

AFFINITIES OF THE AGES

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TWO articles in the *New York Times* recently commented on the influx of European music scholars, young and old, into the United States and gave a friendly welcome to this invasion as a gain for the country. The list was in no way complete; a dozen names might have been added, and more soon will be, of all those scholars whose first refuge was Britain, but who have been forced, since the war began, to leave English libraries and universities for places like the Isle of Man. The list will be further lengthened by men from countries now sharing the blessings of National Socialism — Holland, Belgium, Denmark, France and others where free investigation has likewise become impossible.

But such a friendly greeting may also awaken protest. Some one might well ask: Is this invasion by European musical scholars good and wholesome for a country which is proud of its independence; good, not only for the science itself, but for the ardent efforts to create an American music? From time to time I re-read one of the early works of Friedrich Nietzsche, *Service and Disservice of History in Life*, in order to decide whether the activity I pursue still bears a relationship to the present and is not empty philology or archeology, a monastic occupation with no more value than the compilation of classical authors by a medieval monk in his cell. Nietzsche believed that education in history, learning without experience, is a disease which must ruin the soul of a people. Even at that time, he considered Wagner's works the panacea, the cure-all to restore the health of the sickened German people, and in one respect he was right, although in quite a different way; with *and* without the impulse of historical science the German spirit has transformed itself into sheer bestiality, and Wagner's art, which deserved a better fate, has become the intoxicating drug of nationalism.

The relationships of the creative musician to musicology and that of the musicologist to creative music are very different. The attitude of the scholar to music, to the old, the new, and the newest, must be more than

mere respect for the raw material of his observations. It must be love. Dislike, at times necessary, is only the obverse of love. What would a historian be without love, without capacity to differentiate, without any feeling for greatness! Great or small, the historian knows from the start what his theme is, not merely how he will handle it. What would the scholar be without spirits like Bach, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert! He can know them only if he loves them. The history of music would be a mere series of Homeric catalogues of ships, if it were uninspired by a feeling for the peaks, for greatness. Philology and archeology are not ends in themselves; at most they furnish only the building stones.

Quite distinct from this is the attitude of the creative musician toward music learning. When he is very young (and how many creative musicians strive successfully all their lives to remain children) he entertains a deep-seated scorn or instinctive hate. The deep-seated scorn is like that of a skilled cabinet-maker toward an apprentice joiner who never goes beyond making bootjacks. And to some extent it is justified, for one cannot be a scholar without being a good musician, capable of constructing more than a mere bootjack. He need not be a creative musician — indeed he cannot. But he must possess enough insight to be able to weigh greatness, creative power. It is however possible to measure full weight even with a decimal scale.

All things considered, the instinctive hate of the musician toward the music scholar seems to have still further justification. A creative personality need not know too much, any more than a woman need study anatomy to bear a child. Knowledge disturbs, weighs down the creator. Or rather — since no art work comes into the world with such simple compulsion as a baby — the creator wants to know only what is useful, what advances his work. He does not want to be hemmed in, embarrassed, even paralyzed by the greatness of past masters. Historical learning offers too much that is already formed: Bach *and* Beethoven, the Middle Ages *and* Wagner, Gregorian song *and* Chopin. He would, if he could, really choose to be entirely without preconceptions, but since he has been born late and cannot negate the continuing existence of Bach, Beethoven, Mozart and others, he prefers at least to make his choice from the tables set by the past.

This brings us to the relationships between the art of the present and the past, what I should like to define as "Affinities of the Ages." These did not exist when there was still no musical past. Up to the end of the sixteenth century music was only a living art. Its history had no long memory, no recollections that went back of the preceding generation. The

fifteenth century knew nothing of the fourteenth, the sixteenth nothing of the fifteenth. Dufay knew not Machaut or Landino, nor Josquin Dufay. Only as the sixteenth century developed did the art of the past begin to intrude into the art of the present; what we now describe as music of the Palestrina age, as pure a-capella music, projected itself into the new, concertant, monodic music of the seventeenth century. It has often been asserted that we of today are the first to contend with the problems of the past, indeed to shoulder the burden of too great a past. That is only correct in so far as our historical memory has become *richer* than the memories of Carissimi, Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Wagner. For in the seventeenth century there was already an archaistic unlikelike art, the "Roman style" of the followers of Palestrina, whose dead hand weighed even more heavily on the age of J. J. Fux in Vienna and of Padre Martini in Bologna. Only a single master of the eighteenth century seems to have been able to cope with the past: Johann Sebastian Bach. But he mastered it so personally, standing alone and great in his day, that he can set no other musician an example. In the eighteenth century he himself, or rather the "learned" art which he represents, became part of the past and a problem. Knowing him produced a crisis in the creative work of Mozart and Beethoven, and it is a question whether Mozart and Beethoven altogether got the better of that crisis. Mendelssohn, the first "learned" musician of the nineteenth century, certainly did not, in part of his work — which is why although the *Hebrides* overture and the *Midsummernight's Dream* music are still alive, *Paulus* and *Elias* are not.

In the nineteenth century there are two masters who "got the better of Bach," each in his own way: Wagner and Brahms. Naturally I mean only the Wagner of the *Meistersinger*, which depends essentially on the opposition to and separation from the archaistic, Bach style, of the personal, Wagnerian style. The solution is so dictatorial, powerful, adventurous, so full of the genius of the complete Wagner, one might say that never was Bach treated in more Wagnerian fashion. Brahms takes the problem more seriously. He is the first to indulge in direct relations with musical learning; he was a friend of its first representatives in Germany, Friedrich Chrysander and Phillip Spitta; he was a subscriber to the *Vierteljahrsschrift für Musikwissenschaft*, although he did not read it (or pretended not to read it). He was one of those who received the great Bach Edition, and he studied each new volume, although he was one of the principal opponents of "collected works."

As a creative musician, Brahms was interested in a great deal of the past which musical learning spread before him. He knew the least important pages of Haydn and Mozart, he studied each volume of Bach and Händel. He also knew madrigals and motets of the sixteenth century. Certain tunes of mixed choruses reveal a knowledge of still earlier, "medieval" music. Did it do him any harm? That question is not usually answered in the Brahms biographies. Yes, and no; knowledge of Bach and Händel hurt him badly in *Ein deutsches Requiem*, but helped him greatly in the two *Clarinet Sonatas* or the *Clarinet Quintet* for example. One can scent the past in such works, they are the progeny of ancient ancestors, but their blood has become pure, their bastardry has been overcome. Fortunately that does occur in art and in life.

Since Brahms, our heritage from the past, our patrimony, has become greater, through the pursuit of musical learning. Living art can now give play to its "affinities" and spin relationships with the mass of its heritage. Brahms probably knew works by Dufay, we know the thirteenth and the twelfth centuries. In his *Unterweisung im Tonschaft*, Paul Hindemith analyzes a ballad of Guillaume de Machaut and discovers in it "things that only today we can appreciate as proper and beautiful, because today we again have the ability, widespread in Machaut's time, to oppose and separate compositional elements on hearing and to weigh them against each other." In it he finds a faithful counterpart to the Gothic architecture of that time. Ah how gladly would we again be "Gothic" today! We would gladly be Gothic, because we are so reluctantly "romantic."

It is something new in the history of music to have a generation renounce the art of the preceding generation. Beethoven was a pupil of Haydn and Mozart; and the early romantics, Schubert, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Berlioz, were pupils of Beethoven, each in his own way. Today Richard Strauss, himself a "survival," is the only pupil of Wagner. All the younger men, to the extent that they do want to link up with the past, skip yesterday and the day-before-yesterday, romanticism and classicism, and turn uncompromisingly, to the "objective" unpathetic art of Bach or still earlier masters. Hindemith, and not only Hindemith, has parodied Wagner occasionally. But it would never occur to him to parody Bach and still older masters. This relationship to an older, more remote art, is what I call the affinity of time. There are examples in every other art — the period in which painting turned to the primitive and barbaric; and Stravinsky's occasional "relations" with the classicist sonata-writers of the Empire corresponds to

Picasso's "relations" with the classical outline draughtsmen.

Only a late generation, whose knowledge and taste have been broadened by learning, can permit itself such relationships, give itself up to such affinities. When artists do this they are really indebted to learning. Do our musicians today cast sheep's eyes at medieval music, Dufay, Landino Machaut, because musical learning in the last forty years has preferred to turn to the Middle Ages, or do we find here a hidden bond between creative art and learning, which expresses itself in a general leaning toward a specific period of the past? That is hard to decide. One thing is certain: the generation after 1850, Brahms, would not have been able to know the master of the sacred cantata, J. S. Bach, without the preparatory work of scholars; Hindemith would not have known Guillaume de Machaut unless the medieval manuscripts had been deciphered.

Music learning makes no claim on the gratitude of the creative artist. It is aware of his defensive attitude and understands it. Nietzsche, to quote him again, speaks of "artists with a concomitant analytical and retrospective ability (that is, a rare kind of artist whom one must seek although one may never be so inclined). Brahms was such an exceptional artist, and Nietzsche was perhaps thinking of him — at that time he was still far from the derogatory judgment he passed on him later, in *The Case of Wagner*. Music learning holds no grudge against the musician indifferent to its pursuit, who chooses to be without preconception, or as Goethe put it, to be "ein Narr auf eigne Hand." (But is it really possible to exist today, in the middle of the twentieth century, without preconceptions?) Truly knowledge is dangerous, one must be strong to overcome its hazards. The more learning there is, the greater are the choice and the peril. But there is no danger to anyone who has learned everything and then "unlearned" but not forgotten it, who has so absorbed the past in himself that it becomes his living heritage. Perhaps this young land and its music are strong enough and therefore can view the invasion, of which we spoke at the beginning, with the greatest goodwill.