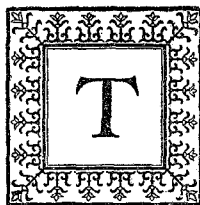


# The Emancipation of Music

BY W. J. HENDERSON

Author of "The Art of the Singer," etc.



THE makers of music are singing a new song: "Come, let us be as Asa and remove all the idols our fathers made." They have liberated their souls. They not only enjoy the blessings of freedom, but are intoxicated with them. They have projected the shadow of approaching oblivion across the names of Bach and Beethoven, and have opened their own windows to the sunlight of a new artistic day. They have seen their own works with the satisfaction of gods and pronounced them good. They have clasped hands with the post-everything painters and sculptors, and have seen "the vision of the world and the wonder that would be." Keats maundering about a Grecian urn conjures pity into their hearts. What indeed were the Greeks? Formalists who made things by patterns cut according to Aristotelian logic, and whose minds dwelt in perpetual slavery to dogmas. The mediæval Italian who fancied that he was evolving new thought in music was only improvising on Greek themes.

Out of his period, however, modern music was fashioned with her strutting opera, her gargoyled fugues, and her pseudo-Gothic organ fantasias. From this ancestry descended the lamentable sonata. What else would, for in such soil were nurtured the Sistine Madonna, Titian's "Ariadne and Bacchus," Tintoretto's "Miracle of the Slave," and Rubens's "Descent from the Cross"? Therefore let all such creations be set in museums, where they may be observed as curiosities, while Art goes bounding forward to its splendid goal where the indescribable sits enthroned beside the incomprehensible.

But movements in art, even those which seem to be mere spasms, should not be dismissed as unworthy of scrutiny.

It must be clear to careful observers that music-lovers, casual in discrimination and habit-bound in taste, quarrel with the progressives on debatable grounds. Therefore we may pause to inquire just what these composers are trying to do, and what they are actually doing.

Regard, then, this catalogue of the master spirits of the age: Arnold Schoenberg and Erik Satie, the fathers of all such as make strange sounds; Bela Bartok, Hungarian; Alfredo Casella, Ildebrando Pizzetti, Francesco Malipiero, Italians; Darius Milhaud, Georges Auric, Louis Durey, Arthur Honegger, Francis Poulenc, and Germaine Taillefer, the Parisian "Group of Six"; Eugene Goossens, Arthur Bliss, and Cyril Scott, British; Paul Hindemith, German; Alexander Scriabin (deceased) and Igor Stravinsky (very much alive), Russians; Leo Ornstein, Carl Ruggles, Dane Rudhyar, and Carlos Salzedo, Americans.

All of these profess to be proceeding toward the same end, the abolition of classic forms and the establishment of new melodic scales, new types of harmony, and new conceptions of rhythm. The only question to be answered is how far music can move along this path without ceasing to be music. But in the bright lexicon of the futurist there is no such term as non-music.

In a delightful magazine article published in December, 1922, Mr. G. K. Chesterton asked: "Are the Artists Going Mad?" He meant the painters, and he was assuredly of the opinion that they were. He said some pungently significant things. For example: "Merely to wish for advanced art is not anarchism; it is simply snobbishness, and snobbishness more vulgar than the vilest worship of rank or wealth. For, after all, there is at least a low sort of sincerity in that sort of snobbery. Rich people can give their sycophants solid pleasure of a sort, for which they can be thanked with-

out falsehood; and it is a shade more honest for men to praise a patron for the champagne and cigars they do enjoy than the pictures and statues they only pretend to enjoy." That perhaps is more directly applicable to the solemn-browed societies which pay for subscription tickets to the concerts of the new music than to the composers, who naturally imagine that they have to get a living somehow. But the fundamental truth in Mr. Chesterton's pithy remarks is that seeking for advanced art merely because it is advanced, is snobbishness of a somewhat pitiable type. But that does not excuse us from sitting down to study the advanced art.

Can we set forth the aims and ideals of these modernists without losing ourselves in a maze of technicalities? Yes, though perhaps not adequately. Above all else they are what the French call "novateurs," a word to which the art world has attached a meaning more specific than that of "innovators." A quotation from the prospectus of the third season (1923-24) of the International Composers' Guild of New York may serve as the general text:

"Strengthened by the support of a growing public as well as by the clamorous opposition of reactionary and conservative forces, the International Composers' Guild plans, during the coming season, an even more vigorous pushing of its aim to produce only that music which is *new*. By new music it will understand first performances of compositions representative of the best and most vital in contemporary life—music that is frankly forward-looking and path-breaking. It accepts and proclaims *experiment* as a valid and indispensable artistic principle of all historic periods in which music has been in a transitional or formative state of technical or social development. It asserts that music is at present in such a state, and that those who oppose this principle serve a dead rather than a living art."

With the doctrine herein set forth there can be no quarrel. Therefore we may proceed to an examination of the tenets of the brotherhood as framed in their own words. "Good talkers," remarked Master François Villon, as he sat by the fire observing Thevenon Pensete in the

agonies of parting with his last coin in a game with the fat monk from Picardy, "are found only in Paris." Let us then introduce M. Darius Milhaud, who communicated to Mr. Paul Morris, writer of the programme notes for the now defunct City Symphony Orchestra of New York, some definite information regarding the labors of the "Group of Six" and their followers:

"One of the purposes," he said, "of the younger French composers is to preserve the older and more perfect musical forms. We have gone back to the eighteenth century for our patterns. Musical form reached its perfect state in the symphonies of Beethoven and those composers who immediately preceded him. Since then symphonies have become longer and longer till their proportions have become distorted. The only composer who kept to the classic proportions was Mendelssohn, whose music has marvellous perfection of form.

"It is a mistake to think of the younger French composers as revolutionists. We are adding to the old harmonies. We are expanding the old forms. But we are not striving to do away with the established order of things. Our purpose is to build up, not to tear down. In music there are two distinct lines—the Latin and the Teutonic. It is our aim to preserve the Latin traditions in an unalloyed state. Foreign influences have been harmful to French music. Wagner, César Franck and Rimsky-Korsakov have had a bad influence on our composers. My music is in direct line from Rameau, Berlioz, Chabrier, Debussy, and Satie, as Schoenberg in Vienna has followed in the footsteps of Mozart and Schubert. Always, it seems to me, these two lines have existed. Rameau had little in common with Gluck, Bizet with Wagner, or Debussy with Strauss. It is our desire in Paris to-day to hold to the best Latin traditions and keep our music free from outside influences."

Which seems to lead toward the fallacious conclusion that nationalism is to be the salvation of art.

In sharp contrast to this apparently modest declaration by M. Milhaud is an article in *The Chesterian* for March, 1923. It is by Hugo R. Fleischman, and is entitled "The Dissolution of the Art of

Music." After describing the modernistic destruction of old meters and rhythms, the author turns his attention to the vital matter of melody. "Does melody still exist in modern music?" he inquires. "Needless to say, this question, so often asked by the laity, must be decidedly answered in the affirmative, and we can even add that precisely in the works of our most radical innovators melodies bordering on the miraculous in their fascinating beauty are found unfolding their nostalgic blossoms. In order to reach such a stage melody had to undergo a twofold transformation from the classical patterns which in their strict regularity are regarded and proclaimed by lovers of tradition as the only legitimate ones. The bonds that restrained its full expansion have been extended in two directions: first of all, in the sense that, in the place of a gently graduated, rising and sinking melodic line, we now have the enormous leaps over two or three octaves which have become so characteristic of Schoenberg; and on the other hand a sultry, blurred chromaticism has invaded the melodic contour and done its share in crushing the old, vigorous diatonic system. And, as if not enough had been done, the audacious Alois Haba, a member of Schreker's very productive school, introduces the quarter-tone system (string quartet in quarter tones), thus dealing the death-blow to traditional melody and leading it into new paths, the enormous significance of which cannot yet be fully grasped by his contemporaries."

In passing, it may be recorded that when this quartet was performed in the summer of 1923, at the Salzburg chamber-music festival, it passed without excitement, while acclamations greeted a work by Kodaly, composed in that musician's genial and frankly diatonic style. Which seems to justify Mr. Fleischman's assertion that the true significance of Haba's forward step escaped notice.

In an article published in the *Æolian Review* for November, 1923, Mr. Dane Rudhyar, one of the most aggressive of the American modernists, learnedly discussed scales, modes, and dissonant counterpoint. To the lay reader his examination of these matters would be incomprehensible, and, furthermore, the same issue

of the magazine contained an admirable article by Mr. Charles Seeger, of the faculty of the Institute of Musical Art, sharply contradicting some of Mr. Rudhyar's conclusions. For the lay reader it may suffice to say that Mr. Rudhyar invites attention to Stravinsky's method of superimposing tonalities, which to the man in the street means making music in two conflicting keys at once, and Schoenberg's manner of indulging in "modal anarchy," or the use of completely separated and unrelated musical entities.

We have now to turn to Mr. Leigh Henry, of London, the authorized British dispenser of Mr. Stravinsky's ideas. According to him, Stravinsky is concerned only about the instantaneous effect of musical sounds "apart from all intellectual premise or abstract theory. . . . All the musical values of his work are derived from the intrinsic aural nature of the sound-substance and sound-sensation treated as things in themselves. . . . The ordinary academic classifications of chords are negated by him; he recognizes in the term 'chord' any combination of notes contributing to an individual sonority. . . . There is nothing in his work pertaining to the thin surface quality of accepted melodic theme-line; he treats his sonorities as complete wholes."

Singularly enough, Mr. Lawrence Gilman, another confessed admirer of Stravinsky (and the writer of this article is also one), pointed out in "Le Chant du Rossignol" no less than four leading themes, dominating the score in various manifestations. Stravinsky could not evade the fundamental plan of repetition without which the identity of a musical design cannot be communicated through the ear to the intelligence. And in not only this composition but also in "Le Sacre du Printemps" Stravinsky employed clearly formed rhythmical figures, which is a vice insistently condemned but quite openly practised by many true modernists. One feels that Mr. Rudhyar was indicating a regrettable weakness in the great master when he called him a communist and acclaimed Schoenberg as a genuine anarchist.

It remains to indicate to the lay reader the separation of the new from the old harmonic system. In the old a close key

relationship is sustained, so that we speak of a symphony in B flat, or a concerto in A major. The principal melodies are clearly defined, and their harmonies cluster around them in simple groups. In the new system key is not considered. It is avoided in one of two ways, either "polytonal" or "atonal." These are new musical terms, coined to denominate the new things. A polytonal page or composition is one which the composer writes in two or three keys at a time. For example, in what musicians call counterpoint two or more melodies are heard simultaneously. According to the old system they had to be in the same key in order to harmonize. According to the new system, in a polytonal passage or work they need not be in the same key, and their counterpoint must be dissonant. Each can have its own counterpoint, entirely and desirably antagonistic to the other. In the polytonal system each melody may be in its own key, but in the atonal system a melody is never in any key; it skids untrammelled by any control of scale origin or chordal relation. You actually have to be a musician to produce a polytonal page; but any one can sit down at a piano, shut his eyes, and by striking notes at random evoke from the helpless keys an atonal unmelody. Even a cat walking upon a piano keyboard may unconsciously create an immortal work of art.

Let us see now if we can enumerate in order the guiding principles of the new method of composing. First, then, the old and long-established major and minor scales, with their fundamental harmonies, are to be deprived of their place as the foundations of music. They must be regarded as constrictive boundaries barricading the progress of the art. They are to be effaced as limits and mingled with the other elements of melodic origin. They should henceforth be employed merely as incidental to the general scheme. What was in antiquated practice regarded as essential is no longer so. What was then held to be secondary and relevant is now promoted to be principal and governing.

In the old system a musical composition published its identity by insistent repetition of rhythmic figures and melodic subjects, either in their original shape or in

logical developments. This type of design is to be abolished. Repetitions must become mere accidents of music. Rhythmic patterns are taboo, or at any rate regarded as pitiable evasions.

Finally the melodic line or curve is to be discarded in favor of the melodic zig-zag. In short, all that was believed by the ancients (Mozart, Beethoven, and their followers) as essential to musical beauty now recedes into subordinate position, while the shattered melodic line, the exotic scale, and the harmonic dissonance become the dominating elements of musical art. I have read much of the propaganda of the new school, and am therefore reluctantly driven to one more conclusion, namely, that it has abandoned entirely the effete conception of art as the embodiment of man's ideals of beauty. I find nowhere any demand that music shall be beautiful either in the old or the new sense, whatever the latter may be. With beauty as an ultimate aim of art these adventurers into uncharted seas are not concerned. Their utterances inform us that they are concerned only about "expression," and an examination of their compositions shows that expression signifies representation, the power of music to depict externals. The new school has not reached that stage of development at which it immerses itself in music as an emotional medium. A searching analysis of the achievements of the modernists in the direction of delineation would carry us too far afield. We shall do better to follow the line of technical progress, for it is this matter which is exercising the ingenuity of the young inventors.

That a wholly new art of music unrelated to the old one cannot be built does not seem to enter the minds of these progressives. Neither can they honestly imagine themselves to be adding new stories to the old structure whose foundations they declare are no longer serviceable. The truth is, of course, that music, like all other products of the human mind, must be the result of a long series of developments, subject to the laws of mental procedure just as all other activities of the human intellect are. It took about fourteen hundred years to complete the foundations of modern music. Thousands of independent artists were engaged in the

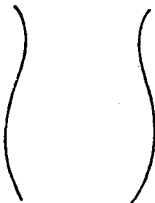


work, many of them following the lead of their predecessors, and all of them consciously or unconsciously submitting to the rule of inescapable laws.

When those foundations were finished and the rearing of the temple itself was begun, it was clear that the fundamentals were melody, rhythm, and harmony, melodic curves drawn with symmetry and an exquisite balance of their upward and downward sweep, rhythms beating their way forward with pendulous swings from bar to bar, and harmonies built of the chords of the elementary keys and their most closely related sisters.

The modernists point to the fact that all musical progress has been made by advancing from the elementary states of these component parts of the art. In this they are incontestably right. But they have forgotten, or to the disinterested but hopeful observer seem to have forgotten, that these elements were the points of all departures, that all lines of progress, including their own, can be traced back to them. But they are reluctant to admit this. They apparently wish us to believe that it is possible in this twentieth century to create new points of departure, or, in other words, to break down the old foundations and set them up topsy-turvy.

Before this could be done it would be necessary to create new fundamental principles for all art, for music cannot dissociate itself from its sisters. All the arts are governed by certain broad general laws which music must obey or perish. It is not incumbent upon us to restate all these laws. A single illustration should suffice. What will happen if, as Mr. Fleischman assures us, the gently graduated rising and sinking lines of melody are supplanted by the lightning zigzag, the wild leaps through octaves of space? When the Greek artist designed his exquisite vase, he formed its outlines thus:



Here we have the gently graduated rising and falling curve which characterizes so many famous melodies. For example, take the cantabile theme of the first movement of Beethoven's violin concerto:



The double curve here transferred from one art to another is simply the famous Hogarthian line of beauty, which was probably first suggested by the divine curve of the female form, beginning just below the shoulder and extending through the waist and over the hip.

The whole struggle resolves itself into a matter of perspective. What is going on in the art of music at this time has taken place several times before, and will undoubtedly recur several times in the future. History is governed by laws of periodicity just as surely as apparently irresponsible comets are. When Johannes Ockeghem and his contemporaries were panting with their exertions in trying to compose music in the then new contrapuntal manner, their chief concern was the solution of technical problems. They were compelled slowly and painfully to read the riddles of subject and answer, canon and fugue. It was not till their exploratory work was done that it was possible for a genius gifted with an unerring instinct for beauty to create immortal works based on the new principles. Josquin des Prés arrived when the new form was fashioned. He was master of it, and, as Schumann wisely remarked, "mastery of form leads talent to ever-increasing freedom." So Josquin left us compositions of incomparable beauty. And his successors advanced still further, till in the creations of Palestrina we find the highest type of expression of which a *cappella* polyphony is capable. With the symphony the cycle of development was the same. First, various experimentalists, including Stammitz and Gossec, then the creators of beauty, Haydn and Mozart, who found the technical materials ready

to their hands, and finally the master of expression, Beethoven. After him came the new explorers who found in the unbroken succession of movements and the use of germinal themes throughout their compositions the method of the tone poem. Schumann opened the way in his D minor symphony, and Liszt paved it with his symphonic poems. These futurists, modernists, radicals, or what you please, are lost in the wilderness of their own technic. They are buried in an impenetrable jungle of dissonances and tonal, polytonal, and atonal theories, so that they can neither get out nor see out. The few who have been touched with wandering rays of sunlight are still groping. Stravinsky, the boldest and most independent spirit of them all, has achieved progress toward the light by sheer force of his indomitable imagination, which rises superior to theories. But he is a stark realist, and his music is devoid of all spiritual quality. Schoenberg should be dismissed from the serious consideration of the progressive army. He is one of Mr. Chesterton's snobs. His compositions reek with insincerity. They smell of a weak and pitiable ambition to draw attention to a feeble personality and create a factitious interest in a third-

rate talent. Of the minor "masters" of the *ars nova* there need be no prolonged discussion. The Frenchmen have not yet said an important word. Their "Group of Six" is ridiculed even at home. The Italians are the most worth while of all, but when one contemplates most of the productions of Casella and Malipiero, one feels discouraged. Pizzetti is the outstanding Italian, but his genius derives its blood from the classics of his country.

But all these futurists are in the same case as Ockeghem, Stammitz, and Gossec. They are doing the mechanical work from which others will later advance to art. But the dream of destroying the old heavens and earth and fashioning new ones is vain. An art is subject to immutable law. Men thought they were developing European civilization according to their arbitrary wishes, but it has been proved over and over again that law, secret, mighty, and inescapable, governs the progress of the human mind. It rules art, too. The foundations had to be laid by the founders. The builders will have to continue building on the foundations. They can no more get them out from under the art than they can get the earth out from under their feet.

---

## Refusal

BY CORINNE ROOSEVELT ROBINSON

You had loved my laughter,  
 So I brought my tears,—  
 Ah! 'twas then and after  
 That the frowning years  
 Bade me, dumb and lonely,  
 Learn the lesson taught,  
 That my laughter only  
 Was the boon you sought.

Hushed, I laid my weeping  
 In a chamber still,  
 Where, awake or sleeping,  
 I could dream at will  
 That your love would share it  
 As a sacred thing,—  
 That your pride would wear it  
 As Love's offering!