

MUSIC—THE SOUL OF ART

The more deeply we study a subject, the more likely we are to practice for ourselves its own kind of criticism. Enthusiasm, then, is all the better for being tempered by judgment.

Today music literally flows out around us in our civilization of abundance. Therefore, it is well to make a distinction between hearing music and listening to it. The analogy of our language, perhaps, serves best here. Listening to our mother tongue is habitual to us inasmuch as we do not have to make any conscious effort to understand what is said. That is, the effort has become so natural that it is negligible. It is a common experience to lose thought of a remark because we have allowed our attention to wander, though we have doubtlessly heard the speech. In other words we have to remain receptive. Now music, which is after all a kind of language, equally demands respectful attention if it is to be understood and enjoyed as something more than a mere conscious sound.

We develop our taste in music (as opposed to our taste for music) gradually and unconsciously. Some of the greatest works yield their secrets to us very slowly. But once we have grasped them we may find ourselves moving in reaction against our former loves. That is, our whole perspective in taste may be raised, or at least changed.

The true conception of taste is a tolerance for all that is good in its own way. This approach to music is an excellent one, if only because of the wide field of enjoyment it keeps open for us.

The first requisite in the enjoyment of music is understanding it, that is, absorbing the delineation of melody and linking it with the pattern of rhythm and harmony. We should try to keep open minds towards any music, old or new, that we do not fully grasp. It may be, as is most often the case, that we are not sufficiently familiar with the particular form of the music, or merely with the pattern of discourse it follows in saying the things it should attempt to say. But that comes with continual listening. Our background of experience will operate more searchingly the more widely it is developed.

Music is dual in its nature: it is both material and spiritual. Its material side we apprehend through the sense of hearing to which there is usually a reaction within and hence an external response resulting. Its spiritual side reaches us through the imagination and the emotional part of us and is exclusively internal. If the scope and capacity of the art of music are to be understood, it is essential that this duality be kept in view. There is something so potent and elemental to us in the appeal which music makes that it can crease furrows in our psychological impressions. But real appreciation of its beauty, which consists in recognizing the qualities which put it in the realm of art, is conditioned upon intelligent listening and keen enjoyment.

Without discrimination it is impossible to recognize even the crude materials of music, for the first step is to coordinate those materials. A tone becomes musical material only when it is associated with another tone. We might hear it alone and study in it these three essential qualities: pitch (its shortness or length in sound, which is determined by the overtones of each individual instrument); but it can never become music so long as it remains isolated. When a succession of tones are arranged

in a pattern pleasing to the ear, we have—what is the basic concept in music—melody. So far as music, though, is merely agreeably coordinated sounds, it may be reduced to mathematics, and its practice to handicraft. Hence we see that melody cannot say enough to us by itself; there must be a binding principle, a pattern which can give it form and meaning.

I order a melody will carry a different feeling with it accordingly as it is played fast or slow. Hence we have the speed or tempo of a piece. Then again we can give a melody a different pattern of movement by changing its regularity of accent or beat. Thus we take a basic arrangement of notes as they are and change only the patterns of rhythm and tempo and get various different pieces of music. This fact alone attests to the importance and necessity of these two elements, tempo and rhythm.

This much we might hear if we were to let music go through our heads like water through a sieve. Yet we must look at a piece of music as a whole. We must bear in mind that there is a basic relationship between these elements. We enjoy music only as we recognize these relationships. Although melody with its determinants is the life-blood of music, there are two further elements which give depth and capacity of expression to the art of music. These are color and the dynamics of expression.

We might digress here to observe that the "key" or tonality of a work produces a definite over-all atmosphere which might be conceived in terms of colour.

Form in music is the over-all plan of symmetry and fabrication that determines the music's shape as a balance discourse. It is difficult to get to know the ins-and-outs of musical form unless we become familiar with the principal devices and subtleties used by the music writer (or composer). In listening to a long piece of music we are often faced with an old difficulty: we cannot get the whole into perspective until we have understood the parts and pieced them together for ourselves. Hence one of the most important things for the listener to try to acquire is an understanding of the growth of an extended piece of music through what is termed "thematic development". This is simply the developing of variations around the framework of the predominant feeling, the "theme".

When we understand how a writer enlarges upon a central idea or theme, sentence by sentence, in an essay, we come close to arriving at a parallel approach to the construction in a piece of music. Just as the central idea of an essay is enlarged upon, given a different approach, extended in its shadings of meanings, and strengthened by repetition, parallels and contrasts, so too the theme of a musical work is developed by harmonic variations, progressions, inversions, contrasts, repetition, and minute shadings of meaning. When music is subjected to such patterns and devices we can easily understand why it is so dynamic and has the capacity to move people. Consequently music is often called the most expressive of the dynamic arts. Perhaps this is so because music is so tangible to us and moves our very soul.

Music knows no particular language, no exclusive claimant, and no barrier to its enjoyment, or in the words of the immortal composer, Wagner,

"The language of tones belongs equally to all mankind, and melody is the absolute language in which the musician speaks to every heart."

Music represents in the psychology of man the cross-section of life and its experiences, for it means many things to many people. A. G. Spalding once said, while the delights of music were pouring into his soul,

"My mother used to say that a hearing of Bach's 'Chaconne' always reminded her of the Sermon on the Mount, and that the introduction of the major variations represented the Beatitudes".

—R. ST. JOHN, '58

NEIGES D'ANTAN . . . NEIGES DU QUEBEC

Toute impression subite ou toute nouvelle expérience exigent un certain recul . . . il faudra alors pardonner à un étudiant en mal du pays ce retour sur le passé. . . .

Il me souvient, à certains moments, de ces radieuses après-midis de l'hiver québécois, charmes d'une enfance envolée. Il me souvient encore de ces excitantes et . . . épuisantes randonnées en skis à travers bois et champs.

Et, ainsi, s'enrole mon imagination: le soleil s'était levé gaillard et brillant ce matin-là . . . désireux, peut-être, de se faire pardonner l'humeur triste des jours précédents. Tout était calme, tout était beau. Dans les vitres, les petiotis collaient leurs minois encore mal éveillés, qui pour admirer ce grand dehors, qui pour s'amuser au spectacle des lutins de givre qui dansaient dans les vitres. La nuit durant, la neige avait tombée, laissant un tapis immense et immaculé, comme pour cacher toutes les saletés de la veille . . . Déjà, se découpaient trois silhouettes à l'horizon. La nature et mon cœur chantaient . . . et mes deux copains n'étaient pas moins enthousiastes. L'un dans la trace de l'autre, nous coupions d'abord à travers champs, nous amusant à décapiter les piquets de clôtures de leur capuchons de neige ou encore à agiter les branches lourdes de ouate sur la tête et dans le cou des copains.

Les épaulements de terrain étaient de plus en plus accusés, et, des skieurs tantôt avançant à foulées rapides, il ne restait plus que trois gamins essouffés. Quand même! La montagne étaient là, droit devant, immobile et comme écrasée par la charge de neige qui reposait sur ses épaules. A peine pouvions-nous distinguer ici et là des traces de lièvres. Quelle escalade! Tantôt, montant avec facilité, tantôt, nous accrochant désespérément à une branche sèche, nous dégringolions avec elle et tout était à recommencer. A la fin . . . tout un spectacle à nos pieds. Le soleil faisant briller nos yeux et les milliers d'étoiles minuscules qui s'entassaient partout. Les ombres que dessinaient nos silhouettes sur la neige semblaient des jeux chinois. Tout en bas, des champs, des arbres, des champs et des arbres encore. Plus loin, les maisons du village blotties les unes contre les autres comme un groupe qui a froid et se resserre pour mieux braver le danger. Calme, calme était le spectacle de la nature; le calme d'un sanctuaire. Un instant, nous nous taisions aussi, pensant que les choses sont plus sages que les hommes. . . . et que nous étions quelqu'un parce que libéré de tout.

C'était alors la descente vertigineuse. Qui riant, qui criant, nous goûtions la récompense de nos efforts, tout en frolant le danger et les souches. Notre descente sensationnelle souvent gâtée par une chute qui ne l'était pas moins, se heurtait à toutes sortes d'imprévus: nous roulions dans la neige, la neige nous roulait aussi.

Les joues rouges de plaisir et de sang frais, nous regagnions le foyer. L'ombre envahissait la forêt; des arbres dénudés tendaient leur bras dans une éternelle prière. Ça et là des taches vertes de sapins, sentinelles silencieuses. Bonhommes de neige, nous voyions déjà la fumée s'élever en spirales des cheminées, nous entendions déjà crépiter un feu de bois sec dans l'âtre. Fatigués et fourbus que nous étions, le repos serait délicieux et le lit aussi épais et doux que la neige des champs. Peut-être rêvions-nous encore d'un sourire de . . . jeune fille, aussi chaud au cœur que les plus brûlantes caresses du soleil.

Et voilà pourquoi, il a fallu pardonner toutes ces choses à un étudiant en mal du pays.

—ALBAN BERUBE '59

PURSUIT

Long shadows licked the wet ledges of Trinity mountain where the two men had taken refuge. Sitting glumly on a rock, Flint watched the flames of the small fire sear his knife-blade, his gray sleepless eyes shifted pensively to the dawn as it streaked along the sloping timberline. He heard the faint gurgling of the cold water as it drained down the arroyo below. He became tense. "They're coming, Barter," Flint said as the distant howling of sirens wafted up from the misty highway. "Don't you want me to sneak down and get a doctor? the bullet's pretty deep, kid". "Use your knife." Barter groaned.

"I don't know," the older man grunted dubiously. "I could feel the bullet with my fingers before, but not anymore."

Dick Barter's lean body twisted with pain and rage. Flint shrugged, turned the knife over in his hand, and leaned over to gently dab at the thick, slowly-welling blood which was oozing from his friends shirt. Overhead the last of the July moon was obscured under a fast-rolling thunder cloud. He took a slug at the whiskey bottle and then pried open the other's mouth and poured the rest down his throat.

"Whatever you say, Dick," Flint shrugged. He opened the faded blue shirt fully to ponder the operation. Barter groaned and the other man touched his mouth slightly.

"Kid, I'm going to put a piece of pine bark in your mouth. Bite on it as hard as you can, bite hard, but don't scream. They're coming, do you hear?"

Dick Barter nodded. "Put out that fire, Flint. They'll see it," he whispered.

"When I'm done with this operation, and not before," Flint replied. He carefully took the knife out of the fire. With his left hand he placed a short round piece of pulpy pine bark between Barter's teeth. "These stupid cops can't even kill a man clean," he thought grimly. "This will take some help on your part, kid."

"Start cutting." Barter ordered. "Remember there's a hundred thousand dollars out in these hills somewhere and it's all ours. The rest are all gone now."