaporous little lady can hear it without the slightest nervous distress. If some scurvy wit bethought him to say to me: 'Monsieur, take care then not to let Armide, mad, express herself like Armide intoxicated with love,' 'Monsieur,' I should reply to him, 'I do not want to dismay Monsieur de La Harpe's ear. I do not want to counterfeit nature, I want to embellish it. Instead of making Armide cry, I want her to enchant you!'"

A contemporary poet, Berchoux, feels pity for the poor singers of the Opéra:

Cent cinquante instruments, nourris de colophane,  
 Semblent prendre plaisir à forcer leur organe  
 Et ces faibles chanteurs, vaincus, anéantis,  
 Succombent au fracas des terribles tuttis.

"To-day that the instruments are the most important part of music," says Rousseau, "sonatas are extremely fashionable, like every sort of symphony. The vocal is scarcely more than its accessory, and the song accompanies the accompaniment."

Bach was reproached with hiding the fine melody with excessive embroideries, with accumulating figures and with nimbly pursuing the "black swarm" of wrangling notes.

John Friedrich Doles, who wished however to pass for a pupil of Bach's, took pains to warn his readers

that he did not forget in his contrapunctal labors "the sweet and touching melody the model for which he found in Graun and in Hasse." In the dedication of his first work, to Gottschec's wife, Johann Ludwig Krebs, Bach's favorite pupil, professes simplicity in order to meet the current taste.

Mattheson indicates recipes to produce easy melodies.

Marpurg,<sup>1</sup> on the contrary, protests against the invasion of effeminate songs and the perpetually skipping melody of the fashionable composers worthy, at most, of street-singers and preachers. and advocates a revival of harmony, a return to the fugue and counterpoint, "a word which sounds ill in our modern ears."

The character of musical poetry is song, said the others. It is found in all the French pieces for viol and harpsichord.

The appanage of musical prose is harmony. Sonatas are musical prose.

Some poked fun at Grétry's orchestra: "Between the first violin and the bass-viol passes a coach and six." Others complain of the over-stuffy, over-rich and over-tiring orchestration of the Germans.

We scoff at Italy where the national taste sacrifices verisimilitude to the pleasure of hearing a brilliant voice playing on a syllable and where, according to Wagner's inspired definition, the orchestra resembles an "immense guitar." Yet Wagner is reproached with having killed the voice, the modern *lied* with being drowned in a torrent of harmony and discords the complication of which would suffice to nourish a symphony and in which the singer limits himself to

<sup>1</sup> *Abhandlung von der Fuge nach den Grundsätzen der besten deutschen und ausländischen Meister*, Berlin, 1753.

accompanying his accompaniment with a few vague cries.

The improvement of instrumental music, like every improvement, lends itself to abuses. It must be admitted however that therein resides the principal, if not the sole element of progress contributed by the century; but a simple enrichment of means is an insufficient proof of superiority in an art. The literature of to-day is not necessarily superior to that of Racine's epoch, in spite of the wealth of new expressions which were then unknown. I regret that it should not be so, for the vocabulary of my mother tongue is infinitely richer than that of the French. "Homer had but four winds for his tempests," said Victor Hugo. "Virgil who had twelve, Dante who had twenty-four, Milton who had thirty-two, create no finer ones, and it is probable that Orpheus' tempests were as good as Homer's, though Orpheus had but two winds to raise the waves."

The past centuries did not know our orchestration but they had other qualities which we no longer have to-day, without counting that instrumental progress has been accomplished at the expense of vocal music.

XI

TRANSCRIBERS

*The historic sense possessed by an epoch may be measured by the way in which this epoch makes translations and seeks to assimilate the past.* FR. NIETZSCHE

ONE day (to celebrate the anniversary of Carrière's death), I played the harpsichord at the home of Rodin who was a great lover of old music. The Master was so extremely kind as to show me his museum of antique sculpture. You should have seen him stopping amorously before each work, caressing each bit of marble with his voluptuous hand. He fell into an ecstasy before a feminine torso mutilated by the centuries. "Look, Madame, at the delicacy, the suppleness of these lines! Ah, what a pity parts of it are missing! . . .

"Why, *cher Maître*, do not you try to reconstitute them?" I hazarded out of curiosity.

He looked at me with astonishment and it was clear this thought had never entered his head. It took a musician to have such an idea.

"But, Madame . . . it is because I do not feel capable of doing so; and even if I did, I should never dare."

And I thought of all that rabble of little virtuosi and dull composers who attack our sublime works — not incomplete works but intact scores — to mangle them, mutilate them, disfigure them. If they have not Rodin's genius, they have greater courage — they



dare everything. They put Bach, Mozart, Handel back on the loom; and after calumniating the greatest masterpieces, they dare couple their obscure names with those of our supreme masters.

Change a syllable in a verse and you will make the poem limp. Such precautions are not taken in music.

And these grinders, scarcely fit to sharpen knives, efface the effigy of the most marvellous genius on the pretext of bringing it up to date.

The reason given is often not very lofty. Every time a publisher proposes a new edition of a piece on my programme, he advises me to make some changes in it, "so that the work may become our property." What is even more humiliating however, is when an unhappy arranger makes us believe, and believes himself, that he has made improvements, has renovated a work of Mozart's sparkling with youth.

What would sculptors say if a mason undertook to cut away some marble from the Venus of Milo to give her a wasp-waist; or if one tried to twist Apollo's nose in order to give him more character?

It is true that the admirable Palais des Papes at Avignon served for a century as a barrack. Mural paintings, works of Giotto's, are sullied with inscriptions: "*Vive la classe!*" and others. . . . That is an exception; but all the masterpieces of music are befouled with similar inscriptions, covered with vulgar, arrogant strokes dictated not by artlessness but by the stupid presumption of superiority over the old masters.

In the operatic repertory, theatrical managers often undertook these amalgams, composing a lyric drama from the two *Armides* — Lully enshrined in Gluck — thus reconciling the worst antagonists.



In a little study written with noble passion and a spirit hardly to be suspected in such a scholar, Michel Brenet gives us a sketch of those innumerable pot-pourris which we owe to the fancy of conductors and sometimes of the greatest composers.<sup>1</sup>

M. Expert cites a most uncommon case of transcription: "On the other hand, Prince de la Moskowa is far from respecting the texts which he has before him. Thus, on the pretext of ease or else of propriety, he modifies words here and there, and this is to the greatest detriment of the form and of the substance where the curious effects of timbres play a preponderant part. The last section is totally disfigured: the cuckoo appeared impudently insolent, so he was turned into an owl! But is it not unheard of to lend the night bird the song of the cuckoo so well known and so amusingly developed here? The blithe Jeannequin did not live again in these incomplete restitutions!"<sup>2</sup>

Wagner and Berlioz often protested against this barbarous mutilation of the most admirable productions, and probably the fear his own works might be subjected to the same process dictated to the author of *Les Troyens* the following injunctions on the first page of his work:

"The author believes it his duty to warn singers and conductors that he has admitted no negligence in his manner of writing. The former are consequently requested to change nothing in their rôles, to introduce no hiatus into the verses, to add neither embroideries nor *appogiature* in the *recitatives* or elsewhere and not to suppress those found there. The

<sup>1</sup> *Le Respect des maîtres* (*Le Guide Musical*, 1901, nos. 18-19).

<sup>2</sup> *Les Maîtres musiciens de la Renaissance française*. Jeannequin, 1898.

latter are warned always to strike certain accompanying accords in the *recitatives* on the beats where the author has placed them, and neither before nor after. In a word, this work should be executed just as it stands. Those who accompany the score are also requested not to double by octaves the passages written in simple notes, and to employ the pedal only in the places where its use is indicated."

It is in the rich harpsichord repertory that the knights of transcription take the most unlimited liberties, invoking the pretended differences between our piano and its predecessor. This, they believe, was restricted in compass, hardly three or four octaves, lending itself to no sonorous change and afflicted with a thousand other defects. All of which proves but one thing, namely, that these folks have never played, perhaps never approached a harpsichord. They are absurdities to justify the taste for faking and the absolute lack of any historic sense.

I should need a volume to enumerate all those pretentious chromos which aspired, successfully alas, to supplant the originals.

It is really regrettable that even great musicians have been guilty of this crime against genius.

"Bach's harpsichord work," says Bülow, "is the Old Testament; Beethoven's sonatas are the New. We should believe in both." In spite of which, he adds measures to the *Chromatic Fantasy*, he enlarges others, he changes the response of the fugue and doubles the basses. Thus, failing to recognize the noble transport and the measured passion of the work, he impregnated it with an emphatic and theatrical character.

A true believer should change nothing in either the New or the Old Testament.

In his edition of Scarlatti's sonatas, <sup>1</sup> Bülow admits having changed the titles, grouped the pieces in suites. "For the public," he says, "fears sonatas." These are insignificant details; but it is graver when Bülow tells us he has transposed the G minor sonata into F minor and introduced a whole series of changes "to give it a thorough dusting." To prove the absolute necessity for so doing, and to give us a proof of Scarlatti's extravagant writing, he quotes the following extract from Czerny's edition:



It is easy enough to recognize that this is a series of *acciaccature* without signs. Farther on in his preface, Bülow speaks of this "eccentric" ornament and declares it cannot be executed on our modern piano. Now, it is one of the most commonly employed by the old masters, as well as one of the most beautiful, and can be executed with the same facility on the piano as on the harpsichord. In any event,

<sup>1</sup> *Achtzehn ausgewachte Klavierstücke von D. Scarlatti*, Kritisch bearbeitet und mit einem Vorwort von Hans von Bülow, Leipzig.

even admitting a grammatical error on the part of Scarlatti, it may be left or eliminated; but what right has anyone to undertake "thorough cleanings?"

When will our masters succeed at length in escaping from the tutelage of the grammarians?

Tausig transposes Scarlatti's *Sonata in D minor to E minor*, thus depriving this composition of all its freshness, all its crispness, rendering it flabby and sentimental. Why? Was it so he could join to it the *Capriccio in E major*?

Bach's organ *Toccata* which, arranged for the piano by Tausig, has attained such popularity, begins with an ornament badly worked out in a brilliant, false style, giving the composition, from the beginning, a noisy, brutal character.

Hummel, in his edition of *Mozart's Seven Great Concertos*, attacks his master's creation with an unheard of *sans-gêne*. The worst sufferer is the *Kronungs Konzert* in which, for whole measures, one forgets that the work is Mozart's; while, in the *Finale*, nearly a hundred measures of the original are suppressed, by way of compensation.

And why did Hummel take impertinent liberties with Beethoven in his arrangement of the seventh symphony (in A), alternating the rhythm of the basses and suppressing several measures, since Beethoven was not yet archaic music?

Some years ago there was played, at Warsaw, Beethoven's tenth symphony constructed by an illustrious unknown out of patched-up pieces and sewed-together bits from his quartettes. The idea is not even new. For Auber, so celebrated for his wit, did not have enough to resist the desire to write a *Nouvelle Symphonie de Beethoven* with bits of sonatas.

Once, when Chopin was sick, a friend took him to the Opera to distract him. They were giving a work of Meyerbeer's. Chopin, disgusted, left the theatre after the second act and his condition became worse.

What would he, who tolerated no alteration of his thought, say if he heard an opera in which Italian singers shouted his most delicate preludes at the top of their lungs? Or if he listened to those pitiful rhapsodies manufactured out of his compositions by unscrupulous virtuosi?

Some say: we must recognize the difference between music and painting, for example. For those who debase a symphony commit an error of taste, an irreverence against the masters, a stupidity in wishing to alloy gold; but the original which served them usually remains intact.

That appears true but it is only half so.

Do you believe an artist would ever dare play publicly Bach's famous prelude in C major? Nobody would hear if, having in his ears that sentimental *romance d'atelier*, that cluster of parasitic *rosalies* which disguises it for ever

Let a sculptor, without altering the Venus of Milo in any respect merely turn her into a group by placing beside her a handsome youth with upturned mustache, holding her in his arms, and the musicians would be the first to expostulate.

I asked one day, at the Bibliothèque Nationale, for a copy of Ph. Em. Bach's *Versuch*. What was my astonishment to find the author saying the harshest things about the harpsichord. Yet, in the edition I use, Philipp Emanuel speaks with enthusiasm of that instrument, preferring it to the piano-forte. Did he perhaps change his mind towards the end of his



life? I read, I re-read and finally I perceived a little note, scarcely discernible, in which Herr Schilling, the editor, states in a few words his conviction that "if Bach's son were living among us to-day, he would certainly change his opinion." He accordingly allowed himself to insert certain precious ideas of his own vintage; and wherever the harpsichord was mentioned, he put *piano*, replacing the word *clavichord* with *pianino*.

Few people have access to the original edition, and the miserable Schilling is, unfortunately, rather common.



## XII

### STYLE

EVERYONE knows that there is but "a single style in music."

Beginning with Beethoven, music is called *modern*, "*grande musique à sentiment*." Before Beethoven, going back to Greek antiquity, it is given the uniform name of *old music* and its execution necessitates what is called style.

"How many styles are there?"

"There is but one style in music."

Musicographs — the scholars — speak to us sometimes of several different styles, but they are pedants who understand nothing about real art.

When we are told that a certain work was executed with *style*, when we read in the papers that a certain artist has *style*, it is always the same style.

You will find books explaining the styles of sculpture or of painting, you will have difficulty in finding a single article to inform you as to musical style. This would moreover be superfluous, for everyone knows and feels what it consists in.

It is a sort of placidity, indifferent, affected, pale. Style is the contrary of sentiment. That is what we are taught, and we are given reasons for it. The old masters never succeeded in expressing the sentiments of the human soul which moreover they ignored completely. They lacked the inspiration which alone communicates life to a work of art. If we wish to in-

interpret them in their traditions, we must lower ourselves to their insensibility.

Here is what one of the greatest pianists, M. Eugène d'Albert, says in his preface to the *Wohltemperiertes Clavier*:

" . . . How many things in his art (Bach's) are unsuited to us! I am quite aware there are those who support his cantatas for hours at a time, without apparent signs of boredom. They are hypocrites or pedants. *Bach knew nothing of the gradation of the passions, of grief, of love* and did not suspect the possibility of rendering them musically."

You know, of course, that Bach had two wives to whom he was deeply attached, twenty-two children whom he loved with all his heart, but he "knew nothing about love," like moreover all the musicians who lived before us. M. d'Albert is categorically opposed to the idea of "rejuvenating" him, demanding on the contrary that he shall be played just as he is, in his real character which is that of his cantatas, in other words, so it will be impossible to hear him "without apparent signs of boredom."

M. d'Albert certainly does not claim to have created this formula. He knows perfectly that, for years, old music has been interpreted with style or, as it is also said, *in the classical manner*.

I was still a child when my master said to me: "No sentiment, Mademoiselle, more style!" I listened to him attentively and had afterwards all the trouble in the world to unlearn what he taught me.

The word *style* is often replaced by *severity* or *sobriety*. The radiant solemnity of the first part of the *Italian Concerto*, the overflowing sprightliness of the *Presto*, the exuberant ecstasy of the *Prélude and Fugue* of

the *Wohltemperirtes Clavier in C sharp minor* and of the chromatic part of Bach's *Toccatà in F sharp minor*, the luminous stained glass of Handel's *Chaconne in F major*, the contained ecstasy of certain of Pachelbel's compositions (*Magnificat primitoni*, François Couperin's *Tendrement*, *Affectueusement*, *Galamment*, his *Voluptueusement sans Langueur*, his *Fièremment et Noblement sans lenteur* — all these should be executed with the same severity, sobriety and rigidity, in this so-called unified style.

\* \* \*

Someone has said that Bach, even in his slightest themes, is immense, profound, colossal and that the execution of his works should be penetrated with this sentiment, without distinction

The public likes those signboards which signal it "straight ahead! no turning!"

However, Bach certainly wrote minuets, dances and certain preludes and fugues (as, for example, those in *C sharp major No. 3*, in *F sharp major No. 13*, in *G major No. 15*, in the first volume) of a light, playful character. He himself entitled them: *Clavier-uebungen bestehend aus Præludien, Allemanden, Couranten, Sarabanden Giges, Menuetten und andere Galanterien, Denen Liebhabern zur Gemuthsergoetzung verfertigt, etc.*

Which means:

"Divertisement for harpsichord, composed of Preludes, Allemandes, Courantes, Giges, Minuets and other *pièces galantes*. Dedicated to amateurs for the delight of their mind."

We know on the other hand that the *style galant* became fashionable about this time. It consisted in a

greater liberty, contrasting with the style of rigid counterpoint. Philipp Emanuel and Quantz speak of it with enthusiasm, considering it a sign of superiority over the old masters — which should not be taken literally, for Poglietti, Frohberger, Fischer, Gottlieb Muffat, Kerl, Richter, Purcell and all the virginalists, Chambonnières, Louis Couperin, d'Anglebert, all the French and all the Italians wrote *pièces galantes* before them, without speaking of the *expressly negligent* style of Kuhnau and of Frescobaldi whom I have already mentioned above.

Bach may quite as well have written his *galanteries* to acquiesce in the taste of the day as to continue a form so magnificently represented by his predecessors. No publisher, no Maecenas, no external influence constrained him to attempt a form which would have been so entirely foreign to him. Why then play a Bach *gigue* like a prayer? And the airs of his cantatas, so infinitely tender or so ecstatically voluptuous, and the *Sinfonia* in the *Christmas Oratorio*, “that distant dream in a clear winter night” — what kinship do these offer with this “immense, colossal style?”

Organ compositions, fragments of cantatas could be found to justify these epithets; but it is not easy to imprison Bach as a whole, with his variety of characters and of styles, in a cell, even were it situated on inaccessible heights.

Another conception, much more widespread still, is this: Bach's style is *always* the organ style.

Of all the old masters, Bach is the only one favored in our days. We know almost as much of his life and his works as of Beethoven's; but, seek as we may, we shall find no detail capable of telling us why the organ

was Bach's one style. We know he excelled as organist no less than as harpsichord player. He had the two instruments at his disposal, yet they have tried to make us believe he almost ignored the harpsichord, preferring the clavichord. The clavichord is not the organ. Besides, this assertion is without foundation, for we find in the inventory made after his death five harpsichords and a spinet, without counting the three harpsichords with pedal-boards which he gave, while still living, to Johann Christian. The value of his instruments was more than a third of the sum total of the legacy. We see then the rôle played by the *cembalo* in Bach's life. On the other hand, we know he employed it even in the Thomaskirche to accompany the recitatives in the Cantatas. I have before me the contemporary editions, in which the master *himself* caused to be inscribed on the title page: "*fuer Clavicymbal*" or "*fuer Clavessin*."

On the other hand, it is not difficult for us to convince ourselves that Bach composed twice as many solos for the harpsichord as for the organ, of his own will and for his own pleasure, without being obliged or encouraged to do so by anything whatsoever.

How are we to explain that, having the two instruments at his disposal, he should have written for the one pieces suited to the other? How are we to admit that the greatest harpsichord player, who was more famous for playing than for writing, should have ever ignored the resources and the character of his favorite instrument? It is enough to study his harpsichord compositions to be convinced of the contrary.

The reasons for this pretended style are not however very difficult to divine.

For the unbelievers of today, the organ appears su-



perior to the piano. Now, the believers of the eighteenth century, even the organists, did not attach much importance to this distinction. The organ was considered a "concert wind instrument," the harpsichord a "concert stringed instrument," both equally admirable, each in its kind, and the great ambition was to be able to excel on the two. This was the case with Bach, as well as with his sons, with Couperin, Frescobaldi and others. "The organ," says Philipp Emanuel Bach (*Versuch*, II, pp.1-2), "is indispensable for the church where it sheds splendour and maintains order; but as soon as we hear recitatives and airs in church, especially when the middle parts have but a simple accompaniment, in order to leave the singing voice all the liberty of the variations we should then resort to the harpsichord. One perceives far too often unfortunately, how bare the execution is in such cases without the harpsichord accompaniment. This instrument is furthermore indispensable to the theatre and to the concert."

There was even rarely any talk of the superiority of religious to profane music. That prejudice did not yet exist. There were others.

"The harpsichord and the organ have certainly many points in common," says Forkel, "but the style of the two instruments and the way of touching them differ as much as their respective purposes. That which produces an excellent effect on the harpsichord expresses nothing on the organ, and vice versa. The best harpsichord virtuoso will always be a bad organist if he has not first familiarized himself with the differences between the two instruments and if he does not always bear in mind their diverse purpose and object. Until now, I have found hardly more than



two exceptions to this rule. The first is J. S. Bach himself, the second Wilhelm Friedemann Bach, his eldest son. They were both accomplished virtuosi on the harpsichord; but once they were seated at the organ it was impossible to perceive in either of them the slightest trace of the harpsichord player. Everything — the melody, the harmony, the movement, etc. — was different, which means they knew how to adapt their abilities to the nature of the instrument and to its purpose. When I had the pleasure of hearing Wilhelm Friedemann play on the harpsichord, everything was delicate, elegant, agreeable. When I heard him on the organ, I was really seized with religious reverence. In the first case, everything was charming. In the second, everything was grand and solemn."

The harpsichord permits half-tone refinements, high, liquid arpeggios which vanish like dreams, mysterious murmurs, not at all suited to the organ on which moreover they would be unobtainable.

The greatest insult for a composer or for a performer was to be accused of writing harpsichord compositions conceived in the character of the organ or organ compositions in the style of the harpsichord. Quantz (*Versuch*, VIII) maltreats German provincial organists who were "scarcely capable of playing the bagpipes in an inn"; and to prove the *summum* of their ignorance he declares they do not know the difference between the organ and the harpsichord. "*Unter Orgel und Clavicimbal machen sie keinen Unterschied.*"

It must be admitted that it is the great respect and veneration for the Cantor of Leipzig which have suggested this *organ* style.

Bach, however, would very certainly have been

highly displeased at it. "What!" he would say to us. "I have devoted a large part of my life to writing *pièces galantes*, I have piously copied out harpsichord works, I have appropriated the elegance and the distinctness of the French style, several of Couperin's ornaments, and you dare say that my sarrabands are paternosters, that the brilliant *Concerto in gusto italiano* is an organ choral; and how about the *Aria mit 30 Veranderungen* and all the *Suites* and all the *Partitas*? Can I have been ignorant of the character of the two instruments, like a bad village organist?"

"Venerated master," we would answer him, "permit us to go on believing that all your sublime works were conceived with a view to our instruments, our conceptions, to our tastes. We know that certain of your contemporaries, like Scheibe, reproached you at times with lack of *agrément*; but we to-day are, on the contrary, too grave to tolerate in music minuets, *gigues*, airs with *ritournelles* or any light, tender, skipping compositions. Zelter already complained of those '*amabilités*,' those layers of light gilding he found even in your cantatas, and removed them without the slightest compunction."<sup>1</sup>

We should no longer do so at the present moment. We are beginning to have more respect for the letter; and, with time, we shall have it for the spirit also.

\* \* \*

<sup>1</sup> Zelter claimed however to be full of piety for the old masters and reprimanded the young: "This ungrateful generation regards with vain pride the heroes who have given it gratuitously the precious artistic means for which it has only to stretch out its hand, whereas they, on the contrary, were obliged to take Olympus by storm to conquer a spark of wit. Compared with these old masters, they appear like rich young rakes who waste on roasts and cakes the inheritance of their venerable fathers, and live by expedients." *Letters to Goethe*.

Not only concerning Bach, but even in connection with the pianistic works of the Romantic composers, we encounter this consecrated commonplace: "We should regard as the greatest artists in the world those capable of transposing to the piano the grandeur and the severity of the organ style."

Why? Beethoven would have been heartbroken had he been given a life sentence to hard organ labor, declaring that "his nerves could no longer stand the power of that gigantic instrument."

\* \* \*

"Plato and Aristotle," said Pascal, "are commonly imagined only in state robes and as persons always grave and serious. They were honest folk who laughed with their friends like other men; and when they made their laws and wrote their political treatises, it was by way of enjoyment and to amuse themselves."

None of us surely would dare say that Bach created his great works to amuse himself, even if we thought so; but permit us to believe that at least his profane pieces were written for "mental refreshment," since those are his own words.

"But the profane work does not count in Bach's case . . ." Pardon me. Out of the forty-five volumes of the *Bach Gesellschaft* there are but thirty dedicated to religious subjects. It was then a third of his life that the master of masters devoted to dance suites, to profane and burlesque cantatas and other diversions "for the delight of the mind of connoisseurs and amateurs," which took nothing from his piety.

Diversion, dance, pleasure, refreshment — all these words are so many crimes against current aesthetics.

I am far from maintaining that Bach's entire profane work is uniquely tender and serene, composed exclusively of *passepieds* and *gavottes*. The *Toccata in F sharp minor* is penetrating in its grief, the *Toccata in D major* broad and magnificently solemn, the *Toccata in C minor* tempestuously passionate, the *Prelude, fugue and allegro* for the harpsichord-lute ecstatically sweet, and there are still so many other marvels of profundity.

I have merely wished to protest against the uniformity to which some would like to condemn Bach.

If the Leipzig critics of his time reproached him with violence and considered him a sort of frowning pedant who made a display of unseasonable science, fired up easily like a man of the people and was always ready to take the pretentious or tearful tone of a village preacher,<sup>1</sup> that is not a reason for continuing such exaggerations, seeking asceticism, bitterness and severity in all Bach's works without distinction. These are certainly the most characteristic qualities of Bach's style in his great works, but they by no means exclude others; and not only in his profane pieces but even in the cantatas, we discover a wealth of airs intimately tender and penetrating, light reveries, pastorals and choruses which sing passionately the happiness of life and exhale the heartiness of festal joys, to take but the *Christmas Oratorio* as an example.

Moreover, Gerber, in his *Lexicon der Tonkunst* (1790), declares that Bach, side by side with his profound, grave music, did not disdain the light, humorous thoughts which he brought out distinctly in his playing.

<sup>1</sup> A. Pirro, *L'Esthétique de J.-S. Bach*.

It is true the Leipzig critics had recourse to these exaggerations in order to diminish the authority of the great cantata-smith. Similar exaggerations are dictated to-day by the highest veneration for the master of masters. Our education, thoroughly impregnated with romantic ideas, renders any excursion beyond Beethoven or Wagner difficult.

Bülow, in his preface, presents Scarlatti as the "*pro-gone*" whose humour gave birth to the Beethoven scherzo. Biographers of Philipp Emanuel, of Rust and of so many others, never fail to discover some vague relationship between those great composers and the author of the *Ninth Symphony*.

We are in general too preoccupied with discovering lines leading from Bach to Wagner, from Palestrina to Beethoven, shutting our eyes to everything separating them; and it is precisely that which forms their particular character, their individual beauty — in a word, *their style*.

Guillaume Costeley writes in his preface:

Va donc mon labeur, suy tous ceux qui t'aimeront;  
Va, va ne t'esbahy de ceux-là qui diront:  
Ce Costeley n'a pas d'un tel le contrepont,  
Il n'a pas de celsuy la pareille harmonie.  
J'ay quelque chose aussi que tous les deux n'ont pas.

When we shall know this "something" which is peculiar to him and which the others do not possess, we shall know his particular character, his style.

"The only durable works," says Goethe, "are occasional works." Bach's, Handel's, Beethoven's and Wagner's, like Homer's, Shakespeare's or Raphael's, are occasional works.

And we must know the spirit, the sentiment, the taste and the atmosphere of the epoch in order to un-



derstand these and to give a more or less accurate reflection of them. When, instead of this, we proceed in accordance with a unique principle of severity or of sobriety, we arrive at those uniform performances where the performers mull over their selections with the same invariably grave, impassive air.

"You always instruct a reader badly when you make him yawn," said a great admirer of Bach whose name was Frederick the Great.

In Romantic music, we distinguish carefully between Beethoven and Wagner. Cortot and Paderewski will not play Schumann, Liszt, Chopin or César Franck in the same manner.

In old music, covering several centuries, there has been adopted, as Ecorcheville has so well said in his study on Bach's style, "that morose tyranny of uniformity" for all composers, for all countries. However, it was clearly perceived that each people had its own turn of mind forming the dominant genius of the nation: "Grave and majestic in Spain, free and cavalier in France, vehement and impetuous in England, delicate and refined in Italy, solid and firm in Germany."

This definition dates from the seventeenth century.

Later, French opinion changes with respect to Italy, and even the admirers of the Italians rarely speak of the *finesse* or the *delicacy* of their music. They find other qualities in it, just as its antagonists find other faults. These opinions are too well known for me to quote them here, *la guerre des bouffons* having long been invested with a particular interest.

Quantz consecrates several pages in his *Versuch* to the question of styles. After insisting at length upon the bad taste and often misplaced virtuosity of the



Italian instrumentalists, Frederick the Great's flutist judged, in general, the Italian music of the last twenty-five years to be decadent: too much liberty in the modulations; the melody rarely as touching as in the earlier music; the voices often having little in common with the principal voice; the accompaniment poor, ostensibly not to conceal the song; and the writing usually rather slipshod. These faults apart, he granted them an incomparable wealth of ideas, a prodigious skill in execution and an innate musical sense.

"Just as the Italian easily changes style, taste and form," he says, "so the Frenchman is too conservative. Little preoccupied with the rich variation of their *adagios* or the working out of the ornaments, the French instrumentalists excel in clearness and precision. They have, at least, the merit of never altering the author's idea and are preferable to the Italians in the orchestra. All musicians, and especially harpsichord players, may be advised to familiarize themselves with French execution. They will thus grow accustomed to playing the notes and the ornaments distinctly and will afterwards be able to add the Italian charm to French brilliancy.

"The art of singing in France does not offer a vast field for virtuosi. Its airs resemble speaking rather than singing," he continues. "French compositions are extremely conscientious. The church music is more serious but also drier than in Italy. Their melody is sincerer but offers less richness. They prefer the natural scale to the chromatic. They take more interest in the meaning of the words than in the beauty of the singing. Contrary to the Italians, who are mindful of the principal voice, neglecting the

others, they put more brilliancy into the bass than into the principal voice. Their recitatives are too singing and their airs not enough. The most characteristic part of the French opera is the choruses and the dances. When we carefully observe the French opera as a whole, we have the impression that the recitatives and the airs are there merely to give greater relief to the choruses and the ballets. It is undeniable that French music lends itself better than any other to the perfection of the dance. The Italians are, in their works, exuberant, superb, lively, expressive, profound, elevated in their conceptions, a trifle bizarre, free, bold, insolent, overflowing, negligent but, at the same time, singing, charming, tender, moving and rich in invention.

“They compose more for the connoisseurs than for the amateurs.

“The French, in spite of their being lively, expressive, natural, amiable, comprehensible for the public, and having greater sense of measure, are neither deep, nor bold but very limited, slaves (“*sklavisch*”), often resembling each other, rather grovelling in conception, dry in invention, constantly warming over the ideas of their predecessors. They compose for the amateurs rather than for connoisseurs . . .

“The interpretation of the Italian artists is overflowing, artificial, complicated, often insolent and bizarre, difficult. It permits a great employment of ornaments and requires a good knowledge of harmony, causing more astonishment than pleasure among the profane.

“The interpretation of the French is strict and modest, distinct, clear and precise, easy to assimilate, neither profound nor complicated, easily understood

and convenient for amateurs. It requires no great knowledge of harmony, because the '*manières*' are generally indicated by the composer.

" . . . As for the Germans . . ."

Here the great flutist makes an excursion into the past of which he speaks with a disdain like that of the musicians of 1860 for the music of Quantz's epoch. He even emits a phrase which might be taken from M. d'Albert's preface to the *Wohltemperirtes Clavier*:

"The German musicians of the past were ignorant of the possibility of awaking and appeasing the passions." (*Die Leidenschaften zu erregen und zu stillen, war ihnen etwas unbekanntes*).

The real, *grande musique* did not begin in Germany, as it is easy to foresee, until his time, principally with Keiser and with the new aristocratic style called *galant*.<sup>1</sup> J. S. Bach is mentioned by Quantz, but only as an excellent interpreter.

The Germans, according to him, have no very distinct natural character in their art but excel through the faculty of appropriating the qualities of other nations; and, "in ratifying the *entente cordiale* of the different tastes, they have created the *mixed style* (*vermischter Geschmack*) which may, without exceeding the limits of modesty, be called German style." (*Versuch*).

It is interesting to note that Quantz's idea approximates what Wagner was to say later:

"It is in some sort a characteristic trait of German

<sup>1</sup> "Counterpoint is very useful not only for writing fugues and other artistic compositions (*Künstlerische Stücke*) but also in many *galant* imitations and in the inversion of the voices; but the old masters revelled too much in these 'musical artifices' (*musikalische Künsteleyen*), went too far in this direction and forgot the most necessary thing in music, that is, the Touching and the Gracious." Quantz, *Versuch*.

art that it goes to foreign sources to enrich its fatherland with what it lacks, while improving upon what it borrows."

Without taking Quantz's ideas literally, it must be admitted that certain of them are just, while others, like those concerning the difference between the working out of the figured bass and of the ornamentation, may be very useful. In any event, it results from them, in the first place, that musicians, in the time of J. S. Bach, distinguished the different tastes of the several nations, in view of a varied, shaded interpretation.

And, before Bach, we find this distinction of the national characters in Athanasias Kircher's *Musurgia* (1650):

"I assert that musicians will derive profit from such studies, lacking which they will produce nothing excellent. From the French they will learn the *hyperchromaticum et exoticis triplis tumidum* style; from the English the symphonic style wherein flourishes a marvellous variety of instruments; from the Germans the harmonious style with many voices and the ingenious assembling of the parts."<sup>1</sup>

Francois Couperin characterizes the Salient traits of the two styles in his *Goûts réunis* and celebrates very wittily the Franco-Italian accord in his *Apothéoses de Lulli et de Corelli*.

At every epoch, in every country, each composer had a style more or less different.

We have a tendency to consider them all sons of the same mother. It is hard for us to disentangle and distinguish the different styles, because we are blinded by the "eternal beauty" which is nothing but the "beauty of the day."

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by A. Pirro in his *Esthétique de J.-S. Bach*, Paris, 1907.

We are very far behind in music as compared with the other arts. Though recognizing that Memling is more pious, more serious, painters are able to admire Watteau and Fragonard.

Musicians are just beginning to know the delight of the historic sense.

## XIII

### TRADITION

MUCH attention has of late been given to this question. Kretschmar's *Einige Bemerkungen über den Vortrag alter Musik* and Kufferath's *Interpretation et Tradition* contain interesting remarks concerning it.

M. Jaques-Dalcroze and M. Jean Huré are not wrong in making fun of *trrrraa*dition, for what is so called is often nothing but a collection of errors or caprices bequeathed by some celebrated and time-honored interpreter, to which pedants really attach an exaggerated importance.

There always have been and always will be these pedants for whom the execution of the least stroke, in accordance with their rules, is dearer than all the beauties of art. Moreover this race, so detested by Gluck, are rarely true scholars but men of half learning and an Indian proverb says of them:

"You can get on easily with the ignorant and more easily yet with the learned; but Brahma himself could never agree with the man whose grain of wisdom has swollen his stupid pride."

M. Jaques-Dalcroze is certainly right when he mocks this uniform interpretation of Bach in the name of a pretended tradition; but, carried away by his subject, he goes so far as to claim that the artist has no need of, or very little concern with indications derived from history, since "genius in interpretation means self-forgetfulness." M. Jaques-Dalcroze is an



admirable musician but he would be unable to execute a large part of the music of the virginalists or of the harpsichord writers or the slightest composition for the lute without having recourse to ancient writings or to modern historians.

Self-forgetfulness would reveal to him neither the execution of the ornaments, nor the tempo, nor the *tabulature*, and he would remain before these marvels like a great reciter called upon to read a poem written in a foreign tongue.

Bring together a hundred musicians and give them a composition by Rameau or by Mozart in *andante*. If they have made no researches, they will play it *slowly*; and if the composition following is marked *piu andante*, they will play it more slowly still. And that will be wrong.

And why will they all be agreed to play in a wrong movement? Is it because of sudden inspiration? No. The fact is that they, too, follow tradition like the rest of us who have recourse to musicographs and old theoretical works. Only they follow *tradition!* the one, unique, for all music, for every epoch — that which ill-informed professors grafted them with in the nurseries of art and which they keep without effort.

Let us look at the word *Andante*.

In the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française*: *Andante*, moderate movement.

In *Littré*: *Andante*, neither too quick nor too slow. *Andantino*, slower than *andante*.

In the *Encyclopédie*: *Andante*, slow movement. *Andantino*, livelier than *andante*.

In the *Encyclopédie des Gens du Monde*: *Andantino*, livelier than *andante*. Under the word "movement" we read: *Andantino*, slower than *andante*.

In the *Encyclopédie Moderne*: *Andantino* indicates a measure less lively and with a certain regularity in the movement which is rather stiffness than gravity.

In *Larousse*: *Andante*, moderate movement tending to slowness. *Andantino*, a word which indicates a modification of movement(?).

In the *Nouveau Larousse*: *Andantino*, more animated. All musicians are moreover agreed as to this.<sup>1</sup>

This pretended agreement among musicians of which Larousse speaks comes from the fact that the movement has changed. In the eighteenth century, *Andante* corresponded in French to *gracieux* and *sans lenteur*. It indicated a moderate movement, going (*andante-going*) from slow to quick. *Andantino* was played in the same movement with more lightness. *Piu andante* signified livelier, not slower.<sup>1</sup>

One can find a thousand other signs which have changed their meaning. I have chosen this example, since it has been the cause of a grave dispute between M. d'Indy and the Opéra-Comique following a performance of *Iphigénie en Aulide*.

M. Saint-Saëns, who took part in the discussion, wrote:

“With this slowness which it is believed obligatory to inflict upon Gluck’s works, while, in modern works, it never seems possible to race fast enough, how can these old compositions be expected not to seem tedious?”

And not only did he, like Vincent d'Indy, admit that an altered movement may spoil the whole effect of a work, but he foresaw at the same time the

<sup>1</sup> George Sand gives almost the exact explanation when she writes: “The autumn is a melancholy and gracious *andante* which admirably prepares the solemn *adagio*.” Only *andante* is always *gracious*, and not necessarily melancholy, for in Handel we often come across the *andante allegro*.

absolute necessity of historical research when he wrote:

"There are very few musicians, in our epoch, well enough versed in the things of the past to understand Gluck. For most of them, this music is a language which they speak without knowing its pronunciation or its mechanism."

M. Jaques-Dalcroze and M. Huré are right in this sense that until now we have, with but rare exceptions, known only two kinds of interpretation of old music. Either it is poured into a modern mould, altering the movement, the shading, and exaggerating the expression; or else it is performed in what is called *style*, with that wan, formal indifference which, heavy, dull and monotonous, gives us the impression of attending an unknown person's funeral: it is indecent to appear interested, yet we cannot cry either, since the ceremony does not move us.

The public, ignorant of the true beauties of these works, says to itself, considering their cast off skins: "These dead men are certainly dead. If they only would leave them in peace!"

Having to choose between the two kinds, one is not wrong to prefer the former, since it is less conducive to yawning.

The pretended traditionalists are proud of conforming to the shades indicated by the old writers.

But the meaning of the signs and shades has changed.

The pretended traditionalists are moreover very proud of adding nothing to the old works; but this too is very wrong.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, performers and conductors were left more liberty than to-day in the choice of *certain* instruments, as well as

in the improvisation of the cadences and the ornamentation of the adagios. Sometimes even, the composer gave merely a rough outline, inviting the performer to become his collaborator for the invention of harmonic embroideries.

The authors also rarely imposed the signs of interpretation and of the movement, leaving these to the taste of the artist.<sup>1</sup>

And not only were the performers free, but they were obliged to interpret the figured basses, to ornament the adagios, to fill up the gaps in the passages where the author had indicated merely the harmonic skeleton — something which we still find in Mozart's concertos and without which the work is incomplete.

But the ancient *ad libitum* was equivalent to our "please feel at home" addressed to a gentleman with the assurance he will not presume upon it and turn the house upside down, throwing out of the window the things which are not to his taste or introducing others which will not be to ours.

We have only too many theoretical works, dating from the epoch, to teach us in what style the cadences should be improvised, how the ornaments should be worked out, the numbered basses interpreted and just how far one instrument may be replaced by another.

The "non-traditionalists," often uniquely anxious to play with abundance of feeling, take exaggerated liberties with greatest masterpieces. Berlioz, who was neither a lover of the past nor a model of moderation, nevertheless very frequently revolted at this.

"A declaimer," he wrote, "has got it into his head

<sup>1</sup> Even Weber thought an excess of indications tended to render a work caricatural.

that accentuation, true or false, but exaggerated, is everything in dramatic music, that it can take the place of sonority, of measure, of rhythm, that it suffices to replace the song, the form, the melody, the movement, the tonality, that to satisfy the demands of such a style, bombastic, turgid, swollen, bursting with emphasis, one has the right to take the strangest liberties with the most admirable productions. When he adopts this system before a certain public, the liveliest, sincerest enthusiasm rewards him for having slaughtered a great master, ruined a masterpiece, reduced beautiful melodies to rags, torn to tatters a sublime passion."

The "great" is the most widespread prejudice of our age.

We continually read that this or that virtuoso or conductor, even when he executes the slightest composition, makes it grandiose. This is very wrong. A little work should remain little. Enlargement is the business of the photographer. A true artist will be able to appreciate a miniature and not have the bad taste to enlarge it; and what madman would want to transform Velasquez's dwarf into a Goliath?

Kuhnau's, Couperin's, Pachelbel's miniatures are marvels, such as we shall rarely find in painting, and are worth as much as the finest extended works.

Neither external magnitude nor internal magnitude is the sole decisive term. Watteau and Raphael are neither grandiose nor profound, yet we can place few names beside theirs. To augment and enhance a work small in size, frail and delicate in conception, is just as much a crime against good taste as to weaken and reduce a great and powerful work. And I am speaking now of true greatness, instead of which



we are offered a false greatness, a vain grandiloquence.

\* \* \*

Though leaving certain liberties to performers, the old authors were very sensitive to the exact interpretation of their works.

We know the number of rehearsals Lully required of his orchestra. "The more we strive to seek perfection and truth," says Gluck, "the more accuracy and precision become necessary. The slightest alteration in a movement or in the expression, a detail out of place, are enough to destroy an entire scene and to turn an air like '*J'ai perdu mon Eurydice*' into a tune for marionettes."

Couperin, in his prefaces, recommends not changing a single note, a single ornament. He also tells us the care that should be taken with regard to the harpsichord, adding that there are artists however who can overlook these recommendations, since they play equally badly on any instrument whatsoever.

Muffat demonstrates the importance of executing Lully's ornaments exactly and of understanding his movements. Viadana, in his counsels to organists, asks them to keep an eye on the singers who often know to perfection all the resources to be drawn from an agile throat but who do not deign to keep to the letter, altering the melodic line and exceeding the limits of the written music.

\* \* \*

It is not by ignoring and changing the shades, the movements and the whole character that we shall bring out the spirit and the expression.



It is agreed that the spirit depends more upon taste than upon signs; but, before speaking, the artist should understand what he is to say, subordinating the expression of the sounds to that of the thought.

He should enter into every idea of the composer's so as to feel and to convey the fire of the expression and every refinement of the details.

There are a thousand different ways of rendering the same composition in its execution, without ever departing from its character.

It should not be feared that knowledge of the signs, of the shades, of the ornaments and of the taste of the epoch to which the work belongs and their perfect execution will curb the performer to the point of discouraging every initiative.

Quite the contrary. It is by following the same routine for every epoch that we become prisoners, eternally breathing the same air. There is no question here of an archeological pedantry but of knowing the language of the work we are to execute. What would you say of a great actor who, having to recite medieval verses, would not seek to understand the meaning of certain words so as to be able to place *ports de voix* according to his inspiration?

It is wrong to indulge the ignorance of performers so religiously. We are continually told that with our innocence we shall also lose our freshness and our rosy cheeks. It is probably feared that the virtuoso or the Conservatory student, after reading Romain Rolland's *Notes sur Lully*, will suddenly become a philosopher, like the musicians of antiquity. Just fancy! what a calamity for us, in pursuit of progress, to be thrown back thus thirty centuries!

Vain fear. We are still so far from it!

We are told of Joachim's spontaneous playing; but Joachim was in constant relations with the musical historians and made researches himself. And how many months did he not devote to learning certain of Bach's works!

Some years ago I had as neighbors in a Viennese hotel a quartet who were apparently preparing for their first concert. They rehearsed and tuned up all day from morning to night.

"They feel very much at home," I said one day to the porter, "but they play well anyway."

"No wonder, Madame," he replied proudly, "it is the Joachim Quartet."

We are often told too of the difference between Bülow and Rubinstein. The former's playing was studied, painstaking, thorough and learned, though fiery and impetuous, while Rubinstein never studied at all, abandoning himself to the mere caprice of the moment's inspiration.

I once happened to meet, in Russia, friends of the great player—the conductors Winogradski and Siloti, the director of the Kiev Conservatory, M. Pouchalski and others.

Antoine, they told me, studied, on the contrary, zealously. Only he always had a terrible stagefright, with the result that his interpretation was never the same two days in succession, to such an extent that at times he forgot what he was playing and was forced to improvise. He was often very unhappy because of this and said himself that a new programme could be arranged with his wrong notes.

Every interpretation should be studied and thought out; and the more it is, the more it gives us the impression of natural inspiration.

Seeing Corneille's verses so pompous and Racine's so simple, one would never suspect that Corneille worked easily, Racine with difficulty.

Beethoven's manuscripts are rendered illegible by corrections and polishings; and in the most impassioned, the most impetuous passages the phrases have been studied, worked over, tormented.

A composer can let himself go more easily than an interpreter, since he has only to follow his thought, his idea, his whim. To execute an insignificant production, no matter; but when it is a work by Bach, by Purcell, by Couperin? . . .

I am quite willing to accept M. Jaques-Dalcroze's formula: "Genius in interpretation is self-forgetfulness."

Self-forgetfulness, yes; but not forgetfulness of the work executed, or forgetfulness of its author's style, of his ideas and of the smallest details to which he certainly attached as much importance as modern composers do to theirs.

One must seek to understand, to know the slightest intentions and often repeat the same passage as many as a hundred times, listening to oneself; and, in spite of these careful rehearsals, one still misses it.

I am not speaking of the purely mechanical work of the virtuoso who effaces the feeling, rendering "the hand skilful and the mind unskilful," though this too is a very important factor, on condition there is no exaggeration. For it is only when you feel your fingers free, your elbows at ease, your mind sure, that you can take your flight "without giving the depressing impression of a painful effort."

Rubinstein as well as Saint-Saëns, Bülow and Liszt not only studied the compositions he was to interpret but delved into the traditions with touching

piety. He has moreover left us moving proofs of this in his book on *Music and its Representatives* where he often complains of ignorance as to Bach's and Handel's intentions concerning the execution of their works and as to the way of working out the ornaments, so important in the interpretation of old music. He sought, he rummaged, he discussed.

His book was written at a moment when old music and old instruments had hardly begun to be investigated.

"I cannot help believing," he wrote, "that Bach's piano had special arrangements which gave it various sonorous effects. I always feel tempted to register the *forte* in his works by means of different touches and different pedals."

And farther on:

"No," he said, "the perfected piano is no improvement for the execution of the old works . . . Since the old works of such and such an epoch were conceived for the instruments then existing and were intended to receive their complete expression from them, I think that these works lose rather in being played on modern instruments. If Ph. Em. Bach has written a book *Üeber die Wahre Art das Klavier zu spielen*, it follows then that expressive interpretation was possible on the instruments of his time."

And the most spontaneous, the most demoniacal interpreter would have been deeply grateful to the historians able to enlighten him concerning all these questions. For not only would the knowledge of these details not have diminished the fire of his execution but, on the contrary, it would have dissipated the doubts which sometimes cramped this great and honest artist's inspiration.

\* \* \*

We are offered works by Bach and by Gluck in the stiffest, most tedious form and are asked to believe that "tradition" is being followed; but at the time these works were reproached with being too impassioned — Gluck with attacking loftiness and charm, Bach with introducing violent passions unfit for religious art into the church.

If we are unable to excite the same feelings, it is because our tradition is false, and it would take a Timotheus to make us unlearn it.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, the conductors who for eighteenth century works triple the strings and practically suppress the wind instruments which constitute the true instrumental colouring of that epoch, say to us: "We seek neither science nor tradition!" Excuse me, you follow tradition, like the others. Your colleagues in Berlin, in Vienna and in London have, with but few exceptions, adopted the same orchestral constitution for the same works. Then it is not in your case "the hand of chance which governs everything, including the rules of art."

It is not the suddenness of your inspiration which dictated this choice, but routine and tradition — bad tradition.

Music, like all other arts, presents an infinite variety of styles, of types and of genres. The past of our art is a magnificent museum where every age, every epoch, every nation has deposited its beauties, all perfect and all different. It is the greatest sacri-

<sup>1</sup> Timotheus, celebrated Greek musician attached to the court of Alexander, made students forget what they had learned "under other musicians," then collected double salary. See *Burgaud des Marets, Rabelais*, Vol. I, p. 172, note 3.



lege to try to reduce it to a moving picture of contemporaneity.

"The first rule of interpretation," wrote Wagner, in *Der Virtuos und der Künstler*, should be to convey the composer's intentions with scrupulous fidelity in order to transmit to the senses the inspiration of the thought without change or loss. The greatest merit of the virtuoso consists then in imbuing himself completely with the musical perception of the piece he is playing and in introducing no modification of his own."

Knowledge of the conventional signs, of the proportions, of the shades and of the instruments is not enough to ensure a faithful, animated, living execution. This should be based upon the poetic content and not upon the musical point of view only.

To give each work the character it had in the mind of its author one must have familiarized one's self with the style, the character, the tastes of the composer and with the taste of his age.

Surely, such knowledge, if not seconded by a genuine interpretative talent, will be insufficient to produce the least emotion and will serve at most as a crutch to help the cripple hobble wretchedly along; but a true artist will be able to profit by it.

"When one has sublime thoughts, one should not spoil them by a bad handwriting," wrote Diderot in his *Leçons de Clavecin*.

\* \* \*

The modern musician, unlike the old-fashioned virtuoso, is no longer content with a few dozen show pieces.

Our art has had its Homers, its Shakespeares, its Raphaels, its Watteaus. We want to know them all,



and it is thanks to the musicographs that we begin little by little to acquaint ourselves with the treasures which, bequeathed us by the great writers of the past, have too long been left mouldering in the dust of the archives.

Certainly, it is easier and quicker to despise science than to acquire it; but there is often more piety and love for music in the writings of these "library rats" than in the fireworks, in the strained gestures and the enraptured *ritardandi* of many fashionable virtuosi.

## XIV

### INTERPRETATION

I HAVE no intention of writing a catechism here. I should merely like to indicate some important faults in execution which make old music lose not only its mark of authenticity but often its whole character, all its beauty.

It would be wrong to be too pedantic. Seventeenth and eighteenth century authors left great liberty to the performers and greater yet to the conductors.

From the writings of the period, from the authors' prefaces, we know the limitation placed upon this liberty which could not go beyond a certain point or alter the composer's thought.

But we should look in vain to find any indication authorizing the changes which conductors and virtuosi too often permit themselves.

Routine is wanting and the historic sense is the sole guide to these mutilations of the greatest masterpieces.

#### 1. THE COLOUR OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY ORCHESTRA

The eighteenth century orchestra comprised, on the average, some forty musicians for opera and twenty for concert.

The King of Poland's Opera, in Dresden, conducted by the famous Hasse and considered by Rousseau the biggest, the best distributed and forming the most perfect ensemble, numbered thirty-nine instrumental-

ists, two stands for trumpets and kettledrums and two harpsichords. The wind instruments were in the same proportion as the strings.

The Strasbourg Academy of Music numbered, in 1731, twenty players, namely: six violins, one viola, two violoncellos, one double bass, two flutes, two oboes, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets and kettledrums.

When playing for Duke Wilhelm Ernst Saxe-Weimar, Bach had at his disposal twenty-two performers, including the singers, each of whom could play one instrument, and often several. To them were added six *Kappelknaben* and, during the great ceremonies, the *Stadtmusikus* came to lend its aid with its musicians.

In his memorial dated August 22, 1730, Bach himself fixes the number of the singers at twelve and of the instrumentalists at eighteen, not counting the organist. It is interesting to note the proportion which Bach preserved between the vocalists and the instrumentalists, without ever seeking the domination of the voices as opposed to Handel who, although the number of his singers was not greater than that of the instrumentalists, always avoided covering the voices with the orchestra and used the organ with more moderation.

La Boissière, treasurer of the States, wrote to Melier, organizer of the Academy of Music at Nantes in the first half of the eighteenth century:

"You have already opened shop, my dear sir, and you have twenty-four on your rolls. That's a lot, if they're good. We have but seventeen in our Italian symphony." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lionel de la Laurencie, *L'Académie de Musique et le Concert de Nantes*. Paris, 1906.

The maximum number of instrumentalists mentioned by Quantz does not exceed thirty-five.

Haydn's orchestra at the Esterhazys' numbered from sixteen to twenty-two players: four or six violins, two violas, one double bass, two violoncellos. The rest was composed of wind instruments: flutes, oboes, bassoon, hunter's horns (often four), and later clarinets — almost as many wind instruments as strings.

We certainly find bigger orchestras, even in the seventeenth century; but these are rare exceptions.

Louis XIV continually increased his musical staff which attained the number of "six score" singers and players, thus causing La Fontaine to say:

Ses divertissements ressentent tous la guerre.  
Ses concerts d'instruments ont le bruit du tonnerre.  
Et ses concerts de voix ressemblent aux éclats  
Qu'en un jour de combat font les cris des soldats.

We should not be surprised at this, for "the twenty-four violins of the King" were not only sufficient as to sonorous force, but Father Mersenne asserts that those who had heard them "declared they had never listened to anything more ravishing or more powerful"; and Jean Denis, in his little book, *L'Accord de l'Epinette*, tells of the miraculous cure effected upon a melancholy young girl by the powerful bowing of the King's violins.

With each increase of the orchestra we hear new criticisms and new recriminations.

About 1740, the noise and the bad taste of the concerts were deplored:

Nos concerts ne nous touchent plus  
Si le monstrueux assemblage  
De vingt instruments superflus  
N'y fait un bachique tapage.<sup>1</sup>

In the latter years of the eighteenth century, there were a few noisy performances; but these were solemn festivals in which greater attention was paid to the decorative splendour than to the artistic side of the execution.

Towards the end of Haydn's life there was given in his honour at Prince de Lobkowitz's a performance of the *Creation* with one hundred and sixty performers, under the leadership of Salieri. In 1786, Bach's successor, Hiller, presented Handel's *Messiah* in the Domkirche at Berlin with one hundred and eighteen singers, one hundred and eighty-four instrumentalists, an organist and a harpsichord player. 3 Nivôse, year IX, one hundred and fifty-six musicians, as many choristers, a harpsichord player to accompany the recitatives — in all three hundred and thirteen artists — participated at the Opéra in a solemn performance of the *Creation* attended by Bonaparte, then First Consul. An infernal machine exploded before the performance, probably to warn the new century of the vanity of exaggerated noise and to prove that a sardine-box charged with explosives can make a greater racket than three hundred and thirteen performers.

Let us not forget that we are at the end of the eighteenth century and that "much" had become one of the principal terms in aesthetics. We are wrong to see an element of progress in this. Monstrous

<sup>1</sup> *Mercur*, 1749. Quoted by Michel Brenet, *Les Concerts sous l'ancien régime*.

orchestras already existed in the seventeenth century but were later abandoned through refinement.

Handel too was reproached with the exaggerated number of his musicians, and Quantz wrote in his memoir that the former's orchestra was intolerably powerful. Handel knew perfectly the number of musicians he composed for and used them to his liking. His employment of a greater number of instrumentalists than was customary might displease Quantz, but the latter did not change the ideas, the style or the character of the genius he interpreted. To-day, when the ancient orchestra is tripled, the finest thoughts are often disfigured, a confusion is produced in the voices and the soloists, instead of being supported, are muffled, must struggle to make themselves heard.

This extraordinary enlargement would in itself be a trifle were the proportions maintained in the choice of the instruments. In the seventeenth century, instrumentation in Italy was reduced almost exclusively to strings and, in the second half, the wind instruments practically disappeared.

In France too, under Cambert, the instrumental mass rests upon the group of strings. Occasional flute passages brighten a little this monotonous mist and give a few touches of colour to this *grisaille*.

Lully likewise builds the background of his orchestra with the violins; but with him, in addition to the flute, the trumpets, the kettledrums, we find oboes, the bassoon, *trompes de chasse*, guitars, bagpipes and, in the ballets, tambourines, castanets and other instruments.

Praetorius informs us as to the different combinations to vary the accompaniment of the choral in the seventeenth century which persisted to Bach's time.



It is to be noted that the wind instruments entered here in the same number as the strings. The kappelmeisters alternated them to avoid monotony.

But if, in the eighteenth century, we still find in Italy some composers preferring the violins, the wind instruments play a much more considerable rôle in Germany and in France. We know the importance of trumpets in Handel's orchestra and what vigour their brilliant sonority lends his instrumentation. The oboe is his favorite instrument. The trombones, the horns, the cornets, the flutes — straight flutes and cross flutes, big and little — the oboes, the bassoons and the double bassoons form part of his orchestra. In Rameau too the winds enter largely.

Bach's instrumentation is still more varied through the diversity of the instruments. He gives a preponderant place to the colouring in his instrumentation, following merely the whim of his genius for the employment of the different timbres. Sometimes he cuts down the violins, sometimes he cuts down the winds. He makes greater use of the trombones than does Handel, especially for choral accompaniment. It is to be regretted that M. Lavoix, in his fine study on the *Histoire de l'Instrumentation*, does not indicate the precise number of instruments included in Bach's and Handel's orchestras.

Fortunately Quantz tells us the necessary proportion to form an ideal ensemble. I choose, among the examples quoted, the one representing the most current dimensions.

For eight violins, two violas, two violoncellos, one double bass — two oboes, two flutes and two bassoons, hunter's horns *ad libitum*.

Since Quantz always favored sonorous moderation,

this proportion would be rather too modest for the wind instruments. Moreover we have already seen that the operatic and academic orchestras contained practically the same number of both.

Now, in modern execution, when the number of strings is doubled or tripled, not only is the proportion of wind instruments not augmented, but their number is even diminished. I have played a Handel concerto where, against twenty violins, there was hardly one flute. I say "hardly," because it did not fail to miss its cue.

When you take from the old orchestra the glowing sonority of the oboes, the softness of the flutes, the pastoral lustiness of the hunter's horns, the jubilation of the trumpets,<sup>1</sup> you destroy its whole colouring, all its airy, ethereal, luminous character which is already sufficiently compromised by the suppression of admirable instruments whose one sin is to be no longer fashionable, such as the *oboe d'amore*, the *oboe da caccia* and the whole family of the viols, or by the inappropriate addition of new instruments, ostensibly to rejuvenate the work.

We pretend to endow the old composers with our extraordinary progress in instrumentation, and the one to whom it is largely due — Wagner — said: "The application of the methods of modern instrumentation would be the surest means of rendering the theme and the character of the old works unrecognizable."

As to Bach, he wrote by little groups of instruments of the same family, answering one another and rarely uniting in *tutti*. The string quartet formed one group, the oboes and the bassoons another, the brasses

<sup>1</sup> In his excellent book, *L'Esthétique de J.-S. Bach*, M. A. Pirro tells us the rôle of each of these instruments and of the care Bach gave to their choice.

a third, the trumpets and the kettledrums a fourth. By enlarging one group to the detriment of another, we make the work limp, taking from it the whole harmony of its construction and the contrapuntal character of the instrumentation — something pianists too are often guilty of when they strive, with a misplaced zeal, to bring out the theme of the fugue.

## 2. THE CHORUSES

I once attended a performance of the *Passion according to Saint Matthew* conducted by a remarkable leader with excellent singers and excellent choruses at his disposal. Only, the orchestra was doubled or tripled, the number of soloists evidently being kept the same as in Bach's time and the choruses increased tenfold. We know however that, with Bach, the singers did not dominate and that their number was rather smaller than that of the instrumentalists.

But, without making archeological excursions and without speaking of fidelity in the execution, it was not difficult to feel that the immense choruses weighed down the work, crushed the soloists, destroyed the polyphonic harmony.

"Our halls are immense," I am told; but who obliges us to seek these abominable "box-office abysses," as Berlioz calls them?

Besides, since we hear the voices solo, even when they are crushed between the immense choruses and smothered by excessive orchestras, we should certainly find sufficient the power of several dozen good voices singing together; and, among three hundred excellent choristers, some forty admirable ones could be chosen without trouble.

The real reason then is to be found elsewhere. The

“much,” an important term in musical aesthetics to-day, offers, it seems, a great attraction for the larger public and every concert organizer and nearly every conductor is very happy when he can put on his posters:

GREAT FESTIVAL! COLOSSAL ORCHESTRA!  
FIVE HUNDRED PERFORMERS!

### 3. THE HARPSICHORD IN THE ORCHESTRA

The harpsichord is the basis of the eighteenth century orchestra. “It is the pillar upon which the entire mass rests,” as Mattheson said, and “the harmonious and murmurous rustling of which has an infinitely beautiful effect on the chorus.”

Ph. Em. Bach and Quantz never tire of insisting upon the importance of the harpsichord in the orchestra. Its rôle was double: it supported the ensemble, while accompanying it, and conducted it.

In the seventeenth century, and even during Bach's youth, some of the kappelmeisters conducted by beating time with the foot, some by making movements with the head, the arm, with both arms, some with a roll of music or with a baton. Those who played the violin kept the measure with their bow. But, after 1730, we see the harpsichord become the real leader of the orchestra. Up to then, conductors had stood. Now, for a century, they were to sit, until the time they began to be recruited principally among the violinists.

The Paris Opéra had its music master who conducted by beating time with a thick stick, which made the great detractor of French music, Rousseau, say that the Paris Opéra was the only theatre in Europe

where time was beaten without being followed, whereas elsewhere it was followed without being beaten. Accompanying harpsichords were however used there.

In Italy and in Germany, the composer of an opera conducted the performances himself, not by beating time, but at the harpsichord.

This instrument was already used in the seventeenth century for church music. Spitta quotes a few such cases in Kuhnau's time and earlier. Frescobaldi and Buxtehude also used it (admirable virtuosos as they were) both for leading and for accompanying.

"The harpsichord, to which our predecessors entrusted the leadership," says Philipp Emanuel in his *Versuch*, (1, p. 7,) "cannot only fill out the basses, but moreover hold the whole ensemble to measure and to pitch. The sound of the harpsichord reaches the ear of every instrumentalist; and I know that the least well harmonized ensembles, composed of mediocre musicians can nevertheless be held together thanks to the sounds of the harpsichord . . . If anyone is disposed to drag or to hurry the movement, the *cembalo* will bring him back at once to the right road."

For operas, two harpsichords were commonly employed — one at the side for accompaniment, the other in the center of the orchestra, for conducting.

For concerts, a single instrument filled the two rôles simultaneously. Handel had in his orchestra two for which he frequently wrote different basses.

About 1681, there were sometimes at the Opéra accompaniment orchestras for the voice composed of several harpsichords, spinets, theorbos and violins.



Bach used the harpsichord not only for his secular works but also in the church. He played this instrument himself to conduct his cantatas.

For some years, the tuning of Johann Sebastian's *cembalo* at the Thomaskirche was entrusted to Philipp Emanuel.<sup>1</sup>

The rôle of the harpsichord in accompanying was more important than in the leading of the orchestra, for we notice fairly often towards the end of the eighteenth century that, when the time-beater became the fashion, the accompaniment *cembalo* persisted.

As late as 1808, during a performance of the *Creation* at Vienna, we see Kreutzer sitting at the harpsichord and Salieri conducting the ensemble.

Hiller, when executing Handel's *Messiah*, used an accompaniment harpsichord. We also find the accompaniment harpsichord at the Paris Opéra at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

"The harpsichord is indispensable for all music, great and small," says Quantz.

Ph. Em. Bach also finds a good performance impossible without the accompaniment of this instrument.

Can the harpsichord be replaced by the modern piano?

The harpsichord in the old orchestra did not constitute a particular matter. On the contrary, the sonority of its plucked strings combined marvellously with the other instruments, forming a harmonious cement to bind together the dispersed voices and to fill the voids in the cadences. Furthermore, its murmurous rustling, so dear to Mattheson, lent a slight, mysterious colour to the instrumentation; and, we

<sup>1</sup> Spitta, Vol. II, p. 158.



are told fairly often, even if you do not hear the *cembalo* in the great performances or in the open air, it makes no difference. You would hear it were you placed high. Try to do without it and its absence will make itself felt.

I have no prejudice against the modern piano, being a pianist first of all; but its beautiful sonority has something oily about it which does not blend with the other sonorities and floats continually in the orchestra.

† This fact was established by one who did not know the harpsichord and who, it must be believed, had some understanding of the orchestra . . . Richard Wagner.

It is so true that, since the harpsichord has been relegated to the museums, the piano enters the orchestra as a soloist only or, very rarely, to produce some particular effect.

Schweitzer makes the same statement in his French *Bach*:

"It is in the *morceaux d'ensemble*," he says, "that we perceive how different the sonority of our piano is from that of Bach's harpsichord. When he wrote his Sonatas for harpsichord and violin, the sonorities of the two instruments were entirely homogenous. To-day they are absolutely different and stand out without fusing. A listener who has an ear and whose imagination has evoked Bach's work with a beautiful homogenous sonority, must suffer from this antagonism of the two sonorities."

"The piano," says Henri Lavoix, in his *Histoire de l'Instrumentation*, "that metronome for the singer, that intelligent auxiliary of the artist on the stage, is not long in troubling the harmony of the timbres when, not content with its modest but useful rôle, it

wishes in turn to make itself heard among the other instruments. *There is not one of them whose sonority can mingle* with its, not one whose soft lines can espouse its angular contours. In a word, this instrument, so widespread, so necessary, is generally, as a chemist would say, insoluble in the orchestra."

The forte piano of 1830 may have had this one advantage that, weaker, it shocked less, since it was less heard.

Kretzschmar's idea of replacing the harpsichord by harps is more acceptable, these instruments not forming a body foreign to the orchestra, like the piano. The harp however is far from possessing the varied wealth of the registers of the harpsichord with its humming, its rustling, the fluted sounds of its upper keyboard, its fine incisiveness, its ardent cicada-like notes the beauty of which antiquity could appreciate, and with the superb clashing of the coupled keyboard that gave the orchestra so particular a colour.

\* \* \*

If J. S. Bach and Handel used the harpsichord, it was not to give their orchestra an archeological character but because they felt its utility and its necessity; and it was not used in the small orchestra only but at the Paris Opéra, in the second half of the eighteenth century. A single harpsichord supported ninety musicians and no one complained of its sonorous weakness. We have seen above a single harpsichord support three hundred and thirteen performers in Haydn's *Creation*, played for Napoleon.

A good harpsichord should have a great sonority which moreover always distinguished it from the clavi-chord and the forte piano until the beginning of

the nineteenth century. These last two instruments were used for the solos or for the accompaniment of a single voice. The forte piano also frequently formed part of chamber music; but important music required one or two harpsichords.

The sonority of these instruments should not be judged by that of museum harpsichords the sounding-board of which has long been dead.

Furthermore, the touch of this instrument being completely different, even opposed to the touch of the modern piano, it is only too evident that the player who has not sufficiently familiarized himself with the eighteenth century instruments will obtain on it hardly a fourth of its true sonority.

\* \* \*

They tell a story of a peasant who said to his wife: "You know, up there, at the castle they simply dote on cherry-tarts. You ought to make me one."

"But butter is dear . . ."

"Well, make it without butter."

"And eggs . . .?"

"We'll do without eggs."

"And then, you know, the cherry season is past . . ."

"Oh! No matter! Make it without cherries!"

The farmer eats his tart and cries:

"Rich folks must be stupid to dote on a thing without the slightest taste!"

Old music is deprived of everything which constituted its true character. It is trimmed, it is cut, it is rewritten, it is mutilated, the harpsichord and the wind instruments are suppressed, the quartet and the choruses are overloaded, the most beautiful thoughts

are torn. All that gives life and movement is annihilated in the name of a pretended tradition and it is finally established, not without satisfaction, that these things have little taste, are not worth our progressive productions.

Let us not forget that there is still the question of the movement, of the ornaments and a thousand other details which living composers defend energetically when their own works are at stake.

#### 4. MOVEMENT

"Old music should be played slowly," — another general formula which is applied to all music of all epochs and of all nations! Nor is it of our invention. It is encountered in every age.

Towards the end of his life, Grétry, after hearing a work of Mozart's, exclaimed: "I shall die only of an adagio." Quantz used to say that, in the preceding century, music was played at least twice as slowly. The Lullists reproached Rameau with drowning beautiful song in modern speed. Did not Lully in turn see his dances treated as "*baladinage*" because of their extreme speed? Among others the critics opposed to him Champion de Chambonnières. Now Father Marseenne speaks with ecstasy of the lightness and incomparable rapidity of Chambonnières's hand.

When musicians, grown old, can no longer follow the younger men, they find it easier to accuse them of abuse of speed than to acknowledge their own slackened powers.

Upon what could the notion of a continual precipitation of movement be founded?

The instruments were imperfect, we are told.

Which? The violins? Are ours more perfect than

those of Guarnerius, of Stradivarius, of Amati? The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries counted dazzling virtuosi who were continually reproached moreover with having sacrificed everything to speed, to tricks, to fireworks.

As for the harpsichord, with the exception of the *glissando*, all the recognized and unrecognized degrees of velocity can be attained on it.

Forkel reports that Bach astonished his contemporaries with the rapidity of his movement when playing his compositions on the harpsichord. "He conducted with great precision in a very animated movement," say Agricola and Gerber.

Couperin counsels playing even the tender pieces not too slowly on the harpsichord, it being possible to keep the cadence and the taste independently of the degree of speed.

The rapidity of Mozart's execution was celebrated. Legends grew up about it. Thus, it is told, one day, at Naples, he astonished the audience with his dexterous playing on the harpsichord, chiefly with that left hand one finger of which wore a ring. The Neapolitans believed it to be witchcraft. It was the ring, they said, that enabled him to play with such prodigious skill. The public made a disturbance and Mozart was forced to begin again, after removing his ring.

It is to be believed he was fairly sensitive to the rapidity of the movement, judging by the letter he wrote his sister after competing with Clementi:



"He is a *ciarlatano*," he wrote, "like all Italians. He writes on a sonata *presto*, *prestissimo* and *alla breve* and he plays it *allegro* in four-time. I can swear to it, for I heard him myself."



In another letter Mozart criticizes exaggerated speed: "The eyes have no time to see, or the fingers to find the keys. However it is much easier to play a passage quickly than slowly. In the swift passages you can miss notes without anyone noticing it; but is it beautiful?"

\* \* \*

What must have caused the error and promoted belief in this pretended slowness is the old writing. "This white notation of the vocal music of the Renaissance, for example, assumes, in modern eyes, a solemn, slow character, but did not, nevertheless, exclude light, rapid movements, any more than the heavy Gothic characters excluded gaiety or grace from the works of the old poets.<sup>1</sup>

The *alla breve* movement, very frequent in Couperin, in Bach, in Philipp Emanuel, in Mozart, must also have been the cause of this slow interpretation. The performers often pay no attention to the bar which crosses the  and take the ordinary movement instead of playing twice as fast. French composers replaced  by a figure 2 which they inscribed at the beginning of the composition and which often escapes the performer's notice. This sign should not be confused with the 2 which we find after the key in Rameau and which simply indicates that the piece is to be played in two-time.

Ph. Em. Bach admonishes those virtuosi whose profession consists in playing rapidly and who astonish the eyes without touching the heart, dazzling the ears without charming them.

"I recognize however," he continues, "the merit, the

<sup>1</sup> Michel Brenet, *Palestrina*.



utility, the necessity of speed in execution, and do not believe I approve those stiff, indolent hands which do us the favor of lulling us to sleep, which under the pretext of *bel canto* are incapable of giving life to their instrument and which, through the irritating jumble of yawn-provoking ideas, deserve more reproaches than those who play too rapidly. These last can at least be corrected. Their fire can be lessened, whereas the hypocondriac who unburdens himself until his lusterless fingers are sore can never hope to improve."

I anticipate however this customary response: "What was then considered very quick would to-day be regarded as the most moderate movement." Fortunately Quantz has left sufficient information on that score to destroy this far too widespread commonplace. Not having at his disposal a metronome of which however he already possessed a certain notion, for Loulié, quoted by him, speaks, in his *Elements ou Principes de Musique* (1698), of a similar machine called the *chronomètre*, he thought it simpler to employ the human pulse. Since there may be a difference between the heart-beat of a man "of a furious and sanguine temperament" and that of a "cold, flegmatic being," he establishes the number of heart-beats of a man in good health at eighty a minute. This corresponds closely to the number 80 of the Maelzel metronome.

According to Quantz's indications, each bar of an *allegro alla breve* should be executed in the duration of a simple pulse-beat, one  $\underline{\text{J}}$  of which lasts half a beat, corresponding on the metronome to  $\underline{\text{J}} = 160$ . Consequently there is enough in ancient music to justify the most fiery speed. Quantz devotes a long chapter

to indicating the precise duration of all the movements and all the French dances. I have long experimented both with the pulse and with the metronome, and I can affirm that this movement is no slower than that of modern music. It often seems to me a little too quick even for Bach's works. It would evidently be out of place to adopt his indications for all music. Secular pieces were always executed in a livelier movement than religious music.

The Italian and German compositions were lighter and livelier than the French. Rousseau and Voltaire speak of the slowness of French singing — strange contrast with the vivacity of the nation<sup>1</sup> — in which the influence of instrumental music is felt. Rousseau's and Voltaire's opinion is exaggerated, for French music had adopted a moderate movement without abusing either speed or slowness.

Often it did not seem necessary to inscribe the movement of a vocal composition. The dances could also let their rhythm and movement be foreseen; but with time composers used a dance title without keeping strictly to its movement.

Since these exceptions are not very numerous — for again Mattheson and Quantz give us proofs to the contrary — knowledge of the seventeenth and eighteenth century dances can be of great service to us.

Neither should we take too literally and interpret in the present manner the tempo signs found in the old editions, for their meaning has greatly changed. I have already indicated above<sup>2</sup> the difference between the *andante* of the eighteenth century and that of to-day.

<sup>1</sup> J. J. Rousseau, *Dictionnaire de la Musique*. Voltaire, *Le Siècle de Louis XIV.*

<sup>2</sup> In the chapter on *Tradition*.

The *grave*, for example, in French overtures, requires a pompous but animated movement.

The *tempo rubato* has little in common with what we to-day understand by this movement. It is a simple ornament.

Mozart already speaks of the *tempo rubato* in our modern conception, and almost exactly as Chopin understood it.<sup>1</sup>

"People perceive now," he writes his father, "that I make no grimaces and that none the less I play with much expression . . . They cannot understand that, in the *tempo rubato* for an *adagio*, the left hand should know nothing. The left hand cannot yield."

It must not be thought however that, before him, our *tempo rubato* was unknown. Already Frescobaldi and Frohberger advised performers to avoid all strict measure and to abandon themselves freely to the movements.

When we read in Quantz that the *adagio assai*, in four beats, should be executed in the time of two beats of the pulse for each eighth of a bar, which makes  $\text{♪} = 40$ , we should not be frightened by this slowness. For, in the *adagio assai* group, Quantz included the *lento* and the *largo*. We see then that the old movements are about the same as those of to-day and that this pretended slowness, in the name of a tradition, is founded upon nothing solid.

\* \* \*

What is called tradition is the long, grey patriarchal beard with which all the authors of the past are tricked out. We are so used to saying "Old Bach," "Papa Haydn" (poor Haydn who never had the good

<sup>1</sup> Cf., p. 156.

fortune to be a father), that in our minds we cannot picture them otherwise than as afflicted with old age and with an ever grave, shuffling gait.

We read in travel books that leaders of caravans sing certain songs which made their majestic beasts march much faster than any use of the whip. If we but knew the secret, we should employ it in nearly all reconstitutions of old music.

Let us be careful however not to fall into the opposite exaggeration, into that *prestissimo* so dear to virtuosi. I am far from wishing to defend abuses of speed; but I confess it is not so much the exaggerated tempo that annoys me as the quality itself of the rapid movements. The wildest gallop of a thoroughbred always remains noble; but in the *allegro* of certain performers there is something or other which evokes the thoughtless brutality of the machine or the feverish haste of the traveler afraid of "missing his train."

## 5. ORNAMENTS

Wagner was accustomed to say to his musicians:

"My children, look out for the little notes. The big ones will take care of themselves."

It was good taste in the last century to ridicule the ornaments of the old music. Some did so because they found it easier to make fun of them than to execute them, which would have required rather minute studies. Others wished to persuade us that these embroideries were but a consequence of the thin sonority of the harpsichord and that if the seventeenth and eighteenth century authors had known our modern piano they would never have abused this *papillote* to such an extent. That is indeed the opinion of Marmontel, of Le Coupey, of Méreaux and of others.

*Book of instruments* →

The human voice and the eighteenth century violin lent themselves to prolonged vibrations as well as to-day. Why then should we find a rich ornamentation in the vocal music and in the violin compositions?

Even more than Wagner, the old composers set store by their ornaments.

"There should be recognized three principal conditions for a good execution," they said: "good interpretation, good '*manières*' and good 'fingering.'"

"No one," said Ph. Em. Bach in his *Versuch*, Vol. 1, p. 51., "has ever doubted the need of *manières*. This can easily be proved, for we find them everywhere in great profusion. When you are aware of their utility, you cannot do without them. They bind the notes together, they animate them, they give them, when necessary, a particular importance. They render them "amiable," arouse the attention and help make the meaning of the music understood. A commonplace composition can be enhanced by ornaments, whereas the best song, without them, appears empty and monotonous."

The notion, propagated by Bülow, that an embroidery which threatens to efface the design itself should be rejected as a parasitical embellishment, has not much correspondence with the ideas held on this score by the seventeenth and eighteenth century masters. They set as much store by their parasitical embellishments as by the distinctness of their design, if not more. The fact is they loved this *style* "*maniéré*" bristling with subtile points, with studied allusions, with coquetry, artifices and delicate whimsicalities.

Nor in adopting severer or more grandiose lines for the church, did they fear to attenuate them with fine attire, delicate embroideries and rich dress which



took nothing from their faith or from their enthusiasm and which often harmonized marvellously with the chasing, the gold and the enamel of the chapels.

The most grandiose chant, when not embellished, adorned, appeared to them a great prison cell; and that is why they fought with such energy, not against the complete suppression of the ornaments, being unable to foresee such an act of barbarism on the part of future publishers and republishers, but against the slightest alteration of a *manière*.

"I am always surprised," says Couperin, "after the pains I have taken to indicate the *agréments* which are appropriate to my compositions and of which I have given separately a tolerably intelligible explanation in a particular method known as *L'Art de toucher le Clavecin*,<sup>1</sup> to hear those who have learned them without following my indications. This negligence is all the more unpardonable in that it is not a matter of choice to introduce such ornaments as one wishes. I declare that my compositions should be executed as I have marked them and that they will never produce a certain impression upon persons of real taste so long as everything I have indicated is not observed to the letter, without augmentation or diminution."

"A misplaced *appogiatura*," says Gluck, "a shake, a *roulade*, can destroy the effect of an entire scene."

Muffat defends the French ornaments against the prejudices of certain German musicians.

"Those," he says, "who indiscreetly decry the ornaments and embellishments of the French method, as if these obscured the air or the harmony, have certainly paid very little attention to this matter or else they

<sup>1</sup> Paris, 1717.



have never heard real pupils play, but only perhaps false imitators of the school of the late M. Lully?"

All the authors carefully indicated the way of working out their ornaments. To remove these or to suppress them is a sacrilege similar to that which would be committed in lopping off the wings, the gargoyles, the chimeras and other ornaments of Notre-Dame de Paris, in order to give it a smooth surface and the severe lines of a Greek temple.

Writers wish to make us believe that Bach made hardly any use of ornaments. Forkel first stated this:

"It was customary," he said, "at the beginning of the last century, to surcharge all the notes written for the instruments with strokes and with ornaments placed sometimes above, sometimes below these notes—a fashion which we have just applied, quite recently, to vocal music. Bach showed some indulgence for this habit, but his error was of short duration and he soon returned to a purer taste, to nature," etc.

However, we see a wealth of ornaments in the *Inventions* and the *Sinfonie*, in his *Aria mit 30 Veränderungen* and nearly everywhere. What may have suggested this error to Forkel and all the rest is the fact that Bach often worked out his ornaments in big notes.<sup>1</sup> He was even reproached with this, for it diminished the beauty and the graphic subtlety of the writing.<sup>2</sup> The *Italian Concerto* was often cited as a model of ornamental sobriety.

<sup>1</sup> All the *manières*, all the little ornaments, in short everything included in the *method* of accomplished playing, he (Bach) expresses formally in full notes, and this not only takes from his works the beauty of the harmony but, in addition, renders the melody entirely unintelligible." *Scheibe, Critischer Musikus*, 1737. Quoted by A. Pirro, *L'Esthétique de J.-S. Bach*.

<sup>2</sup> Marpurg advises writing the *long appoggiaturas* in big notes, although the graphic beauty suffers from it. Marpurg, *Anleitung zum Clavierspiel*, Berlin, 1753, p. 48.

Here is how the *Andante* of this *Concerto* would have looked had Bach written the signs instead of working out the ornaments in notes:

Andante

*Andante* *forte*

This page contains eight systems of musical notation, each consisting of a treble and bass staff. The music is written in a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a 3/4 time signature. The tempo is marked *Andante* at the beginning, and the dynamics include *forte* and *pp* (pianissimo). The notation includes various note values, rests, and articulation marks, with some passages featuring dense sixteenth-note patterns. The page is numbered 132 in the top right corner.

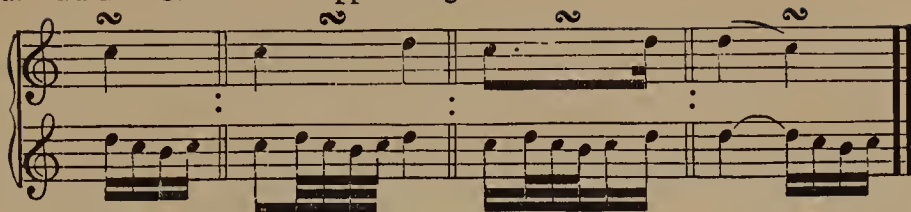
This page contains six systems of musical notation for piano. Each system consists of a treble staff and a bass staff. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and accidentals. Some notes are labeled with letters: G, H, and A. The first system shows a sequence of notes in the treble staff, with G, H, H, H, H, H, G, G, H, H, G, H, H, G. The second system shows a sequence of notes in the treble staff, with G, H, G, H, H, G, d, d, a, a, G, H, G. The third system shows a sequence of notes in the treble staff, with G, G, G, G, G, G, G, G, G, G, G, G, G, G. The fourth system shows a sequence of notes in the treble staff, with G, G, G, G, G, G, G, G, G, G, G, G, G, G. The fifth system shows a sequence of notes in the treble staff, with G, G, G, G, G, G, G, G, G, G, G, G, G, G. The sixth system shows a sequence of notes in the treble staff, with G, G, G, G, G, G, G, G, G, G, G, G, G, G.





FACSIMILE OF THE EDITION ENGRAVED BY BACH.

a. Turn — Cadence — Doppelschlag —



b. Port de voix — Vorschlag — Appoggiatura — Accent —



c. Suspension — Verbeissen —



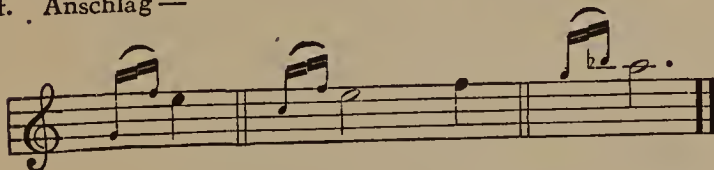
d. Slide or Slur — Coulé ou flatté — Schleifer —



e. Mordent — Pincé — Mordant —



f. Anschlag —



## EXPLANATION OF THE ORNAMENTS



*Explanation of the Ornaments*

G. *Manières arbitraires* (arbitrary ornaments, *willkürliche Manieren*). They had no sign and their employment depended entirely upon the interpreter who diminished certain big notes "at will" to embellish the melodic line with arabesques and variants.

H. *Tempo rubato*, anticipation or delay. This ornament has no sign either and belongs to the category of *arbitrary ornaments*.

\*Ornamental signs indicated by Bach: five beats (*pincé, mordant*), five shakes (*trillo*) and four turns (*cadence, doppelt-cadence*).

O. Simple *appogiature* written by Bach in small notes.

We thus find in the 49 measures of the *Andante* of the *Italian Concerto* more than 150 ornaments only 16 of which have been indicated by Bach, 14 by lines and 2 in small notes. All the others have been worked out by him in big notes. The abundance of arbitrary ornaments is easily explained, being given the Italian character of the composition.


Two ways of ornamenting an *adagio* were distinguished at the epoch: the French taste demanded a precise execution of all the *ports de voix*, shakes, beats, *battements*, *flattés* and *agréments* indicated by the author without adding others to them; the Italian taste admitted, in addition, the arbitrary ornaments (*willkürliche Manieren*) which necessitated a certain science of counterpoint and some personal invention. These are variants, rolls, arabesques, the *Grosso* (*Walze und Rolle*), the *Circolo mezzo* (*Halbcirckel*), the *Tirata* (which Mozart's father compared to firing a gun), the *Ribattuta*, and others: *rollende Figuren*, which are

manifold and vary, forming what was called *vermischte Manieren*, where all sorts of ornaments were intermingled.

Diruta,<sup>1</sup> Praetorius,<sup>2</sup> Mattheson,<sup>3</sup> Leopold Mozart,<sup>4</sup> Quantz,<sup>5</sup> Marpurg,<sup>6</sup> give us detailed descriptions of them.

Bach has left a table of ornaments in Wilhelm-Friedemann's *Clavier büchlein*, but it is far from complete. It contains only the shake, the beat, the turn, the accent and several combinations of two composite ornaments, for instance the shake and beat, accent and beat, or double turn.

The slide or slur (*coulé*, *Schleifer*), the *arpeggio*, the *Nachschlag*, the *acciacatura* are lacking in the table, although these ornaments are very frequent in Bach's works, like moreover the arbitrary ornaments.

The working out of one author's ornaments must not be applied to another's compositions. Thus, for example, the *accent*, in Bach, is not to be confused with François Couperin's *accent*. This later corresponds to the German *Nachschlag*, while the former is a *port de voix* X. Purcell marks the shakes with the following sign ||. Gottlieb Muffat employs |: to indicate a slide or slur. Others express it also by a bar | instead of .

<sup>1</sup> Diruta, *Il Transilvano, Dialogo sopra il vero modo, di Sonar Organi et Istromenti da peina*. Venice, 1593.

<sup>2</sup> Prætorius, *Syntagma Musicum*, Lib. III, 16, 18-19.

<sup>3</sup> Mattheson, *Der Vollkommene Capellmeister*, 1739.

<sup>4</sup> Leopold Mozart, *Gründliche Violinschule*, 1756.

<sup>5</sup> Quantz, *Versuch*.

<sup>6</sup> Marpurg, *Anleitung*.

## XV

### THE HARPSICHORD

A VERY great confusion exists as to the harpsichord, the clavichord, the spinet and the forte-piano.

These terms are employed without distinction, though they designate totally different instruments.

In Germany the confusion is perhaps even greater than in France, for seventeenth and eighteenth century musical writers often wrote *Clavier* without further distinction or alternated the words *Flügel*, *Clavicymbel*, *Cembalo*, which caused the ill-informed to believe there was a difference between these instruments. This was still further complicated by the fact that *Flügel* and *Clavier* also designate our modern instruments. Add that in the later editions of Ph. Em. Bach's *Versuch*, unscrupulous publishers took the liberty of replacing the terms *harpsichord* and *clavichord* with *forte-piano* and *pianino*, and we shall not be surprised to find frequent errors nearly everywhere — even, at times, in the most learned historians.

I have before me the catalogue of the Mozart Museum at Salzburg, in which I read:

“The little clavichord (spinet) sic of five octaves, which Mozart still used for five months while composing *The Enchanted Flute*, *Tito*, the *Requiem* and the *Free Masons' Cantata*, as proved by a note of Constance, State Councilor Nissen's wife and Mozart's widow.”

If it was a spinet it could not be at the same time

a clavichord, this latter having its strings struck, the former plucked.

*Clavier*, as used by Philipp Emanuel, by Marpurg, by Quantz, by Mattheson, is a general term for all keyboard instruments.

The *Flügel* is the harpsichord, an instrument different from the *clavichord* and from the *forte-piano* and not even belonging to the same family.

A fairly widespread notion is that the *clavichord* was a very popular instrument in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as much so as the harpsichord, if not more.

Now in France it was almost unknown. Bonnet, in his *Histoire de la Musique*, does not even mention it.

In the *Supplément du Dictionnaire des Sciences*, of the eighteenth century, we read:

“It is presumed that the clavichord is slightly less old than the spinet. This instrument has a very sweet sound. It serves to accompany light voices but should not be combined with other instruments. It has not enough force to make itself heard.”

In another article, in the same *Supplément*, we find:

“Ordinarily, the deep notes of the clavichord have the sound of a cauldron and the high notes none at all. The clavichord can scarcely have more, at most, than three octaves the sound of which is agreeable.

“A celebrated German musician named *Bach*,<sup>1</sup> at present musical director of the city of Hambourg, judges a harpsichord player only when he has heard him play the *clavichord*.”

The clavichord had a very limited influence upon musical art and never created a school, for there were never any “clavichordists.”

<sup>1</sup> Philipp Emanuel.

In Germany alone that instrument played a certain rôle, but not the one attributed to it to-day. Excluded from *la grande musique*, it served to accompany a light voice, or as an instrument for beginners.

Philipp Emanuel recommended it principally as an instrument for study, because its touch was lighter and because it was, more than the harpsichord, capable of *piano*, of *forte* and of holding when handled properly. Thus the student could accustom himself to giving expression to his playing. As Marpurg is of an opposite opinion and deems the harpsichord preferable for beginners because of its strings, with their longer vibrations, Philipp Emanuel's opinion cannot be taken as general.

Whatever the French have said, the clavichord is an instrument of a fascinating sonority and it is easy to understand the fondness of a player like Forkel who preferred it to the forte-piano; but upon what is based the assertion that J. S. Bach preferred the clavichord to the harpsichord? Forkel's French translator, Félix Grenier, went still farther: wherever, in the original, he saw either *Flügel*, or *Clavicymbel*, or *Clavier*, or *Clavessin*, he put simply: *Clavicorde*.

What charming simplification! We find, then, in the translation: clavichords with two keyboards, clavichords with registers and other monsters which have never existed, *concerti grossi* for two clavichords — as much as to say, for two mute keyboards.

And, to avoid monotony, he sometimes introduces, quite by chance, the English word *Harpsichord*, instead of the French *Clavecin*.

Even in the list of works engraved during Bach's lifetime and corrected by the Cantor's own hand, we find these precious "modifications":



“*Clavierübung*, or *Exercises for the clavichord!* consisting of a concerto in the Italian style and an overture in the French manner written for a harpsichord with two keyboards.”

What nonsense — clavichord exercises written for a harpsichord with two keyboards!

The exact title of the edition, of which I have seen the copy corrected by Bach at the British Museum, reads: *fuer ein Clavicymbel mit zweyen Manualen*; and Forkel gives an exact copy of it.

I have chosen this example among a thousand, and what more natural than that such editions should create confusion in the minds of readers!

\* \* \*

Another very widespread opinion is the following:

Harpsichord players were very dissatisfied with their instruments and dreamed of our modern piano.

While recognizing the difference between it and the bowed instruments which hold the sounds longer, Couperin says: “The harpsichord has in its way a brilliancy and a distinctness that are scarcely to be found in the other instruments . . . The harpsichord is perfect as to compass and brilliant by itself.

“This instrument has its properties just as the violin has its. If the harpsichord does not swell its sounds, if the repeated strokes on a single note are not extremely suited to it, it has other advantages which are: *precision, distinctness, brilliancy and compass.*”

Ph. Em. Bach always speaks with enthusiasm of the harpsichord and of all the keyboard instruments of his epoch.

“It would not be difficult,” he writes, “to demon-

strate their perfection, for they unite the qualities of all the other instruments."

After enumerating the difficulties of execution, he says that everyone is so attracted by the charm of the keyboard instruments that a player does not let himself be discouraged by the trouble they require.

I have spoken above of the importance attributed to the harpsichord in the orchestra.<sup>1</sup>

This king of keyed instruments has been considered not only excellent but perfect, and it was believed that, such as it was, it would last forever, without ever laying down its scepter.

Balbastre, Louis XVI's organist, said to Pascal Taskin, the famous inventor of the *registre de buffle*, who had just tried the first piano-forte introduced into the Tuileries: "Try as you will, my friend, this new-comer will never dethrone the majestic harpsichord."

"The piano-forte is a kettle-maker's invention compared with the harpsichord," said Voltaire.

Philipp Emanuel foresaw the reproach of dryness and lack of expression which can be brought against the harpsichord, but he asserted that this could only be the result of bad execution.

We exaggerate to-day when we claim that the harpsichord could produce short sounds only, for the vibrations of its strings are as prolonged as those of a piano without pedals. I have proved this many times.

It is also possible to obtain the *piano* and the *forte* on the harpsichord, especially that with two keyboards, taking *piano* on one and *forte* on the other.

Quantz and Philipp Emanuel even give instructions making it possible to obtain the *piano* and the *forte* on a *cembalo* with one keyboard.

<sup>1</sup> See page 115

Le Gallois, in his letter to Mlle. Reygnault de Salier referring to music (1680), asserts that Jacques Champion de Chambonnières, by his method of striking the keys of the harpsichord, drew from this instrument sounds so mellow that no one could equal him in that art.

"All things considered," said Jean Denis, in his *Accord de l'Espinette* (1650), "it has been impossible to get any better instrument than the spinet... the finest instrument in the world and the most perfect, seeing that no music can be written which it does not express and execute all by itself, there being harpsichords with two keyboards to compass all the unisons, something the lute is incapable of."

And La Fontaine, in his *Epître à M. de Nyert*, on the opera:

De cet aimable Enfant <sup>1</sup> le clavecin unique  
Me touche plus qu'Isis <sup>2</sup> et toute sa musique.  
Je ne veux rien de plus, je ne veux rien de mieux  
Pour contenter l'esprit et l'oreille et les yeux . . .

These quotations could be multiplied indefinitely.

\* \* \*

How did the "phlegmatic forte-piano" come to dethrone the "majestic harpsichord?"

That is a more complicated question than is thought.

The "perfect beauty" of the lute has always been universally recognized. Now, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, this instrument disappeared entirely . . . Why?

Titon du Tillet <sup>3</sup> said he had met M. Falco, a great amateur of the lute who declared it would be hard to

<sup>1</sup> See note p. 53

<sup>2</sup> Opera by Lully,

<sup>3</sup> *Le Parnasse Français*, 1732. Page 405.

find in Paris more than three or four venerable old men who played that instrument. "He invited me to visit him and when he had placed me in an old arm-chair he played me five or six lute compositions, looking at me meanwhile with a tender air and from time to time shedding tears on his lute. I could not help mingling some tears with his; and thus we parted."

Towards the end of the seventeenth century the best lutes were in demand to be transformed into theorbos by lengthening the handle and adding extra strings.

A little later, the fashion having suddenly fastened upon the *vielle*, formerly left to beggars and to village minstrels, the *marquises* of the court of Louis XV were seen hunting for lutes, "those contemptible Gothic instruments which are still extant, to have them transformed into *vielles*," says Michel Brenet.<sup>1</sup>

In Abbé Cabarsus' letter on *La Mode des Instruments de la Musique* (1739), a professor of the *vielle* which was then beginning to be the vogue, criticizes musical instruments:

"If Madame will glance at all the musical instruments, she will find none perfect, save the *vielle*!"

At the monster concert given at Nuremberg, May 12, 1643, and entitled: *L'Origine, le Progrès, l'Usage et l'Abus de la noble Musique*, in the number on the programme intended to illustrate the abuse of noble music, compositions were performed on instruments which had become too vulgar or had fallen into disuse. Among them were the *vielle*, the bag-pipes and the *chalumeaux*, instruments beginning to be very fashionable in France.

Hubert le Blanc devoted a whole book<sup>2</sup> to de-

<sup>1</sup> *Notes sur l'histoire du Luth en France*, 1899.

<sup>2</sup> *Défense de la Basse de Viole contre les Entreprises du Violon et les Prétentions du Violoncelle*, 1740.

scribing the strife between the violin and the viol. According to him, it was merely the merit of filling "the concavity of a vast hall" which made the vulgar violin triumph over the tender viol.

It would be a mistake to believe that the harpsichord was dethroned for the same reason.

The piano-forte, in its original form, and later at the time of Philipp Emanuel, of Haydn, of Mozart and even of Beethoven, down to the middle of the nineteenth century, was sonorously inferior to the harpsichord. Quantz, Marpurg and Bach's son state this on every page of their writings. Those who have a little acquaintance with these instruments can moreover entertain no doubt as to it.

People persist in finding in the harpsichord, as M. Pirro has so well said, merely the "little quavering voice of an old man in a *jabot*," completely overlooking the power of its deep notes and that simple, massive sonority which can be obtained by coupling the registers.

It is interesting to note that the attempts to strengthen the sonority of the harpsichord were relatively very rare, the innumerable inventions being above all destined to augment the sonorous variety or to prolong the sound.

In 1610 Jean Heyden invented a harpsichord which was capable of prolonging the sounds and which was presented as a special attraction at that famous Nuremberg concert of which I have spoken above.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, the bow-harpsichord (*Hohlfeldtischer Bogenflügel*) was all the rage in Germany.

The three great potentates of music, Philipp Emanuel, Quantz and Marpurg, regarded it as the ideal



instrument<sup>1</sup> and in every respect superior to the piano-forte, to the clavichord and even to the harpsichord.

"We could wish that all the harpsichords might be constructed on Hohlfeld's system," wrote Philipp Emanuel. In spite of its many qualities, this instrument had no success eventually.

The harpsichord-theorbo had a softer sonority, as did also the harpsichord-lute for which J. S. Bach had written divine compositions.

The admirable invention of the manufacturer, Pascal Taskin, who replaced the feather-tips with bits of leather, produced, not a sonorous augmentation but a *softer plucking which caressed the string*. This invention was adopted everywhere under the name of *registre de buffle*.

This register was very much liked and it persisted even in the forte-pianos where it could be obtained by employing the B and C pedals simultaneously. The third pedal of the piano-forte was moreover called the *jeu de buffle*.

The piano-forte had also a lute effect, like the harpsichord, obtained by coupling the first two pedals, A and B.

There were, towards the end of the eighteenth century and at the beginning of the nineteenth, pianos which had these first two pedals only. They were called *ordinary pianos*.

<sup>1</sup> In the supplement to the *Dictionnaire des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers* which appeared in 1776, at Amsterdam, F. D. C. tells of having seen an instrument of this sort at Berlin: "The maker had substituted gut for steel springs, and a sort of bow with parchment-covered wheels. The bow was a large band, formed by a number of horse-hairs knotted at the end. This band of hairs, forming a ring, passed over two cylinders. At one end of the bow was a little sachet of muslin, or some other light material, full of rosin, which continually rubbed the hairs."

The English grand pianos had but two, that marked B, to lift the dampers, and that marked D, to produce a *pianissimo*, also called *pédale céleste*.

The piano-forte, in its primitive form, is a charming instrument, of a delicious sonority, the resources of which are sometimes more varied than those of the modern piano but very feeble, very attenuated in tone.

It was not, therefore, because of its power that it was able to supplant the harpsichord. The double keyboard began to be superfluous in Haydn's and Mozart's time, as music gradually lost its polyphonic character and the descriptive style became rare in the realm of the piano.

Furthermore, the piano-forte offered great practical advantages. Its less complicated construction, its lower price, its easier and more lasting tuning were in its favor.

Yet, in spite of all these merits, it took nearly a century to be adopted. In Bach's time its rôle was insignificant. In Bach's son's time the harpsichord was preferred to it. Mozart and Haydn used it equally with the harpsichord, without showing preference for either of these instruments.

Its real triumph dates from the beginning of the nineteenth century only.

And the king of instruments which, for three centuries, charmed the leisure of highborn ladies, enlivened the solitude of cloisters, was the confident of Frescobaldi, of Bach and of Couperin, reigned as master in church and in theatre, was now — dethroned, disdained and despised — to go and end miserably its existence, transformed into desk, into dressing-table, into wardrobe; or, thanks to the rich paintings of Boucher, of Teniers and of Vanloo, was to be relegated,

beneath the dust of museums, to the laughter of gaping idlers who understood nothing of its elegance, of its beauty, of its nobility, of its splendour.

*Sic transit gloria mundi!*

This exclamation is very often found on old harpsichords and spinets. It signified, it is believed, that the glory of this world vanishes like its sound.

## XVI

### VIRTUOSI

VIRTUOSITY is not an invention of recent date, the majority of the composers in times past having been great virtuosi. Bach owed his fame even more to his perfection on the organ and on the harpsichord than to his works. Handel, Mozart, Haydn were great virtuosi. Father Mersenne, in *Harmonie Universelle* (1636), speaks with enthusiasm of Jacques Champion de Chambonnières in whom the spinet "found its last master," in spite of the fact that the Marquis de Chambonnières prided himself on being a man of the world, playing the harpsichord for his pleasure only.

The English virginalists had to have astonishing skill, their works presenting greater difficulties than Liszt's *Rhapsodies*. In general, an extreme importance was attached to good execution. Lully took the violin from the hands of a player who had made a mistake and broke it over his head. He made the orchestra of his operas rehearse as many as thirty times. Ph. Em. Bach says that, with the best orchestras, there should be several rehearsals, even in the easiest pieces, because of a few notes.

J. S. Bach dreamed of hearing Handel play and travelled to hear Reincken. He even played for Reincken who, already very old, cried, when he had heard him: "I believed this art was going to die with me, but I see you have made it live again."

Frescobaldi could even play the harpsichord with his

hands crossed, a feat not easy to imitate. Hiller says that Bach played with his feet passages which others would have found it hard to execute with their hands.

Bruhns, a pupil of Buxtehude and author of admirable organ compositions (1666-1697), often executed violin compositions playing the bass himself on the pedal-board of the organ.

The demands made upon soloists were manifold. The harpsichord player had to be able to improvise in the different styles, to develop a given theme in accordance with the several rules of harmony, to transpose from one tone to another *prima vista*. He had to possess thoroughly the figured bass according to strict counterpoint or in the *style galant*. He had to be able to execute it even when it was not figured, either to accompany a soloist or to perform the *basso continuo* in the orchestra.

The demands upon the organists were even greater.<sup>1</sup>

It was not enough, affirms Ph. Em. Bach, for a performer, like a real pedant, to see and execute the figures in mere accordance with the accepted rules. He was required to have taste, fancy and invention.

The seventeenth and eighteenth century artist could not therefore abandon himself exclusively to the sportive passions in the execution. The public was very sensitive to the merit of the difficulty overcome, without however being uniquely absorbed in the cold calculation of technical combinations, and fireworks. The soloist had necessarily to be a good musician, which is not always the case with virtuosi to-day. In our art nurseries, music is easily grafted on wild stock which does not yield readily to the process. After an

<sup>1</sup> Tobias Norlind, *Was ein Organist im Iften Jahrhundert wissen muste*. J. M. G.





Chopin's piano used by him while staying with George Sand  
at the monastery of Villedemosa, Majoica, November, 1838  
(Collection *Wanda Landowsky*)



intense labour, the zealous student, in spite of an anti-musical nature, can succeed in acquiring what are called "magnificent fingers"; and, by constantly practising the two or three dozen pieces which form the outfit of every virtuoso, he can become a great violonist, a great pianist, without being musician or artist. As the repertory has scarcely changed for thirty or forty years, the interpretation of the same pieces causes not the least embarrassment. The little ones imitate the big ones, exaggerating their genre. Then, become big in their turn, they are imitated by their pupils.

The artistic motto is always the same: "It is better to hit hard than hit accurately, and recoil before nothing capable of producing an effect!"

"The more I play in public," wrote Clara Schumann, "the more I hate pure virtuosity."

I believe the first virtuoso, in our conception of the word, was the famous pianist Steibelt.

He made extensive tours in England and Germany and visited Vienna where he came into conflict with Beethoven, even appearing to have the advantage in the opinion of a certain set of amateurs. His detractors reproached him with the immoderate use of the *tremolo*, the unevenness of his playing and the weakness of his left hand.

His favorite style was fantasies with variations, brilliant rondos and bacchanales with tambourine accompaniments executed by his wife. Norvins asserts that he "dethroned Dussek by the charlatanry of his pedal play." He confesses himself, in his *Méthode*, that his activity on the pedals made everyone accuse him of charlatanry, but that they changed their minds.

Perhaps he was the initiator of that *mise en scène* since adopted by so many pianists. In any event, he brought to it the consummate science of a man ignorant of none of the weaknesses of his contemporaries.

Norvins was witness to it at the home of his cousin, Mme. de la Briche.

"In these magnificent salons, crowded with the aristocracy of birth and of money, in this sort of literary and musical academy frequented by the élite of intellectual France—poets, artists and savants—Steibelt presented himself, preceded by his reputation as a magical and fantastic virtuoso, his eye somber and fatal, his brow burdened with clouds, his bearing inspired. He walked straight to the piano, sat down at it like a conqueror and began with a brilliant improvisation which brought him a thunder of applause.

"Then he reflected for several seconds and, in a stern voice, with an imperious gesture, ordered the lights out—even the two candles on the piano. The fire on the hearth alone lighted the room and its ruddy gleams danced on the anxious faces of the ladies seated in the front row. Everyone, puzzled by these . . . preparations, until then unknown in the world of artists, exchanged a few words, in a low voice, with his neighbours. A series of quick, abrupt arpeggios commanded silence.

"Then a fresh pause. Finally, when he no longer heard the slightest murmur, Steibelt struck heavy chords on the keyboard; and suddenly there broke loose a veritable musical hurricane . . . which bowed every head and clutched every heart.

"This séance sufficed Mme. de la Briche's curiosity. That lady left to those more enamoured than she of

fantastic harmonies, the privilege of receiving this demoniac musician."

Norvins speaks of still another of Steibelt's recitals: "Invited by the Marquise de Brisay, he absolutely refused to play, in spite of the instances, even the prayers, of his hostess. The situation was becoming painful for everyone, when a tall man walked straight up to Steibelt and, touching his arm, said to him, looking him straight in the eyes: "You are going to play, and at once!" Steibelt, as if fascinated by this apparition, turned frightfully pale and went, reeling, to the piano. His playing showed no effect of this sudden terror. Never had he been more pathetic and more thrilling. The artist went through his entire repertory. It was feared for a moment he could never be stopped."

Norvins learned later the secret of this enigma. The person whose intervention had so easily overcome Steibelt's obstinacy, was Baron Golz, Prussian Minister at the French Court. He knew, in detail, the whole story of his compatriot's past. Steibelt, at first protected by King Frederick William II, had committed a theft which had caused him to be driven from Berlin, and Baron Golz held against him a demand for extradition which he had but to present to the French Government.<sup>1</sup>

Steibelt died of want and exhaustion, at Petrograd, where he replaced Boïeldieu as director of the Italian Opera.

Oscar Commettant, in *Le Piano et les Pianistes*, tells a story of a virtuoso which seems improbable but which he declares to be absolutely authentic.

A certain great pianist, as admirable a performer as

<sup>1</sup> Norvins, *Mémorial*, published by L. Laurac de Laborie, Paris, 1896, quoted by Paul d'Estrées, *L'Art Musical*.



he was a skilful self-advertiser, conceived the idea of paying women twenty francs a concert to pretend to faint from pleasure in the midst of a *fantaisie* played so fast that it would have been humanly impossible to bring it to a conclusion. Once, at Paris, one of the women paid to faint missed her cue and fell into a deep sleep while the pianist played Weber's *Concerto*. Counting upon this woman's fainting-spell to interrupt the finale of that composition, he had taken it at an impossible tempo. What to do in this interesting case? Muddle it, like a vulgar pianist, or pretend to forget? No, he simply played the rôle which should have been filled by the fainter and fainted himself. The crowd pressed about the pianist, doubly phenomenal because of his lightning execution and of his sensitive organization. He was carried into the foyer, the men applauding madly, the women waving their handkerchiefs; and the "fainter," waking up fainted—perhaps really, this time—in despair at not having pretended to faint.

Bonnet tells us a story from Greek history which might have occurred in our day.

A famous flute player, Harmonides, a disciple of Timotheus, asked the latter what to do in order to win the music prize in a public festival at Athens. Timotheus pointed out to him the difficulties of this enterprise, among others the fact that "those who ordinarily decide in the festivals and spectacles are often those who are the least connoisseurs; that however they are the most stubborn, the most headstrong and cry the loudest, like those called to-day the *petits maîtres de l'Opéra*. Harmonides reflected upon these counsels and thought he could win the prize by playing a whole tone higher than usual on the flute; but

the very first time he went on the stage to perform he expired."

And, in every age, we encounter this striking fact, that artists, to please the vulgar taste, resort to turpidity, to force and to extravagant accents.

The eighteenth century did not lack "virtuosi" among the singers, men and women, for whom all art was often summed up in canary-like trills and nightingale sighings or in forcing the voice in order to display lung power.

Instrumentalists too were sometimes complained of: "Music to-day is no longer anything but the art of executing difficult things," says Pococurante in Voltaire's *Candide*, "and what is merely difficult does not please in the long run."

You will remember Gluck's neat *mot*. During the rehearsals of *Orphée* at the Académie Royale de Musique, Legros insisted upon shrieking, according to his method, the phrase of the entrance into Tartarus: "*Laissez-vous toucher par mes plaintes.*" One fine day the composer, exasperated, interrupted him in the midst of his period and sent him this blow full in the face: "Monsieur! Monsieur! You will be good enough to moderate your outcries! The devil take me if they howl like that in hell!"

The Italian *virtuosi* are the prototypes of our note-jugglers.

The public enjoyed them as a refinement, but people of taste thought that "the passion mimed by these beardless men were too open to the suspicion of being false" and that their voices lacked naturalness. For "they were like an instrument from which the workman had cut away wood to make it produce sounds." The modern virtuoso, with his muscles

atrophied or hypertrophied by mechanical work, is somewhat in the same situation.

\* \* \*

The opera created a theatrical style which should be kept for the theater without attempting to apply it to works of an intimate character.

There is a certain musical literature to which this showy interpretation can be adapted; but the classics certainly suffer from it. As for the music of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it does not at all lend itself to such interpretation, for it demands a quite different and almost absolutely opposite perfection.

\* \* \*

Chopin, who has become the war-horse of all the noisy interpreters, was himself the opposite of the virtuoso-type.

His interpretation, relates Moscheles, corresponded to his aspect, both delicate and dreamy. "It is only now I have heard him" he says, "that I begin to understand his music and explain feminine enthusiasm. His *ad libitum* which, with his interpreters, consists in an absolute lack of measure, is in him but the most gracious originality. Certain harshnesses in the modulations no longer shock me, for his fingers glide over these with a sylphlike lightness. His *piano* is so delicate that, to obtain the desired contrasts, he has no need of a powerful *forte*."

Chopin placed the ideal of piano-playing very high. The first lessons were, according to his pupils, a veritable martyrdom. The touch always appeared dry and the slightest detail which did not meet the mas-

ter's approval was severely repressed . . . To give the hand a position at once favorable and gracious, he made it touch the keyboard very lightly. His style was based essentially upon the refinement of the touch and upon the greatest simplicity of phrasing. He rejected all affectation and consequently every excessive change of tempo.

"How little the interpretation of our modern virtuosi resembles that dreamed of by Chopin!" exclaims the master's famous biographer, Professor Niecks, in his remarkable work, *Chopin als Mensch und Musiker*.

In one of the halls at Pleyel's is seen a little old faded mahogany piano ornamented with modest bronzes. It is Chopin's piano on which he composed the *Fantaisie in F minor*, the *Marche Funèbre*, the *Largo in D flat major*, *Préludes*, *Nocturnes* and *Mazurkas*.

The pianists and the employees of the establishment regard this relic piously, but not without a certain compassion . . . *petit son!*

*Petit son!* as Cherubini said contemptuously when the death of one of his instrumentalists was announced to him.

"His playing is elegant," said Fétis after Chopin's first concert at Paris, "light and gracious, remarkably brilliant and distinct, but he gets little sound out of his instrument."

After Chopin's first concert at Vienna, we read in the *Wiener Theater Zeitung*: "He but indicates lightly, as if talking in a distinguished company, without that rhetorical *aplomb* deemed indispensable by all virtuosi."

One day Lenz, Chopin's pupil, accompanied his

master to the Countess Cheremetiev's where the composer had promised to play variations on Beethoven's *Sonata in A flat major* (Op. 26). "He played admirably," Lenz relates. "I was wonderstruck but *only* by the beauty of the sound, by the touch, by the charm and by so pure a style . . . It was not Beethoven. It was too light, too feminine!" Returning, the pupil gave his frank opinion to his professor who replied: "I only indicate, suggest and leave it to my hearers to complete the picture."

They entered the house and when Chopin went into the neighboring room to change his clothes, Lenz had the audacity to begin playing the same Beethoven theme. The master, curious, entered in shirt-sleeves and, approaching the piano, listened attentively to the very end, after which, placing his hand on his pupil's shoulder, he said: "I am going to tell this to Liszt, it will amuse him. It is very well played; but should one speak in so declamatory a fashion?"

Liszt declares that everything resembling melodrama in music, in literature and in life, inspired Chopin with profound aversion. According to his pupils, his *tempo rubato* had little in common with the *rubato* of our virtuosi, with that *epileptical rubato* which makes a pell mell of the designs and the arabesques. *Rubato*, for Chopin, meant nonchalance, not disorder. The left hand had to keep the measure, while the right hand abandoned itself to its fancy, and he then said: "The left hand is the *maître de chapelle*."

All contemporaries are agreed as to the distinctness, the evenness of his playing and to his aversion for the turgid, emphatic style.

His pupil, Guttman, declares that Chopin's playing was always very calm and that the incomparable poet



of the piano rarely had recourse to the *fortissimo*. In the execution of the *Polonaise in A flat major*, for example, he did not display that thunderous strength to which certain virtuosi have accustomed us. He began the famous octave passage *pianissimo* and carried it through to the end without too crashing a dynamic progression. In general, he avoided every noisy effect and all fireworks.

Baron de Trémont said that Chopin was the "intimate pianist." If the Couperin of the nineteenth century should rise to-day from the tomb, he would certainly be surprised to see so much useless force and so many tasteless outbursts on the part of his interpreters.

"Monsieur Chopin, you repose me from the piano," said to him one day Auber, weary of the virtuosi who swarmed then as much as to-day.

## XVII

### MUSIC AND MAECENASES

3 PLUVIÔSE, year II, the mayor of Rouen thanked the composer Champion in the following terms for having offered the commune several patriotic airs:

“The arts have finally reached their goal which is no longer to amuse a certain number of fortunate beings who corrupted everything with their gold. Artists will no longer prostitute their industry to the caprices and the dissolute tastes of a debauched heart. You will be at the call of the Republic. The musician shall sing the victories of the *sans-culottes*, of vanquished prejudices and of reason waving its torch over the ruins of superstition.”<sup>1</sup>

It is easy to understand the initial infatuation, but this same old story has continued until to-day. To believe it, the Maecenases have in all ages been the greatest obstacle to the development of the arts. People are never tired of telling us the same anecdotes: Mozart badly received by a Count's servants, Haydn thee'd and thou'd by Prince Esterhazy; and as a climax, to prove to us that the situation of the artist in past centuries was the most contemptible possible, we are shown Lully clowning to make his king laugh. As if it were more degrading to make Louis XIV laugh than to bring tears into the eyes of a wholesale grocer's wife!

As late as Beethoven it was still the custom to dedi-

<sup>1</sup> Du Robec, *La Musique pendant la Terreur, Mercure Musical*.

cate one's works to influential men; but everyone looked with scorn upon dedications full of reverence and adulation and expressions like "your very humble, very devoted and very obedient servant," pitying their authors. People were unwilling to see in these epistles simple polite formulas or very sincere and well merited compliments for those who were often the salvation of art.

"Condemned to the sole end of charming the ears," said Wagner, "a luxurious distraction, music left its swaddling clothes . . ." etc.

Henceforth music was no longer to be the art of a few fortunate beings. Proletarians of all countries, unite! Beyruth will be the trysting-place of the *sans-culottes!*

Towards the end of his life Wagner had all the luck in the world. Enemy of the Maecenases, he found in the very heart of the nineteenth century a real Renaissance Maecenas; but before then he often struggled against cruel odds of material necessity and knocked at the door of some little patron of the arts with varying success. His life was not like that of a Palestrina, of a Haydn, of a Bach working in the tranquillity of their modest life and dedicating the fruits of their labours to some rich connoisseur whose protection or material aid permitted them to create new works. He fought like a true nineteenth century artist, with feverish agitation, reduced to the most humiliating need of pressing with all his might toward the light of day, in order not to starve. The admirable pages in which he tells us of it indirectly can not be read by a modern artist without emotion.

"Why do all these privileged mortals whose heart burns with the fire of divine inspiration leave their

sanctuaries? Why do they run thus, breathless, in the muddy streets of the capital? Why do they so eagerly seek bored, jaded people to whom they sacrifice at any price an inexpressible happiness? How many efforts, how much agitation, how much mortification, to have an opportunity to make this sacrifice! How many schemes and intrigues are they not reduced to during a good part of their lives to make the vulgar hear what they are never capable of understanding! Is it for fear the history of music will some day be interrupted or come to an end? Is this why they erase the most beautiful pages of the history of their own heart and break the divine tie which would have linked sympathetic hearts from century to century, while now it is question of all sorts of schools and of manners only? . . . Oh, if you were all my brothers and friends, I should make you an amicable proposal: I should induce you to compose music for yourselves alone and to follow, at the same time, some good trade or to speculate on the Stock Exchange.”<sup>1</sup>

\* \* \*

I have just reread Karl Maria Weber's letters and am still under the crushing impression produced by their perusal. You would think you were going through the mail of some theatrical promoter. There is nothing in them but talk about contracts, proposals, concerts, receipts, applications, publicity — all those flat, petty, degrading struggles inevitable however for the artist who, through want of a Maecenas, must himself offer his wares to the public . . . There are passages in this correspondence which would seem

<sup>1</sup> R. Wagner, *Le Musicien et la Publicité*. *Revue et Gazette musicale*, 1840, reproduced by the *Courrier musical*.

to us almost cynical, did we not know Weber's tender soul and the struggles an artist must go through to-day.

Here is a letter addressed to Gaensbacher, a composer of church music:

"MY DEAR BROTHER,

"Your long silence alarms me. Yet you must have received my letter of the twentieth in which I told you that *Silvana* had been *accepted*. To-day it is a sad circumstance that puts the pen into my hand, and I come to pour my sorrow into the heart of a friend. Day before yesterday I received from Gotteried the sad news that my dear old father had died and that he still thought of me in his last moments. Forgive then the disorder of this letter. Tell me who paid for the copies and drew a draft on me. Since copying costs less in Prague than here, have the two operas copied with their librettos. On the twenty-fifth we gave our second and last concert at Berlin. It was not successful and did little more than cover the expenses . . ."

And the letter (the 18th) goes on, ending with these effusions of a man entirely absorbed in the struggle:

"My music becomes the fashion here (in Berlin) . . . What new work have you in hand? I am looking for a subject and a libretto.

Your faithful brother,

WEBER."

One would not suspect that this was written by that "sad dreamer" the day after his father's death. The other letters are not much different. Sometimes we find in them things which almost border on the comic — in the seventeenth, for example: "Do not worry, my dear brother," he writes to the same



Gaensbacher, "I shall take charge of the *publicity* for your *Requiem* in the *Journal Elégant*."

About 1810 he created, with Meyerbeer and some other composers, an *Association Harmonique* the purpose of which was mutual aid in view "of the difficulty encountered in honouring real masterpieces, given the judgments rendered with so much partiality by publishers' hired puffers." At a certain period the relations between Meyerbeer and Weber were slightly strained. You will certainly never guess the cause. The author of *Freyschütz* explains it in one of his letters: "I have been on the point of falling out with that excellent fellow because of his carelessness and his business negligence. I was obliged to write him severely, which the young gentleman took in bad part."

Meyerbeer careless and negligent in business affairs! He has, however, never been presented to us in such a light.

It should not be believed that Weber accepted this uninterrupted struggle without rebellion. Those interminable calls on pretended connoisseurs and all those little patrons who supplanted the great *Mæcenases* exasperated him.

"I must muster all my reason," he writes, "not to become lazy and sad. For is there anything more wretched than to scour foreign countries, playing for everyone, in order to prove you really know something when, out of thirty people, but one can be useful to you. . ?" <sup>1</sup> All the riff-raff to whom I have letters pay not the slightest heed to me, and you know I am not a man to make many calls." "Not a man to make many calls." . . . Yet listen: "In three

<sup>1</sup> Letter IX, February 27, 1811.

words I can tell you what I do day in and day out. From seven to eleven my home resembles a pigeon coop which people enter and leave incessantly. Then I begin to pay calls until two, when I sit down to dinner until about four. The calls begin again until theatre time. When not calling, I return home to work."

Weber did not disdain the Maecenas. He was even at times attached to the service of some prince; but in his youth he was more attracted to the situation, newly created, of the modern artist who ranges the world, thirsty for swift fame. Mozart did it before him, but all the material side reposed upon his father. Karl Maria Weber seems to me to present the first model of the musician devoting a large part of his time and of his strength to making a name. In spite of that, he remains all his life the great, sincere artist who made no concession in his music and who "could not and would not write claptrap as was demanded of him."<sup>2</sup>

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"To-day, when the market-place has become too large," said Nietzsche, "fame needs shouts. Consequently the best gullets start crying too loudly, and the goods are offered by hoarse voices."<sup>3</sup>

I have not the least intention of inveighing against corruption and decadence. There are in every epoch prophets of evil who take alarm and predict the end of art, the end of the world; and the world continues to exist and will perhaps exist a little longer still. I should merely like to answer a commonplace which

<sup>1</sup> Letter XXIV, April 16, 1813.

<sup>2</sup> Letter XLIV.

<sup>3</sup> Fr. Nietzsche, *La Gaya Scienza*.

has enjoyed a considerable vogue for more than a century: that our art and our artists are freer having shaken off the yoke of the Maecenases; but we make infinitely more concessions to our modern Maecenases, the public, than were made to the Medici, the Esterhazys, the kings and the popes. It is in order to be more popular that artists affect to be undignified and vulgar. It is to please it they abuse those loud, clamorous effects, those extravagant strokes, that pianistic racket — to please the mob always faithful to its taste for the clatter of broken dishes. It is to attract it they sound the trumpet, beat the bass drum and make all this street fair din about themselves.

“To give you an idea,” Liszt writes to George Sand, “of how artists who play in Geneva heighten the public curiosity, I will transcribe literally a notice which I read at the bottom of a programme on my arrival here and which made me despair of ever being able to attain so elegant a wording, such poetry of style:

“*Notice:* The Public, often on its guard against pompous announcements, may sometimes have been deceived by a culpable hoax. Here, what is seen, what is heard, is even superior to the promises of the artist and the hopes of the music lover!”

Shortly after, the Geneva *Fédéral* announced to its readers:

“Great festival for our musical public next Wednesday. M. Liszt gives a concert. M. Liszt, the great pianist, the artist full of sentiment and of power, the musician whose execution is at once so light and so prodigiously energetic, M. Liszt who, above all, has rendered services so important and so disinterested

to the growing Geneva Conservatory, will perform three selections. For the rest, the evening will resemble a *soirée* of the Music Society, with the aid of faithful amateurs, much music well executed and well sung, a whole brilliant concert. Do not forget it is for Wednesday!"

Liszt must have been sickened by this circus style; but we have made progress since. It is we, the musicians, who now write our announcements and even the reviews of our concerts. Future centuries will be able to appreciate, from these practises, the fineness and the delicacy of our taste.

In recent years we have been shocked by the advertisements of a celebrated virtuoso who had himself announced to the public as "a curious subject of metempsychosis, combining Liszt's and Rubinstein's talents with something still greater."

He could not however announce himself quite simply as celebrated, incomparable, unequalled. He would have been taken for a beginner, for a pupil of the Conservatory; and then the public loves to be struck by something extraordinary.

"The public," cries Richard Strauss ecstatically in his manifesto on progress, "the public is God's voice!" Has the greatest king, the most beautiful queen ever been so flattered? And how is it possible not to be the very humble, very obedient servant of the populace, if it represents the voice of the Lord? How often have artists not said to me: "I am playing little horrors this evening; but how can I help it? It's what the public likes best." And so little horrors are often composed, little atrocities are often played for it; and when the public manifests some satisfaction by its applause, the artist bends and bows, the author comes

forward breathlessly and places his hand on that region of his waistcoat which covers his palpitating heart. I have not the least wish to play the moralist who would like to see this state of affairs changed; but tell me, what more did the artists of the past do for their Medici?

I once played with the Duke of Mecklenburg's quartet on their return from Nijni-Novgorod where they had given a concert. The train was eight hours late and the artists did not reach Nijni until the theatre was already full. No time to get their trunks, to change their clothes, so they apologized to the audience for being forced to play as they were.

During the entr'acte, Maxime Gorki who was present came to congratulate the artists: "I did not miss your evening clothes or your stiff shirts," he told them; "but I confess that what always shocks me at a concert is to see real artists rise after performing a masterpiece by Beethoven or by Mozart and run to the front of the stage to bow. It would seem to me juster and more dignified for the public to rise and acclaim the artists or the masterpieces they had just interpreted."

So spoke the great Russian democrat.

The composer of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* however considers the concessions and the salaams which we bestow upon our new Maecenas still insufficient. "Taken singly, they are asses," he says, "but collectively they are the voice of God."

This sally, quoted by Richard Strauss, has as its author Karl Maria Weber who was thus the first musician to address a dedication to the new patron of the arts, the PUBLIC.



\* \* \*

Let us not think that the ancient Maecenas has completely disappeared. On the contrary. For every one who existed formerly we count a thousand to-day. In every large city — and I have visited several countries — obliging people advise you to play at Mrs. X's: It is enough to have appeared at one of her soirées to gain the graces of high society. I have been in London a good many times during the season. It is the great music fair. Thousands of pianists, singers, violonists and young composers flock there to make a name for themselves or to make a living when they already have a name.

They run, they swarm, panting, breathless — an afternoon at Mrs. X's, a tea at Mrs. Y's. To-night one must try to get invited to Mrs. So and So's . . . "Is she a good musician?" "Oh! no, she's a goose . . . She couldn't tell a key of G from a door-key." "Generous, then?" "Not that either. Only, you see, she's enormously rich and has lots of connections."

And Weber was right when he said that out of thirty people hardly one can be of any use to you whatever and that "that riff-raff takes all your time."

I have often thought of a certain Franciscan monk. One of his penitents, a hatter by trade, was pouring out to him the whole litany of his peccadillos.

"But, my son," the reverend father asked him "when do you make your hats?"

The patrons of the arts, modern style, take all your time, all your strength. You go to bed late, you have hardly the time to exercise your fingers, to go over the few dozen pieces learned at the Conservatory and

the two or three by some modern author you want to oblige.

Oh! The modern Maecenases! There are certainly exceptions. I know some, even. They are often enriched artists who do not want to exploit their poor comrades, or else true connoisseurs with a sincere love of music.

And the Maecenases who themselves compose! In their houses you usually play the compositions by the master of the house. The master of the house usually has another occupation more lucrative than art. I will not blame him for it. Palestrina was interested in a fur business which came to him from his second wife. Only, Palestrina occupied himself principally with his music, while they — with their furs.

Now it sometimes happens that the composer-Maecenas has had no time to write his compositions. Then these have to be written for him . . .<sup>1</sup>

\* \* \*

In what respect could the situation of the modern artist be freer than that of a Haydn who composed tranquilly under the protection of Prince Esterhazy, than that of a Palestrina dedicating his works to some intelligent patron, which entailed no concession in his art, or of a Rameau finding in the person of the *fermier général* de la Popelinière a large-minded, devoted friend who loaded him with favors? I do not speak of the slightly brutal generosity of the medieval lords who, marvelling, threw their purses, their gold chains, their fur-trimmed mantles to the minstrels or of the incomparable pomp of the Roman Maecenases.

<sup>1</sup> The advertisement in the *Musikkalender* is well known: "Compose, transcribe for orchestras in every style. Moderate prices. Absolutely confidential!"

Relatively, the artist had to struggle less in the past in order to live and had to resort to fewer devices to bring his art to the attention of the public.

It is precisely in this struggle however, so I am told, that we should see the greatest incentive to the evolution of art. What a sorry jest! Did Da Vinci, Michelangelo, Raphael agree to gather about the Medicis because these last represented the frightful incentive you speak of? The religion of the parvenu, not content with deifying the goal, would still further sanctify all the toil, often low, of reaching it.

Had he not found a few lean patrons, what would have become of Beethoven, that untameable genius, that character too unruly to seek to please, too dignified to run after quick fame, too proud to make his way painfully through the throng?

We have publishers and impresarios too, but the end they seek and impose upon artists is not always the ideal in art.

What are publishers, patrons, the public however, compared with that supreme institution which holds in its own hands the destinies of art, which can with a stroke of the pen condemn you to death or place the tiara upon your brow, pronounce an edict of exile against you or make you immortal?

In the world of musicians, much is said of the uselessness of the press. I am far from sharing this opinion. Suppress the press and you will arrest musical interest in the public. The Encyclopaedists are scoffed at, yet it is to their quarrels we owe in large part the passion for music in eighteenth century France. They are reproached with not having been musicians; but the mechanics of an art and taste for it are two different things. It was Wagner's opinion

that, in a certain very important and perhaps the one true sense, Beethoven was understood only by non-musicians and not at all by professionals. Clara Schumann said she preferred as auditors the little circle of painters which had grown up about her to all the musicians in Dresden, stiffened in their immutable theories.

The one reproach that could be addressed to the Encyclopaedists is their having poured out their scepticism without letting a drop of it fall upon their own opinions and their own formulas. They occasionally delivered oracles.

Let a writer give us an account of what pleases or displeases him, we should receive his confidences with interest, since we attach importance to the opinion of the crowd. Let him do so artistically, wittily, we could not but be enchanted with it; but . . . if it occurred to him to put a little modesty into it, we should then be touched, enraptured and, most of all, deeply surprised. For, with but few exceptions (and these happily exist), those who write about music take liberties with the greatest geniuses. They list them, they classify them, they accept them or abolish them with an incredible liberty.

If, at least, this were spontaneous; but, for the most part, the taste-doctors carry with them a Cinderella slipper. The untidy little girl who can thrust her foot into it is proclaimed queen; but woe to the most beautiful princess if her foot does not fit! She will be driven away and outrageously ill-used.

A god is chosen for a certain length of time and is submitted to blindly, fanatically, to the exclusion of every other, because what is feared most of all is eclecticism. When, for example, one is a Wagnerite,

one treats with disdain whatever is not Wagnerian; but Wagner, that Marat of music as some call him, was himself an eclectic. He heartily admired Bach, Beethoven, Palestrina, Mozart, Weber, even the French folk-song; and all true musicians had the eclectic taste. I shall not here enumerate all the masters whom Bach admired, since I should need several pages.

It has happened to me in certain cities to be warned by connoisseurs: "If you want to be successful here, play Brahms and, above all, no Mozart." "How is it that, in the neighbouring city, the public seems to have a marked taste for the author of *Don Juan*? Yet, there seems to be so little difference in the climate!"

"It is because our public is very fastidious." (They say that in every city).

The truth is that the music critic of the biggest local daily, who accepts nobody but Brahms, has on various occasions written that Mozart is too frivolous a musician and that his works are nothing but "*musiquette*," devoid of all interest.

Diderot said of criticism what Malherbe said of death: everything is subject to its laws,

Et la garde qui veille aux barrières du Louvre  
N'en défend pas nos Rois . . .

When, for the first time, some fifty years ago, Liszt gave three concerts of his own musical works in Dresden, the public received him enthusiastically. Next day the little local sheet declared that Liszt was, in sum, no composer. At once all those good folk who had given free vent to their enthusiasm were ashamed of their applause. Everyone denied having been enraptured and a thousand excuses were discovered.

This is a daily happening and is found in the life of



every artist. Richard Strauss admits it by referring to it, which does not prevent him from maintaining that "the decisive factor in the victory, for Wagner, as for any other genius, was the mass of the public *entirely spontaneous in its artistic enjoyment.*"

The author of *Salome* forgets that, at the moment of Wagner's triumph, each of his musical phrases was sustained and driven home by tens of pages written by his admirers.

It is the press that determines public opinion. It is these minions of the Beautiful who rule the crowd almost dictatorially. They are the principal arbiters of fame.

"They shall have no ascendancy over me," said Schumann, "for the one thing they can do is to make me die of hunger."

The Maecenas of old could do no more.

## XVIII

### THE RENAISSANCE OF OLD MUSIC

*It is not we who revive the masterpieces.  
It is the masterpieces which revive us.*

JULES JANIN

I FEAR I have made myself ill understood, having been able scarcely to skim the surface of this vast subject.

If I have insisted upon the truism of "musical progress," it is because I consider it the principal cause of the ignorance of our past and of all the errors in the interpretation of the old masters. It is because of this prejudice, become a religion, that music, filled as much as the other arts with beautiful things, is still very poor in its revelation of these things.

We are still deaf to the miracles of those beauties which uplift the soul by means of the melodious echo so marvellously remote and by that divine link which "unites sympathetic hearts across the centuries."

A more or less cultivated musician admires the painting of Raphael, of Leonardo da Vinci, of Botticelli. Yet with what works of the musical Renaissance is he familiar?

The painter, the poet, the sculptor knows he can but vary the beautiful. The musician alone claims to make it progress.

And this is why, in the history of our art, there is talk of nothing but revolutions and liberations.

Italy in the seventeenth century should have the credit of freeing music from the polyphonic ties which encompassed it too closely.

Lully delivered us from the slow, mournful song of the ancients.

Rameau liberated us from "the Lullist plain chant which had been droned for a century."

The eighteenth century Italians delivered us from Rameau's dryness through their light, tender song.

The Romantics freed us from the French and Italian levity, and from the contrapuntal cuirass which sheathed Bach's music.

In every epoch one believes to serve us by ridding us of the burden of our treasures. The right of inheritance is suppressed in music. We are reduced to living on our daily resources. The domain being thus reduced and limited, there is a rush on the fashionable author to discover in him all the horrors and all the beauties.

What have the Wagnerian commentators not found in each passage of his operas — philosophy, astrology, metaphysics, and a thousand things he never placed there?

And now, already, there is talk of delivering us from Wagnerism!

But we want no more of these liberators, of these false Messiahs. This trick has been played upon us too often; and we shall tell them: Create new beauties. We shall be able to love them without for that reason relegating to the shade the masters who served you as models. Create new beauties. Masterpieces are not wolves and do not devour each other, as Gounod said.

If, through having too long inhabited the heights,

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we sometimes yawn upon the summits, if we sometimes lack air in the rich atmosphere of strained romanticism, we have but to open wide the windows upon our magnificent past and it will refresh our souls.

We want to be able to participate, to our heart's desire, in every emotion, in every rapture; and the humdrum advocates of progress will no longer make us believe that while all the other arts flower so marvellously, music, universally exalted by them, was but a weak and puny plant which had all the trouble in the world to come out of the ground. If the art of our ancestors was still in its cradle, we are no less sensitive to the charm and to the poetry of childhood's unconscious prattling than to the most masterful discourse of an experienced orator.

If their art is afflicted with old age, we can respect and admire the beauty of a wrinkled face.

No, their genius was not a straw fire as we have been asked to believe. Under their secular ashes we discover an eternal brazier which warms us softly and which will never die out.

\* \* \*

“Still, one must belong to one's epoch . . .”

In the name of what prejudice are we to continue to be suspended to the little speck we occupy in space instead of extending our view afar, of being contemporaries of all men?

Besides, it is thus we shall really belong to our epoch, since the greatest merit of the last century is having awakened in us that taste for retrospection, that sense of comparison and that pleasure in what is old — even when this old is less new than the new.

There has been lighted in us a passion not only for superior civilizations, but even for those in which our aesthetic barometer indicates childhood, decadence or barbarism.

Musicians are only a little late. Modest attempts were made in the second half of the nineteenth century to resurrect old music,<sup>1</sup> but of late these have assumed admirable proportions.

In Germany, the publications of the *Bach und Händel Gesellschaft*, the *Denkmaeler der Deutschen Tonkunst*, the historical works of Kretzschmar, Johannes Wolf, Hugo Riemann, Schering, Heuss, Schneider, Kinsky, Einstein, Springer, Curt Sachs and so many others.

In France, the monumental publication of *La Musique de la Renaissance Française* by Expert, the editions of the organists Guilmant and Pirro, the publications of the *Société Internationale de Musique*, the editions of Rameau and of Couperin, the historical works of Romain Rolland, of Ecorcheville, of la Laurencie, of Schweitzer, of Pincherle, of Prunières, of Quittard, and the rest.

In Austria, the *Denkmaeler der Oesterreichischen Tonkunst* under Guido Adler's direction and the historical works of Botstiber, of Koczirz, of Mandy-czewski.

<sup>1</sup> Some had already been essayed at the beginning of the century. Liszt, in a letter to George Sand, speaks of a General C. who had undertaken to raise "the august legitimacy, the stainless majesty of the names of Handel and Palestrina like a sacred dike against the flood of Italian fiorituri and of lifeless French compositions." Goethe, in a letter to Zelter, speaks of a law professor named Thibault de Heidelberg "who, although a jurist, has a very sweet musical nature and who has gathered about him a group by whom old compositions are executed with much loving care."

Eugene Delacroix remarks, in his diary, that, in 1855, amateurs and even distinguished composers had been seized with a passion for archaic music.



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In England, the *Virginal Book* edited by Fuller-Maitland and Barclay-Squire, editions of Purcell, of Pasquini, Kuhnau, of Kerl with Shedlock's exquisite realizations, the historical works of Dannreuther, Niecks, Dent and many more.

In America, the flourishing school of musicography gives the highest hopes thanks, in part, to the zeal of those who bring together the richest materials for historical studies in libraries and museums.<sup>1</sup>

Bernoulli, Nef in Switzerland, van den Borren, Closson in Belgium, numerous savants in Italy, in Poland, in Russia and almost everywhere, are devoting their lives, with admirable fervour and abnegation to revealing the treasures of the past.

Thus, daily, are opened for us new crypts where treasures lie hidden beneath venerable dust. Daily, new voices rise from the tombs proudly demanding their right to be heard.

It is not difficult to note steadily growing interest in old music.

The greatest musicians — Saint-Saëns, Bordes, D'Indy, Dukas, Debussy, and recently Ravel, Falla, Stravinsky, Honegger and the whole galaxy of "*les jeunes*" — have taken the lead in this movement. That in itself would prove nothing since, in every age, the Bachs, the Wagners, the Mendelssohns, the Chopins, the Liszts, the Brahms, the Joachims and the Bülowes prostrated themselves before the works of the geniuses their predecessors.

<sup>1</sup> The marvellous collections of old instruments in the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Washington Museum, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the Library of Congress, the Steinert collection at New Haven, to name but a few, begin already to rival the treasures of the Musical Academy at Berlin, of Heyer at Cologne, of the Conservatories at Paris and Brussels, of the Musik Historisches Museum at Copenhagen, of the Kensington at London.

But even the public is beginning to understand and to enjoy the marvels of the past. It will not take long to educate it. Organizations are springing up almost everywhere; and while enormous subsidies are given to opera houses which present Gounod's Faust for the 1300th time, Bach Societies develop admirably all by themselves. Sooner or later even the governments will understand that a work by Josquin des Prés is worth as much as a Breughel. They will then erect museums where we shall be able to hear and admire our Palestrinas, Pachelbels, Bachs, Handels, Couperins and Rameaus just as painters can admire their Titians, Velasquezes and Raphaels. We shall thus be able to prolong our lives by the remembrance of times which are no more.

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