

*A commencement address given at the University of Western Ontario, Faculty of Music, London, Ontario.*

To explain my title and its significance, I must reminisce about my student days. The menu of courses offered music students in those days was much like the courses you are taking today. There is always music history section meeting MWF at 8am and one really had to love music to make that class which at the University of Minnesota meant one mile up-hill from the river flats of the Mississippi to the lecture hall. During 20 below winters this tested our determination if we should remain music majors, and of course, harmony, one's instrument, and in my case composition studies.

In harmony we studied nothing but the Bach Chorales and memorized a lot of rules - when the third of one chord goes to the third of another chord, always double the third in the second chord, etc. Our secret strength was in knowing there was more to music than this. In Music History we concentrate on Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Brahms, the straight "German tour" but of course, there were those old favorites Cipriani de Rore and Philip de Monte - whose melodies we all knew and loved. During those years of chilblains and Mortus Musicus, the name of Peter Ilytich Tchaikovsky was nary uttered. One could after all, hear Romeo and Juliet or a symphony easily enough but the stuff was so obvious that it did not merit much probing. Our attitude and the attitude of the instructor was that deep down the music was shallow. Those syrupy melodies swiped by TinselTown but much really better than Hollywood's tune-smiths, those saccharine harmonies really quite ingenious, the noisy orchestration with brass and timpani always chasing the string section on the off-beat seemed cheap and obvious, the product of a facile musicality whose sole aim was applause and success. We all tacitly and smugly assumed this view. To have expressed admiration, even a mild liking for any of this music would have shorn our credibility admitting not only bad taste but liking bad taste. At bottom, then, this was an attitudinal categorization none too different than a "Stones" aficionado harboring a secret like for the Beach Boys or Pat Boone. (If you'd like another far-out but true parallel imagine a literary studies major publishing on Faulkner while secretly reading Somerset Maugham.) Not only does taste make the man, taste becomes a quality of mind.

I daresay that recent decades have reinforced this view and that music students still pigeon-hole one another by such statements as "she likes Puccini, you know, or "he likes Webern. Stockhausen and Cage" -although such a juxtaposition of musical taste defies logic - can one really like Cage? One may like Cage's attitudes or ideas, but how do you then like or get to like the "music"? In any case, let us think about Tchaikowsky for a moment, let us consider him not in any musicological sense, but consider him simply as a musician; it is this aspect of the man which interests me. That he was a genius, I do not think will be argued against. He was not a wunderkind, but came to music very late when he was in his early twenties. Being a latecomer, he must have worked very hard to cultivate his musical craft and I think few would argue that he was slovenly of metier or that he lacked inspiration - although he could manufacture music like many another composer for cash. That he was a serious man, can also not be disputed, one has only to look at his theory book by the writing of which he hoped to secure a teaching position and also earn a few rubles. Reactions to his early music are well known, his teachers, performers and conductors railing against the piano and violin concerto - jealousy existed in those days too. That he worked hard is also beyond doubt; the next time you find yourself in the library stacks, just look at the space needed to house his complete works. If I wanted to push a point, the claim might well be made that his ballets are as monumental in their performance length as the Ring Cycle and in many ways the ballets are supreme achievements of sustained, high-level inspiration; there are no dead moments in their thrust. So what do we have? We have a very hard working composer who left behind a very large output of work who died in his 53rd year. Not an unimpressive creative legacy for thirty years work!

Can the criticism made of his work that it is often shapeless, that it lacks intellect stand? That his music exhibits character no one can deny and I would explain to those complaining Tchaikowsky's music lacks intelligence, that intelligence does not constitute character; character which is what we are after is a quality of inner discipline. The quality of discipline we get in Tchaikowsky is his particular inspiration and, yes, his intelligence. This perception our music historians usually lack. We, as students of a more humbler nature must remain true to our perceptions for they will form our convictions and henceforth, our character. Is this not what education is all about? But I am preaching and this must stop.

The point I am making is that attitudes are always forming about creativity, and that what one generation admires the following may despise. What is particularly dangerous is the attitude then found in the academy or music schools. Some things are in, others are out, you may compose this way or you must not compose this way. All of this forges shackles on creativity or, at the very least inhibits our pursuit of creativity. I'll give you some pertinent up-to-date examples. They are all, alas, from the academy. You may know of them.

If you are in an English Department which espouses deconstructionism or for that matter constructionism and do not profess faith in either of these critical, analytical policies, then woe unto you. If you are in a department of philosophy where Marxist aesthetics are big and you have an interest in pure aesthetics, then get out but fast because you won't be taken seriously. If Webern or Milton Babbitt don't turn you on and as a young composer you find yourself in a serially-oriented composition department, then you had better move elsewhere too. (I'd to say a bit more about this in a moment). But don't get me wrong. It is not that I am against Webern or Babbitt, but should students of any creative art be forced to toe any particular party line...just as I was told or at least it was intimated that it is NOT alright to like Tchaikowsky.

The point of my topic you may realize now is not Tchaikowsky at all, but that I am merely using him to illustrate the ping-pong shifts of musical taste. Nowhere is this back and forth tug of what is fashionably in or what is out more neatly at work than in universities and it is particularly formative in music departments. From the late 50's until the early 80's for example, 12-tone and serialism seemed the right musical road to go and many good music departments adopted the teaching at seriality as an act of historical faith and, kindly considered, this confession of faith was well intentioned. It was well meant because it sought to establish a regime of law and order against the chaos of John Cage AND because serial is eminently pedagogical. Serialism can be taught, Cage can't. Actually, looking back at it this push-pull between law and order was a good state of affairs because it triggered the turbulence of creative thought, more importantly the argument reshaped musical standards or criteria. It was a much more interesting and important musical time than the 18th century war between the Lullyists and the Piccinists - a still hot musicological debate. If the Lully-Piccini squabble of three hundred years ago seems as academic and unimportant today as the difference between the artichoke or cauliflower style of

18th century wigs, the controversy between a serial or non-serial style has, in a less than a decade become equally remote.

The serial, non-serial turbulence no longer exists. Like Eastern Europe, serial bastions are clamoring for freedom. After all, serialism's principles can be taught as mechanically as traditional harmony for its principles like those of traditional harmony have been codified - and two years ago the guest presenter of Harvard's prestigious Charles Elliot Norton Lectures was none other than John Cage. Past composers in the series have been Igor Stravinsky, Paul Hindemith, and Leonard Bernstein. To have made the leap from Stravinsky to Cage by an institution priding itself on soundness of intellectual judgment is a puzzler, but also an indication, a measure of how fast change is taking place in the arts today, but all too often it seems that change for the sake of change is the prime and only motivating factor behind change. What does all this mean?

It means that we are artistically lost.

The reasons for this state of affairs are complex and numerous. It would take me another good lecture hour to probe their why and wherefore, but let me attempt a mini-analysis in the hope that you may be able to continue it for yourselves. Could it be that the language of music has depleted itself? A not particularly comforting thought, but ironic as it may seem this may just be more true of serialism than it is of tonality. Of course, this does not mean that it is no longer possible to write a serial piece any more so than it was Schoenberg's contention that it was still possible to write a good piece in C major. Music is, after all, a matter of the speculative musical mind exercising itself and we can be assured that good pieces of music will still be still be written. Getting them to the public is another matter entirely and one which is considerably less reassuring.

A more likely reason is to be found in reappraising the two words most hallowed in our 20th century vocabulary - yet the two words which are also the most abused: the words are - culture and democracy.

Our concepts of culture and democracy have become so entangled that defining each has become very tricky. Culture for us exists as high, middle, low, ethnic, elite pop while democracy has become

splintered and often hyphenated - there is peoples democracy, socialist democracy, capitalist democracy, sexual democracy, cultural democracy and even liberal democracy. The result of this confusion is exacerbated - and exploited by the entertainment industry where culture becomes entertainment. The greatest and most assiduous students of culture I hasten to add, are not to be found in universities where one would expect to find them, but in the glass and brass offices of marketing agencies. The marketing expert perceives of culture as a soda-anthropological phenomenon as a description of observed behaviour, something similar to the ideas set down in a book by anthropologist Ruth Benedict published in the 30's as *Patterns of Culture*. This book dealt with patterns of tribal behavior in Maori and Samoan tribes. The ad-man's idea then is clearly a long way from the 19th century German idea of culture as *Bildung* - or the educated frame of mind, the frame or life of the mind so aptly summed up in Matthew Arnold's directive - "the duty of culture is to possess and live the best that has been thought and known." Our social multiplicity is a long way from this ideal and some people would maintain that because of social multiplicity, impossible to attain. We must be aware that the triumphant egalitarianism of democracy lowers culture and destroys content. Democracy presumes every and any idea has a basic right to be heard, and to be heard uncritically for democracy is the great leveler of ideas and with this comes the assumption that every cultural object, be it Mozart or Madonna, are of equal worth.

Before you get set to throw me off campus, don't get me wrong. I am not advocating a dictatorial view of life and culture - I don't subscribe to Puccini's remark that "to give the common people democracy is like putting water into a wicker basket." The remark attributed to Schoenberg that his "discovery of the twelve-tone system assures the supremacy of German music" is equally odious to me. The principles of democracy - cumbersome as they often are - remain the glory of Western civilization. Let us simply remember that democracy is a set of policies and beliefs which activate the mechanics of government; this has to do with political consent, free and frequent elections, executive and legislative tasks, etc.

It is the blurring of these definitions of these two words which is responsible for the present aesthetic crisis - where popular taste and manufactured glamour and hype have only the goal of commercial success as their end - nothing more, nothing less.

As a footnote to a recent musical lowpoint let me mention Leonard Bernstein's new song cycle Arias and Barcarolles in which Lennie courts the stylistic sophistication of none other than that master of melody Marvin Hamlisch. Conversely, Mick Jagger's business instincts are more honest and elegant when he figured out what the French royalty would be on a record by taking off the VAT tax... he learned a lot at the London School of Economics!

Need I describe then or detail the predicament in which the music student or the film composer find themselves as a result of this confusion. (The performer has it a bit easier, being able to fit into the entertainment slot more readily). At this point I wish I could offer easy words of encouragement, a quick solution as is the fashion these days, but the best I am able to do is offer the distinctions I've drawn to make you aware of distinctions for the drawing of distinctions is also not a popular pastime these days. If, as music students you sometimes feel on the periphery of life, or the scene of action where ever that might be - let me make you aware that the study of music can be the focal point, the crux, the battle ground if you wish, of this attempt, this duty to revive culture - the life of the mind which deals with the highest values - the good, the beautiful, self-discovery, truth, the way in which we wish to live our lives. Does not the phrase knowing the best that has been known and thought lead to the humanization of man in society? Let me quote Matthew Arnold's lines in full for they affirm both culture and democracy.

The great men of culture have a passion for carrying from one end of Society to the other, the best knowledge, the best ideas of their time, to make it efficient outside the clique of the cultivated and learned, yet still remaining the best knowledge. No call to education and pedagogy is more noble "an old-fashioned word" than this call to a passion which makes the best ideas efficient to all those capable of receiving them for the humanization of man in Society. This is a tall order to be sure, yet a challenge worthy of ourselves. The challenge poses enormous pedagogical problems and responsibilities. What music shall we study, is technical analysis enough, shall we compare styles and evaluate them? Is there in music a course or concept parallel to studies in comparative literature? Is there bad music - what is it can we define it, would it help us to define good music?

And what about the master whose name invoked in my title/ What have my words to do with Tchaikowsky? Everything.

Is it OK to like, to listen to Tchaikowsky? Of course it is. Just as it is OK to listen to Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Bernstein, Boulez, Boyce, Boitto Bottestini or Bottenberg. The point is to listen, compare, think and to seek the excellence in culture and by so doing, to define ourselves.

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