

MORE ABOUT SPACE AND TIME IN MUSIC

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“WHY is the *G Minor* any better a piece of music than *My Little Grey Home in the West?*”, a correspondent wishes to know, after examining my thesis that music exemplifies the mutual transcendence of space and time, which was published in the October 1927 number of *The Open Court* under the title, “Space and Time in Music.” Music to him is enjoyable for its “architecture” rather than for “the peering of time into space, and the melting of space into time.” The architecture of music! It was the city of King Arthur which arose to the strains of music and was “therefore never built at all, and therefore built forever.” Is music as mere architecture to be taken seriously? The sort of building that goes on in music is comparable only to life, or to consciousness, for in this one art, process and result remain of equal value. It is true that most popular songs are “built” not according to high principles but are preponderantly rhythmical and sentimental. This sentimentality is the result of a partial cleavage of fact and meaning, and wherever anything less than complete correlation of melody, harmony and rhythm (elements of space-time’s true expression) occurs, the music is insofar not pure. The individual whose thought habitually moves on a jazz level finds in jazz the true expression of life as animal functioning which still has its moments. The more difficult question is why the sensuous expression of truth through music may take so many forms. Instead of comparing Mozart’s *Symphony in G Minor* with the single rhythmic melody of such a song as the one mentioned, would not a more pertinent query read something like this?—If it is true that music gives the truth of space-time, and the *G Minor* says the last word in musical perfection, how is the critic to explain the existence of many other musical masterpieces?

Music is highly sensuous. The physiology of the human ear makes the regular vibrations in the musical tone extremely pleasurable. But the reason for the concourse of sweet sounds in music being so variously enjoyed as well as the reason for an infinite possibility of arrangement of these sounds is discoverable in the fact that music is the shadow of creative thought, not of logical thinking. A mechanical sameness is the result of logic, but living thought is individual in each expression. The logic of the perfect whole with perfection of the parts is derived through that sense-organ, the eye. The musical composition taken as a whole with tone relations working to that end is a visual concept. The composition completed is no more the purpose and meaning of music than death is the purpose and meaning of life. In enjoying music who can deny that beyond the all-at-once experience given by the completeness present in each step of the process there is in addition a sensation of living, almost as though one had become for the time the very "note grown strong"? There is a saying that "The lark mounts to heaven on the wings of his song," and something like it happens to the music lover when he listens to good music. It is indeed almost impossible not to think of everything, even of life, in terms of the whole, just because the expression of space-time which the ear gives is more difficult and accordingly is not retained in memory so well as the simpler synthesis supplied by the eye. But analysis and synthesis at once is involved in life, or consciousness. The ear-sense, hearing, is capable of representing this; vision is not. The combination of analysis and synthesis does not produce a new synthesis, and the synoptic view which philosophers of today, yesterday, and the dim ages of philosophical speculation, have stressed, may put the thinker beyond time as they claim it does, but after all it is only the time in the particular event noted. The "eternal" view as illustrated by Mozart's reported dream referred to in the preceding paper is certainly not to be desired above living through the moments which make up the picture, whatever speculative philosophy may have held as its ideal. It is a one-sided attitude, and if the person who holds the doctrine but knew it, his wish to be beyond time without remaining in it is an extremely paradoxical one. What is time in itself? Like space, time is dependent, derived, and any duration is the expression of time, and any qualification of that duration expresses space. They are both

the external forms of thought and absolutely essential to one another.

Music cannot be considered the synthesis of space and time because analysis is of equal importance in the mutual transcendence of these thought forms. A successive difference of tone leaves the various differences isolated and distinct, though still in a continuum of tone. The tone, I repeat, in a composition of true music, is surcharged with its past and future and yet retains perfect individuality. This is not the case with color. Colors in juxtaposition have their individualities injured, and this is consequently true of colors in a series. It is because of the power of the sense of hearing to make a synthesis, and also permit analysis, not as parts of a whole but as equal in value with that whole, that space and time are given adequately through music, where space is expressed as time, and time as space, without either losing its original meaning. This is the true expression of each in relation to the other, and it is not so strange as it may at first appear. This relation is in fact only an example of what is meant by the word "transcendence" so often on the tongue of the philosopher.

Music is no pattern for thought. It is the natural expression of thought's form. To say this is not to put barriers between form and content whose relation is also a transcendent one. Instead of a sensuous expression of thought's form, the melody, harmony and rhythm of tone we hear in music may just as well be called the far echo of truth. Therefore, beautiful as the compositions of Mozart, Beethoven, Franck, Tschaikowsky and the whole category of favorites, seem to our sensuous souls, the high thought whose inner relations these musicians have presented has just so much the more beauty and value.

Poetry is compelling because the form of this art (as well as the attitude found here by reason of its form) is of the universal significance of music. Poetry conveying misrepresentation of truth carries with it a much more serious danger than is possible in any other art. In the tenth book of *The Republic* Socrates disparages both the poet and painter as mimetic, but he bars only the poet from the ideal state. For its power to make the good man bad Plato indicts poetry, the most deleterious art of all in its misuse. Poetry, says Plato's chief character, must appear at her truest and best in a well-ordered society, or not at all. Real poetry has the

appeal of truth in its content in direct relation to the music of its form. In Matthew Arnold's memorable essay, *The Study of Poetry*, the relation of content to form is emphasized: "In poetry . . . the spirit of our race will find its consolation and its stay. But the consolation and stay will be of power in proportion to the power of the criticism of life. *And the criticism of life will be of power in proportion as the poetry conveying it is excellent rather than inferior, sound rather than unsound or half-sound, true rather than untrue or half-true.*"

Music is all-sufficient in itself. It does not and should not suggest content for the form of thought becomes the reality of music. Its purpose is the demonstration of the relationships of thought-forms. Only incidentally are these relations logical, for logic, though it has its place, is the heritage of eye-minded philosophers who find in complete structures such as the eye witnesses, the sole truth. The moods given by music are evidences of the living reality of these thought relations. In a representative symphony such as Beethoven's "Mighty Fifth," moods from despair and resignation to joy and triumph succeed one another and are caught up and intermingled as the theme moves along. A mood is much more complex than we generally think of it. The mood is the tone—observe how commonly the sensory term occurs in our speech—the tone of the thought whose living form-relations are represented by music.