

SKETCH OF A NEW ESTHETIC OF MUSIC

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649017560

Sketch of a New Esthetic of Music by Ferruccio Busoni

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FERRUCCIO BUSONI

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ESTHETIC OF MUSIC**

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OF
A New Esthetic of Music

BY
FERRUCCIO BUSONI

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY
DR. TH. BAKER

NEW YORK : G. SCHIRMER
1911

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SKETCH OF A NEW ESTHETIC OF MUSIC

"What seek you? Say! And what do you expect?"—
I know not what; the Unknown I would have!
What's known to me, is endless; I would go
Beyond the end: The last word still is wanting."

[*"Der mächtige Zauberer."*]

LOOSELY joined together as regards literary form, the following notes are, in reality, the outcome of convictions long held and slowly matured.

In them a problem of the first magnitude is formulated with apparent simplicity, without giving the key to its final solution; for the problem cannot be solved for generations—if at all.

But it involves an innumerable series of lesser problems, which I present to the consideration of those whom they may concern. For it is a long time since any one has devoted himself to earnest musical research.

It is true, that admirable works of genius arise in every period, and I have always taken my stand in the front rank of those who joyfully acclaimed the passing standard-bearers; and still it seems to me that of all these beautiful paths leading so far afield—none lead *upward*.

The spirit of an art-work, the measure of emotion, of humanity, that is in it—these remain unchanged in value through changing years; the form which these three assumed, the manner of their expression, and the flavor of the epoch which gave them birth, are transient, and age rapidly.

Spirit and emotion retain their essence, in the art-work as in man himself; we admire technical achievements, yet they are outstripped, or cloy the taste and are discarded.

Its ephemeral qualities give a work the stamp of "modernity;" its unchangeable essence hinders it from becoming "obsolete." Among both "modern" and "old" works we find good and bad, genuine and spurious. There is nothing properly modern—only things which have come into being earlier or later; longer in bloom, or sooner withered. The Modern and the Old have always been.

Art-forms are the more lasting, the more closely they adhere to the nature of their individual species of art, the purer they keep their essential means and ends.

Sculpture relinquishes the expression of the human pupil, and effects of color; painting degenerates, when it forsakes the flat surface in depiction and takes on complexity in theatrical decoration or panoramic portrayal.

Architecture has its fundamental form, growth from below upward, prescribed by static necessity; window and roof necessarily provide the inter-

mediate and finishing configuration; these are eternal and inviolable requirements of the art.

Poetry commands the abstract thought, which it clothes in words. More independent than the others, it reaches the furthest bounds.

But all arts, resources and forms ever aim at the one end, namely, the imitation of nature and the interpretation of human feelings.

* * *

Architecture, sculpture, poetry and painting are old and mature arts; their conceptions are established and their objects assured; they have found the way through uncounted centuries, and, like the planets, describe their regular orbits.*

Music, compared with them, is a child that has learned to walk, but must still be led. It is a virgin art, without experience in life and suffering.

It is all unconscious as yet of what garb is becoming, of its own advantages, its unawakened capacities. And again, it is a child-marvel that is already able to dispense much of beauty, that has already brought joy to many, and whose gifts are commonly held to have attained full maturity.

* * *

Music as an art, our so-called occidental music, is hardly four hundred years old; its state is one

* None the less, in these arts, taste and individuality can and will unceasingly find refreshment and rejuvenation.

of development, perhaps the very first stage of a development beyond present conception, and we—we talk of “classics” and “hallowed traditions”! And we have talked of them for a long time!*

We have formulated rules, stated principles, laid down laws;—we apply laws made for maturity to a child that knows nothing of responsibility!

* * *

Young as it is, this child, we already recognize that it possesses one radiant attribute which signalizes it beyond all its elder sisters. And the law-givers will not see this marvelous attribute, lest their laws should be thrown to the winds. This child—it *floats on air!* It touches not the earth with its feet. It knows no law of gravitation. It is wellnigh incorporeal. Its material is transparent. It is sonorous air. It is almost Nature herself. It is—free.

* * *

But freedom is something that mankind have never wholly comprehended, never realized to the full. They can neither recognize nor acknowledge it.

They disavow the mission of this child; they hang weights upon it. This buoyant creature must

* Tradition is a plaster mask taken from life, which, in the course of many years, and after passing through the hands of innumerable artisans, leaves its resemblance to the original largely a matter of imagination.

walk decently, like anybody else. It may scarcely be allowed to leap—when it were its joy to follow the line of the rainbow, and to break sunbeams with the clouds.

* * *

Music was born free; and to win freedom is its destiny. It will become the most complete of all reflexes of Nature by reason of its untrammelled immateriality. Even the poetic word ranks lower in point of incorporeality. It can gather together and disperse, can be motionless repose or wildest tempestuosity; it has the extremest heights perceptible to man—what other art has these?—and its emotion seizes the human heart with that intensity which is independent of the "idea."

It realizes a temperament, *without* describing it, with the mobility of the soul, with the swiftmess of consecutive moments; and this, where painter or sculptor can represent only one side or one moment, and the poet tardily *communicates* a temperament and its manifestations by words.

Therefore, representation and description are not the nature of music; herewith we declare the invalidity of program-music, and arrive at the question: What are the aims of music?

* * *

ABSOLUTE Music! What the lawgivers mean by this, is perhaps remotest of all from the Absolute in music. "Absolute music" is a form-