

RECORDED NOISES - TOMORROW'S INSTRUMENTATION

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IS the destiny of new music confined to the exploitation of counterpoint? Or to a linking together of chords according to different techniques, boldly taking any liberty and carrying dissonant and rhythmic combinations to a frenzied climax? Or does it lie in a gradual increase of the present-day orchestra's apparatus, which will bring new members to the already sufficiently large families of strings, woodwinds, brasses and instruments of percussion?

Stravinsky and Schönberg, to mention only two influential musicians among contemporary innovators, are fundamentally not so far from Bach, Beethoven, Mozart or Wagner. They speak different dialects of the same language or rather of the same kind of language. Their methods, audacious as once they may have seemed, differ little if at all—in one respect at least—from those of the classicists and romanticists; paper is needed to inscribe their thoughts and instruments must be in the hands of performers to transmit these thoughts to the audience.

Are the instrumental achievements of the notorious Italian *bruitistes* the authentic milestones of a new music? These noisemakers are in all probability the spiritual descendants of the Czech, Blaha, who, in the nineteenth century, invented a quite intricate machine operated by a bellows. Not only could it reproduce the tones of instruments like the fife, the flute or the trumpet, but it created new sounds imitating the noise of the wind, the tempest, and, on occasion, proved to be a veritable thunder-box. The Italian noisemakers, launched in 1911 by the fiery manifesto of Balila Pratella and a precisely conceived proclamation on the *Art of Noise* by the painter, Russolo, have made no advances since their debut.

Russolo, who had a quite imaginative idea of the direction music might take, wrote as follows: "Life in antiquity was silence. Noise was born in the nineteenth century with the invention of the machine. Today noise reigns supreme over human feeling." Further on he says: "Every act of our life is accompanied by noise. Noise is familiar, it has the power to recall us to life. Tone, on the contrary, is strange to life, always musical, a thing apart, occasional; it has become to our ear what a too well known face is to our eye. Noise, jutting out in confused and irregular fashion, never completely reveals itself; it holds innumerable surprises. By collecting and co-ordinating all noises we will enrich mankind with a wealth of new treasure."

To introduce and defend their idea, the noisemakers found a fervid apostle, completely convinced, enthusiastic and eloquent, in Marinetti. This name will always be associated with the period when mankind, viewing the splendid flight of the machine, felt the need to create a new esthetics. Marinetti is one of those who have given form to the spirit of our time. A belligerent and passionate advocate of futurism, he set himself rigorously to destroy the past before building his new structures. As we look back today we cannot but wonder at this deeply felt need to heap up verbal ruins in order to create something new. Though I may prefer the Eiffel Tower to the Tour Saint Jacques, some day I may wish to linger in the shadow of the old building and delight myself with the phantoms of another age.

The noisemakers were dedicated in purpose to the music of the future, but their realization fell far short of the goal. For all the hummers, the exploders, the thunderers, the whistlers, the rustlers, the gurglers, the crashers, the shrillers, and the sniffers of the "futurist" orchestra obey the same laws of execution as the common violins, violoncellos, flutes, oboes, and other instruments in the traditional orchestra. No matter how new the acoustic effects they create, they are always in need of performers.

Other producers of sound have succeeded the noisemakers. Not only do we have the peculiar instruments of the jazz-band, but various new devices for the electrical production of music, notably those of Professor Thérémin, the Russian, and of the Frenchmen, Givelet, Martenot and René Bertrand, the engineer

who has given us the dynaphones. (The orchestra of radio-electric dynaphones seems destined to play an important role in music today. Arthur Honegger has just used it successfully in *Roses en Métal*.)



Music must evolve in spirit and in expression. But before discussing its future, let us agree on some definition of music. Let us take the most commonly accepted meaning, namely, that this is the art of associating sounds in a manner agreeable to the ear. Then let us turn to noise, which, I believe, holds the secret of the future.

How far removed from music is noise? Where is the line of demarcation? Is not this indeed, just a question of the time and the individual? Before certain masterpieces were recognized as such—the *Ninth Symphony*, *L'Après-Midi d'un Faune*, *Le Sacre du Printemps*, or *Pacific 231*—how many heard in them only noise? It is largely a matter of what one is accustomed to hear. I have met a music-seller to whom Debussy's *La Mer* represented nothing but a trolley with bad brakes.

What has differentiated noise from music is that the orchestra makes no use of it except as the incidental effect of excessive dissonance or of great intensity of sound produced by the usual instruments. If we take a definite noise, capture and associate it with other noises according to a definite design, an act of composition is performed and a work of art authentically created.

Why, and I have been asking this for fifteen years, are phonograph records not taken of noises such as those of a city at work, at play, even asleep? Of forests, whose utterance varies according to their trees—a grove of pines in the Mediterranean mistral has a murmur unlike the rustle of poplars in a breeze from the Loire—? Of the tumult of the crowds, a factory in action, a moving train, a railway terminal, engines, showers, cries, rumblings?

If noises were registered, they could be grouped, associated and carefully combined as are the timbres of various instruments in the routine orchestra, although with a different technique.

We could then create symphonies of noise that would be grateful to the ear. There are plenty of symphonies today which are anything but agreeable, while there are at large and unregistered, a myriad of delightful sounds—the voices of the waves and trees, the moving cry of a sailing vessel's rigging, an airplane gliding down, the nocturnal choruses of frogs around a pool.

Once registered, naturally no significance other than that of sound can attach to individual noises. They will cease to be the creaking of a bus axle, the rumbling of a cauldron, the roaring of a cataract. They will have become merely noise factors, as saxophones, clarinets, violas or oboes are factors of musical sound.

A new field will open up for an art not imitative but truly creative, intriguing and difficult. To the sonorous material already at the artist's command a wealth of unforeseen riches will be added.

And what security recorded noises will hold for the composer of the future. No longer at the mercy of interpreters, he may first listen to the sounds he wishes to combine, choosing what he wants from numberless possibilities at his disposal. Noises captured on separate records may finally be gathered as a symphonic ensemble on one disk. A work may be heard at any time exactly in the form of its creation, as a picture presents itself always just as the artist has made it. The exact, the definitive work will be ever at hand, for the time approaches when the recording and reproducing apparatus will be perfect; it is nearly here now. Then the composer of music will have a laboratory and not a study.

The future of music lies in the conquest, the subjugation and the organization of noise. A new spirit will be served by a new material. That, for a time at least, will free us from the bondage of reminiscence.