

## MUSIC OF AND FOR THE RADIO

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WITH broadcasting in Germany today a government monopoly, the radio problem is one of national and cultural importance. Since each locality is served by one unit and most listeners are compelled by cheap sets to tune in on the local station, it has been quite a problem to construct programs satisfactory to all kinds of individual taste. The general solution has been to make selections so broad in scope that they contain something for everybody. Under the influence of government subsidy the tendency has been to develop the radio as an educational factor by broadcasting the best music of all ages.

But here certain difficulties arise. Do not listeners on the radio get an incomplete or even entirely false impression of musical masterpieces? Is not the environment of the radio audience different, does it not demand a special type of music? And there is an added consideration: should not music written for the radio be based on a technic of composition (instrumental, polyphonic, etc.) which will take into account the technical factors and be calculated automatically to ensure good reproduction?

The answers to these questions are still in dispute. Most radio engineers are convinced that the quality of reproduction is purely a technical problem. They believe it is only necessary to put the musicians before the microphone and have them play as they do at concerts. The engineers take the responsibility for the technical quality, since they expect soon to perfect the reproduction of all works. But the musician hears quite differently from the engineer. Technically perfect broadcasts have completely failed to satisfy the artist who has in mind the native tone of the instruments. On the other hand certain tonal distortions which upset the engineers do not bother the musician at all. There need be no hesitation in placing the greatest degree of confidence in the

technician, but it is unprofitable to make him sole judge of the quality of broadcast music. By right the only important critic of any reproduction is the conductor or performer himself.

Recent experiments have demonstrated that the arrangement of the orchestra in the broadcasting studio must be absolutely different from that in a concert hall. It has even been found that it is well to modify the seating of the orchestra according to atmospheric conditions, the temperature of the room and other incidental factors. These experiences, now generally familiar, have led in Germany to the innovation of a music director at all musical broadcasts, whose job it is to keep the conductor posted on how the actual reproduction in the loud speaker is coming over. Thus problems of radio interpretation, in addition to their immediate importance, have made us realize that certain effects which the musician tries to produce, no matter how painstaking the performance, cannot be reproduced on the radio because of technical considerations.

We must bear in mind that with the exception of a few recent works, all music written so far has been created for concert halls, and that all observations about their effect on the listener arise from experiences *shared* by auditor and performer. Listening in the same hall in which the music is played, a number of factors come into play which are lacking when one hears a broadcast. The auditor is not under the influence of the musician's personality, he does not share the atmosphere which permeates the concert hall, the festive impression of an illuminated auditorium is lacking. Instead he concentrates on the sound. Music from a loud speaker above all must be comprehensible to be effective.

Wind instruments which blare too loudly in the middle section can drown a violin melody and make that part of the work unintelligible. An orchestra used as it is in Wagner's *Ring der Nibelungen* is not broadcast as it really sounds. The many horns and tubas blur and confuse the tone. The doubled thirds of the woodwinds in Brahms' symphonies lose most of their characteristic color value when they are broadcast, because of the dissolution of timbre. One could cite many more examples to show that no matter how careful and technically correct a broadcast may be, the tones issuing from the loudspeaker are different from the

original. Since the composer calculates his effects in terms of the concert hall, the music is incomprehensible when these are lost. Even time and movement are different in a broadcast. A flowing passage or the development of a symphonic phrase, which the immediate listener hears as gradually mounting to a climax, often is uniform and level to the ear of the radio listener. In a word, the concert hall's performance is more plastic, its effect more intense than the radio's.



These problems—the common artistic experience, the tonal effect, the dynamic and plastic phenomena as contrasted with those of the concert halls—have been studied quite intensively with two aims in view. First, to have a broadcast as nearly technically perfect as possible. This question, so far as it concerns musical direction inside the studio, need not be further discussed here. But then there has been a further development. Is it proper to modify existing works so that they may better meet the conditions of broadcasting? It is felt that this is justified, provided the modification makes the real nature of the work more apparent. Unfortunately not many experiments have been conducted along these lines; more data must be gathered.

The receptivity of the radio listener is admittedly different from that of the concert-goer. The radio listener does not experience the work in common with other people, sharing it in the festive concert hall. He is solitary and concentrated on the music. Furthermore, he is alone in his familiar room, unconcerned about his surroundings, unobserved and resting from his labors. In such an environment the style suitable for a concert hall may appear irrelevant. Therefore the idea has arisen that music composed especially for broadcasting must be like chamber music. It is of course understood that this applies to the spirit, not the outer form; for a sort of chamber music could be written for a military band. The second consideration is the more important. A person sitting alone before his radio is more subjective and more prone to fantasy than the concert-goer who is closely bound to the actuality of his surroundings. Thus the concert-goer experiences music plus reality, the radio listener music plus fantasy. The



contrast in these two ideas indicates the stylistic necessities of a special radio music. If we add to these considerations the requirements in the technic of composition mentioned before—modification of sound, dynamism, polyphony, etc.—we will be able to set down a fairly unified formula for a special radio music.



The need for such a music scarcely needs demonstration. The possibilities of radio are not limited to presenting a series of music reproductions which are substitutes for the original, like the reproductions of paintings in a portfolio of collected works. We have all had radio experiences which gave us a new and unique thrill, for example, participation in important events taking place far from us. It means more to us than any directly tangible sensation when in Germany we hear the voice of the President of the United States. The feeling of “being-there” that we have at the broadcast of an opera-premiere, the revelation of a scientific marvel, the burial of unfortunate mountain folk, is a unique experience, given us for the first time by radio. If we look at the matter from this viewpoint, any broadcast of an opera or concert may be justified, no matter how great may be the artistic gaps in the performances.

When we hear certain tales over the radio the effect is quite different from reading them. Everything which we get from the radio is immediately bound up with our imagination in the creation of a new picture. The mind of the radio listener is freer, more released than that of an auditor under any other circumstances. For example, Bert Brecht’s and Kurt Weill’s *Lindberg-Flug* may be recalled. The fight with the storm, the emotions of the aviator are presented more vividly than is possible on the stage, on the screen, or in a narrative. The fantastic, the conceptual, in short everything which stretches to the horizons of human imagination and intellect are never so effective as over the radio, which adds something unreal to anything this apparatus brings us. However I do not mean that the offering is fantastic in the sense of something inchoate. On the contrary, the listener’s willingness to concentrate demands a concentrated



form. Since there are things that are most effective when presented over the radio, and since such subjects are capable of musical expression, the demand for a characteristic radio music is obviously authentic.

This is the problem as it absorbs the artists who are especially interested in broadcasting. The public as a whole is not much concerned. But the artists realize that they have a great responsibility. With broadcasting a government monopoly in Germany, a great power has been given them; they can influence the taste of the people; they nearly all feel that they have a cultural mission; and in this sense the best is none too good. Therefore, even in our poverty stricken country, the radio broadcasting stations have become important patrons, since they give commissions to composers. Radio research facilities have been established at the state academies of music. Here the characteristics of broadcast music and the problem of creating a new music for radio are studied.

The results so far indicate that the technic of a special radio music must be characterized by a certain primitiveness, by a simple clear construction. The question of typical feeling or spirit is not involved; a romantic work is just as appropriate as a classic. What is important is to achieve that simple clarity of expression which is realized in primitive art.

One more point must be added. Radio will never replace concert music. It will always offer a substitute for the majority of existing works. Therefore it is ever so much more the task of the music creator to make use of the new method of presentation by radio in such a way as to reveal new possibilities in its method of expression, and to provide his listener with new impressions.