

## UNIVERSALITY AND MUSIC TODAY

ALFRED EINSTEIN

**I**N the earlier periods of the history of music, universality was something demanded of the musician. He had no right to follow his inclinations or his impulses. Incorporated into the social order of his age, he was expected as a good craftsman to deliver whatever that order demanded of him—music religious or secular, vocal or instrumental. No one inquired about his special preferences or qualifications. If his craftsmanship was good, it was considered "art;" the personal qualities he offered over and above the handicraft and art were just those values that might perhaps outlive the age.

Naturally there have been specialists in all ages. The Notre Dame musicians occupied themselves only with sacred music; the Florentine contemporaries of Petrarch and Boccaccio practised a secular art almost exclusively, madrigals, *cacce* and ballads. But in the same period, a greater and more universal master, Guillaume de Machault, was active in France, and his output dominated the whole field of his century's music, both ecclesiastical and wordly. This domain was called "ars nova." It was still possible then to achieve universality through a new, revolutionary art, and if the "New Music" of today were to seek a patron saint, it would have to select this master of Rheims, who was not only musician but poet as well.

In the following century, the universal musician is Guillaume Dufay. Universality at that time was synonymous with world domination, for Dufay is the greatest Burgundian master, and in the quattrocento there was practically no art outside the Burgundian. But the century in which universal composers stud the musical firmament like constellations is the sixteenth, with Josquin and Willaert and Rore, or with Jannequin and the two

Gabrieli. Then one sees musicians who are not only genuinely universal but also national. Only Lasso is not so easily assigned to any one nation for he was a Frenchman by inclination and an Italian by education; but he also wrote German songs and he handed down a by no means negligible lifework of secular as well as sacred music. In the sixteenth century, at all events, there begin to appear the great figures who are "one-sided" by direction and gift. Palestrina wrote a series of excellent madrigals but he remains the sacred composer par excellence; and a few Spaniards of the period, by their exclusive preoccupation with ecclesiastical music, are true representatives of the Counter-Reformation. Luca Marenzio published some volumes of motets, but they do not loom large beside his life-work as a master of madrigals.

In later centuries universality becomes increasingly difficult of attainment. The only one to whom we can completely ascribe it is Mozart. The universality of Bach and Handel does not represent a mastery of all spheres, of the entire realm of music; it is a universality of style. Bach would have been willing to write operas if he had had commissions for them, like his contemporary Telemann; but they would have revealed no new side of his work. The root of Bach's creation is instrumental, it is nourished on the organ, and from this root grew not only his whole instrumental composition, but also all his vocal works, the motets and cantatas, the songs and the choruses; if he had happened to write operas, they would have appeared no different intrinsically from the *Coffee-Cantata* or the *Peasant Cantata*. In contrast to this is Handel (whom we always think of as cradled like a Siamese twin with Bach on the lap of the baroque age). Handel is the typical vocal composer, who carried over the vocalism of his cantatas, duets and fugues into his organ concertos and even into his fugues, no matter whether they were choral fugues in an oratorio or piano fugues in a suite. It is a universality of handwriting, no exercise of mastery in all fields each according to its own particular style. An aria by Bach is not completely vocal, nor a fugue by Handel completely instrumental.

It is in Mozart that universality is truly evident. His biographers can never quite determine the field which really represents

the peak of his art, the vocal or the instrumental; they cannot decide whether to choose the opera composer above the creator of the piano concertos, the quintets, the quartets, and the four last symphonies. And it appears to have been only chance or a shortcoming of the age that he did not also attain full height as a sacred composer. Beethoven, like Bach, is a born instrumentalist and his vocal approach is secondary. But his foundation is not based like Bach's on polyphony but on the "obligato," on the concertante. And then what of the great specialists who could express themselves completely only in one medium? Gluck is an opera composer par excellence, despite a few chance works dashed off in other forms. And Weber, strictly speaking, wrote but one opera. Wagner is so obsessed with the dramatic possibilities of the scene that his musical imagination scarcely unfolds at all under the compulsion of absolute music; without the stimulus of dramatic elements, the creator of *Tristan* and *Parsifal* becomes an amazingly mediocre musician. How many-sided—though not universal—is Berlioz compared to Wagner. What a "specialist" is Hugo Wolf compared to Schubert, who conquers, or at least invades the whole field of music from the firm basis of his song. How self-deluded was Brahms when he toyed with the idea of writing an opera. In the course of the nineteenth century the whole field of music appears to have contracted. Sacred music, even the Catholic, disappears long after Protestantism had brought forth its greatest representative in Bach. Church music of course still continued to be written. In 1880 a childlike spirit like Bruckner composes posthumous, baroque, Upper-Austrian masses, a century late. But Liszt, according to all evidence, is already living in pseudo-Gregorianism and Verdi is embarking quite naively on a requiem restricted by his conception of what is operatically feasible. The church still refreshes itself at an apparently inexhaustible fount of tradition, but the vital spark is dead.



Enough of retrospection. Is universality still possible today? It should be easier to realize, now that the domain of music has become still further restricted. More types of music have died

out, or rather, many more retain only the appearance of life. Songs are probably still written but Song exists no longer. For our age, which has properly grown more reticent, song is too uncompromising an expression of emotion. We prefer to escape by stylization, in the masquerade of the cantata. Symphonies are still being written but there no longer is a Symphony. In the symphony, one man attempts to talk to all, perhaps even *for all*, but I am not sure that such a man may be found today, no matter what his name. And so, again quite properly, the attempt is made to write symphonic music within the smaller, less hampering concertante forms, and here too refuge is sought in stylization, preferably in the concerto grosso, and not in the solo concerto with its cultivation of subjectivity. The symphonic form, the "sonata form," is a discursive one, and a discourse that reveals too much inner feeling is not popular. All the subjective types of music developed by the nineteenth century are disappearing.

At the beginning of the movement for new music, everything disappeared which had particularly to do with vocal art, most especially opera and choral works. Only gradually did music regain its conception of universality. I believe that the vocal elements today have more vitality than the instrumental. But at the outset, the string quartet was pre-eminent. Any description of the development of this movement must first note the transformation wrought in Schönberg's string quartet. In the period around 1920, a new composer's first opus was usually a string quartet. It was the abstract period of the new music; and the abstract became the dominating style. The paths or bypaths over which Schönberg travels until he arrives at the twelve-tone system are truly remarkable; but once arrived at the goal, Schönberg applies his system to all fields, it becomes universal. It is just as universal in this respect as all the other experiments with tonal materials altered or augmented by arbitrary division. And Hindemith, whose musical nature is so unrelated to Schönberg's—for he is a maker of rhythm and a practising musician—resembles him in this respect: he can and does apply his manner to the whole field of music. A survey of his work will show that Hindemith has been effective in all fields which a composer of

new music can cultivate. But he constructs as an instrumentalist, even in his operas or choruses. There are choruses developed from the tonal material of the anti-vocal principle of equal temperament; there are operas in which the drama and the music belong to different spheres. It is really unnecessary to quote Hindemith's remark on the failure of his first opera: never again would he compose an opera without reading the book; one has only to recall *Cardillac*. Even in *Mathis der Maler*, the musical elements, despite all attempts at "compromise" are only a reflection of the dramatic. It is not a dramatic music.

Quite different, more realistic in nature is Stravinsky's universality. Stravinsky has no style, and even no manner. Each of the "new musicians" who did not grow up in the era of new music, who are now fifty or sixty, has experienced a "transformation." In Schönberg's case it was in the *Gurre-Lieder*, in Stravinsky's, *Le Sacre du printemps*. Since then Stravinsky has become antipodal to all young musicians who compose without preconception, who seek to produce pure expression. He always establishes a hypothesis, a point of support, a circumference to which his line is tangential. Here we must except such purely folk works as *Noces* or an apparently negative work like *L'histoire du soldat*—without in any way commenting on their artistic importance. At a quite early stage he is already in contact with the classicism of the early eighteenth century; in the Pergolesi *Suite*, there is the cheerful style of the opera bouffe. For a moment he touches the old classical style in *Oedipus Rex*, which is an un-natural, chilling opera. He touches Bach's polyphony in his *Violin Concerto*; the stylized bucolicism of the old French school from Lully to Rameau in his *Duo* for piano and violin; the old music drama and at the same time the oratorio in his *Perséphone*; in *The Card Party* he touches and parodies Rossini's opera and many other stylistic idiosyncrasies of the Empire or Biedermeier period which has almost the same attraction for him, the lure of a mechanistic and puppet-like world, that it exerted on Busoni. It is a universality of relativity and in this respect, Busoni is one of the precursors of Stravinsky.

Can universality again be achieved within our own limits, within the limits of a living music? I believe it can. Change

gives us hope. Twenty years ago opera was a field completely abandoned by living, contemporary creators. Young musicians shunned nothing so much as the hypertrophy of materials, the excessive romanticism, the unreality that prevailed in post-Wagnerian opera, Richard Strauss included.

Today it is opera, the unpathetic opera, the opera which addresses itself to a new public, whose first efforts in Germany, as shown in works of Krenek and Weill, were trampled underfoot by the cultural hordes of the Third Reich, that represents perhaps the most fertile activity in the whole sphere of music. Who can tell whether from the chaos of the present there will not be born a new piety, a new desire for religion, which while it may not require sacred music, may still need a new ritual for new men? Whether the period of negation, of tangential music will not be followed by a period in which the demand for a "direct" music will once again come to life? If such a new music appears will it be without predetermined concepts, divorced from contact with the past? That is the new question, and it is not easily answered.