

A RAID ON THE INFINITE

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Every work of art is a raid on the infinite.

In a world of finiteness bounded by infinitude, the artist seeks to push beyond the fringes of his boundedness in order to extend his inner world, to release more and more of the energy locked in his psyche, to know more of existence. Every raid on the infinite is an assault on the deep black inner space which encompasses his consciousness.

Even if it were an illusion that man as artist and artist as man could actually penetrate the infinite, it is an illusion so basic that without it nothing could be accomplished.

If the Sun and Moon were to doubt,
They'd soon go out.

Writing to Goethe on May 28, 1810, Elizabeth Brentano described her meeting with Beethoven. Among the things she reports Beethoven as saying are two quite remarkable statements: "When I open my eyes I must sigh, for what I see is contrary to my religion, and I must despise the world which does not know that music is a higher revelation than all wisdom and philosophy, the wine which inspires man to new generative processes; and I am the Bacchus who presses out this glorious wine for mankind and makes them spiritually drunken. . . . Speak to Goethe about me. Tell him to hear my symphonies and he will say that I am right in saying that music is the one incorporeal entrance into the higher world of knowledge which comprehends mankind but which mankind cannot comprehend."

Doubt has been cast on Elizabeth's attributions, and admittedly the language of her report is extravagant. She was apparently a young woman of beauty, intelligence and culture, with a sensitive, responsive nature who sought out as her friends men of the calibre of Goethe and Beethoven. Should we then discount what she says Beethoven said be-

cause her way of reporting their conversation may be exaggerated and extravagant? The day after their first meeting she showed Beethoven what she had written. His reaction was: "Did I say that? Well, then I had a raptus."

Even if we discount the language, the substance of what Beethoven may have said is curiously consistent with what we know of him, especially through his music. The question is not: "Did Beethoven say these things," but "could he have said them?" And the answer for me is: "Yes."

Translating these remarks into another language which takes us into the realm of the paranormal experience of heightened states of consciousness, three things emerge with stunning clarity: that music is a form of spiritual revelation of reality; that this reality enfolds man in its mystery and through music man gains "incorporeal entrance" into it; that music releases the limitless energies locked into man's psyche. In short, the substance of Beethoven's remarks, uttered in what he called a "raptus," is cosmological; i.e., music is one of man's innate ways of relating to the universe that made him and enfolds him in its mysterious reality.

In August 1906 Gustav Mahler wrote Mengelberg, the conductor: "I have just finished my Eighth. . . . Imagine that the universe bursts into song. We hear no longer human voices, but those of planets and suns which revolve." *Cosmogony*. The unmanifested sound of the human heart manifested in the world.

Later Mahler said of the Eighth: "My other works are all tragic and subjective; this one is a great dispenser of joy." The sound that is for liberation, to make man spiritually drunk.

Cosmogony. Ancient and primitive man relates sound to the universe. Music becomes the magical link between man and the cosmos, the "incorporeal entrance." Music is the "sound" of cosmic forces which have taken shape as man and live in him, and which he can set in motion magically.

"Music is the seat of secret forces or spirits which can be evoked by song in order to give man a power which is either higher than himself or which allows him to rediscover his deepest self." ¹

Strange and remarkable things happen when you are composing.

"... every being has its own sound or its own song, the timbre and rhythm of which embody the mystic substance of the owner." ²

"... for anyone who knows and can imitate the specific sound of an object is also in possession of the energy with which the object is charged. The purpose of magic is to utilize this indwelling energy. . . ." ³

Sometimes it is impossible to keep up with the rush of ideas. You

feel integrated and whole, released from the lethargic world of mundane literality and psychic/physical gravity.

"All life arises solely from stamping, from the tension or friction of two opposing factors which have to sacrifice their strength and, if need be, their life for the birth of new life." ⁴

Sometimes you enter into a state of frenzy, or ecstasy. Everything in you is flowing freely. The locks of the inner canals are wide open. You are running, leaping, flying.

"The luminous nature of sound, which in Indian tradition is based on the similarity between *svar* (light) and *svara* (sound), recurs in the creation myth of the Navaho." ⁵

"For primitive races sound is a wholly concrete expression of the spiritual world." ⁶

"The views on music held by the Chinese in antiquity were remarkable in that its essence was conceived to be not sound but a transcendent power." ⁷

Sometimes you feel as though the music that is coming out is happening to you. You are not making it; it is making you.

"'In the heart is a lotus with twelve petals, called anâhata, belonging to Shiva in his aspect of the Syllable om, a beloved object of adoration.'"

"'There the wise revere the unmanifested sound according to the instructions of the preceptors, the sound that is for liberation but not for enjoyment. That sound, however, when manifested in the world, serves for enjoyment, but also to break the cycle of existence.'"

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Sometimes you feel the essence of a work like a palpable presence within; and sometimes without. It is like living a dream except that the dream is the sound and shape of the music which you can also taste and smell and see.

"'In Egypt, the priests hymn the gods through the seven sounds in direct succession.'"

 [attributed to pseudo-Demetrius Phalerius, 1st century A.D.] ⁹

Cosmic Affinity. Egyptian Priests hymn the Gods through the seven sounds in direct succession. The sound that is for liberation, when manifested in the world, serves for enjoyment, but also to break the cycle of existence. The power of music to sustain or destroy the Universal Harmony. *Svar* and *svara*. Light and sound. The luminous nature of sound. Music is the dark giver of power which leads to the light. It not only creates the world; it cultivates and preserves it. Sound forms the substance of life. To imitate the specific sound of an object is also to be in possession of its energy. Every being has its own sound

which embodies the mystic substance of its owner. Music is the seat of secret forces.

"Speak to Goethe about me. Tell him to hear my symphonies and he will say that I am right in saying that music is the one incorporeal entrance into the higher world of knowledge which comprehends mankind but which mankind cannot comprehend."

A curious circumstance attended the composition of Mahler's *Eighth Symphony*. While he was still at work on the first movement set to the medieval text, *Veni Creator*, by the monk Hrabanus Maurus, to celebrate the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the Apostles on the day of Pentecost, he wrote to a philologist friend of his, Dr. Friedrich Löhr, to verify the prosody of the Latin text. Löhr noticed that the text which Mahler had found in an old prayer book was incomplete and so he sent Mahler the missing verses. When Mahler received them, he discovered that they occurred precisely at that point in the hymn where he had composed a long orchestral interlude. He was able to insert the missing verses without making any changes in his music. He merely added the choral part.

Strange and remarkable things happen when you are composing.

In the summer of 1959 I wrote the first part of my second string quartet. When Fall came I had to break off, and because of a series of external circumstances was unable to return to the quartet until the summer of 1961. In between I began to feel that it would be impossible to continue the work as a purely instrumental composition. It needed another solution: a vocal commentary. So I searched for a text to set for soprano voice which would join with the quartet, not as soloist, but as an intrinsic part of the ensemble. When I left off in 1959 a particular melodic thread had suggested itself as the basis for continuing on from the point to which I had carried the work that summer. It hung there for those two years like a quivering filament, not quite fully alive but with a promise of life. The text I decided to use was the 9th Duino Elegy of Rainer Maria Rilke. Specifically the opening and closing sections. Then a remarkable thing happened. I discovered that the opening words would fit the melodic thread of two years ago exactly. Still more amazing, the emotional curve of the text of the opening section of the Elegy paralleled the emotional curve of the opening section of the first part of the quartet. I set about matching the text and the already composed music. The vocal line I wrote for the soprano was new and independent. Magically, it seemed, my problem was solved for me, and the idea of making the second part a vocal commentary on the first was realized. [Plays 2nd Quartet; Soprano entrance.]

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Music: the light-sound ship that carries the composer spiritual-Viking to the borders of the infinite. The sound of liberation: to make mankind spiritually drunk, to break the cycle of existence, to merge oneself with the universe, to be one with the Cosmos.

Twice since 1965 I thought I was hallucinating. The first time when I wrote the *Contra Mortem et Tempus*; the second when I wrote the *Music for the Magic Theater*. Looking back, the sensations I experienced when composing these works seemed totally new, unlike any I had ever experienced before. I seemed to be totally suspended internally. Time did not exist; or it had lost itself utterly in the hidden spaces of my psyche. There was no effort attached to composing. Just the physical effort of putting signs and symbols down on paper. Otherwise, I felt only a profound calm, a quiet joy in the presence of what was emerging. In both instances the state of consciousness I am trying to describe continued on after the works themselves were done, and then slowly faded away. In neither case did I experience the black depressions or sense of total physical and psychological depletion that have often followed the completion of a work.

But, regardless of the nature of the sensations accompanying the act of composing itself, regardless of whether composing came easily or with great difficulty—and one can never predict which it will be the next time—invariably I have known that I was tapping the fierce energies that burn in the universe, subjecting myself to the fires that burn away the dross of “opakeness,” as Blake called it, and enlarging my inner world by pressing back, however slightly, the boundedness of the finitude which encloses me.

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Contra Mortem et Tempus was the work which released me from the tyranny of history and style. It is not an “original” work in the sense that I invented its themes. The material for the work was gathered from seven pieces by seven different composers, some of them still living (myself included, for I borrowed from one of my own works). This material covered a wide range of musical styles and melodic-harmonic languages. In point of chronology from around 1900 to 1960. But I was seeking for primal, archetypal musical images which I believe all composers draw on unconsciously; and having found the essential image that I felt bound these sources together, I proceeded. The state in which I composed the work, I have already described. But there is one more facet of the work which is worth mentioning: namely, that preceding its composition by several years I had become obsessed by the notion that the past was simultaneous with the present and the

future. Though I could not substantiate this notion then (or now), I often felt an overwhelming sense of living in an Eternal Present. It was this sense and the ideas which fed it and strengthened it that ultimately released me from what we call "history" and made it possible for me to abandon its narrow concepts of time and human experience. Finally I could accept and understand that all human projections which attain the condition of spiritual reality are no longer subject to the "laws" of time, space or history; that they occupy an entirely different Space and create an entirely different Time—are, in fact, Eternal. [Plays *Contra.*]

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