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Sketch of a new esthetic of
music

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A New Esthetic of Music

BY
FERRUCCIO BUSONI

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY
DR. TH. BAKER

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1911

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SKETCH OF A NEW ESTHETIC OF MUSIC

“What seek you? Say! And what do you expect?”—
I know not what; the Unknown I would have!
What’s known to me, is endless; I would go
Beyond the end: The last word still is wanting.”

[“*Der mächtige Zauberer.*”]

LOOSELY joined together as regards literary form, the following notes are, in reality, the outcome of convictions long held and slowly matured.

In them a problem of the first magnitude is formulated with apparent simplicity, without giving the key to its final solution; for the problem cannot be solved for generations—if at all.

But it involves an innumerable series of lesser problems, which I present to the consideration of those whom they may concern. For it is a long time since any one has devoted himself to earnest musical research.

It is true, that admirable works of genius arise in every period, and I have always taken my stand in the front rank of those who joyfully acclaimed the passing standard-bearers; and still it seems to me that of all these beautiful paths leading so far afield—none lead *upward*.

The spirit of an art-work, the measure of emotion, of humanity, that is in it—these remain unchanged in value through changing years; the form which these three assumed, the manner of their expression, and the flavor of the epoch which gave them birth, are transient, and age rapidly.

Spirit and emotion retain their essence, in the art-work as in man himself; we admire technical achievements, yet they are outstripped, or cloy the taste and are discarded.

Its ephemeral qualities give a work the stamp of "modernity;" its unchangeable essence hinders it from becoming "obsolete." Among both "modern" and "old" works we find good and bad, genuine and spurious. There is nothing properly modern—only things which have come into being earlier or later; longer in bloom, or sooner withered. The Modern and the Old have always been.

Art-forms are the more lasting, the more closely they adhere to the nature of their individual species of art, the purer they keep their essential means and ends.

Sculpture relinquishes the expression of the human pupil, and effects of color; painting degenerates, when it forsakes the flat surface in depiction and takes on complexity in theatrical decoration or panoramic portrayal.

Architecture has its fundamental form, growth from below upward, prescribed by static necessity; window and roof necessarily provide the inter-

mediate and finishing configuration; these are eternal and inviolable requirements of the art.

Poetry commands the abstract thought, which it clothes in words. More independent than the others, it reaches the furthest bounds.

But all arts, resources and forms ever aim at the one end, namely, the imitation of nature and the interpretation of human feelings.

* * *

Architecture, sculpture, poetry and painting are old and mature arts; their conceptions are established and their objects assured; they have found the way through uncounted centuries, and, like the planets, describe their regular orbits.*

Music, compared with them, is a child that has learned to walk, but must still be led. It is a virgin art, without experience in life and suffering.

It is all unconscious as yet of what garb is becoming, of its own advantages, its unawakened capacities. And again, it is a child-marvel that is already able to dispense much of beauty, that has already brought joy to many, and whose gifts are commonly held to have attained full maturity.

* * *

Music as an art, our so-called occidental music, is hardly four hundred years old; its state is one

* None the less, in these arts, taste and individuality can and will unceasingly find refreshment and rejuvenation.

of development, perhaps the very first stage of a development beyond present conception, and we—we talk of “classics” and “hallowed traditions”! And we have talked of them for a long time!*

We have formulated rules, stated principles, laid down laws;—we apply laws made for maturity to a child that knows nothing of responsibility!

*
* * *

Young as it is, this child, we already recognize that it possesses one radiant attribute which signals it beyond all its elder sisters. And the lawgivers will not see this marvelous attribute, lest their laws should be thrown to the winds. This child—it *floats on air!* It touches not the earth with its feet. It knows no law of gravitation. It is wellnigh incorporeal. Its material is transparent. It is sonorous air. It is almost Nature herself. It is—free.

*
* * *

But freedom is something that mankind have never wholly comprehended, never realized to the full. They can neither recognize nor acknowledge it.

They disavow the mission of this child; they hang weights upon it. This buoyant creature must

* Tradition is a plaster mask taken from life, which, in the course of many years, and after passing through the hands of innumerable artisans, leaves its resemblance to the original largely a matter of imagination.

walk decently, like anybody else. It may scarcely be allowed to leap—when it were its joy to follow the line of the rainbow, and to break sunbeams with the clouds.

* * *

Music was born free; and to win freedom is its destiny. It will become the most complete of all reflexes of Nature by reason of its untrammelled immateriality. Even the poetic word ranks lower in point of incorporeality. It can gather together and disperse, can be motionless repose or wildest tempestuousity; it has the extremest heights perceptible to man—what other art has these?—and its emotion seizes the human heart with that intensity which is independent of the “idea.”

It realizes a temperament, *without* describing it, with the mobility of the soul, with the swiftness of consecutive moments; and this, where painter or sculptor can represent only one side or one moment, and the poet tardily *communicates* a temperament and its manifestations by words.

Therefore, representation and description are not the nature of music; herewith we declare the invalidity of program-music, and arrive at the question: What are the aims of music?

* * *

ABSOLUTE Music! What the lawgivers mean by this, is perhaps remotest of all from the Absolute in music. “Absolute music” is a form-

play without poetic program, in which the form is intended to have the leading part. But Form, in itself, is the opposite pole of absolute music, on which was bestowed the divine prerogative of buoyancy, of freedom from the limitations of matter. In a picture, the illustration of a sunset ends with the frame; the limitless natural phenomenon is enclosed in quadrilateral bounds; the cloud-form chosen for depiction remains unchanging for ever. Music can grow brighter or darker, shift hither or yon, and finally fade away like the sunset glow itself; and instinct leads the creative musician to employ the tones that press the same key within the human breast, and awaken the same response, as the processes in Nature.

Per contra, "absolute music" is something very sober, which reminds one of music-desks in orderly rows, of the relation of Tonic to Dominant, of Developments and Codas.

Methinks I hear the second violin struggling, a fourth below, to emulate the more dexterous first, and contending in needless contest merely to arrive at the starting-point. This sort of music ought rather to be called the "architectonic," or "symmetric," or "sectional," and derives from the circumstance that certain composers poured *their* spirit and *their* emotion into just this mould as lying nearest them or their time. Our lawgivers have identified the spirit and emotion, the individuality of these composers and their time,

with "symmetric" music, and finally, being powerless to recreate either the spirit, or the emotion, or the time, have retained the Form as a symbol, and made it into a fetish, a religion. The composers sought and found this form as the aptest vehicle for communicating *their* ideas; their souls took flight—and the lawgivers discover and cherish the garments Euphorion left behind on earth.

A lucky find ! 'Twas now or never ;
The flame is gone, it's true—however,
No need to pity mankind now.
Enough is left for many a poet's tiring,
Or to breed envy high and low ;
And though I have no talents here for hiring,
I'll hire the robe out, anyhow.

Is it not singular, to demand of a composer originality in all things, and to forbid it as regards form? No wonder that, once he becomes original, he is accused of "formlessness." Mozart! the seeker and the finder, the great man with the childlike heart—it is he we marvel at, to whom we are devoted; but not his Tonic and Dominant, his Developments and Codas.

* * *

Such lust of liberation filled Beethoven, the romantic revolutionary, that he ascended one short step on the way leading music back to its loftier self:—a short step in the great task, a wide step in his own path. He did not quite reach absolute

music, but in certain moments he divined it, as in the introduction to the fugue of the Sonata for Hammerclavier. Indeed, all composers have drawn nearest the true nature of music in preparatory and intermediary passages (preludes and transitions), where they felt at liberty to disregard symmetrical proportions, and unconsciously drew free breath. Even a Schumann (of so much lower stature) is seized, in such passages, by some feeling of the boundlessness of this pan-art (recall the transition to the last movement of the D-minor Symphony); and the same may be asserted of Brahms in the introduction to the Finale of his First Symphony.

But, the moment they cross the threshold of the *Principal Subject*, their attitude becomes stiff and conventional, like that of a man entering some bureau of high officialdom.

* * *

Next to Beethoven, Bach bears closest affinity to "infinite music."* His Organ Fantasias (but not the Fugues) have indubitably a strong dash of what might be overwritten "Man and Nature."† In him it appears most ingenuous because he had

* "Die Ur-Musik," is the author's happy phrase. But as this music *never has been*, our English terms like "primitive," "original," etc., would involve a *non sequitur* which is avoided, at least, by "infinite." [Translator's Note.]

† In the recitatives of his Passions we hear "human speech"; *not* "correct declamation."

no reverence for his predecessors (although he esteemed and made use of them), and because the still novel acquisition of equal temperament opened a vista of—for the time being—endless new possibilities.

Therefore, Bach and Beethoven* are to be conceived as a *beginning*, and not as unsurpassable finalities. In spirit and emotion they will probably remain unexcelled; and this, again, confirms the remark at the beginning of these lines: That spirit and emotion remain unchanged in value through changing years, and that he who mounts to their uttermost heights will always tower above the crowd.

* * *

What still remains to be surpassed, is their form of expression and their freedom. Wagner, a Germanic Titan, who touched our earthly horizon in orchestral tone-effect, who intensified the form of expression, but fashioned it into a *system* (music-drama, declamation, leading-motive), is on this account incapable of further intensification. His category begins and ends with himself; first,

* As characteristic traits of Beethoven's individuality I would mention the poetic fire, the strong human feeling (whence springs his revolutionary temper), and a portent of modern nervousness. These traits are certainly opposed to those of a "classic." Moreover, Beethoven is no "master," as the term applies to Mozart or the later Wagner, just because his art foreshadows a greater, as yet incomplete. (Compare the section next-following.)

because he carried it to the highest perfection and finish; secondly, because his self-imposed task was of such a nature, that it could be achieved by one man alone.* The paths opened by Beethoven can be followed to their end only through generations. They—like all things in creation—may form only a circle; but a circle of such dimensions, that the portion visible to us seems like a straight line. Wagner's circle we can view in its entirety—a circle within the great circle.

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* *

THE name of Wagner leads to program-music. This has been set up as a contrast to so-called "absolute" music, and these concepts have become so petrified that even persons of intelligence hold one or the other dogma, without recognition for a third possibility beyond and above the other two. In reality, program-music is precisely as one-sided and limited as that which is called absolute. In place of architectonic and symmetric formulas, instead of the relation of Tonic to Dominant, it has bound itself in the stays of a connecting poetic—sometimes even philosophic—program.

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* *

Every motive—so it seems to me—contains, like a seed, its life-germ within itself. From the

* "Together with the problem, it gives us the solution," as I once said of Mozart.

different plant-seeds grow different families of plants, dissimilar in form, foliage, blossom, fruit, growth and color.*

Even each individual plant belonging to one and the same species assumes, in size, form and strength, a growth peculiar to itself. And so, in each motive, there lies the embryo of its fully developed form; each one must unfold itself differently, yet each obediently follows the law of eternal harmony. *This form is imperishable, though each be unlike every other.*

* * *

The motive in a composition with program bears within itself the same natural necessity; but it must, even in its earliest phase of development, renounce *its own proper mode of growth* to mould—or, rather, twist—itsself to fit the needs of the program. Thus turned aside, at the outset, from the path traced by nature, it finally arrives at a wholly unexpected climax, whither it has been led, not by its own organization, but by the way laid down in the program, or the action, or the philosophical idea.

And how primitive must this art remain! True, there are unequivocal descriptive effects of tone-painting (from these the entire principle took its

* “. . . Beethoven, dont les esquisses *thématiques ou élémentaires* sont innombrables, mais qui, sitôt les thèmes trouvés, semble par cela même en avoir établi tout le développement . . .” [VINCENT D'INDY, in “César Franck.”]

rise), but these means of expression are few and trivial, covering but a very small section of musical art. Begin with the most self-evident of all, the debasement of Tone to Noise in imitating the sounds of Nature—the rolling of thunder, the roar of forests, the cries of animals; then those somewhat less evident, symbolic—imitations of visual impressions, like the lightning-flash, springing movement, the flight of birds; again, those intelligible only through the mediation of the reflective brain, such as the trumpet-call as a warlike symbol, the shawm to betoken ruralism, march-rhythm to signify measured strides, the chorale as vehicle for religious feeling. Add to the above the characterization of nationalities—national instruments and airs—and we have a complete inventory of the arsenal of program-music. Movement and repose, minor and major, high and low, in their customary significance, round out the list.—These are auxiliaries, of which good use can be made upon a broad canvas, but which, taken by themselves, are no more to be called music than wax figures may pass for monuments.

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And, after all, what can the presentation of a little happening upon this earth, the report concerning an annoying neighbor—no matter whether in the next room or in an adjoining quarter of the globe—have in common with that music which pervades the universe ?

Music, indeed, it is given to set in vibration human moods: Dread (*Leporello*), oppression, grief, invigoration, lassitude (Beethoven's last symphonies), decision (*Wotan*), hesitation, despondency, encouragement, harshness, tenderness, excitement, tranquillization, the feeling of surprise or expectancy, and still others; likewise the inner echo of external occurrences which is bound up in these moods of the soul. But not the moving cause itself of these spiritual affections;—not the joy over an avoided danger, not the danger itself, or the kind of danger which caused the dread; an emotional state, yes, but not the psychic species of this emotion, such as envy, or jealousy; and it is equally futile to attempt the expression, through music, of moral characteristics (vanity, cleverness), or abstract ideas like truth and justice. Is it possible to imagine how a poor, but contented man could be represented by music? The contentment, the soul-state, can be interpreted by music; but where does the poverty appear, or the important ethic problem stated in the words "poor, but contented"? This is due to the fact that "poor" connotes a phase of terrestrial and social conditions not to be found in the eternal harmony. And Music is a part of the vibrating universe.

* * *

I may be allowed to subjoin a few subsidiary reflections:—The greater part of modern theatre

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music suffers from the mistake of seeking to repeat the scenes passing on the stage, instead of fulfilling its own proper mission of interpreting the soul-states of the persons represented. When the scene presents the illusion of a thunderstorm, this is exhaustively apprehended by the eye. Nevertheless, nearly all composers strive to depict the storm in tones—which is not only a needless and feebler repetition, but likewise a failure to perform their true function. The person on the stage is either psychically influenced by the thunderstorm, or his mood, being absorbed in a train of thought of stronger influence, remains unaffected. The storm is visible and audible without aid from music; it is the invisible and inaudible, the spiritual processes of the personages portrayed, which music should render intelligible.

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Again, there are “obvious” psychic conditions on the stage, whereof music need take no account. Suppose a theatrical situation in which a convivial company is passing at night and disappears from view, while in the foreground a silent, envenomed duel is in progress. Here the music, by means of continuing song, should keep in mind the jovial company now lost to sight; the acts and feelings of the pair in the foreground may be understood without further commentary, and the music—dramatically speaking—ought not to participate in their action and break the tragic silence.

Measurably justified, in my opinion, is the plan of the old opera, which concentrated and musically rounded out the passions aroused by a moving dramatic scene in a piece of set form (the aria). *Word* and stage-play conveyed the dramatic progress of the action, followed more or less meagrely by musical recitative; arrived at the point of rest, music resumed the reins. This is less extrinsic than some would now have us believe. On the other hand, it was the ossified form of the "aria" itself which led to inveracity of expression and decadence.

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THE audible presentation, the "performance," of music, its *emotional interpretation*, derives from those free heights whence descended the Art itself. Where the art is threatened by earthliness, it is the part of interpretation to raise it and reëndow it with its primordial essence.

Notation, the writing out of compositions, is primarily an ingenious expedient for catching an inspiration, with the purpose of exploiting it later. But notation is to improvisation as the portrait to the living model. It is for the interpreter to *resolve the rigidity of the signs* into the primitive emotion.

But the lawgivers require the interpreter to reproduce the rigidity of the signs; they consider his reproduction the nearer to perfection, the more closely it clings to the signs.—

What the composer's inspiration *necessarily* loses* through notation, his interpreter should restore by his own.

To the lawgivers, the signs themselves are the most important matter, and are continually growing in their estimation; the new art of music is derived from the old signs—and *these now stand for musical art itself.*

If the lawgivers had their way, any given composition would always be reproduced in precisely

*How strongly notation influences style in music, and fetters imagination, how "form" grew up out of it and from form arose "conventionalism" in expression, is shown very convincingly and avenges itself in tragic wise in E. T. A. Hoffmann, who occurs to me here as a typical example.

This remarkable man's mental conceptions, lost in visionary moods and revelling in transcendentalism, as his writings set forth in oft inimitable fashion, must naturally—so one would infer—have found in the dreamlike and transcendental art of tones a language and mode of expression peculiarly congenial.

The veil of mysticism, the secret harmonies of Nature, the thrill of the supernatural, the twilight vagueness of the borderland of dreams, everything, in fact, which he so effectively limned with the precision of *words*—all this, one would suppose, he could have interpreted to fullest effect by the aid of music. And yet, comparing Hoffmann's best musical work with the weakest of his literary productions, you will discover to your sorrow how a conventional system of measures, periods and keys—whereto the hackneyed opera-style of the time adds its share—could turn a poet into a Philistine. But that his fancy cherished another ideal of music, we learn from many, and frequently admirable, observations of Hoffmann the *littérateur*.

the same tempo, whensoever, by whomsoever, and under whatsoever conditions it might be performed.

But, it *is* not possible; the buoyant, expansive nature of the divine child rebels—it demands the opposite. Each day begins differently from the preceding, yet always with the flush of dawn.—Great artists play their own works differently at each repetition, remodel them on the spur of the moment, accelerate and retard, in a way which they could not indicate by signs—and always according to the given conditions of that “eternal harmony.”

And then the lawgiver chafes, and refers the creator to his own handwriting. As matters stand to-day, the lawgiver has the best of the argument.

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* *

“Notation” (“writing down”) brings up the subject of Transcription, nowadays a term much misunderstood, almost discreditable. The frequent antagonism which I have excited with “transcriptions,” and the opposition to which an oftentimes irrational criticism has provoked me, caused me to seek a clear understanding of this point. My final conclusion concerning it is this: Every notation is, in itself, the transcription of an abstract idea. The instant the pen seizes it, the idea loses its original form. The very intention to write down the idea, compels a choice of measure and key.

The form, and the musical agency, which the composer must decide upon, still more closely define the way and the limits.

It is much the same as with man himself. Born naked, and as yet without definite aspirations, he decides, or at a given moment is made to decide, upon a career. From the moment of decision, although much that is original and imperishable in the idea or the man may live on, either is depressed to the type of a class. The musical idea becomes a sonata or a concerto; the man, a soldier or a priest. That is an Arrangement of the original. From this first transcription to a second the step is comparatively short and unimportant. And yet it is only the second, in general, of which any notice is taken; overlooking the fact, that a transcription does not destroy the archetype, which is, therefore, not lost through transcription.

Again, the performance of a work is also a transcription, and still, whatever liberties it may take, it can never annihilate the original.

For the musical art-work exists, before its tones resound and after they die away, *complete and intact*. It exists both within and outside of time, and through its nature we can obtain a definite conception of the otherwise intangible notion of the Ideality of Time.

For the rest, most of Beethoven's piano compositions sound like transcriptions of orchestral works; most of Schumann's orchestral compositions,

like arrangements from pieces for the piano—and they are so, in a way.

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Strangely enough, the Variation-Form is highly esteemed by the Worshippers of the Letter. That is singular; for the variation-form—when built up on a borrowed theme—produces a *whole series of “arrangements”* which, besides, are least respectful when most ingenious.

So the arrangement is *not* good, because it *varies* the original; and the variation *is* good, although it “*arranges*” the original.

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THE term “*musikalisch*” (musical) is used by the Germans in a sense foreign to that in which any other language employs it.* It is a conception belonging to the Germans, and not to culture in general; the expression is incorrect and untranslatable. “Musical” is derived from *music*, like “poetical” from *poetry*, or “physical” from *physic(s)*. When I say, “Schubert was one of the most musical among men,” it is the same as if I should say, “Helmholtz was one of the most physical among men.” That is musical, which *sounds* in rhythms and intervals. A cupboard can

* The author probably had in mind the languages of southern Europe; the word is employed in English, and in the tongues of the Scandinavian group, with precisely the same meaning as in German. [Translator’s Note.]

be "musical," if "music-works" be enclosed in it.* In a comparative sense, "musical" may have the further signification of "euphonious."—"My verses are too musical to bear setting to music," a noted poet once remarked to me.

"Spirits moving musically
To a lute's well-tuned law,"

writes Edgar Allan Poe. Lastly, one may speak quite correctly of "musical laughter," because it *sounds* like music.

Taking the signification in which the term is applied and almost exclusively employed in German, a musical person is one who manifests an inclination for music by a nice discrimination and sensitiveness with regard to the *technical aspects* of the art. By "technics" I mean rhythm, harmony, intonation, part-leading, and the treatment of themes. The more subtleties he is capable of hearing or reproducing in these, the more "musical" he is held to be.

In view of the great importance attached to these elements of the art, this "musical" temperament has naturally become of the highest consequence. And so an artist who plays with perfect technical finish should be deemed the most musical player. But as we mean by "technics" only the

* The only kind of people one might properly call *musical*, are the singers; for they themselves can sound. Similarly, a clown who by some trick produces tones when he is touched, might be called a *pseudo-musical* person.

mechanical mastery of the instrument, the terms "technical" and "musical" have been turned into opposites.

The matter has been carried so far as to call a composition itself "musical,"* or even to assert of a great composer like Berlioz that he was not sufficiently musical.† "Unmusical" conveys the strongest reproach; branded thus, its object becomes an outlaw.‡

In a country like Italy, where all participate in the delights of music, this differentiation becomes superfluous, and the term corresponding is not found in the language. In France, where a living sense of music does not permeate the people, there are musicians and non-musicians; of the rest, some "are very fond of music," and others "do not care for it." Only in Germany is it made a point of honor to be "musical," that is to say, not merely to love music, but more especially to understand it as regards its technical means of expression, and to obey their rules.

A thousand hands support the buoyant child and solicitously attend its footsteps, that it may not soar aloft where there might be risk of a serious fall. But it is still so young, and is eternal; the

* "But these pieces are so musical," a violinist once remarked to me of a four-hand worklet which I had characterized as trivial.

† "My dog is *very* musical," I have heard said in all seriousness. Should the dog take precedence of Berlioz ?

‡ Such has been my own fate.

day of its freedom will come.—When it shall cease to be “musical.”

* * *

THE creator should take over no traditional law in blind belief, which would make him view his own creative endeavor, from the outset, as an exception contrasting with that law. For his individual case he should seek out and formulate a fitting individual law, which, after the first complete realization, he should annul, that he himself may not be drawn into repetitions when his next work shall be in the making.

The function of the creative artist consists in making laws, not in following laws ready made. He who follows such laws, ceases to be a creator.

Creative power may be the more readily recognized, the more it shakes itself loose from tradition. But an intentional avoidance of the rules cannot masquerade as creative power, and still less engender it.

The true creator strives, in reality, after *perfection* only. And through bringing this into harmony with *his own* individuality, a new law arises without premeditation.

* * *

So narrow has our tonal range become, so stereotyped its form of expression, that nowadays there is not one familiar motive that cannot be fitted with some other familiar motive so that the

two may be played simultaneously. Not to lose my way in trifling,* I shall refrain from giving examples.

* * *

That which, within our present-day music, most nearly approaches the essential nature of the art, is the Rest and the Hold (Pause). Consummate players, improvisers, know how to employ these instruments of expression in loftier and ampler measure. The tense silence between two movements—*in itself music*, in this environment—leaves wider scope for divination than the more determinate, but therefore less elastic, sound.

* * *

What we now call our Tonal System is nothing more than a set of "signs"; an ingenious device to grasp somewhat of that eternal harmony; a meagre pocket-edition of that encyclopedic work; artificial light instead of the sun.—Have you ever noticed how people gaze open-mouthed at the brilliant illumination of a hall? They never do so at the millionfold brighter sunshine of noonday.—

* With a friend I once indulged in such trifling in order to ascertain how many commonly known compositions were written according to the scheme of the second theme in the Adagio of the Ninth Symphony. In a few moments we had collected some fifteen analogues of the most different kinds, among them specimens of the lowest type of art. And Beethoven himself:—Is the theme of the Finale in the "Fifth" any other than the one wherewith the "Second" introduces its Allegro?—or than the principal theme of the Third Piano Concerto, only in minor?

And so, in music, the signs have assumed greater consequence than that which they ought to stand for, and can only suggest.

How important, indeed, are "Third," "Fifth," and "Octave"! How strictly we divide "consonances" from "dissonances"—*in a sphere where no dissonances can possibly exist!*

We have divided the octave into twelve equidistant degrees, because we had to manage somehow, and have constructed our instruments in such a way that we can never get in above or below or between them. Keyboard instruments, in particular, have so thoroughly schooled our ears that we are no longer capable of hearing anything else—incapable of hearing except through this impure medium. Yet Nature created an *infinite gradation—infinite!* who still knows it nowadays?*

*"The equal temperament of 12 degrees, which was discussed theoretically as early as about 1500, but not established as a principle until shortly before 1700 (by Andreas Werkmeister), divides the octave into twelve equal portions (semitones, hence 'twelve-semitone system') through which mean values are obtained; no interval is perfectly pure, but all are fairly serviceable." (RIEMANN, "Musik-Lexikon.") Thus, through Andreas Werkmeister, this master-workman in art, we have gained the "twelve-semitone" system with intervals which are all impure, but fairly serviceable. But what is "pure," and what "impure"? We hear a piano "gone out of tune," and whose intervals may thus have become "pure, but unserviceable," and it sounds *impure* to us. The diplomatic "Twelve-semitone system" is an invention mothered by necessity; yet none the less do we sedulously guard its imperfections.

And within this duodecimal octave we have marked out a series of fixed intervals, seven in number, and founded thereon our entire art of music. What do I say—*one* series? Two such series, one for each leg: The Major and Minor Scales. When we start this series of intervals on some other degree of our semitonic ladder, we obtain a *new key*, and a “foreign” one, at that! How violently contracted a system arose from this initial-confusion,* may be read in the law-books; we will not repeat it here.

* * *

We teach four-and-twenty keys, twelve times the two Series of Seven; but, in point of fact, we have at our command only two, the major key and the minor key. *The rest are merely transpositions.* By means of the several transpositions we are supposed to get different shades of harmony; but this is an illusion. In England, under the reign of the high “concert pitch,” the most familiar works may be played a semitone higher than they are written, without changing their effect. Singers transpose an aria to suit their convenience, leaving untransposed what precedes and follows. Song-writers not infrequently publish their own compositions in three different pitches; in all three editions the pieces are precisely alike.

* It is termed “The Science of Harmony.”

When a well-known face looks out of a window, it matters not whether it gazes down from the first story or the third.

Were it feasible to elevate or depress a landscape, far as eye can reach, by several hundred yards, the pictorial impression would neither gain nor lose by it.

* * *

Upon the two Series of Seven, the major key and the minor key, the whole art of music has been established; one limitation brings on the other.

To each of these a definite character has been attributed; we have learned and have taught that they should be heard as contrasts, and they have gradually acquired the significance of symbols:—Major and Minor—Maggiore e Minore—Contentment and Discontent—Joy and Sorrow—Light and Shade. The harmonic symbols have fenced in the expression of music, from Bach to Wagner, and yet further on until to-day and the day after to-morrow. *Minor* is employed with the same intention, and has the same effect upon us now, as two hundred years ago. Nowadays it is no longer possible to “compose” a funeral march, for it already exists, once for all. Even the least informed non-professional knows what to expect when a funeral march—whichever you please—is to be played. Even such an one can anticipate the difference between a symphony in major and one

in minor. We are tyrannized by Major and Minor—by the bifurcated garment.

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* * *

Strange, that one should feel major and minor as opposites. They both present the same face, now more joyous, now more serious; and a mere touch of the brush suffices to turn the one into the other. The passage from either to the other is easy and imperceptible; when it occurs frequently and swiftly, the two begin to shimmer and coalesce indistinguishably.—But when we recognize that major and minor form one Whole with a double meaning, and that the “four-and-twenty keys” are simply an elevenfold transposition of the original twain, we arrive unconstrainedly at a perception of the *UNITY of our system of keys* [tonality]. The conceptions of “related” and “foreign” keys vanish, and with them the entire intricate theory of degrees and relations. *We possess one single key.* But it is of most meagre sort.

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* * *

“Unity of the key-system.”

—“I suppose you mean that ‘key’ and ‘key-system’ are the sunbeam and its diffraction into colors?”

No; that I can not mean. For our whole system of tone, key, and tonality, taken in its entirety,

is only a part of a fraction of one diffracted ray from that Sun, "Music," in the empyrean of the "eternal harmony."

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However deeply rooted the attachment to the habitual, and inertia, may be in the ways and nature of humankind, in equal measure are energy, and opposition to the existing order, characteristic of all that has life. Nature has her wiles, and persuades man, obstinately opposed though he be to progress and change; Nature progresses continually and changes unremittingly, but with so even and unnoticeable movement that men perceive only quiescence. Only on looking backward from a distance do they note with astonishment that they have been deceived.

The Reformer of any given period excites irritation for the reason that his changes find men unprepared, and, above all, because these changes are appreciable. The Reformer, in comparison with Nature, is undiplomatic; and, as a wholly logical consequence, his changes do not win general acceptance until Time, with subtle, imperceptible advance, has bridged over the leap of the self-assured leader. Yet we find cases in which the reformer marched abreast of the times, while the rest fell behind. And then they have to be forced and lashed to take the leap across the passage they have missed. I believe that the major-and-

minor key with its transpositional relations, our "twelve-semitone system," exhibits such a case of falling behind.

* * *

That some few have already felt how the intervals of the Series of Seven might be differently arranged (graduated) is manifested in isolated passages by Liszt, and recently by Debussy and his following, and even by Richard Strauss. Strong impulse, longing, gifted instinct, all speak from these strains. Yet it does not appear to me that a conscious and orderly conception of this intensified means of expression had been formed by these composers.

I have made an attempt to exhaust the possibilities of the arrangement of degrees within the seven-tone scale; and succeeded, by raising and lowering the intervals, in establishing *one hundred and thirteen different scales*. These 113 scales (within the octave C—C) comprise the greater part of our familiar twenty-four keys, and, furthermore, a series of new keys of peculiar character. But with these the mine is not exhausted, for we are at liberty to *transpose* each one of these 113, besides the blending of two such keys in harmony and melody.

There is a significant difference between the sound of the scale $c-d\flat-e\flat-f\flat-g\flat-a\flat-b\flat-c$ when c is taken as tonic, and the scale of $d\flat$ minor. By giving it the

customary C-major triad as a fundamental harmony, a novel harmonic sensation is obtained. But now listen to this same scale supported alternately by the A-minor, E \flat -major, and C-major triads, and you cannot avoid a feeling of delightful surprise at the strangely unfamiliar euphony.

But how would a lawgiver classify the tone-series *c-d \flat -e \flat -f \flat -g-a-b-c*, *c-d \flat -e \flat -f-g \flat -a-b-c*, *c-d-e \flat -f \flat -g \flat -a-b-c*, *c-d \flat -e-f-g \flat -a-b \flat -c*?—or these, forsooth: *c-d-e \flat -f \flat -g-a \sharp -b-c*, *c-d-e \flat -f \flat -g \sharp -a-b-c*, *c-d \flat -e \flat -f \sharp -g \sharp -a-b \flat -c*?

One cannot estimate at a glance what wealth of melodic and harmonic expression would thus be opened up to the hearing; but a great many novel possibilities may be accepted as certain, and are perceptible at a glance.

* * *

With this presentation, the unity of all keys may be considered as finally pronounced and justified. A kaleidoscopic blending and interchanging of twelve semitones within the three-mirror tube of Taste, Emotion, and Intention—the essential feature of the harmony of to-day.

* * *

The harmony of *to-day*, and not for long; for all signs presage a revolution, and a next step toward that "eternal harmony." Let us once again call to mind, that in this latter the gradation of the octave is *infinite*, and let us strive to draw a little

nearer to infinitude. The tripartite tone (third of a tone) has for some time been demanding admittance, and we have left the call unheeded. Whoever has experimented, like myself (in a modest way), with this interval, and introduced (either with voice or with violin) two equidistant intermediate tones between the extremes of a whole tone, schooling his ear and his precision of attack, will not have failed to discern that tripartite tones are wholly independent intervals with a pronounced character, and not to be confounded with ill-tuned semitones. They form a refinement in chromatics based, as at present appears, on the whole-tone scale. Were we to adopt them without further preparation, we should have to give up the semitones and lose our "minor third" and "perfect fifth;" and this loss would be felt more keenly than the relative gain of a system of eighteen one-third tones.

But there is no apparent reason for giving up the semitones for the sake of this new system. By retaining, for each whole tone, a semitone, we obtain a second series of whole tones lying a semitone higher than the original series. Then, by dividing this second series of whole tones into third-tones, each third-tone in the lower series will be matched by a semitone in the higher series.

Thus we have really arrived at a system of whole tones divided into sixths of a tone; and we may be sure that even sixth-tones will sometime

be adopted into musical speech. But the tonal system above sketched must first of all train the hearing to thirds of a tone, without giving up the semitones.

To summarize: We may set up either two series of third-tones, with an interval of a semitone between the series; or, the usual semitonic series *thrice repeated* at the interval of one-third of a tone.

Merely for the sake of distinction, let us call the first tone C, and the next third-tones C \sharp , and D \flat ; the first semitone (small) c, and its following thirds c \sharp and d \flat ; the result is fully explained by the table below:

c	c \sharp	d \flat	d	d \sharp	e \flat	e	e \sharp	f \flat	f	f \sharp	g \flat	g	g \sharp	a \flat	a	a \sharp	b \flat	
C	C \sharp	D \flat	D	D \sharp	E \flat	E	E \sharp	F \flat	F	F \sharp	G \flat	G	G \sharp	A \flat	A	A \sharp	B \flat	etc.

A preliminary expedient for notation might be, to draw six lines for the staff, using the lines for the whole tones and the spaces for the semitones:

then indicating the third-tones by sharps and flats:

etc.

The question of notation seems to me subordinate. On the other hand, the question is important and imperious, how and on what these tones are to be produced. Fortunately, while busied with this essay, I received from America direct and authentic intelligence which solves the problem in a simple manner. I refer to an invention by Dr. Thaddeus Cahill.* He has constructed a comprehensive apparatus which makes it possible to transform an electric current into a fixed and mathematically exact number of vibrations. As pitch depends on the number of vibrations, and the apparatus may be "set" on any number desired, the infinite gradation of the octave may be accomplished by merely moving a lever corresponding to the pointer of a quadrant.

Only a long and careful series of experiments, and a continued training of the ear, can render this unfamiliar material approachable and plastic for the coming generation, and for Art.

* * *

And what a vista of fair hopes and dreamlike fancies is thus opened for them both! Who has not dreamt that he could float on air? and firmly

* "New Music for an Old World." Dr. Thaddeus Cahill's Dynamophone, an extraordinary electrical invention for producing scientifically perfect music. Article in McClure's Magazine for July, 1906, by Ray Stannard Baker. Readers interested in the details of this invention are referred to the above-mentioned magazine article.

believed his dream to be reality?—Let us take thought, how music may be restored to its primitive, natural essence; let us free it from architectonic, acoustic and esthetic dogmas; let it be pure invention and sentiment, in harmonies, in forms, in tone-colors (for invention and sentiment are not the prerogative of melody alone); let it follow the line of the rainbow and vie with the clouds in breaking sunbeams; *let Music be naught else than Nature mirrored by and reflected from the human breast*; for it is sounding air and floats above and beyond the air; within Man himself as universally and absolutely as in Creation entire; for it can gather together and disperse without losing in intensity.

* * *

IN his book "Beyond the Good and the Bad" (*Jenseits von Gut und Böse*) Nietzsche says: "With regard to German music I consider precaution necessary in various ways. Assuming that a person loves the South (as I love it) as a great training-school for health of soul and sense in their highest potency, as an uncontrollable flood and glamour of sunshine spreading over a race of independent and self-reliant beings;—well, such an one will learn to be more or less on his guard against German music, because, while spoiling his taste anew, it undermines his health.

"Such a Southlander (not by descent, but by

belief) must, should he dream of the future of music, likewise dream of a redemption of music from the North, while in his ears there rings the prelude to a deeper, mightier, perchance a more evil and more mysterious music, a super-German music, which does not fade, wither and die away in view of the blue, sensuous sea and the splendor of Mediterranean skies, as all German music does;— a super-European music, that asserts itself even amid the tawny sunsets of the desert, whose soul is allied with the palm-tree, and can consort and prowl with great, beautiful, lonely beasts of prey.

“I could imagine a music whose rarest charm should consist in its complete divorce from the Good and the Bad;—only that its surface might be ruffled, as it were, by a longing as of a sailor for home, by variable golden shadows and tender frailties:—an Art which should see fleeing toward it, from afar off, the hues of a perishing moral world become wellnigh incomprehensible, and which should be hospitable and profound enough to harbor such belated fugitives.”

And Tolstoi transmutes a landscape-impression into a musical impression when he writes, in “Lucerne”: “Neither on the lake, nor on the mountains, nor in the skies, a single straight line, a single unmixed color, a single point of repose;— everywhere movement, irregularity, caprice, variety, an incessant interplay of shades and lines,

and in it all the reposefulness, softness, harmony and inevitableness of Beauty."

Will this music ever be attained?

"Not all reach Nirvana; but he who, gifted from the beginning, learns everything that one ought to learn, experiences all that one should experience, renounces what one should renounce, develops what one should develop, realizes what one should realize—he shall reach Nirvana."* (KERN, *Geschichte des Buddhismus in Indien.*)

If Nirvana be the realm "beyond the Good and the Bad," one way leading thither is here pointed out. A way to the very portal. To the bars that divide Man from Eternity—or that open to admit that which was temporal. Beyond that portal sounds *music*. Not the strains of "musical art."†—It may be, that we must leave Earth to find that music. But only to the pilgrim who has succeeded on the way in freeing himself from earthly shackles, shall the bars open.

* As if anticipating my thoughts, M. Vincent d'Indy has just written me: ". . . laissant de côté les contingences et les petites choses de la vie pour regarder constamment vers un idéal qu'on ne pourra jamais atteindre, mais dont il est permis de se rapprocher."

† I think I have read, somewhere, that Liszt confined his Dante Symphony to the two movements, *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, "because our tone-speech is inadequate to express the felicities of Paradise."

ADDENDA

FEELING—like honesty—is a moral point of honor, an attribute of whose possession no one will permit denial, which claims a place in life and art alike. But while, in life, a want of feeling may be forgiven to the possessor of a more brilliant attribute, such as bravery or impartial justice, in art feeling is held to be the highest moral qualification.

In music, however, feeling requires two consorts, taste and style. Now, in life, one encounters real taste as seldom as deep and true feeling; as for style, it is a province of art. What remains, is a species of pseudo-emotion which must be characterized as lachrymose hysteria or turgidity. And, above all, people insist upon having it plainly paraded before their eyes! It must be underscored, so that everybody shall stop, look, and listen. The audience sees it, greatly magnified, thrown on the screen, so that it dances before the vision in vague, importunate vastness; it is cried on the streets, to summon them that dwell remote from art; it is gilded, to make the destitute stare in amaze.

For in life, too, the *expressions* of feeling, by mien and words, are oftenest employed; rarer, and more genuine, is that feeling which acts

without talk; and most precious is the feeling which hides itself.

“Feeling” is generally understood to mean tenderness, pathos, and extravagance, of expression. But how much more does the marvelous flower “Emotion” enfold! Restraint and forbearance, renunciation, power, activity, patience, magnanimity, joyousness, and that all-controlling intelligence wherein feeling actually takes its rise.

It is not otherwise in Art, which holds the mirror up to Life; and still more outspokenly in Music, which repeats the emotions of Life—though for this, as I have said, taste and style must be added; Style, which distinguishes Art from Life.

What the amateur and the mediocre artist attempt to express, is feeling in little, in detail, for a short stretch.

Feeling on a grand scale is mistaken by the amateur, the semi-artist, the public (and the critics too, unhappily!), for a want of emotion, because they all are unable to hear the longer reaches as parts of a yet more extended whole. Feeling, therefore, is likewise economy.

Hence, I distinguish feeling as Taste, as Style, as Economy. Each a whole in itself, and each one-third of the Whole. Within and over them rules a subjective trinity: Temperament, Intelligence, and the instinct of Equipoise.

These six carry on a dance of such subtlety in the choice of partners and intertwining of figures,

in the bearing and the being borne, in advancing and curtesying, in motion and repose, that no loftier height of artistry is conceivable.

When the chords of the two triads are in perfect tune, Fantasy may—nay, must—associate with Feeling; supported by the Six, she will not degenerate, and out of this combination of all the elements arises Individuality. The individuality catches, like a lens, the light-impressions, reflects them, according to its nature, as a negative, and the hearer perceives the true picture.

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In so far as taste participates in feeling, the latter—like all else—alters its forms of expression with the period. That is, one aspect or another of feeling will be favored at one time or another, onesidedly cultivated, especially developed. Thus, with and after Wagner, voluptuous sensuality came to the fore; the form of *intensification of passion* is still unsurmounted by contemporary composers. On every tranquil beginning followed a swift upward surge. Wagner, in this point insatiable, but not inexhaustible, turned from sheer necessity to the expedient, after reaching a climax, of starting afresh softly, to soar to a sudden new intensification.

Modern French writers exhibit a revulsion; their feeling is a reflexive chastity, or perhaps rather a restrained sensualism; the upstriving mountain-

paths of Wagner are succeeded by monotonous plains of twilight uniformity.

Thus "style" forms itself out of feeling, when led by taste.

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The "Apostles of the Ninth Symphony" have devised the notion of "depth" in music. It is still current at face-value, especially in Germanic lands.

There is a depth of feeling, and a depth of thought; the latter is literary, and can have no application to tones. Depth of feeling, by contrast, is psychical, and thoroughly germane to the nature of music. The Apostles of the Ninth Symphony have a peculiar and not quite clearly defined estimate of "depth" in music. *Depth* becomes *breadth*, and the attempt is made to attain it through *weight*; it then discovers itself (through an association of ideas) by a preference for a *deep register*, and (as I have had opportunity to observe) by the insinuation of a second, mysterious notion, usually of a literary sort. If these are not the sole specific signs, they are the most important ones.

To every disciple of philosophy, however, depth of feeling would seem to imply exhaustiveness in feeling, a complete absorption in the given mood.

Whoever, surrounded by the full tide of a genuine carnival crowd, slinks about morosely or

even indifferently, neither affected nor carried away by the tremendous self-satire of mask and motley, by the might of misrule over law, by the vengeful feeling of wit running riot, shows himself incapable of sounding the depths of feeling. This gives further confirmation of the fact, that depth of feeling roots in a complete absorption in the given mood, however frivolous, and blossoms in the interpretation of that mood; whereas the current conception of deep feeling singles out only one aspect of feeling in man, and specializes that.

In the so-called "Champagne Aria" in Don Giovanni there lies more "depth" than in many a funeral march or nocturne:—Depth of feeling also shows in not wasting it on subordinate or unimportant matters.

ROUTINE is highly esteemed and frequently required; in musical "officialdom" it is a *sine qua non*. That routine in music should exist at all, and, furthermore, that it can be nominated as a condition in the musician's bond, is another proof of the narrow confines of our musical art. Routine signifies the acquisition of a modicum of experience and artcraft, and their application to all cases which may occur; hence, there must be an astounding number of analogous cases. Now, I like to imagine a species of art-praxis wherein each case should be a new one, an exception! How helpless and impotent would the army of practical

musicians stand before it!—in the end they would surely beat a retreat, and disappear. Routine transforms the temple of art into a factory. It destroys creativeness. For creation means, the bringing form out of the void; whereas routine flourishes on imitation. It is “poetry made to order.” It rules because it suits the generality: In the theatre, in the orchestra, in virtuosi, in instruction. One longs to exclaim, “Avoid routine! Let each beginning be, as had none been before! Know nothing, but rather think and feel! For, behold, the myriad strains that once shall sound have existed since the beginning, ready, afloat in the æther, and together with them other myriads that shall never be heard. Only stretch forth your hands, and ye shall grasp a blossom, a breath of the sea-breeze, a sunbeam; avoid routine, for it strives to grasp only that wherewith your four walls are filled, and the same over and over again; the spirit of ease so infects you, that you will scarcely leave your armchairs, and will lay hold only of what is nearest to hand. And myriad strains are there since the beginning, still waiting for manifestation!”

* * *

“It is my misfortune, to possess no routine,” Wagner once wrote Liszt, when the composition of “Tristan” was making no progress. Thus Wagner deceived himself, and wore a mask for

others. He had too much routine, and his composing-machinery was thrown out of gear, just when a tangle formed in the mesh which only inspiration could unloose. True, Wagner found the clew when he succeeded in throwing off routine; but had he really never possessed it, he would have declared the fact without bitterness. And, after all, this sentence in Wagner's letter expresses the true artist-contempt for routine, inasmuch as he waives all claim to a qualification which he thinks meanly of, and takes care that others may not invest him with it. This self-praise he utters with a mien of ironic desperation. He is, in very truth, unhappy that composition is at a standstill, but finds rich consolation in the consciousness that his genius is above the cheap expedients of routine; at the same time, with an air of modesty, he sorrowfully confesses that he has not acquired a training belonging to the craft.

The sentence is a masterpiece of the native cunning of the instinct of self-preservation; but equally proves—and that is our point—the pettiness of routine in creative work.

RESPECT the Pianoforte! Its disadvantages are evident, decided, and unquestionable: The lack of sustained tone, and the pitiless, unyielding adjustment of the inalterable semitonic scale.

But its advantages and prerogatives approach the marvelous.

It gives a single man command over something complete; in its potentialities from softest to loudest in one and the same register it excels all other instruments. The trumpet can blare, but not sigh; contrariwise the flute; the pianoforte can do both. Its range embraces the highest and deepest practicable tones. Respect the Pianoforte!

Let doubters consider how the pianoforte was esteemed by Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Liszt, who dedicated their choicest thoughts to it.

And the pianoforte has one possession wholly peculiar to itself, an inimitable device, a photograph of the sky, a ray of moonlight—the Pedal.

The effects of the pedal are unexhausted, because they have remained even to this day the drudges of a narrow-souled and senseless harmonic theory; the treatment accorded them is like trying to mould air or water into geometric forms. Beethoven, who incontestably achieved the greatest progress on and for the pianoforte, divined the mysteries of the pedal, and to him we owe the first liberties.

The pedal is in ill-repute. For this, absurd irregularities must bear the blame. Let us experiment with *sensible* irregularities.

I FELT . . . that the book I shall write will be neither in English nor in Latin; and this for the one reason . . . namely, that the language in which it may be given me not only to write, but also to think, will not be Latin, or English, or Italian, or Spanish, but a language not even one of whose words I know, a language in which dumb things speak to me, and in which, it may be, I shall at last have to respond in my grave to an Unknown Judge."

(Von Hoffmannsthal: A letter.)

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