

# **The Double Silence**

**Reflections on Music and Musicians**

**Preliminary, Unedited,  
Version**

**The Double Silence**

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**Antoni Pizà**

# The Double Silence

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## Prologue

The book in the reader's hands is a pure delight, and anyone who takes an interest in the world of music and its periphery will take pleasure in working through all of its twists and turns, fruits of a truly broad knowledge and a curiosity that is neither specialized nor sectarian (rather the opposite: music is analyzed here in all its aspects and from the standpoint of an absolute lack of prejudice, something that is really difficult, if you think of the entire range of what people normally think of as music).

Thus in its content as well as its form—direct, knowledgeable, at ease, and light in Calvino's sense of *gravità senza peso* (gravity without weight)—we are talking about a collection that helps us penetrate, with an understanding of what it is all about, into a sizable multiplicity of facets of the musical universe. If we add to all this that the author comes from a land that could be qualified as practically illiterate from the musical point of view—an accusation that may sound startling on first hearing but is easily demonstrable with all sorts of irrefutable data—the book has an apparent double virtue, intrinsic and extrinsic (that is, by text and by context), which is no doubt the first thing about it that we should be grateful for: its exceptionality.

The “double silence” of the title, as the Mallorcan-born musicologist Antoni Pizà tells us, is applied both to music itself and to its intellectual environment, in which we are always being told to be quiet on the subject of music, on the pretext of its ineffability, that is of the near impossibility of capturing nonverbal phenomenon by means of language. But by this logic we would have to stop talking about dance or painting, and it would even be wrong, or at least dangerous, to argue over poetry, which is where language takes on its greatest incandescence, and, therefore, polysemy.

Certainly, we should not confuse the fundamentally aesthetic act of listening, of interiorizing a musical work with its later analysis or attempt at interpretation: the one is not a substitute for the other, but rather a consequence. Nothing, in any case, can substitute for the intensity of the aesthetic experience of listening to music—or of any of the other arts, of course—but this does not prevent us from talking about it, even if in a tangential, partial, approximative, even speculative way.

In spite of, or perhaps thanks to their journalistic character, the articles in the present volume are unified by their methods of analysis: we can say that in a good many cases the author has practiced the “dislocation” of which Hans-Georg Gadamer has spoken. For this German philosopher, “the observer needs to *dislocate* himself and understand the point of view of the other....by arriving at an intermediate point in which the two horizons fuse: the point of view of the observer and that of the object being observed.”

For that reason, even if many of these articles take their points of departure from the incidental or altogether anecdotal—the ephemera of anniversaries and commemorations, the release of a new recording or publication, a concert, a simple news item—the author has a gift for contemplating it and always manages to transcend its origin and to place us, one way or another, on the threshold of that terra incognita that music always is, one of the most thrilling, occult, fundamental activities of the human being (Lévi-Strauss, for example, says that the invention of melody is the supreme mystery). What is really happening when we listen to this or that work? What is the source of its significative capacity, beyond that of language, and what kind of meaning does it possess? We know that it is a kind of meaning that cannot be translated or paraphrased, and yet charged with significance—but will we ever be able to take a step beyond these perceptions?

From this standpoint, *The double silence* is surely one of those books that a reader will enjoy for a long time: thanks to its innumerable suggestions, we will discover or reevaluate a work, understand the reason for a particular fascination or interest, but above all we will perceive that it is possible—and even desirable—to dare to talk about music, that this is indeed the aim of every piece of music that has any ambition at all, a dialogue between ourselves and the Other that we all carry within; and music thus establishes itself as one of the most effective methods we have for habituating ourselves to listening, to

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listening as much as we can or want, to listen until we realize that this is one of the most foundational and decisive actions we can perform. George Steiner—one of the authors presented in this book—says that “If one tries to think in the signifié of the signifié, music is what tells us to think deeper.”

Alex Susanna

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## [EPIGRAPH]

Poques paraules surten  
de les boques en calma.

(Few words rise  
from the calm mouths.)

B. Rosselló-Pòrcel, *Nou poemes*

Preamble: Silence

## [EPIGRAPH]

Und wieder lachte es und floh: dann wurde es stille um mich wie mit einer zwiefachen Stille.  
(And again was there a laughing, and it fled: then did it become still around me, as with a double stillness.)

One of the most splendid moments of the traditional piano repertoire is in the opening of Schubert's sonata in B-flat major. It is a matter of an affable, gentle melody, that doesn't impose itself the way a Beethoven theme might do but rather persuades and convinces with its cordial warmth; it rambles, not so much breaking with any formal or harmonic scheme as amiably holding forth, in traditional and customary gestures. With an admirable fluency, two perfectly balanced phrases are set out, antecedent and consequent, on the model of Viennese classicism: order, proportion, balance, and steadiness.

All the same, in spite of all the seductive aspects of this melody, I have always believed that its essential element, what really rounds it out and gives it its sense of rightness, is not the melody itself, charming as it is, but what comes after all the notes: a group of rests, for a relatively long silence that allows the music that has just played to breathe for another couple of seconds. The stillness that follows seems like a presentiment of the music that is to come. When the theme is repeated immediately after the silences (subtly altered, it is worth noting), the return of the momentarily muted music fills us with a comforting, familiar effect, like the recognition of a dear friend in an inhospitable place.

## [MUSIC HERE]

The articles that follow are a collection of columns published under the rubric *Dislocations* in the *Diario de Mallorca* between 2000 and 2003. They are writings representing my reactions, or written responses, to various musical events: the issuing of recordings and books, celebrations and anniversaries, musicians and musics I admire, the routines, conventions, and vices of the musical world, my own manias and idées fixes, etc. Even though it seems natural to me to react in writing to a musical event, I am aware that this kind of writing is an activity that is generally not much prized (especially among musicians). It is not difficult to notice that criticism has a less savory reputation in the world of music than it does, for instance, in the worlds of literature or art. This is based on the idea (deeply established) that musical experience is ineffable, inexpressible, indescribably, impossible to verbalize (Schopenhauer *dixit!*).

This collection of writings is meant modestly to show that composing, performing, listening to, talking about, and finally writing about music (for those with the habit of doing that) are all part of a single process, each phase being important in its own right and each dependent on the others. It is not hard to see that one of the periods of the highest creative intensity in the history of European music was a moment in which this process (composing, performing, talking, writing) maintained an uninterrupted flow. The prolific writers Schumann, Berlioz, Wagner, and a few decades later Debussy, to take some obvious examples, understood that composing was only the first of a succession of episodes in a single continuum. Talking and writing about music was, and should have continued being, before anything else,

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a way of escaping the silence, of filling it, if you like, to create discussion, debate, interchange of ideas, and thus of facilitating and protecting music itself.

The double silence to which music is subjected includes the purely musical (the pause or rest in the musical discourse), but also the ideology that attempts to silence, elide, and suppress all argumentation about music. The rests at the end of the Schubert melody permit—among other things—a moment of reflection: during its brief seconds a listener can complete the just-finished phrase or imagine the one that is to come. The pause suggests sound processes that are not really there. In other musical styles, silences are a stimulus to fantasy, imagination, and creative freedom: they are, in short, an incitement to musical elaboration, the co-creation between composer and interpreter. In a solo concerto or opera aria, for example, the *fermata* that indicates a prolonged rest gives way to a passage that was originally meant to be improvised, a cadenza. By the same token, jazz improvisation has its origins in the silence of the “break”, when a soloist improvised a brief bridge melody to fill the gap between two choruses. In all these cases, musical silences are elements that provoke a creative *discursus*, or wandering outside the path—to the creation of a musical discourse removed from the established score.

There is thus a constant tension between the almost infinite expressive possibilities of a strictly musical silence (the rest in a score) and what we might call the philosophical silence imposed by an unfortunate ideology that censors, reprobates, mutes debate and reflection on the musical fact. The writings in the present volume—at least such are my hopeful intentions—seek silences like those of the musical examples mentioned above and exploit these moments of muteness, these cracks or fissures in musical texture, to insert a commentary, an annotation, a gloss or scholiast. Sometimes a musical event is an excuse for ruminating on more general themes; sometimes a general theme is concretized in a particular work. All in order that the double silence by which music is constantly besieged can resolve itself into a single silence, a simple symbol over the five lines of the staff.

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### *Acknowledgments*

Nowadays it is not easy to publish articles on music in the daily press. My sincere gratitude, therefore, to Joan Riera, subdirector of the *Diario de Mallorca*, for giving me the opportunity to write and publish these contributions, and naturally to Bartomeu Amengual for introducing me to him. The admirable Anna Cazurra has encouraged me in innumerable ways to start assembling this collection. My colleagues at the Barry S. Brook Center for Music Research and Documentation, Barbara Dobbs Mackenzie and Zdravko Blažeković, have furnished an unsurpassable environment and infrastructure for research. Thanks are due to my parents Guillem Pizà and Miquela Prohens, who must take some of the responsibility for this cri de coeur. His comments have always been very valuable.

## **In a minor key: Rarae aves**

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### **I. In a minor key: Rarae aves**

## In a minor key: Rarae aves

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### *Brother of the more famous Anaïs*

Joaquín Nin-Culmell will have to excuse me for invoking the name of his sister in order to talk about him and his music. He has complained more than once about the obstinacy with which journalists and critics, to seduce the newspaper reader's wandering eye, conjure up the myth of Anaïs Nin—especially of her erotic writings—to come to the subject of the composer. If we remember, moreover, that the father of Joaquín and Anaïs was the famous composer Joaquín Nin Castellanos (with whom Anaïs confessed in her diary to having had incestuous relations), we can sympathize with the younger Joaquín for paraphrasing Mendelssohn's celebrated saying on more than one occasion: "I spent the first third of my life being my father's son and the second being Anais's brother; I'd like to spend this third simply being myself."

Joaquín Nin-Culmell reaches the age of 92 this September 5, and still maintains the optimism and enthusiasm of a beginner, of an apprentice in his trade. He lives in the same house in Oakland where he lived for many years with his mother, the Cuban-Danish singer Rosa Culmell. The house, near the campus of the University of California at Berkeley, where he was a professor for more than 20 years, holds a library on Spanish musical subjects that is probably unique in the world. Those who have visited him in California assert that, in spite of his age, he is a first class cook and makes it a practice to assign each guest a plate decorated with his or her own Zodiac sign. An unstoppable conversationalist, he can talk for hours about Falla and Turina, Debussy, Dukas, and Stravinsky, and in the end, if you insist enough, about Anaïs, Henry Miller, Antonin Artaud, Otto Rank, and Lawrence Durrell. Cosmopolitan, ecumenical, and eclectic, Nin-Culmell has not just been an attentive observer of the 20th century, but one of its most assiduous protagonists.

Born in Berlin in 1908, he has spent his life in a continuous convergence of different languages and cultures. His father, Joaquín Nin Castellanos (1878-1949) was a nomad as well, both from inclination and necessity. Born of Catalan parents in Havana at a time when Cuba was still Spanish, Joaquín senior was a precocious piano prodigy, given to constant touring and dressing-room romance. In spite of his cosmopolitanism and character as a universal artist (feeling at ease everywhere, but at home nowhere), he was regarded as an uprooted Spaniard and Catalan. Nin Castellanos always lived like a prince, but it was the Parisian *dames* who took care of his bills. An unregenerate womanizer, he left his wife and children one day, telling them that he was going out to buy cigarettes, and never returned.

From the outset, dislocation was a constant in the life of Joaquinito, as he was then called. The young composer lived a number of years in Germany, Belgium, France, the United States, and Spain, learning the languages of each country and absorbing their cultural forms. Because of their father's desertion, there was never much money for Anaïs and Joaquín; though godparents on the father's side in Barcelona helped, and aunts in New York, Rosa Culmell's sisters, contributed to the abandoned family. Soon enough, their privations wiped out the memories of opulence—a false opulence, to be sure—in which they had been raised.

This precarious life, without an established home or family, without a predominant language or culture, left a mark on the definitive form of his work. For Anaïs, lost as well in this confusion of influences and forces, it was in her sexuality that she found the heart of her identity and her writing (which was the only thing uniquely "hers", peculiar to her, and as such the distinguishing feature of her

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being); Joaquín Nin-Culmell found the source of his musical creativity in Spanish music, the only solid rock in a life made of ephemeral moments and lightning flashes of uncertainty.

His *Tonadas* are a collection of 48 miniatures for piano inspired by traditional music from almost every Spanish region. Bach wanted to codify the newly consolidated tonal system in 48 preludes and fugues, writing each prelude and fugue in a different key to demonstrate the possibilities of a scale divided into 12 equal parts; Nin-Culmell, in a parallel process, seems to have wanted to codify—even if in a more artistic than scientific spirit—the sounds of an ideal Spain. “Spain follows me,” he rightly claimed, because it is from the shatterings of Spanish folklore that he created his cultural identity.

In more or less direct form, all his music takes the path of rediscovering his Spanish identity. Even in his work as a transmitter of culture, as pianist and pedagogue, Nin-Culmell always endeavored to get back to the Spain of his ancestors. In a recital he gave in New York in 1938, the program offered works by Cabezón, Cabanilles, Halffter, Rodrigo, and Nin-Culmell himself. Clearly, connecting and interweaving with his past became the task of his life, embracing the masters of the Renaissance, Sephardic songs, and Spanish and Cuban folklore.

Until a few years ago, Nin-Culmell spent his summers in Barcelona, participating in round tables, conferences, and festivals. In spite of age, he keeps up with his creativity with a learner’s mind. Inspite of his strong Catalan roots, he never has a favorable opinion of the process of “normalization” in Catalonia in which Catalan language and culture are restored to an increasingly official status. The cosmopolitan and chaotic character of his youth has allowed him to try out many identities, but he chose the Spanish, which for him means a convergence of Castilian, Catalan, Sephardic, and many more. Anaïs—in response to the same cultural dislocation—began writing her colossal diary in French, having been after all born in Paris, but soon switched to English, and even as she kept living in France for many years transformed herself into a great Anglo-American writer. Singularly enough, Joaquín Nin-Culmell is a genuinely Spanish composer, the most Spanish of Spaniards: a Spaniard of Berlin, Barcelona, Paris, Havana, and California.

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### *The composer-general*

Some lives are *unbiographicizable*. Not to say, of course, that their deeds and activities literally cannot be narrated, but that they are so fantastical, so romanesque, that they refuse to take the form of the impartial biography, tending inevitably to break out of the objective mold and fall into a freer narrative form like that of the novel. Something of the kind appears to have happened some years ago, when the author Horacio Vázquez Rial tried to narrate the life of Gustavo Durán (Barcelona, 1908 – Alones, Greece, 1969); in the face of the quantity of unusual, extravagant, and unpredictable events of Durán's life—although in reality there were more louche moments than glorious episodes—the work that was supposed to be a biography ended up being a novel, *El Soldado de Porcelana* (The Porcelain Soldier). Perhaps it was for this reason that Jaime Gil de Biedma, the extravagantly self-fictionalizing poet of the Generation of '50, understood as no one else could the chimerical and illusory aspects of Durán's life, understanding that they shared the quality of having made a norm out of anomaly. When Durán turned 60, Gil de Biedma dedicated to him the following lines:

*Algo de tu pasado, me dijiste  
que yo te devolvía.  
(...)  
De viva voz, entonces,  
no me atreví a decir que en ti veía  
algo de mi futuro...*

(Something of your past, you told me,  
I gave you back...  
At the time, aloud,  
I dared not say that in you I saw  
something of my future...)

The dislocated and dismembered life of Gustavo Durán was shaped by innumerable separate lives that coincided (as if by a kind of sorcery) in the same person of flesh and blood. There is Durán the composer, the folklorist, the writer, the art critic, the Republican general of the Spanish Civil War, the American spy, the diplomat, the Paramount executive. In the 1920s, the young aspiring artist belonged to the intellectual circles of Madrid. At the Residencia de Estudiantes, he knew “everyone”: Dalí, Buñuel, Alberti, Ernesto Halffter, Emilio Prados, Adolfo Salazar, and of course Lorca, who for some years wrote him a letter every day. The musicologist Salazar described the relationship between the poet and the

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aspiring composer thus: “There is a boy Federico is enthusiastic about at the moment who, determined to be a ‘modernist’ composer, ‘drinks in’ every score that comes out.”

The ambition to compose did not last long. He studied with Joaquín Turina and took advice from his admired Ernesto Halffter. He managed to compose a collection of piano pieces and a handful of songs (some to texts by his friend Alberti) in which one can see the influence of the Paris of the beginning of the century (especially Ravel and Stravinsky, filtered through Halffter). The climax of his musical career came when his ballet *El Fandango del Candil* was staged by Antonia Mercè “La Argentina,” and the famous soprano Conchita Supervía performed some of his songs in various European cities. Little more, actually; but the end of Durán the musician, like that of the phoenix reborn from its own ashes, was the birth of another Durán.

Like most of the artists of his time, Durán moved to Paris to soak himself in culture, art, and especially in the bohemian conventions that guaranteed him his credentials as a genuine *artiste*. We know from his diaries that in Paris he began to lose interest in music and composed little. The right-wing critic Carlos Bosch could not swallow the fact that Durán, like Lorca, was Republican and homosexual, and wrote of the Paris period: “Afterwards, he was brought to Paris by the painter Néstor Martín Fernández de la Torre, who paid his living expenses and academic fees, until he went to work in the film industry to make communist propaganda, graduating with high honors into the Red pseudo-Army.”

The honors in the army of which Bosch speaks with such scorn earned Durán the admiration of the great Hemingway, who, decades after the Civil War, still continued referring to him as “*mi General*”. In fact Hemingway idolized him for a time, and included him—with name and parentage—in his novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Hemingway always said that he was a genuine war hero, and praised him everywhere. When Durán went into exile in the USA, the writer tried unsuccessfully to find him a job in the Paramount studio (Durán had previously worked for its French affiliate), and at last obtained him a place in the American embassy in Havana as the ambassador’s right-hand man and chief of counterespionage. The day Durán arrived in Cuba to take up his post, Hemingway told him: “You need to keep two pistols: one under your pillow, and the other in the drawer with your clean shirts.”

His experience in American politics was a disaster. In the 1950s, the infamous Senator McCarthy interrogated him and Gustavo Durán—humanist, ex-composer, diplomat—had to go through the humiliation of responding to the question: “Señor Durán, are you now or have you ever been a Communist?” Durán, impassive and evasive, replied, “Hemingway was the real leftist.” For some time, relations between Hemingway and Durán had been cooling, and now they broke off.

During the 1940s and early 1950s, the ethnomusicologist and professor Henrietta Yurchenko made a number of trips to Spain to collect traditional songs of Sephardic origin. Her fieldwork also took her to the Maghreb, where she recorded many hours of Judeo-Spanish women’s songs. Henrietta was in those days, and continued to be well into her eighties, an idealist, feminist (before the word existed), and communist. In the course of a research project funded by the United Nations, she came into contact with Durán. Speaking of him on one occasion, she told me, “Gustavo Durán, what a man! When I knew him he traveled a lot with André Malraux—I believe they were lovers. He ended up working for the UN. He’s probably the most attractive man I’ve ever known. What a looker! He was gorgeous!”

## In a minor key: Rarae aves

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### *News of Alfau*

We know so little about Felipe Alfau that for quite some time it was not even clear whether he was dead or alive. Now, unhappily, we know: He died shortly before last summer in the home in Queens, New York, where he lived in the last years. No doubt the silence on his death seems faithful to his principles and consistent with the attitude he always held during his life. Alfau died in the same oblivion in which he lived, and the same anonymity that governed his life and his work—in a self-willed vanishing act—also ruled his death.

Like most readers, I first heard of Felipe Alfau in the early 1990s. Among the New York intelligentsia (readers and the merely curious who organized visits to his sordid quarters in the home for the aged that had taken him in) it was said that Alfau was a shy, unapproachable, sour misanthrope. It was also said that his fiction (written exclusively in English between 1936 and 1948) had been a precursor of the literary experiments of Nabokov and Borges and that the American postmoderns—Barth, Pynchon, Barthelme—were his debtors for his investigations into the limits of the possibilities of narrative. In spite of this acclaim, no one could explain how it could be that his work had passed unnoticed over half a century until the republication in 1987 of his *Locos: A Comedy of Gestures* and the issuing in 1990 of *Chromos*, a manuscript that had waited in a drawer for more than 40 years. So many decades after their writing, both novels were accorded the highest literary distinction in the US and, once they were translated into Castilian, treated as veritable cult works in Spain.

In the critical commotion provoked by his work, one question remained irretrievably unanswered: that of the relation of Alfau's writing with music. “I always wanted to be an orchestra conductor,” he said on more than one occasion, “And this brought me to study music. Mathematics and physics were loves of mine as well. As can be seen, there are clear indications in my novels of these passions, that have lasted all my life.” Moreover, on more than one occasion he has called himself a “frustrated musician.” I had always taken this last phrase as something of a riddle. It may be that there was a real and ostensible musical influence in his writings, but it is also possible that the writer was laying out a false spoor to startle and confuse the critics—in the last analysis, disconnecting his life from his work has always been one of his primordial obsessions.

Born in Barcelona in 1902, Alfau arrived in New York at the age of 14. His father had been governor of the Philippines during the colonial period. Early on, Alfau matriculated at Columbia University, where he studied music. Between the ages of 18 and 25 he was music critic for *La Prensa*, a New York Spanish-language daily later absorbed into today's *El Diario La Prensa*. One of his few friends has claimed that Alfau spoke often of music, that he “explained the difference between Arturo Toscanini and Bruno Walter...” For another thing, both *Locos* and *Chromos* describe similar situations: two cities (New York and Madrid respectively) inhabited by a group of clownish and absurd characters who dedicate themselves, in the midst of their risible existence, to declaiming on more or less transcendental themes such as mathematics and music. Music is, in fact, one of the narrator's preferred topics.

All these indications are too general to determine the real role of music in his work. So it was that, some time ago, with the idea of finally clarifying the question, I made some attempts to explore the files of *La Prensa* for examples of Alfau's music criticism. Innocently (and please excuse me for the audacity), I was hoping to discover “Alfau the musician” as luckier scholars had found Nabokov the ethnomologist, or Carpentier the musicologist. At the offices of *La Prensa*, the staff (suspicious, but probably honest) told me that copies of the papers for the years I was searching for had not been

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preserved. Given the precariousness of the lives of immigrants like Alfau and of the institutions such as *La Prensa* that served them, I was ready to believe that such was indeed the case, and that Alfau's journalistic and critical writings were probably lost forever—although I must confess that I still have not lost hope that they may ultimately be found in some private collection: these articles would not only resolve the problem of Alfau and music but would constitute the only prose he composed in his native Spanish.

The oblivion into which his work passed, and what seems to be the total loss of his critical writings, are examples of the uprooting and dislocation that ruled Alfau's elliptical life. The determining break in his being, however, was brought not by music or any other passion, however powerful, but by the moment when he decided to switch languages and write his work exclusively in English. *Chromos* begins symptomatically with an expression of the tension implied by diving into a foreign language, especially in the aim of creating literature. Without preamble or circumlocution, Alfau starts out: “The moment one learns English, complications set in.” At the end of the work, however, the narrator seems to solve the conflict in the change of language: “In Spanish one observes, and everything remains unquestioned and clear. In English, one studies and discovers meanings that one does not understand. And then, as I said at the outset, the complications begin.” Exile brought him to a new world and a new language, at the same time as the process of finding himself led him to question things that before, in his native language, were axiomatic. For Alfau, to learn English was to dislocate, to de-center himself, and writings *Locos* and *Chromos* was a way of recovering the lost centeredness, the umbilical cord of his being.

## In a minor key: Rarae aves

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### *Artà, California, and Persia: Story of a musical misunderstanding*

History, through its inevitable labyrinths of confusion and chaos, in its feckless and fatal way, can confound places as far apart and improbably connected as ancient Persia, Spanish California, and the town of Artà in Mallorca. They are brought together in the single figure of Joan Sancho i Lliteres, who—just to prove the point—was a Franciscan monk, a missionary, an adventurer, and a composer, provoking a misunderstanding that has caused sleepless nights to scholars on two continents. In order to understand the situation we have to picture ourselves in the Mallorca of the end of the 18th century and in the colonial California of the missionaries at the beginning of the 19th, with a passing reference to the dynasties of the mythic Persian empire.

The composer Joan Sancho (or Sanxo) was born in Artà in 1772. Little is known of his childhood and early musical training. It is to be supposed that he joined the Franciscan community in Palma when he was still a boy; we know, at any rate, that in 1795-96 he was a choirmaster at the church of Sant Francesc there. He arrived in California in 1804 and installed himself at Mission San Antonio de Padua in central California, east of the Santa Lucia mountains. There he remained for the rest of his life, 28 years, until his death on February 8, 1830.

Through a wealth of documentation, we know a good deal about the daily life of the Franciscan missions. From the musical point of view, which is what interests us here, the missions were almost little city-states. Each community consisted of one or two brothers, a dozen or so soldiers, and a larger number of Native Americans. Agriculture, cattle ranching, and the fur trade were their principal sources of income. In parallel with these economic activities, all the missions included a library and a school. Music as well was a very important point of the mission's cultural life. The members of the community sang in the choir and played practically all the instruments of the period.

The music performed at the missions was mostly religious, although there were exceptions, such as the performance of folk music from Spain and other European countries. Other than that, the repertoire was made up of basically two different styles: plainchant (monody, unaccompanied chanting of a single melodic line) and polyphony (music with several voices). The repertoire was not native to the missions, but brought by the missionaries from Spain and Mexico.

According to Professor William Summers of Dartmouth College, during the years that he worked at Sant Francesc in Palma, Joan Sancho copied a considerable number of scores to bring them to California. One of his manuscripts is made up of more than 170 folios of all kinds of music originally composed or copied in Palma; it includes some 40 compositions of different genres and styles, some of them probably composed by Sancho himself, but most of them standard works that were probably sung everywhere in Spain at the time, and certainly at Sant Francesc in Palma. Sancho copied them in the intention of teaching and performing them at Mission San Antonio.

Sancho was a professional musician, not just a talented amateur like Junípero Serra (who had founded the mission in 1771). Based on the annotations in his manuscripts, it is clear that he had mastered keyboard instruments, presumably the piano and the organ, and that he was an expert in the realization of the figured bass (where the composer writes out an abbreviated accompaniment with only the bass line and numbers, or “figures,” from which the performer can improvise corresponding chords). On the other hand, his harmonizations are simplistic and technically monotonous; in general, little more than

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consecutive thirds—a system that is not regarded as especially clever, but has the advantage of being easy to memorize and therefore suitable for singers that are not professionals.

When Joan Sancho left Palma for California, one of the manuscripts he brought with him had a piece entitled *Artaserse*. Some investigators mistakenly deciphered the inscription as *Artanense*, that is, “from Artà,” Sancho’s village, but the title is in fact that of an opera libretto by the celebrated Pietro Metastasio, whose texts were set by Handel, Gluck, Mozart, and countless others. The plot of *Artaserse* involves the assassination of the Persian emperor Xerxes, followed by political and amorous intrigues between his son Artaxerxes and his rivals.

During the 18th century more than 50 composers set the text—including Hasse and Gluck. The musical fragment that Sancho copied to bring to California is an aria from the second act, but its composer has not been identified, unless (if I may speculate) it was the Catalan Domingo Tarradellas (1713–1751), who is said to have been murdered in Rome by his rival Nicoló Jommelli (what times were those, when composers still killed out of professional jealousy!). Sancho adapted the aria for religious use, exchanging Metastasio’s text for Psalm 116 (*Laudate Dominum*) and a hymn, *Iam auditur celum*. And, finally, any curious person can hear Sancho’s works in many current recordings including an album distributed by the Smithsonian recorded in New York in 1953 by the Coro Hispànic de Mallorca conducted by Joan Maria Thomàs.

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### ***His masters' voices***

Stravinsky could not imagine composing without a piano. His contemporary Schoenberg, in contrast, explicitly forbade his pupils to use a piano for writing music; according to him, it was necessary to hear the music mentally, “in one’s head,” and for the idea to govern the resulting sound rather than the other way around (certainly a highly debatable proposition). Stravinsky, of course, was a fairly good pianist; Schoenberg was no professional instrumentalist, still less a virtuoso. Which leads to a question and a corollary: Must one know how to play an instrument well to compose? What kinds of performers were the great composers of the past?

To help us answer the second question—leaving aside the first as unresolvable—we now have recordings rescued from the secret troves of the first record companies. In 1889, Johannes Brahms put some musical fragments on wax cylinder, still preserved, while Tchaikovsky, an enthusiastic endorser of Edison’s new invention, apparently refused to record his own piano playing, saying that he did not want to immortalize his mistakes, though he did leave a recording of his speaking voice. In time, Bülow and many other pianists and composers tried the machine out, and, as is known, the history of music changed forever. They say that a recalcitrant Bach took his time to accept a new instrument that had just come out, the *fortepiano*, preferring his old familiar harpsichord, but eventually gave in to the novelty—it was on a piano in the royal palace at Potsdam that he improvised the three-part ricercar of the *Musical Offering*. In the same way it is not hard to imagine that the composers of the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries, faced with the challenge of being able to record sound and “freeze” it forever, were attracted and at the same time cautious and circumspect. Their discretion, as history shows, was justified.

A recording originally issued as an LP and reissued on CD in 1991 reminds us that Catalan music was at the forefront of recording technology in the first years of the 20th century. *The Catalan Piano Tradition* (VAIA/IPA 1001), as the title indicates, is a compilation of sound recordings of the great pianists and composers of the Catalan tradition: Albéniz, Granados, Joaquim Malats, Frank Marshall, and what is probably the last representative of the tradition, the wondrous Alicia de Larrocha (who is still hopping ceaselessly from plane to plane, as they say, from Manila to Dallas and Rome to Moscow). In addition, the disc presents examples of the splendid voices of the two great *Conxitas*, Conxita Supervia (accompanied by Frank Marshall) and Conxita Badia (accompanied by a nine-year-old Larrocha!). So, let’s ask, returning to the beginning of this essay, what sort of pianists were Granados, Albéniz, Malats, and Marshall? And there is only one answer: they were very good.

Most of these recordings were made in Tiana, near Barcelona, in the first decade of the 20th century. The driving force behind the sessions was one Rupert Regorosa Planas, who had bought an Edison machine in the USA. There is no need to say that the recordings are in wretched condition or that in spite of the various sound transfer processes the crackles and pops generally overcome the musical sound. But nevertheless, each of these masters is shown to be an authentic virtuoso, with an admirable musicality. As a matter of interest, the patron Señor Regorosa announces the title of the work and the performer who will play it before each selection. Once in a while Regorosa, or perhaps someone else who was present at the sessions, breaking all the rules of concert etiquette out of the emotion aroused by the musicians’ brilliant execution, cries out in ecstatic enthusiasm, “¡Muy bien! ¡Muy bien!”

On the disc, those pianists who were also composers (Albéniz, Granados) mostly play their own compositions. Sometimes they play them as written, but very often they improvise, adding and taking

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away notes according to the momentum of the performance (but don't allow conservatory students to read this, because if they take it as the norm the inevitable liberties of performance may become libertinage). As well as improvising on their own compositions, both Albéniz and Granados offer some pure improvisations, not formally very refined, but presenting examples of an art that is unfortunately lost in classical music.

I want to take the opportunity to note another disc of performances by great composers: *The Composer Plays* (Nimbus 8813) features recordings from pianola rolls made by Granados, Prokofiev, Stravinsky, and Gershwin, and provide a good demonstration of how these composers played their own compositions. The piano roll is a completely distinct recording method from the wax cylinders invented by Edison. Each note in a pianist's performance is converted into a hole punched in a roll of paper (this must have been the origin of the first computers). The playback was then produced by a specially outfitted "pianola" that strikes a note for each hole. The sound quality of the piano roll disc, unlike that of the wax cylinders, is excellent, but it does not produce the same impact: while the sound of the wax recordings is a direct, soulful record of the actual sound the composer produced, the sound of the perforated rolls is produced by the holes in the paper, reflecting the composer only indirectly. Be that as it may, both recordings are genuine documents of how some of the most important composers of the last century played their instruments, a faithful demonstration of their masters' voices.

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### *Anniversaries, celebrations, and some necrology*

The good fortune of historians is to engage in an exclusive dialogue with the dead, and thus avoid contact with the living, which may, as everyone knows, be risky or even downright dangerous. In this column on music, we usually deal more with the dead than the living, and even “commemorate” (but only in the appropriate sense of the word) the passing of one worthy spirit and another, as well as calling to birthdays, centenaries, and other anniversaries. Alas, there are more such dates than there are opportunities to write about them. After the end of the first year of the new millennium, there still remain a good many luminaries of musical life whose anniversaries were allowed to go by with neither sorrow nor glory. I will take the occasion of this first column of the New Year to recall some names that, in my opinion, deserve a tribute.

We all know that 2001 was the Year of Verdi, and I don't believe there is any need to remember him once again. All the same, there is one aspect of Verdi's work that I think has not been stressed enough. It was the British thinker Isaiah Berlin who declared, with his renowned intuition, that Verdi was the “last great popular artist” in history. And certainly it is not easy to imagine the composer that will manage to write the “Va pensiero” or “La donna è mobile” of the future. Verdi, for Berlin, was the last artist (not just musician) who knew how perfectly to combine popular taste with artistic demands. Putting it another way, the Verdi year should have reminded us that composers should not write just for composers, or poets just for poets, and that painters do not need to paint just for other painters. Excuse my idealism.

During 2001, the Catalan composer Joaquim Homs reached his 95th year. A student of Robert Gerhard (who in turn had studied with Schoenberg), Homs spent his whole valuable career following the precepts of dodecaphonism, that is of the non-hierarchical use of the twelve notes of the scale. (In the traditional harmonic system, some notes in any given piece are more important than others and are therefore repeated more often, creating a feeling of familiarity and recognition.) His music can seem unpleasant at first glance, but it has a great structural clarity—it is not for nothing that Homs worked as an engineer—which translates into a great expressive intensity. Like good wines, Homs's music is not easy to appreciate, but, like the best vintages, it seems to get better over the years. His song cycles on texts by Salvador Espriu (*Cementiri de Sinera*) and Rabindranath Tagore (*Ocells perduts*) stand out, along with the two piano sonatas, which, like the rest of his piano works, reflect an affinity for things German.

In 2002 we will celebrate the centenary of Joaquín Rodrigo. The Valencian composer does not need recommendations of any sort, because he is undoubtedly the most popular musician of the entire Spanish kingdom, especially among foreigners. During the forties, fifties, and sixties, while many “avant-garde” composers experimented with dissonances, unconventional instruments, alternatives to the traditional concert such as “happenings,” and interdisciplinary collaborations with other fields of artistics creation, Rodrigo established himself as a unique and in that sense discordant voice. His musical traditionalism annoyed many; his Spanish nationalism was disturbing even to the Spanish themselves because of its local-color clichés. Obstinate, Rodrigo avoided the signs of the times then identified with a European Spain and a bold, ahead-of-the-pack music.

Nevertheless, this is exactly his good luck because, when one puts aside one's political prejudices, his work is surprisingly solid, and his decided, brave defense of melody as a primordial musical element has ended up convincing even the staunchest ex-avant-gardists—all of them today comfortably ensconced in the professorial chairs of the conservatories. One other point: Some of us

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learned to appreciate Vivaldi by way of the arrangements Bach made of his concertos, and in the same way, for me I learned to appreciate Rodrigo and his *Concierto de Aranjuez* by listening to and the Miles Davis album *Spain*. I recommend the experiment.

Another Valencian who passed away not long ago is the pianist Perfecto García Chornet, a musician of capital importance for Mallorca's musical scene in the seventies and eighties. Before the Conservatory of Music of the Balearic Islands had the resources, well-deserved, that it has today, the students had to go to Valencia to take their performance examinations, although sometimes, if there were enough candidates, the Valencia professors traveled to Palma instead. Perfecto García Chornet came to Palma as a member of one of these examination panels and recruited a number of pupils there, including Bartomeu Jaume, Miquel À. Segura, Miquel Estelrich, Francisca Artigues, and many more. As a teacher, Perfecto was very pragmatic and, rather than verbalizing and analyzing his interpretive ideas, simply sat down at the piano and illustrated the sound, the fingering, the tempo, and the expressive means he regarded as adequate. His apartment in Valencia as well his the summer home in Cullera were always at his students' disposition, something that shows his open, honest character. Like Joan Moll himself, he helped to create a consciousness of the national musical heritage for the young pianists of the era (for example, he recorded the piano music of Joaquim Homs). And just for that we should value him as he deserves. R.I.P.

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### *Musical archaeology: Albéniz, Pedrell, Literes, etc.*

Every once in a while, one reads in the papers (or overhears from a group of aficionados during a concert intermission, when, playing dumb, one eavesdrops on the conversation of the fans smoking in the vestibule) that the world of classical music is like a “museum”. The comment generally comes in a scornful tone, with the understanding that museums are institutions dedicated to the past, lacking in vitality and in a view to the future: saying that the *petit monde* of the concert is a museum is to say in so many words that it is antiquated, stale, remote, and out of touch with current reality. It is worth saying that I go to lots of museums, and see them, unlike many concert halls, crammed with a mostly young public standing reverently in line (as if to enter a fashionable disco), paying juicy prices to look at Roman amphorae or paintings by some celebrity artist of the 1980s... Comparing classical music concerts to museums, for this reason, is to my mind paying them a compliment they hardly deserve. Museums present, if anything, a model that we ought to follow—ideally concert halls would be much *more* like museums than they currently are.

In recent years a passion for what you might call museification, including a lust for preserving and maintaining the musical heritage, has been growing in our country. In the last few months alone we have seen revivals of three operas by Isaac Albéniz, one by Felipe Pedrell, and one by Antoni Literes. Albéniz’s *Merlin* (composed between 1897 and 1902) is now in repertory at the Teatro Real in Madrid, following the staging a few months ago of his *San Antonio de la Florida* (1894) at the Teatro de la Zarzuela as well as the recent recording of *Henry Clifford* (1895; Decca 473937). A few years ago, indeed, Albéniz’s *Pepita Jiménez* (in the adaptation of Josep Soler) and complete songs were recorded, so that the new generation would no longer know Albéniz only as an incomparable composer for piano, but a solid composer (it’s too early to say great) in all genres, from chamber music to opera.

Albéniz’s teacher, Felip Pedrell, has also enjoyed some recent, if belated, success with the staging of his *Els Pirineus*, more than a century after it was composed. Both *Merlin* and *Els Pirineus* are lyric dramas, drenched in the ideas of Wagner. Their colossal scale (*Merlin*, for instance, is the first part of a trilogy entitled *King Arthur*, but the composer never managed to write the other two parts), and their legendary themes as well, mixing history, mythology, folk traditions, and an idealized vision of the Middle Ages are marks of a direct Wagnerian influence. Musically, too, they followed Wagner’s path in the use, for example, of advanced harmonies, unresolved dissonances, and melodies lacking the three-part arch of beginning, bridge, and final.

Long before Pedrell and Albéniz, a few other composers took on the task of creating a purely Spanish style of opera. The Mallorcan Antoni Literes, along with Sebastián Durón, probably reached the highest level in these halting operatic efforts of the early 18th century. Now we have, thanks to Eduardo López Banzo and Al Ayre Español, a recording of his *Júpiter y Semele* (Harmonia Mundi Ibérica 987036.37). As was to be hoped, the performers show us a Literes far from historicist museum orthodoxies; his *Júpiter y Semele*, like the versions of his other operas that have come out, is extremely lively, with a percussion section that can make you think you are listening to a popular music band of the period, but with voices like that of the soprano Marta Almajano that reminds us that we are dealing here with a refined and enlightened repertoire.

One question many ask in the face of this archaeologico-musical euphoria is the following: up to what point is it worth the trouble of rescuing works from oblivion? On the one hand there are those who argue that recovering the art of the past is an unavoidable obligation. At the other extreme, some believe

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that if a musical work has disappeared it is simply because it was no good. Take the case of Albéniz: his *Ibérica* for piano has no need of being rescued, because its music is so powerful that it has never left the repertoire. On the other hand, by the same logic, his operas have been forgotten because the material itself was not good enough in the first place. This Darwinian point of view suggests that there is a “natural selection” in art in imitation of that in nature.

Most likely, neither of these extremes has it right: we should neither excavate works for the sake of excavation nor stop excavating them on the grounds that a Darwinian natural selection has buried them with good reason. To return to an earlier example, the music of Literes has shown that it can find an audience that appreciates it and regards it as practically on the same level of quality as the operas of Handel and Scarlatti (“practically”, “sort of”, “almost”, but whatever words I use not equal). Its recovery, thus, shows that if this music has been forgotten it was not by a natural selection, but a selection that was totally *unnatural*, and highly artificial, to put it precisely. Here is the proof: first, the burning of the musical archives in the Palacio Real in Madrid, in 1734, in which much of the patrimony of Spain was lost; second, the lack of interest on the part of some of the Bourbon kings for Spanish music—or anything Spanish, for that matter (Felipe V did not speak Spanish, and understood it only with difficulty). No doubt in the case of Literes musical archaeology is justified not only for sentimental or patriotic reasons: the music is what counts—and what should count, in all the demands of the musical patrimony.

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### *Jaume Mas Porcel as critic*

In 1929, the Círculo de Estudios of Palma de Mallorca decided to offer its homage to Antoni Maria Alcover on the publication of his monumental *Diccionari Català-Valencià-Balear*, and invited a large number of intellectual notables from all over the world to collaborate on a collection of essays dedicated to the distinguished Mallorcan philologist. The volume was a success, but given the international character of the work it ended up leaving out most of the friends, scholars, and artists of the Balearic isles who had been personal contact with him or been influenced in one way or another by his work. Thus there arose the idea of making another volume, just for authors from the islands, and in 1933 this *MisCELÁNEA BALEAR* was published, bringing together articles, research papers, poems, literary essays, and musical scores.

It is a curious thing that music, usually the most neglected of cultural aspects in our country, played a singular and significant role in the *MisCELÁNEA BALEAR*. For instance, Antoni J. Pont contributed an article in Catalan—a somewhat uncertain Catalan, judging by the use of *y* for *i* in his title, “Tonades y balls mallorquins” (Mallorcan tonadas and dances). Joan Maria Thomàs contributed “Un aspect litúrgic de la música d’orgue” (A liturgical aspect of organ music), and Bernat Salas offered the score of a song, “El meu xabec” (My xebec), with lyrics by Pere d’Alcàntara Peña. Finally, our attention is drawn to an essay sent from Paris by a young composer (not yet 20 years old!), “El impresionismo sonoro” (Impressionism in sound). The author is Jaume (or Jaime, since he was writing in Spanish) Mas Porcel, and the article reveals the young composer’s stock of ideas, his aesthetic preoccupations, and quite naturally his aversions as well.

Mas Porcel begins by sketching out the genealogy of the impressionist movement (Monet in painting, Debussy in music) and, following a rather 19th-century historiographical model, compares Debussy with Beethoven and Wagner, the three composers epitomizing a picture of “progress” in the history of music. Debussy’s music should not be qualified as belonging to a school of preciosity (*preciosista*), and the titles of his works are not “mere musical descriptions, today entirely out of fashion, and we protest against those who suppose such a thing as that Debussy’s music is no more than the evocation of what is expressed in the title” (p. 294). He goes on to defend Debussy from certain ill-intentioned critics who have accused him of “packaged Hispanicism” (*españolismo acartonado*, p. 295). He emphasizes that impressionism does not provide a detailed description of reality (as does, in Mas Porcel’s opinion, Borodin’s *In the Steppes of Central Asia*) but that what the music reflects is the *ambiente*, the atmosphere.

In addition to Debussy, Mas Porcel names Satie, Ravel, and the Six as French composers close to Impressionism. In Spain, Albéniz, Turina, and Falla also show impressionist traits. Mas Porcel rejects the label of neoclassicism for composers seeking inspiration from the musical forms and instruments of the 18th century. This is the case of Ravel, whose piano writing is sometimes *clavicinística* or “harpsichordic”, and as well for Falla, whose use of the harpsichord is a new departure, which Mas Porcel calls *scarlattismo*. In a sort of manifesto of what we would now call aesthetic postmodernism, he affirms: “Today, fortunately, every musician who is free of prejudices writes according to his tastes, some creating his own styles while others follow their old habits.”

Mas Porcel’s article externalizes, in all probability, the aesthetic program the composer had set out for himself for his own future professional life. This aesthetic ideology can be summed up in a single word: Gallicization. For any young composer at the beginning of the 20th century there were two

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approaches: on the one hand, the German path, on the other, the French. Mas Porcel shows that he is au courant with both tendencies (he admires the folklorism of Bartók and Kodály), but that he is totally a partisan of the French option. These aesthetic ideas are naturally reflected in his own music. His *Météors* (1936), for instance, consists of a collection of short pieces presenting a gallery of personalities, from the unusual to the intimate: an innocent girl, an elegant lady, an earnest contrapuntalist, a female optimist, a Kantian philosopher, a swimming champion, etc. These titles are more ironic than descriptive (recall his way of listening to impressionism and his aversion to the idea of musical description). In spite of everything, the earnest contrapuntalist and the Kantian philosopher are stereotypes of German culture, and the innocent girl and elegant lady represent the French mentality.

Jaume Mas Porcel's music is not just an adaptation of the French fashions of the early part of the century. In Spain (especially Catalonia) and in southern France, what the Parisians called "impressionism" were remodeled into "mediterraneanism", as in the work of the Provençal composer Déodat de Séverac (1872-1921), whose ideas can give us a clearer idea of what was meant by "Mediterranean" music at the beginning of the 20th century. Séverac's piano music participates in Parisian impressionism, but is much more coloristic. Though he studied some years in Paris, what Walter Benjamin was to call the "capital of the 19th century", he associated the city's cosmopolitanism with superficiality, a lack of identity and roots. Séverac thought composers should take inspiration from country life: peasants, folk festivals and religious feasts, dusty roads, and vineyards. In order to foster Mediterranean music, he came up with the plan of founding music schools in different locations of the Mediterranean coast (Barcelona and Marseilles would be the capitals of this new musical aesthetic). The function of the Mediterranean schools would be not only to encourage traditional music but to create an entire aesthetical movement capable of standing up against Germanism and Parisianism.

I don't know if Mas Porcel knew Séverac's music or his ideas, but his work, like that of other composers of the Mediterranean part of Spain, effectively helped to put Séverac's theories into practice. The music of composers like Mas Porcel, Toldrà, Esplà, Blancafort, and especially Mompou can be described in the same words as those Mas Porcel used to define the work of Ravel: "Affection for simplicity, for innocence, for childish tastes" (p. 296).

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### **Pachmann: Madman, Romantic, and pianist**

Oscar Wilde was fond of launching the occasional *boutade* to provoke the public, rouse it, and shake it out of its hypocritical, pharisaical sleep. It was not a bad idea, but it did not work out well for him, alas, in the end. First he went to prison and then to exile in France, where he died totally dispossessed, abandoned, humiliated, and reduced to the most wretched circumstances, with no money and no friends. Like it or not, Wilde's lessons—his acid, vitriolic sentences, his lacerating judgments—are still quite valid. For example, when he claims, in "The Critic as Artist", that it is much more difficult to be a critic than an artist, nobody takes it seriously. And yet it has unfortunately been proven that Wilde was right, given the abundant supply of bad artists we have (especially in our region) and the lack of critical voices to denounce them.

In the first act of his best known play, *The Importance of being Earnest*, there is a scene that perfectly illustrates one of the principal dilemmas—the principal dilemma, perhaps—of musical performance. We are in an elegant London residence, and a piano plays offstage. The master of the house, a frivolous and hedonistic young man, enters and asks the housemaid, "Did you hear what I was playing?" "I didn't think it polite to listen, sir," replies the maid. "I'm sorry for that, for your sake. I don't play accurately—anyone can play accurately—but I play with wonderful expression. As far as the piano is concerned, sentiment is my forte..." Here in a few brief phrases is a summary of the task of the musical performer in the face of the score: should one play it with fidelity, or let oneself go in favor of expression and sentiment?

Lately there has been some renewed attention to the life and work of Vladimir Pachmann (1848-1933), a pianist for whom the concept of "fidelity" hardly existed. On the one hand, a biography of his picturesque life has just been published (Mark Mitchell, *Vladimir de Pachmann: A Pianistic Virtuoso's Life and Art*, Indiana University Press, 2003), and on the other, a compilation of his recordings has been released (*Vladimir de Pachmann, the Mythic Pianist: Recordings from 1907-1927*, Arbiter 129). Pachmann was one of the great virtuosos, for whom playing the piano must have seemed so natural and easy that he could not adapt to playing just what was written, but felt the compulsion to add, change, and modify the score according to his mood and the occasion. Even directly crossing the composer's will was not aggressive enough for him, and as he played he used to chatter and lose himself in philosophical disquisitions. Very often these commentaries referred to Pachmann himself, to his virtuosity and technique. Sometimes instead of a concert he offered a kind of lecture, naturally about him and his genius. Critics regarded him as a madman; but the audiences loved him, and listening to these recordings one can imagine why—the fantasy, the imagination, the "expression" and the "sentiment" as Wilde would say.

Chopin's famous etude op. 10, no. 3, sometimes called "Tristesse", in a 1912 recording by Pachmann, is a good display of his pianistic style. Any young damsel who has tried to play it knows that the piece consists of a stimulating melody in the right hand floating ethereally over a delicate accompaniment of sixteenth-notes in the left. Pachmann plays the melody freely, with extraordinary amounts of rubato; one has no sensation of tempo or of a stable pulse. Curiously, the left hand presents the same anarchy. Normally, one anarchy simultaneous with another does not make two anarchies but a much larger, practically unsustainable number of anarchies: chaos. Pachmann, in any case, comes out of it well enough. The ultimate effect is that of a soprano (the right-hand melody) taking considerable interpretive liberties with the accompaniment of an orchestra (the sixteenth-notes of the left) trying to follow the diva's unpredictable and capricious changes—thus Pachmann's left hand tries to respond and react to the caprices of his right.

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Pachmann and his Romantic playing style fell into disrepute beginning in the 1940s. Harold C. Schonberg, for example, in *The Great Pianists*, dismisses him as an eccentric musician with an outlandish life, but little musical caliber. This opinion has predominated until now. But with books like Mitchell's and reissues of his recordings, we can go back to appreciating Pachmann's art. Strangely enough, he foresaw this re-evaluation of his work, with his unfathomable genius. In one of his writings, he said it straightforwardly: "When your children and grandchildren ask you, 'Who was this Pachmann?' you can show them how I played... And even though they cannot see me, they will be able to hear my voice through my music and thus they will know why everyone in the world loved this Pachmann..."

Like the character in the Wilde play, Pachmann, in addition to his innocence of the concept of fidelity, also knew little of modesty; and like Wilde himself, he was punished by the Lord (who may not be as nice as people say). At the end of his life, Pachmann abandoned his wife and moved in with a so-called secretary, an unscrupulous young Italian adventurer who put all the pianist's property, bank accounts, and other belongings in his own name. When Pachmann died, the ex-secretary retired on the proceeds with his own wife and children; they say their heirs are still living off the estate. Obviously, when genius is based on madness and mental disturbance, as in Pachmann's case, the consequences can be dangerous.

In a *Pachmann-ian* turn of events Mark Mitchell's *Vladimir de Pachmann: A Piano Virtuoso's Life and Art* was withdrawn by the publisher in 2006, and all remaining copies destroyed, on the grounds that it did not "sufficiently acknowledge the intellectual debt it owes" to an unpublished manuscript by Edward H. Blickstein. According to a "News bulletin" by Jennifer Howard in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 28 March 2007, Blickstein continues to work on his study of Vladimir Pachmann, and it is hoped that it will eventually be published, perhaps directly on the Internet.

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### *Halffter, the composer of small things*

Everyone has a cross to bear, and I too have mine. One of them—because in fact, as logic dictates, there is more than one—is having to listen to music falsely called “new” or “innovative” or “avant-garde.” One of the problems of much music of the kind is its grandiloquent tone, inflated with excessive ambitions. In my humble opinion there are too many sonatas, symphonies, and concertos for soloist and orchestra (all Germanic and Nordic genres, in the last analysis) and not enough more modest offerings, better suited to our southern temperament. It is for that reason that, in the face of the insipid and soporific musical presentations of certain composers of “major” works, one is enormously thankful for the more modest contribution of some other “minor” composers.

A recording of the complete piano works of Ernesto Halffter (1905-1989) by the North American Adam Kent (BRIDGE 9106) is a good example of “minor” music. It presents for the first time all of Halffter’s piano music, down to a tiny piece entitled *El Cuco* (1911) written when the composer was six years old. There was already one other recording issued on the Etnos label with some of Halffter’s piano works played by the Madrid pianist Guillermo González (a tip of the hat, incidentally, to Joan Moll, who has recently recorded Miquel Capllonch’s music for Etnos). But González’s recording was incomplete, and besides, it has never been transferred to CD. Alicia de Larrocha and Artur Rubinstein, among others, have also recorded pieces by Halffter, but Adam Kent’s is the only recording wholly dedicated to him.

Halffter’s music shows the typical characteristics of French music of the beginning of the 20th century. There is, in these musical miniatures, a certain elegance, a certain dandyism (also manifest in the composer’s looks, as you can see from the disc’s jacket), the maintenance of a certain distance and even a definite coolness, aspects that are a constant in all the arts in 20th-century France, from Camus’s *L’Étranger* to the frozen pyramid of the Louvre. Hearing this music one can travel to the world of Erik Satie, Jean Cocteau, and Les Six (especially Poulenc). It is the universe of absinthe drinkers and the idle flâneurs of the Parisian cafés. It is also the universe of the cosmopolitan and ecumenical cocktail parties of the El Terreno neighborhood in our own Palma de Mallorca as described in the novels of Llorenç Villalonga, where the inexperienced heir of a Balearic farm can become acquainted with a northern European duchess. It is an exquisite, refined, sophisticated, and lightly immoral world; a universe of repressed and contained emotions, but very formal and correct.

In Halffter’s music, gallicization is combined with the Spanish element through the influence of his teacher, Manuel de Falla. Nevertheless, Halffter had a marked tendency to parody and paradox (once again you see the French influence), and even when he presented an explicitly Spanish music he adopted an ironic tone. His piano piece *L’Espagnolade* (1938) was his contribution to an album by Spanish composers published at Paris in connection with the 1937 Exposition. Here Halffter takes hold of the “formula” of Spanish music (that is, what Parisians could recognize as Spanish music, the Andalusian sound) and works his way through it with humor and grace. The result is that the composer manages to write a “Spanish” piece while mocking the concept in itself at the same time.

It is worth mentioning that Ernesto Halffter maintained throughout almost all of his life an affectionate and productive relationship with Mallorca. Through his teacher Falla and a Mallorcan patron, Joan Maria Thomàs, he came to the island many times. Joan Parets of the Centre de Recerca i Documentació Històrico-Musical de Mallorca has concert programs presented by the composer’s wife, Alicia Camara Santos, at the Chopin Festival in Valldemosa (in 1938 I believe). His relation with

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Mallorca went on into the 1980s, when the island's Coral Universitària performed some of his music at the Palau de la Música in Barcelona.

Ernesto Halffter, together with Frederic Mompou, is one of the unquestionable masters of the pianistic miniature. Precisely his *Homenaje a Federico Mompou* (1988) is a jewel of simplicity and contained emotion. His famous *Habanera* (1945) evokes in its first four notes, as has been said, a lost and idealized world connecting the composer to the aesthetic of *antillanismo*, of the evocation of the Caribbean, that was so much in vogue in the first half of the 20th century and gave birth to those other habaneras, of Xavier Montsalvatge and Óscar Esplà. His *Llanto por Ricardo Viñes* is a tribute to one of the most important Catalan pianists of the 20th century, but the accompaniment of the melody winks at the Spanish vihuela school of the Renaissance. In other works, the evident musical referent is the keyboard school of El Escorial (Scarlatti and Soler). They are indeed musical miniatures, but they sound as solid as diamonds, certainly.

Adam Kent does not merely play these pieces with extraordinary attention to the musical details, but understands as well the links between the notes and the culture that created them. One of Kent's unarguable merits is his capacity for keeping a melody pianissimo at length, maintaining a uniform and direct sound production. Kent has a superb melodic instinct, always smooth, fluent, and clean. This recording, absolutely to be recommended, has not yet been distributed in Spain; for those who can't wait, it can be ordered online.

### **II. Writers and thinkers**

### *Paul Bowles, composer*

There are artists whose fame seems out of proportion with their professional merits. It has been said, for instance, that the considerable musical and literary output of Paul Bowles does not come up to the height of his myth, or of the aura of “beat” prophet that surrounded him in his lifetime. Put in another way: if an earlier generation gave a positive evaluation of the revolting Orientalism of his work or of the mere fact that he was a smoker of *kif*, that cannot guarantee that the work will survive from a strictly artistic point of view. And nevertheless there can be no doubt that Bowles—whether on account of the myth or of the intrinsic value of his work—was a person of notable weight throughout the 20th century. His figure was already present in Paris at the beginning of the century with the literary experiments of Gertrude Stein and Jean Cocteau and continued to be visible in the 1990s in the work of Bernardo Bertolucci. There were certainly few who witnessed the century as Paul Bowles did, and fewer who witnessed it from so many different artistic perspectives.

Strangely, the only constant in Bowles’s life was its fragmentation, its dislocation, the lack of continuity and the permanent indecision. As a young man he tried being a painter, but he abandoned that (he kept up his interest writing introductory matter to the exhibitions of Juli Ramis and Julio Bravo, among many others). He also wanted to be a poet, but the grande dame of the century’s avant-garde, Gertrude Stein, told him clearly that he would not do. Thanks to the composer and teacher Nadia Boulanger, he came to know Aaron Copland, who took him on as a composition student. Years later, Copland admitted that, although his relations with Bowles had always been excellent, Bowles had never been a diligent pupil, and as a musician was fundamentally an autodidact.

In 1930, when he was 20 years old, Bowles sent a composition exercise to Sergei Prokofiev to ask his opinion as to the possibility of his making a career as a poet. The Russian composer immediately sent him the following reply, which I translated in these pages in 1993: [CITATION]

*Dear Mr. Bowles:*

*It is not that I find your minuet to be out of fashion, but you have written it in a very uninteresting form. Here is why: it has 24 measures, followed by three final chords, but in these 24 measures there are only 5 measures of music (1-4, and 9). The rest is no more than repetition of these five measures.*

*Imagine that I were to compose a symphony of 24 minutes in length, but with only five minutes of music, while the rest was merely repetition of the preceding parts. What monotony!*

*You will say that this happens to you because you have not yet learned to compose and that you sent me your manuscript in order to see if it would be worthwhile for you to learn. Very well, friend, I cannot judge a composer on the unique basis of 5 measures, and moreover there has never been any composer who sent me 5 measures in order for me to give him an opinion on his music.*

*Very sincerely,  
Sergei Prokofiev*

In spite of the honesty and lucidity of Prokofiev’s letter, Bowles was not discouraged and went on composing music on a professional basis for the next 20 years, and probably, in a very sporadic way, for his entire life. The 1930s and 1940s were one of his most prolific periods as a composer, because he began writing incidental music for plays by some of the lions of the American theater, such as Orson Welles Lillian Hellman, William Saroyan, and Tennessee Williams. Even though his music reached the mythic Broadway, Leonard Bernstein premiered works of his for New York’s cultural elite at the Museum of Modern Art, and his music criticism in the New York press had brought him a good number

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of readers, at the end of the 1940s he abruptly quit composing and “exiled” himself to Tangier. From that moment, literature occupied most of his time.

One of the most interesting aspects of Bowles’s music is that it is absolutely different from his writing. His prose has a certain austere, aphoristic quality, like an oracular voice; the tone always objective and pessimistic, always soaked in discouragement and demoralization (not coincidentally, he was one of Sartre’s first English translators). His music, on the other hand, is terribly optimistic and playful. Both the writing and music present elements of exoticism, but with completely different results. In the literary work, Asia and the exotic accentuate the existentialist, pessimist tone of the prose; in the music, the exotic is present in the form of coloristic, picturesque quotations. Many of Bowles’s compositions, for example, use musical themes from Latin America, especially Mexico, but the results are often superficial and banal.

Another element of his musical vocabulary, related to the previous point, is its parody and mixture of styles, or, better put, the collision or shock of various styles creating genuine sound collages. The music can sound like an apocryphal quotation from Ravel, a jazz theme, a tune from a Broadway musical, and a Mexican folk rhythm, all at the same time. Formally, the musical ideas are never developed, except by repetition (of which, as Prokofiev thought, there is too much) and by apparently arbitrary superpositions of form. The instrumentation, as well, is generally defective, and the composer himself often had professional composer orchestrate his scores.

Curiously, Bowles’s music—and this point is significant—avoids the Maghreb element. This is to be explained in the first place by the fact that during his residence in North Africa Bowles devoted himself to writing, not composing. But more important is the fact that he did fieldwork in North Africa, collecting Berber songs, thanks to a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. There can be no doubt that direct contact with the real music of the Berbers made him aware of the value of traditional musics from cultures different from his own, and convinced him not to appropriate or trivialize the Berber music as he had done with traditional Mexican music. (The Library of Congress published a selection of his Moroccan field recordings in 1972; other materials, still unpublished, are available for consultation at the library.)

This November 18 will mark the first anniversary of Bowles’s death. December 6 will be the first anniversary of the death of K. Robert Schwartz, my fellow student, music critic for the *New York Times*, and the first scholar of Bowles’s music. For years he promised a book on Bowles’s music that will now never be finished. If we lack the book, we still have his opinions and intuitions on the subject recorded in numerous reviews, articles, essays... and also in the many conversations we had. Many ideas in the present article are in reality his.

### ***Edward Said, “orientalist” and musical thinker***

Living in a country where intellectuals carry little direct weight in society has certain advantages: what a pleasure to see oneself free of a percussion section of opinionators leading and manipulating the ideas of the whole tribe from newspaper columns and televised debates! All the same, sometimes, one feels that it would not be such a bad idea for the Mediterranean world to bring it the North American system of intellectuals tied to the university campus, discreetly paid and dedicated to every sort of arcane and circumstantial research. Then again, it could be argued that when the insidious commentator discusses the skill required to buy a mobile phone or the inconvenience of daylight savings every autumn—when banality, in short, becomes the norm—the writer on duty has no doubt abandoned his role as investigator to cultivate another more trivial but, of course, economically more profitable sphere of activity.

These reflections are roused by the work of Edward Said, writer and Palestinian-American militant, and his self-declared excitement over anything to do not just with literature and music, but also with the Palestinian cause. In this and many other respects, Said is an exception to the rule: unlike most North American intellectuals, he has never been afraid to leave the classroom to get out onto the street and fight for what he believes in. Said has never satisfied himself with his books, translated into almost every European language, or with accepting the maternal protection of a prestigious university (Columbia), but like Sartre and Foucault—two of his paragons of the committed intellectual—he has truly rolled up his sleeves, wanting to put his theories into practice on that street. For this reason, it cannot be doubted that Said (rather like the Chomsky of 30 years ago) is one of the voices that has reverberated the most in North American public opinion in recent years.

I recall having heard of a photograph of some years ago showing him throwing stones at Israeli soldiers in a street crowded with Palestinians (incidentally, in a village that has a remarkable resemblance to some of Mallorca’s). I never managed to find out whether this was an authentic image or only part of the mythology he has earned for himself over the past 30 years. This mythology did often take him on some shocking paths: the author who went on television to debate the Palestinian question, and who drew the kinds of crowds generally reserved for movie stars when he attended a literature conference is also (or was, alas!) an incorrigible seducer of female students (those wicked tongues!). That he dominated such a wide range of fields as literary criticism, musicology, and the complexities of the relations between the Jewish and Palestinian peoples was disconcerting as well, given how habituated we are to smaller ambitions, or at least more attainable ones, depending on how you look at it.

Said’s work nourishes a variety of fields: the literary, the political, and not least the musical. He began his academic career as a specialist in Joseph Conrad and a theorist of the confluences between colonial power and literature. One of his most widely read books is *Orientalism*, a study bringing out the way European literature (Conrad and Flaubert, for instance) has actively participated in the formation of stereotyped ideas, concepts, and prejudices on the “Oriental” world. After having read *Orientalism* it is virtually impossible to approach an “Orientalist” work with innocent eyes: suddenly almost every representation of North Africa seems suspect. Certainly the African manner in the work of Paul Bowles or the Spanish poet Juan Goytisolo has ended up repelling us all.

One still relatively unknown aspect of Said’s work is his musical thinking. Said has noted on various occasions that, although he never attained professional skill, he learned to play piano as a small child, thanks to his mother’s tenacity; and it is to her that he dedicated his *Musical Elaborations*, the only book devoted entirely to music that he has published to date. Music and politics often join forces in his writings, demonstrating the ecumenical character of his vocation by serving over a number of years as music critic for the esteemed magazine *The Nation*.

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As a musical thinker, Said is marked by his approach to music from an interdisciplinary, humanist perspective. Both his concert reviews (and it is a scandal that these have not yet been collected into a book) and his weightier and more ambitious essays try to situate music in a historical and cultural context that explicates it from a variety of angles. Since the 19th century, thinkers have renounced the “explanation” of music (wrongly, I believe) as an ineffable, inexplicable, and thus unquestionable phenomenon. In opposition to this standpoint and always in accessible language, Said can explain the relations among music, art, politics, and society. In one essay known for its originality, for example, Said relates the opera *Aida* to the construction of the Suez Canal and the European colonial expansion in Africa. Equally fine exercises of the intelligence are his writings on Glenn Gould and on the excesses of the art of musical interpretation.

Lately Said returned to our attention when, suffering from cancer, he published his autobiography *Out of Place*. In spite of the commercial success of his books, the prestige of his figure as engagé intellectual, his status as preferred opinion writer and “talking head” in newspaper and television... in spite of all this, it seems that he has found himself “out of place” all his life: as a Palestinian in the United States, as a refined scholar preaching to the crowd, or as a littérateur explaining music. But there is one further point: Said was able to profit, as few others have done, from his intellectual and geographical dislocation, because through his writings and public appearances he was able to wield an influence in a country where neither the thinker nor the thought normally counts for much.

### *Against rock, against records: Thoughts of George Steiner*

Lapidary and forceful, Federico Sopeña used to say that Spanish intellectuals were “deaf,” that is, that they were indifferent to music. Through a good number of books, articles, talks, and especially in his music history classes at the Madrid conservatory, Sopeña always tried to create bridges between music and the other disciplines, and he was always convinced that if so-called intellectuals were to have a bit of musical training it would strengthen their points of view and increase the value of their work. By the same token, he also warned the future musicians in his classes categorically—not for nothing was he a priest and Franco supporter—that the musician must overcome the traditional aversion for everything “intellectual.”

In opposition to this tradition of an indolent “deafness” in the face of the phenomenon of music, northern Europeans of the (now already distant) 20th century furnished a rich crop of thinkers for whom music was not only an affinity or a pastime but the epicenter of their ideas. The philosopher and social theorist Theodor Adorno is just the tip of the iceberg, with more than half of his collected writings devoted to music, and I don’t believe the hermeneuticist Georg Gadamer can have been far behind. One heir to this humanist tradition of seeing culture with a generalizing fervor as an organic whole rather than a series of separate and disconnected coteries is George Steiner, literary critic, professor, novelist, and commentator on all that is human, whether it be literature, art, or music.

Steiner’s life has been a patchwork of different cultural, linguistic, religious, and professional identities. His parents were Austrian Jews, but domiciled in Paris, where Steiner was born in 1929. A precocious reader, he studied at the Sorbonne and the universities of Chicago, Harvard, Oxford: it is not surprising that he found himself at home in “three and a half languages”—German, French, and English, with American English as the extra half. Steiner’s dislocation goes well beyond culture and language, however; singularly, he is Jew, Christian, and agnostic all at the same time. As critic and professor he has not only had the courage to write popularizing works (a grave sin in the world of specialists) but even ventured into narrative fiction. His detractors have accused him of being a popularizer and a “generalist,” lost in abstract notions. These critics seem to have had little effect on Steiner, whose flight from specialization and pigeonholing has led him (even though he has said, “I write too much”) to very frequent reflections on music (which is what leads us to include him among the dislocated individuals considered in these pages).

One of the fixations of Steiner’s thinking is the idea—not especially original, in fact—that Western humanist culture is in free-falling decline. In his 1971 essay *In Bluebeard’s Castle: Some Notes towards the Redefinition of Culture* (the title was inspired by Béla Bartók’s opera) inveighed against the popular musics (rock, pop, folk) that were at that time ravaging the youth of the five continents. According to Steiner, these commercial musical styles have created a new language that could displace literary culture. The ancient notion of music as a “universal language” has finally become a reality: the same rock can be heard in New York, Palma, and Quito. Everyone understands that universal language of the electric guitar and the amplified voice, new fashions are created to “go” with the music, and certain ideals are shared and transmitted along with it (of generational rebellion, drug use, aspirations toward freedom, antimilitarism, etc.).

On the other hand, says Steiner, so-called “classical” music has gone from being a unique experience to a phenomenon of mass consumption: the phonograph recording has allowed the democratization of an elitist art and the excess of music has lowered its value. Music has become confused with its reproduction (the disc), as if one were to confound the posters bought in the souvenir shop of a museum with the original works of art in its galleries. For Steiner, the culture of classical music has become the culture of the record, and new “experts” have arisen within this culture of sound replicas,

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the record collectors who love the fetishized form of the disc as much as its content. (“It’s the first recording,” these new mandarins like to report, or, “It’s a limited edition.”)

In his writings, Steiner is at one and the same time prophetic and somewhat naive—and these reflections are now 30 years old! It doesn’t matter: sometimes his great merit is that he dares to generalize, and stick his nose into territories outside his specialization, that he dislocates himself from one field to another in his writings in the same fashion as, in his life, he dislocated himself from the German language to French, only to end up permanently in that of English. His writing, even when it sounds excessively candid or excessively apocalyptic, is always backed up and fortified with persuasive arguments and bits of inspired prose (“...to die at thirty-five but to have composed *Don Giovanni*...” In the last analysis, the fact that Steiner has the courage to think and write as an amateur in the best sense—that is, as a genuine lover—on a subject of which people have been saying for the last two centuries that thinking is impossible, is already distinction enough.

### *Nietzsche's piano music*

The musical works of Friedrich Nietzsche have been available to performers and students for many years now. The philosopher's musical legacy includes numerous piano works, songs, and even sketches for symphonies, oratorios, and other works of large scope. According to anecdote, Nietzsche began composing at the age of ten, when he improvised at the piano as a game, using music as a way of representing a state of mind, a sentiment, or an impression, and then expecting his listeners to guess what it was. But in spite of his precocious musical talent, he focused from an early age on his studies in philology; nevertheless, his affection for music remained intact throughout his life, and his relationship with Wagner is a convincing proof of that.

However, though Nietzsche's music may have become accessible to anyone interested, we must admit that it has not made its way into the performing repertoire or the world of recordings. The album *Friedrich Nietzsche: Piano music* (Newport Classic NPD85513) is a remarkable exception, and deserves a little recognition if only for that reason. The recording presents a rather *sui generis* selection of the philosopher's piano music; the performer is John Bell Young, a young American pianist whose recording debut this is.

The first thing to consider in the case of a record of this type is whether it is really worth the trouble of reviving this music just because it was composed by a famous philosopher. It has been said that Wagner regarded Nietzsche's music as that of an amateur. The comment (certainly not meant kindly, in any case) may have been caused by the great composer's jealousy, and also because he knew that Nietzsche regarded him in turn as a great intellectual but a "bad artist". Nietzsche's works may not show professional skill, but they are well beyond those of a simple aficionado.

Nietzsche is a conservative composer, in the sense that he absorbed the influences of Schumann and Beethoven, but found difficulty creating a musical language of his own. He often uses short forms in easily identifiable structure (such as mazurkas or Hungarian dances). All the same, there is always an interesting melody, a suggestive harmony, something, in any event, that tells us that the hand behind this music is that of a true artist.

John Bell Young's interpretation is always correct, if not particularly special. Unhappily, the recording includes some distracting noise (for instance, the sound of the pedal). In two pieces for four hands Young is joined by Constance Keene, but on the other hand the pianist has decided to transcribe two of Nietzsche's lieder for piano solo. It would have been interesting if the pianist had shared his center stage with a singer, so that the public could appreciate the original versions of these works.

All the same, the album is a real joy for anyone seriously interested in Nietzsche's music or his work in general. Hearing the music of a philosopher, contemplating the painting of a composer (such as Schoenberg), reading the literary work of a musician (taking Schumann as just one of countless examples), one has the feeling of having been given an indiscreet window into his inviolable personal world. Nietzsche's music is hardly of the quality of, say, a Ravel or Monteverdi, but it presents an unknown, almost hidden aspect of one of the great minds of the 19th century.

### Gadamer's musical horizons

The German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer was always late for everything. He published his masterpiece, *Truth and Method*, when he was 60 years old, and even his death, a little over a week ago in Heidelberg, where he taught for most of his professional career, arrived at the age of 102. There is little improvisation in Gadamer's work, and very few philosophical outbursts à la française, high on rhetorical fireworks and low on content; rather, it is a meditated and mature work that has left its mark not only in the world of philosophy but also in literary studies, art criticism, and even in that most recondite of the humane sciences, musicology.

Gadamer's interpretive method, known as "hermeneutics," uses the concept of the *horizon* as a metaphor for knowledge. The horizon is the line discerned as a limit by an observer; if the observer moves forward, or to left or right, the horizon logically moves as well. In this way the observer can never stop and seize the object of reflection, because it moves parallel to her or him. As a shadow follows the profile of the object that creates it, so the observer creates, transforms, and modifies the object she wants to study and thus projects her prejudices onto it. Gadamer proposes a kind of game to allow a meeting or dialogue between this observer and the object: the observer must *dislocate* herself (just as we normally try to dislocate ourselves in the present writings) and try to understand the Other's point of view—must insert herself in its skin, to arrive at the halfway point where the two horizons fuse, the point of view of the observer and that of the observed.

These ideas exercised a powerful influence on music history, especially through the writings of Carl Dahlhaus, making it possible to escape from the conventional forms or models of writing the history of music, passing from the pure compiling of information to the interpretation of this information and the re-creation of the cultural, historical, and musical context of the phenomena under study. For Gadamer, the context is almost as important as the text when it comes to understanding the work of art. To take only one commonplace example, if we want to *understand*, in the broadest sense of the word, Beethoven's *Pastoral* symphony, we can study the score, the literary program that inspired it, and even the composer's biography for the period when it was composed, but the comprehension will remain incomplete unless we also understand the whole of the context that nourished and inspired the creator and the creation.

Another example is Constantin Floros's monumental biography of Mahler (*Gustav Mahler*; Wiesbaden, 1977), which aspires to a presentation of Mahler's musical world, not just to the story of his life and work. The formal analysis of the symphonies, the observations on Mahler's style, the assembly of information on the composer and his works (letters, documents, musical sketches, opinions of his contemporaries) are nothing but preliminary steps here in achieving an understanding of the music. All this information makes no sense except insofar as it allows us to decipher the music's symbolism, as for instance when the composer tips us a wink in his symphonies with the use of bird calls, echoes of shepherds' bells, peals of a hunting horn, and Jewish songs.

For my part, I have always found it surprising that, in general, Latin and southern European intellectuals have so often declined to meditate on the musical work. It seems that the written text in literature or the painted text in the visual arts lend themselves more than music to philosophical and critical detours. Also, our intelligentsia holds to the 19th-century belief (already formulated by Schopenhauer) that musical art is "ineffable" or inexplicable, so that any attempt to decode it is doomed to failure. Even Kant—the German mind par excellence, recognized that the problem of music is its evanescence, the way it disappears "leaving no residue on which it is possible to reflect." But beyond Kant—who as everyone knows never left his native town and who committed the serious blunder of remarking that a woman who thinks "might as well have a beard"—northerners, and Teutonics in particular, have given us a considerable number of thinkers on musical matters. One who comes to mind

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is Adorno, who detested popular music, and another is Gadamer himself, who valued all kinds of music, or at least had the tact and good taste not to disparage any in public.

It is certain that Gadamer's writings helped to create a humanist music criticism that is unafeard to question and that directly confronts issues of the first importance: Is it possible to appreciate a work of art in general and of music in particular in a "sensorial" way, without the need of intellectualizing it? Is the contemplation of music a legitimate philosophical activity, or is it a vague and undefined task that leads nowhere? Why should we complicate the experience of art—isn't it enough to appreciate it without questioning it? What is the need for philosophizing about music? No doubt Gadamer's work helps to reply to some of these questions. At the very least they mark out a path that one can follow.

### ***Thomas Bernhard as virtuoso performer***

“Artists are the worst liars, even worse than the politicians.” (Thomas Bernhard, *Alte Meister*, 1985)

Resentment is not necessarily a negative force. Without his anger, rancor, and animosity, it is very likely that the author Thomas Bernhard might not written the twenty-odd novels and plays that make up his literary legacy. For him, denunciation, accusation (sometimes gratuitous), desperate complaint, choleric criticism were the flames that ignited his creative power. Gitta Honegger, in her recently published *Thomas Bernhard: The making of an Austrian* (Yale University Press, 2001) goes further, making the claim that for Bernhard, ire and indignation were an art form in their own right, a virtuoso, magisterial performance, meant to stir up the “spectator”—the passive reader of his books, that is—literally at the gut level.

It is not surprising that the writer aspired to the status of virtuoso performer in words, if we remember his training as an actor and musician. Indeed, in the 1950s he studied voice and acting at the famous Mozarteum in Salzburg. According to Honegger, he was not a very good actor (he suffered from constant memory lapses) and soon began concentrating on theatrical directing. Nor did he make much progress as a singer, though he participated in *Hausmusik* with friends all his life, with his fine bass-baritone voice, singing arias from his favorite opera, Mozart’s *Magic Flute*. Music remained one of the most important constants in his work as well, and it can be said with no exaggeration that every single one of his novels and dramatic works has a dense musical content.

*Cement*, for example, begins with a grand virtuosic introduction, with a “solo” by the narrator (like a concerto from the Romantic era). In the German text, the first speech is 237 words long, an entire paragraph. The protagonist is a musicologist, who has collected absolutely “all” the books and articles that have ever been written on Mendelssohn, with the intention of making his own scholarly work on the composer the most ambitious of all. Having prepared for ten years for this magnum opus without actually managing to write any of it, he decides to go to Mallorca to embark on the task. Naturally, he does not succeed in writing his study, though Mallorca is his favorite place, because of its ideal climate both for his physical and his mental health.

*The Loser* (*Der Untergreher* in the original German) is the story of two friends, young musicians consecrated to the piano. During a master class taught by Vladimir Horowitz, they meet Glenn Gould, whose musical facility is so astonishing that it destroys the aspirations of the two young men. Bernhard mixes real personages (the brilliant pianists Horowitz and Gould) with fictional characters (the frustrated students). Naturally the scenes themselves are totally fictional: Horowitz never gave Gould a lesson. But in spite of the fact that the details are invented, the portrait of Gould is done to perfection—genial, manic, and permanently unsatisfied with his art, like Bernhard himself. Once more, the themes of frustration and genius repeat themselves as an ostinato element.

*Old Masters* (*Alte Meister*), Bernhard’s last novel, tells the story of Reger (a reference to the composer Max Reger?), a music critic in Vienna for the London *Times*. Reger is 82 years old, and every day for the past 36 years he has gone obsessively to the Kunsthistorisches Museum to contemplate the Tintoretto portrait of a man with a white beard (the portrait of Sebastiano Venier, 1571-72). He pontificates on the supposed genius of artists (Giotto, Velázquez, Rembrandt, etc.) and comes to the conclusion that they are all treating us as fools. Reger himself is no genius, only the author of some little weekly articles in the *Times*, but the book’s narrator feels that although music criticism is a minor genre,

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these pieces have the reach and breadth of a masterwork—small essays, but of the ambition, once again, toward a magnum opus.

We cannot overlook the fact that music, for Bernhard, is more an intellectual than sensual artistic expression. The characters in *The Loser* would rather “read” the score and “hear” it mentally than listen to it being performed. In the same way, in *Yes (Ja)*, another narration with a musical theme, the narrator remarks that music is better “heard” by reading a score than by listening in a concert hall, while the musicologist who wants to write a masterpiece on Mendelssohn prepares himself by “reading” everything published on the composer, not by listening to the music. For Bernhard, music comes as much through a text as through sound.

Like Flaubert, Thomas was financially independent all his life (though unlike Flaubert, he did not have the cheek to describe himself in his passport as a “propriétaire”). Thanks to the support of his “life companion”, Hedwig Staviancek, he was able to read, write, and travel without going through the ignominy of a non-artistic job. Moreover, throughout his life, he found aristocrats—not especially elevated ones, as a rule—who protected him, proud of maintaining a “genius.” At various times, Bernhard or the theaters that staged his works received grants and subventions. As you might expect, in his writings Bernhard subjected his noble patrons to ridicule (who in turn denounced him for defamation, *prestissimo*) and accused politicians of attempting to control the culture—these naturally repaid him with decorations and medals, insignia, honorary crosses and ribbons. I am not sure that we have yet learned our lesson.

### ***In the name of the father and of the son: The bicentenary of Alexandre Dumas père***

I don't think it would be going far wrong to say that what truly characterizes contemporary reality is not, as some preachers have claimed, globalization, but rather a lugubrious and unhappy *dislocation*. Really, everything seems out of place, fractured, fragmented, disconnected, divided, separated, unknotted. It is certain that we live in an atomized world, especially in the world of culture, as if it were a universe made up of discontinuous and unconnected, unrelated monads in which everybody sticks with "his own," without any hope—or intention, as far as that goes—of breaking out of his own little circle.

Now, it was not always like that. There was a time when the arts and the humble workers in the arts had relationships with one another, nourishing their creativity, mutually inspiring one another, even copying one another at need. Consider just one example: many of Debussy's piano preludes are based on literary texts, a kind of response by the composer to a challenge posed by a writer. Thus in the first book of the *Préludes* we find the suggestive "Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir," evoking a poem by Baudelaire, and in the second, the delightful "Hommage à S. Pickwick, Esq.," a joyous response to the famous and long novel of Dickens. When the pianist Claudio Arrau recorded the latter piece, he decided to read Dickens's original work—all 1000 pages of it!—without a second of hesitation, simply because it had inspired Debussy's music. Listening to Arrau's recording, thus, is not just hearing Debussy's notes, but also being immersed in Dickens's literary world. Could one ask for a more fruitful kind of artistic relationship?

The bicentenary of the birth of Alexandre Dumas (1802-70) reminds us that music and literature have often been united. The prolific French author (he published more than 250 works, and is said to have employed more than 70 amanuenses or secretaries to help him set it all down) once acknowledged that, although he had studied the violin, he was still incapable of tuning it. And yet his influence on music cannot be doubted: Liszt, Berlioz, Franck, and many other composers wrote songs setting his verses. Bellini and Meyerbeer asked him for librettos for opera projects, but he never really managed to finish any of them and left them waiting and hoping. Other composers (Donizetti, Humperdinck, Cui, Flotow, etc.) were lucky enough to write sincere and skillful operas on texts by Dumas—not great operas, unfortunately, but they do show the narrative flare that also characterizes *Les Trois Mousquetaires* (1844) and *Le Comte de Monte Cristo* (1845).

Aside from having a direct influence on musicians, Dumas was also part of the musical life of the Paris of his time. For instance, he was a founding member of the prestigious musical review *Revue et Gazette Musicale*, a pioneer outlet of music criticism. Moreover, he wrote stories on musical themes, such as *Un Dîner chez Rossini*, telling the tale of a dinner at the home of the Italian composer and the argument of the guests over whether it is music or words that have the primacy in opera.

All the same, Dumas *père* was not the writer in the family who was to be inscribed forever in the annals of music history, but his son. He led—if we are to trust the biographers—a dissipated and dissolute life. He had many lovers, and squandered the fortunes of all of them. With the money of one mistress, for example, he had the nerve to build nothing less than the Château de Monte-Cristo, now a museum dedicated to the writer. He lived in exile as well, though not from idealism or political reasons, only to flee his many creditors.

Dumas *fils*, as one might expect, turned out puritanical and moralistic. However, as fate would have it, he fell in love with a woman of the demimonde, who died young in strange circumstances. In 1848, Dumas *fils* wrote an autobiographical novel on the affair, *La Dame aux Camélias*, whose operatic version is now known to everybody as *La Traviata* (that is, the woman who went "astray," the "lost"

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one). And let no one doubt that *La Traviata* is a great opera, but its message is fearfully moralistic, since it is Violetta's wicked life that puts her in her grave.

In this way, Dumas father and son both passed into the history of music as protagonists of the first order, and they are in good company: think of Verdi's adaptations of Victor Hugo (*Rigoletto*, *Ernani*) or the operas based on Pushkin such as *Eugene Onegin*, *Boris Godunov*, *Ruslan i Lyudmila*...; to say nothing of those based on figures like Oscar Wilde (*Salome*) or Georg Büchner (*Wozzeck*).

We often hear that people have no time to read in modern life, especially when it comes to the great narratives of the 19th century, particularly the Russian, French, and English novel, because most of these works are upwards of 500 pages long. In this connection, it occurs to me that a quick way of introducing oneself to 19th-century literature might be through music in general, and opera in particular. Of course this would only be possible in a world where the arts were not so dislocated and fragmented, which is clearly not ours.

### ***The bicentenary of Victor Hugo; or, How a replica can be better than the original***

Too often, one finds oneself in the company of informed, educated people who cling to the (certainly highly debatable) idea that a book is always better than a film based on it. Nevertheless, it is hardly difficult to realize that replicas and copies often manage to improve on their originals. This is the case with a number of literary works of the 19th century that have fallen into oblivion in their original versions, but survive very well in operatic reproductions. It is enough to mention Verdi's *La traviata*, based on *La Dame aux Camélias*, the once vastly popular autobiographical novel of Alexandre Dumas fils, and his *Rigoletto* based on Victor Hugo's play *Le roi s'amuse*.

A writer of acknowledged merit, artist, and politician, Victor Hugo (1802-85) seems to reunite all the traits of 19th-century French Romanticism in a single person. His defense of personal liberty, his critique of censorship, which so often got in his way, his support for democracy and his defense—a little too much, to modern eyes, in the pamphleteering manner—of the unfortunate and the destitute make him valued beyond his literary qualities alone.

There can be no doubt that his (somewhat inflated, if you like) aesthetic of the grotesque and clownish, his portrayal of the thousand and one imperceptible integuments of the human psyche—resentment, rancor, regret, and so on—made his texts into an indispensable prime material for the opera librettos of the time, early on. There are plenty of very well known examples, from Donizetti's *Lucrezia Borgia* and Verdi's *Rigoletto* down to Claude-Michel Schönberg's *Les Misérables* in our own time. But his influence hardly stops there: Berlioz, Liszt, Bizet, and Saint-Saëns, among many other of his contemporaries, set his texts. In Spain alone, for instance, during the 19th century, his influence was enormous. Pedrell, Granados, and Chapí, among others, wrote operas based on the plot of *Notre-Dame de Paris*. In one form or another, all these composers understood that the gothic ambience of hunchbacks, gargoyles, and secret passages through ancient crypts made an ideal imaginarium for the opera libretto; and Hollywood knows this still, as it demonstrated a few years ago with the animated version for children of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*.

Victor Hugo's relationship with music, all the same, was always ambivalent. Hugo knew that opera helped to popularize his work, but mistrusted the librettists and composers who adapted his plays and novels. On two occasions, for example, he filed lawsuits against the responsible parties for operas based on his works (Donizetti and Verdi, as a matter of fact). At bottom, Hugo adored music and makes abundant references to it in his writings. Curiously, the king of Romanticism always showed a clear preference for what he called “la musique retrospective,” that is music of the past, something that in those days was a rarity—Pergolesi, Monteverdi, and above all Gluck were among his favorite composers. Among his contemporaries, he admired Beethoven as the “greatest musical thinker.”

I don't know Hugo's current status in the world of literature, but I suspect that his writings are not as popular as the operas, musicals, and films based on them. A very clear case of the phenomenon is the opera *Rigoletto*, with a libretto by Francesco Maria Piave and music by Verdi. The original play (*Le roi s'amuse*) is not an exceptional work from any point of view and very few people would take the trouble to stage it, or even to read it, today (as far as I know, there are not even any translations into Spanish or Catalan). The opera is another matter: it has been an essential part of the repertoire, in every part of the world, since it was first produced in Venice in 1851.

Verdi's music has many popularizing moments (the ones dominated by the oom-pa-pa, oom-pa-pa of the orchestral accompaniments) and others that are sublime and glorious. The last come when there is an especially intimate symbiosis between music and text. As just one example, consider the ominous humming of Rigoletto: “La-ra, la-ra, la-ra...” Rigoletto is a hunchbacked court fool, with a limp, and this

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physical characteristic is portrayed in the hiccuping, lurching, interrupted musical line. Whenever the “la-ra, la-ra” is heard, the audience associates it with the protagonist, his handicap, his malice against the courtiers, and his final humiliation (his daughter is seduced and abducted). This fine characterization is not found in Hugo’s play.

Another detail found in Verdi’s opera and virtually absent in Hugo’s work is the soliloquies in the purest Shakespearian manner. In Verdi’s version, the characters are not what they seem, and nevertheless they do not know, at the beginning of the opera, what they actually are. It is by means of soliloquies (like Rigoletto’s aria “Pari siamo”) that the characters come to grasp and understanding of who they are and where they are coming from. These moments of profound introspection and examination of the conscience make another major difference in the comparison with Hugo’s play. For this very reason, choosing between the original by Hugo and the replica by Verdi, most people would prefer the replica.

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## *Fetishism, homosexuality, and opera: the “queens of the throat”*

Opera may be the art of sound par excellence, but it drowns many other aspects of human experience in silence. Until very recently, the relation between opera and homosexuality had never been studied; even the possibility of studying it was never raised. All the same, especially in the English-speaking world, the gay and lesbian affinity for opera was an open secret, what is known in Catalan as a *secret a veus* (a “secret with voices”). The 1993 appearance in the U.S. of the book *The queen’s throat: Opera, homosexuality, and the mystery of desire* by the poet, professor, and self-styled “opera queen” Wayne Koestenbaum clarified this cultural conjunction. Since the book, a good number of essays and articles have appeared not only working out the relationship between sexuality and opera, but seriously calling into question whether there was anything to argue about in the first place.

An “opera queen” is a homosexual with a passion, devotion, even obsession for the opera. But not everything in the opera matters to him, or holds the same value; the queen venerates the voice above all: dramatic structure, libretto, orchestration and the interpretation of the roles all have a secondary rank. The queen, furthermore, is devoted exclusively to the aria, subordinating all the other elements (recitatives, overtures, instrumental interludes, duets, etc.) in a strict hierarchy of which the aria is the absolute top level. For another thing, the opera queen does not worship all the tessituras of the human voice: only the soprano voice deserves his tenacious and constant devotion. And it must be noted that not all sopranos are created equal, and that in consequence there are official lists of whom to respect: Maria Callas is the greatest prima donna that has ever existed, and after her without any special order may be found Anna Moffo or Leontyne Price, or, for my own compatriots, Montserrat and Victòria (calling the divine diva by her first name alone is another symptom of the queen). The opera queen is, further, a stubborn and tireless collector of recordings, which take on for him an almost religious value, like amulets.

Fetishisms and fixations apart, ever since its invention at the beginning of the 17th century opera has been fated to be powerfully attractive to the gay as an art form. The Camerata—the Florentine savants who invented opera in an attempt to re-create the ancient Greek theater—was an exclusively male group. A little later, when Monteverdi composed what may be considered the first true opera, *Orfeo*, he used a libretto based on Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and the theme could hardly have been more homoerotic. It tells the story of the young Orpheus who, after the loss of his beloved Eurydice, goes through a homosexual phase. According to the Roman poet, Orpheus, ruler of the powers of music, was murdered in a cruel and curious form, with a spear through the mouth and throat, thus preventing him both from singing and from oral sexual pleasure. We remember, finally, that Wagner, almost 300 years after Monteverdi, composed his *Parsifal*, the story of a young man indifferent to sex, member of an exclusively male order of companions among whom the greatest—the most severely punished—transgression is coitus!

From the standpoint of opera librettos and plots, the rest of the genre’s history is mainly a celebration of heterosexual passions. There can be no doubt that *Madama Butterfly*, *Carmen*, *Manon*, *La Bohème* and a very long etcetera of works exalt passionate loves and hatreds between man and woman. The authentic and genuine opera queen, however, does not regard the plot of the libretto as an essential element in opera, as we have seen. Opera plots display a wide range of human emotions and passions, but always represented in a schematic and stereotyped form. Certainly what gives an opera its emotional coloring—and by the same token its credibility and verisimilitude—is the other elements of the show, the voice, the staging, the instrumental score.

With its improbable plots and unreal situations, opera has always celebrated extravagance and caprice and scorned the ordinary and prosaic, that is, real life. Even in the verismo opera, with scenarios meant to be fragments of ordinary life, the artificiality of the operatic voice creates a distance from the everyday reality of the audience. The fact that opera is an anachronic, atavistic, artificial art (and really, to

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recognize this is not to diminish the value of the genre, merely to place it in its historical context) accentuates this distancing from daily reality. Its inverisimilitude thus ends up fostering fetishism. The word “fetishism” can be used with different meanings: often for irrational and extravagant devotions, but also for when sexual interest is displaced from a person to an object (the fetish). Both meanings apply to the opera queen: his enthusiasm for the opera is definitely visceral, and the object of his passion—the diva’s voice—is equally irrational. The opera queen idolizes and worships opera because it is one of the very few available channels of escape in repressive and adverse political and social circumstances. The escape—breaking through to a better world, though an unreal one—finishes by being a form of political resistance. For that precise reason, the voice and the throat are the peak of the queen’s artistic experience.

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### *Puccini: A passion for art, cars, and life*

Race cars, women, Havana *puro* cigars, hunting parties in the Tuscan hills, more cars, women, and *puros*, good liquor, gambling sessions into the small hours, more *puros* and more women, speedboats cleaving the waves off the Italian coast and spraying the beaches and ports with foam (in those days, when there were no swimmers other than the occasional eccentric lady from the Nordic lands and sea resorts were inhabited only by fishermen in rowboats), voyages abroad, official commissions to write operas in New York, author's rights spent on spectacular Florentine villas, a motor accident that almost kills him, a very jealous woman, a housemaid who commits suicide, depressions, quarrels with the librettists, the impresarios who mount his works, and the divas who want to display themselves, and more, and more, and always more... Ah! Luckily there is always the refuge of the cars, the speedboats, the glasses, the *puros*, and the hunting parties in the Tuscan hills.

No, the scenes sketched here are not the elements of some intricate opera plot, but the real life of one of the opera's major creators: Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924). Certainly, one of the possible conclusions one might take from the two biographies recently published on him (*Puccini: A Biography* by Mary Jane Phillips-Matz and *Puccini: His Life and Works* by Julian Budden) is that the composer loved life. Or rather more than loved it: he was a glutton for vital experience, and each and every one of his works reflects this grand passion for life, for experimentation, for conquering and overcoming the difficulties and blows that always inevitably arrive. It cannot be doubted that his operas communicate this anxiety for life because he felt it himself. And this is the source of his success.

Phillips-Matz's book is based on the composer's correspondence with his librettists and collaborators, other musicians, theater managers, etc. In addition to working through the Italian archives, as one would expect, she has also benefited from the invaluable help of the composer's family and their friends. Julian Budden's book, on the other hand, rather than a biography, is a critical study of his works with musical examples and technical terminology that requires a reader to have some minimum of musical knowledge (mainly in music history and theory). The two biographies are thus complimentary, and this is something to be happy about.

The logical question, for the moment, is why, all of a sudden, and without the usual pretext of an anniversary or a commemoration, there should be so many books on Puccini? One possible answer: Puccini, according to the statistics, is the savior of the opera house box office, especially in the U.S., but also everywhere else, because the money earned by singers, scenographers, and conductors in the U.S. is generally reinvested in Europe. Frankly speaking, Puccini, 79 years after his death, is still putting food on a lot of tables. Even your humble columnist, my friends, will be collecting a modest fee for commenting on these books! And thus there is a demand for the books because their protagonist is very much a man of the moment.

Success, in any case, is a double-edged weapon: triumph with the plebeians can be a debacle on the side of the patriciate. There are composers, for example, who are cheaters, mediocre, anodyne, and altogether insignificant; then there are those, as can easily be deduced, who are geniuses, inventive, egregious, of superior taste and universal dimension. A bad composer can be successful—something that happens often—just as a great composer may never see a recompense for his honest work and end up forgotten. The real rarity, however, is when an absolutely brilliant composer also achieves a popular success: Chopin, Verdi—in spite of his oom-pa-pas like those of an out-of-tune town marching band—and, of course, Puccini, are among the tiny number of the elect in this category. As a logical consequence, their success has won them the scorn of a certain kind of critic.

Puccini indeed makes shameless concessions to public taste, and often gives them what they expect. In an era when traveling was a rarity, for instance, a large incentive for going to see his operas

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was their exoticism: *Butterfly* is set in Japan, *Fanciulla* in the California of the gold prospectors, *La Bohème* in the Paris of artists who will give all for their art, *Turandot* in imperial China... Even *Tosca* is a tour through monuments of historic Rome. Each act is set in a touristic center of the city: the first in Sant'Andrea della Valle (setting for the monastery of a very Mallorcan order, the Theatine Fathers); the second in the Palazzo Farnese; and the third in Castel Sant'Angelo. And thus Puccini's operas really come to be voyages taken without leaving the seats of the auditorium.

Another criticism of Puccini is that his music is not "modern" enough, and that his musical language is left back in the 19th century. There is truth in this too, but it must be nuanced. Puccini was indeed almost the contemporary of Stravinsky and Schoenberg and his music was little affected by the revolutions that those composers led. At the end of his life, however, Puccini made a liberal use of dissonances and other modern effects (such as the Orientalism of the pentatonic and whole-tone scales). And it is for this reason that the ultra-modern composer Anton Webern wrote to his teacher Schoenberg, after hearing *Tosca*, "The score has an original sound from beginning to end, it is splendid, every measure is a surprise... and there is not the least bit of kitsch." It seems to me that the public continues to subscribe to this opinion.

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## *The finale of Turandot*

Like the mutilated torso of a classic statue or the unfinished sculptures of Rodin, music history is full of incomplete or partially destroyed works. For example, the composers of perhaps the three most important operas of the 20th century were unable to complete their masterpieces: Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron*, Berg's *Lulu*, and Puccini's *Turandot*. And there is something here to lose sleep over, perhaps because it makes us wonder if it really would pay to have them finished and if it would be worth the trouble to commission a composer—ideally one with an artistic affinity with the original creator—to write the work's finale.

Lately this question has come back with a certain relevance. Luciano Berio—better known for the avant-garde excesses of the 1960s than for his incursions into the traditional 19th-century world of the opera—has presented his own finale for *Turandot* premiered in January 2002 at the 18<sup>th</sup> Festival de Música de Canarias, followed by a good number of opera houses around the world over the past year, on a long road from Amsterdam, Los Angeles, Salzburg, and as a kind of culmination it appeared barely a week ago at the Metropolitan Opera in New York.

The history of the problem is well known. When Puccini died in 1924, he had completed all but the last duet of Act III, but left some 36 pages of sketches, drafts, and annotations for the opera's ending. *Turandot* was first staged in 1926 under the baton of Toscanini, and a finale had been prepared based on Puccini's sketches by a student of his, Franco Alfano. On the night of the premiere at La Scala in Milan, however, Toscanini decided, as a sign of respect for the master, not to use it: when he came to the last measures composed by Puccini, he laid down his baton and told the audience that the performance would finish there. For the next 70 years, though, Alfano's version, slightly cut, was used in almost every production of the work.

It has been said with considerable justice that Alfano's finale is unconvincing. For one thing, it is loud and cheerful, like the finale of a Broadway musical, where we know that Puccini looked for a quiet transcendence at the finish. Moreover, the scoring is strictly Romantic, reflecting more Puccini's earlier style than the advances he had made in his last period, and in *Turandot* in particular. Berio's conclusion, some 20 minutes in length, is more modern, using a musical language based on modal harmony, pentatonic and whole-tone scales, and bitonality, features Puccini had adopted himself. Furthermore, Berio has made scrupulous use of the notes and sketches Puccini left and intended for the music of the last scene. He cuts, as well, a considerable part of the original text, a license justified by the plot that has gone before. Both versions make use of the tenor's Act II aria, "Nessun dorma" (popularized by Pavarotti in the soccer World Cup of 1990 and Pavarotti's last-minute substitution at the 1998 Grammy awards by the unexpected but haunting performance of Aretha Franklin), but while Alfano gives it a Broadway-style reprise with chorus, Berio's reharmonizes it to give it a new meaning in line with the new development of the characters.

Audiences and critics have been listening to this new version for almost a year now, and the reactions have been different. It is clear that the great institutions have invested in the new finale: famous conductors like Riccardo Chailly (who led the production in the Canaries), Kent Nagano (in Los Angeles), and Valery Gergiev (at Saint Petersburg), among others, have bet on Berio's completion, which seems to guarantee that in the coming years it is likely to predominate over the old one. And, by the way, the copyright on *Turandot* runs out in the next 20 years, which means that anyone who wants will be able to try writing an ending of his or her own!

A question that remains unresolved is, as we noted at the outset of this column, whether it is worthwhile to finish what a creator has left incomplete. Very often—and to the contrary of what is commonly thought—the composer failed to finish the work not because of an unexpected death but

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because he could not bring it to an end satisfactorily to the maximum of his own professional and artistic demands. Falla struggled for most of his life to finish *L'Atlàntida*. Schubert—according to the most recent studies—never intended to finish the “Unfinished” symphony. Even Mozart was unable to finish his Requiem.

When an artist continues to postpone bringing his work to a conclusion, it is because there is some flaw, some lameness in its structure or form. Puccini was a composer before everything else, and the ability of his melodies to stick a finger in the wound, to express emotion with a change in harmony or a different tinge in the instrumental timbre proves this. But Puccini was also a man of the theater and, more concretely, the theater of verismo. The plot of *Turandot* is incoherent, because the princess of the first two acts is cruel, pitiless, “icy,” as has often been said. Puccini could not write the music for the ending because the librettists had been unable to resolve the narrative incoherence of the idea that such an inhuman, ferocious person could inspire love. Puccini as well could not, did not want to write the music. And this goes straight to the *quid* of the question: if he did not want to write it, then why did Alfano and Berio?

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## *Puccini, composer of transparent emotions*

A composer's last works are generally considered to be a musical testament, or last artistic will. Consider the cases of Beethoven—probably the most obvious, and the first that comes to mind—with his last string quartets; of Brahms and the *intermezzi*, real epigrams of intangible construction; and of the Strauss of the Last Songs, lieder of a resigned and imperturbable contemplation. In the face of these examples, if we were forced to come up with some conclusion, we might say that, in the expectation of death, composers tend toward distillation and formal abstraction, a rejection of virtuoso pyrotechnics and maximal concentration on the pure idea. It is important, however, to acknowledge a curious counterexample, the testament of Puccini, the opera *Turandot*, which is not a succinct, concentrated, abstract, immaterial composition like those mentioned, but a vital, robust work, one might almost say youthful; essentially an opera of clear emotions and without ambiguities.

And it is the case that up to the very last moment Puccini was a lover of life, of the emotion that makes your heart beat without any preliminary discussion, of circumstances that make a person abandon the safety of the nest (a nice job, a secure relationship, the habits and routines that make for stability) and of the “ice” that the preserves and protects our feelings, as is the case of the Princess Turandot. Puccini, putting it another way, wanted his music to reflect the inevitable convulsions that hurl us into uncertainty, hazard, the vicissitudes that make life unpredictable and, by the same token, interesting and vital.

The surprising vitality of *Turandot* is to be found mostly in its musical sumptuousness and grandeur. The music, in this respect, comes closer to the ideal of Wagner than those of the Italian *melodramma*. The orchestra, for example, acts almost as another character of the plot and, as such, helps to convey the story and make it realistic. The instrumental colors are remarkable and unusual, with the use of adult and children's choirs and additional and rare instruments. At *Turandot*'s New York premiere at the Metropolitan Opera in 1926, it is worth mentioning, there were more than 800 performers! On the other hand instruments such as the xylophone receive a virtuosic treatment of the kind normally reserved for the piano and violin. Naturally, the composer was not a professional anthropologist, and when it came to re-creating the obligatory *chinoiserie* he based it on a few collections in the library of his publisher, Ricordi, on a music box using Chinese melodies, and even on the Chinese national anthem. What is surprising is that what might easily have ended up as an exuberant pastiche instead sounds original, unusual, and beyond everything else vitalistic, clear, and abundant.

*Turandot* also possesses the virtue of combining the operatic tradition of the 19th century (of which Puccini was, of course, one of the main protagonists) with some advances of the 20th-century musical avant-garde. Bitonality, for example, is used to create situations of conflict, great disjunctions or oppositions; for instance, in the first act, when the feeble deposed king Timur collapses to the ground at the same time as the crowd is calling furiously for the death of the Prince of Persia. The actions are musically painted in two different keys to express their opposition. Another modern (and Orientalist) touch is in the use of whole-tone and pentatonic scales, as in Timur's arietta “Signore, ascolta”. Finally one could mention the modal harmony that functions as tone-painting for the exotic or archaic, and is, at the same time, precisely because of its primitivism, what Rimbaud called “absolutum moderne”.

Another aspect of the score is its formal ambivalence. From one point of view, the opera is well unified and coherent, with its repetitions of interrelated melodic motives throughout the work. But according to another point of view, *Turandot* is made of independent musical blocks or fragments, and the repetition of motives does not signify the composer meant to create a work without visible joints or articulations. To the contrary, Puccini takes a modern approach and celebrates the fragment as a complete work, much in the experimental manner of Webern's musical miniatures, for example, though not going so far as Webern in the dissolution of tonality.

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A work made up of fragments must rely more than ever on the dedication of the opera's protagonists, the singers. From its first staging under Toscanini, *Turandot* has always been a favorite of the great singers of every era. Even though the wonderful Pavarotti's "Nessun dorma" cloyed in the end, we should recall some of the other exceptional voices in the role of Calaf, among them Björling, Corelli, and Domingo, and according to the first reviews the magnificent Miguel Fleta, who sang at the premiere. On the other hand, the part of the ice princess Turandot must be one of the greatest challenges in the soprano repertoire. Claudia Muzio, Lotte Lehmann, and Maria Jeritza, according to documents of the period, were stars worthy of the role, and later Callas, Nilsson, and Jones had enormous success with their versions.

If singers have helped an incomplete opera composed of fragments to sound like a finished, coherent work, the same cannot be said of the composers who tried to complete the sketches left by Puccini in his hospital room after he died on 29 November 1924. (It is an endless irony, indeed, that the creator of some of the loveliest melodies in the operatic repertoire died from an operation meant to cure a throat cancer!) Franco Alfano, first, and then Luciano Berio (a composer who died only a few weeks ago) tried to finish the work with little success. But in fairness to the truth, it should be added that Puccini himself had been unable to complete it, and not merely because he was surprised by death: but also because he was still waiting for his librettists, Giuseppe Adami and Renato Simoni, working from a tale by Carlo Gozzi, to work out a way of resolving the transformation of the ice princess Turandot into a character that would finally accept the vulnerability of life through Calaf's love, that is a character who can let down her guard and accept emotion as part of life, and stop calculating and scheming to protect herself from all the possible blows to which life destines those who participate in it.

Coming back to the theme with which we began: Puccini, in order to create music, required a general emotion, a shared feeling that the audience could recognize and with which it could identify. The librettists could not manage to provide the transformation of Turandot into a woman of flesh and blood, and for this reason the composer was unable to finish his work. Puccini was not a composer of ethereal, incorporeal, abstract subtleties, but of youthful vigor and strength, and even his last musical expression, *Turandot*, contrary to the norm among composers, ended up a work of transparent emotions.

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## *The “phantasm” of the opera*

If God came back to create the world once more, he would surely have to improve it on many sides. Aside from eliminating hunger, war, disease, and social injustice, the Creator would have to suppress the bursts of irrationality from which such evils generally spring. It would be a matter, in fact, not just of cutting off the evils of the world but of pulling them out by the roots.

It must be said that irrationality—and, by extension, fantasy and imagination—have not always caused evil, and indeed have in many cases been sources of goodness, beauty, art, and, which is what interests us here, of opera. The eccentric English moralist Samuel Johnson, in one of his startling and comical polemical judgments against everyone and everything, declared that opera was “an exotic and irrational entertainment”. This dictamen is unsurprising, given that writer’s limited appreciation for art. For Dr. Johnson, whatever was non-verbal, what could not be explained with words, was outside his value system, and therefore held in low esteem. Opera in particular.

It is not difficult to compare the stony opinions of the stubborn Doctor with the sensible and worthy views of other more moderate voices of people who were equally or better qualified to judge: Stendhal, Bernard Shaw, Thomas Mann, Adorno, Gadamer... all these understood that the irrational ritual and ceremonial of the opera—the non-verbal and “spectacular” dimension—is exactly what allows the audience members to eliminate their own spiritual disorder and internal confusion. It comes to be like a process of osmosis in which a highly concentrated solution transmits a solvent by way of restoring its chemical equilibrium. The external irrationality of the operatic ritual balances and suppresses, osmotically, the internal irrationality of the spectator.

Indeed, anyone who wants to apply the norms of common sense to the operatic spectacle is setting himself up for a pratfall, because in the end Samuel Johnson was right: opera is irrational by definition and common sense is not a useful tool for explaining it. Just take a glance at some of its incongruities, for example the repetition of words or entire sentences in the course of the narration (how many times do the lovers say “Addio” just before they separate in Mozart’s *Cosi*?). Or how is it that in all those duets, trios, quartets, etc., the protagonists all sing at the same time and nevertheless all understand what everyone is supposed to be saying? And what can you say about the absurdity of some plots?

My opinion is that the irrationality of opera—the “phantasm” that inspires it and gives it life—is nowadays more apparent in the “world” that surrounds the spectacle than in the spectacle itself. In the final analysis, when the audience goes to a performance it knows that the events on the stage are the product of the artists’ imagination. The wine Scarpia drinks in a production of *Tosca* is probably Coca-Cola or blackcurrent juice, and when the desperate Tosca stabs him shortly afterwards she is faking, because if she didn’t they would have to find another Scarpia for the following evening.

I insist: the irrationality of opera is found more in the “world” of the opera than in the opera itself. Who can explain, for instance, the cost of the renovation of the Teatro Real in Madrid? Who can justify the pathological need of people in Barcelona and its environs to see whatever spectacle comes to the Liceu regardless of quality, so epidemic that it has been given a medical name: *liceitis*. Who can justify the fact that in the 1990s a stagehand at New York’s Metropolitan Opera earned a salary of \$425,911? (“Overtime,” said the management—although this may be entirely an urban myth.) And then there is the fetishism of the fans, melomanes, and record collectors (how many minutes was Caballé’s pianissimo in her last “Casta diva” in Milan?).

For some time I too professed this faith and went to the vesper “services” at the Met every Monday at 8:00. Why Mondays? I don’t know, but I always went on Mondays. And why did I always choose, as far as possible, the same seat on the same side of the auditorium? I don’t know, but I always tried to get that seat. And why did I always go alone, to the point that if I was invited to see an opera with

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a group I made my excuses and stayed home? I don't know the answer to that one either, except to ask, aren't truly profound experiences generally individual transformations, intimate, and a little egotistical? It is likely that they are.

Each Monday evening at 8:00 one saw almost the same people, which makes me think that true aficionados really have a "day" that they practically never miss. Naturally shy, I didn't dare to speak with anyone. There were glances of complicity, as if we wanted to say to one another, "I've seen you here before..." but they did not go beyond a barely perceptible motion of the head which, if it had not corresponded with a similar motion from the other party, could easily have been passed off as an involuntary movement or a glance at someone else. But not everybody was like this: I always admired how two persons thrown by chance into adjoining seats could sometimes burst into conversation as they remembered the "unrepeatable" evenings with Sutherland in the 1960s and 1970s, or Tebaldi "that night when she..." The two interlocutors seemed to be competing as to who recalled more memorable moments, or could cite the exact date and casting of the first performance of this or that opera in Tokyo, or Dallas, or Johannesburg. It was indeed an exercise in futile and fetishistic erudition. This was when I understood that the "phantasm" of opera, from the immemorial age of the Florentine Camerata, still was with us.

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## *A gentleman from Ciutadella: Joan Pons*

For years now, certain defeatist critics have been announcing the death of the opera. But there is no reason to be frightened in the face of these specialists in the issuing of death certificates: they have announced the death of the novel, of the spoken theater, of classical music, and of course opera as well, and in spite all of these sinister premonitions culture continues to be as alive as ever, or more. It is clear that traditional culture cannot compete with mass culture, but these death sentences are exaggerated and totally gratuitous: there have never been as many readers, music lovers, and gallery visitors as there are now. In the very city of New York, the Met alone (and naturally there are other opera companies as well) puts on a performance every day except Saturdays, when there are two. Or consider the case of Joan Pons.

In this context, the evolution of the Minorcan baritone is especially surprising, because his career has been and continues to be one string of successes that have taken him from his native isle to the most important opera theaters of the world. Joan Pons was born in the town of Ciutadella in 1946, studied in Barcelona, and began his professional career singing minor bass parts in the Gran Teatre del Liceu in the Catalan capital. Montserrat Caballé encouraged him to try the baritone range, and this voice change was to be a decisive step in his career, opening the doors of the European opera houses. From 1979, when he sang the part of Alfio in *Cavalleria Rusticana*, his career became international with triumphs in Paris, Vienna, Turin, New York, San Francisco, and inevitably Maó, Minorca's capital.

That Pons adapted to the baritone tessitura instead of remaining a bass says much about his artistic personality. Baritones came relatively late in the history of opera; other than a few exceptional roles in a handful of Mozart operas (Papageno, Count Almaviva, etc.), until well into the 19th century few of the operas of the repertoire had any roles for this voice. The conventional opera is Manichaean in conception: it represents a world of good and evil, love and hatred, honor and disgrace. These archetypical concepts are normally polarized into different voice types: the tenor (the hero, lover, warrior, etc.), the bass (sage, king, father, priest, etc.), and finally the soprano (generally the young seductress).

When composers began incorporating important roles for the baritone from the second half of the 19th century, opera gained a new dimension: the baritone voice can represent shades that break the stereotypes of the conventional opera. The baritone can represent a person who is young but psychologically mature and complex (such as Wagner's Wolfram or his Dutchman); sometimes the baritone is the rival in love of a tenor hero (like Ernani's nemesis Don Carlo in the Verdi opera); finally, the baritone can be vile and despicable (Puccini's Baron Scarpia). That is to say, the baritone roles signify an increase in the diversity of shadings in the opera's narrative Manichaeism; he is situated between the seductress and the seduced, between the impulsive young man and the wise old one. It cannot be denied that the most complex operatic characters are the baritones, such as Wagner's Sachs and Wotan and Verdi's Rigoletto, Iago, and Falstaff.

Joan Pons possesses a voice of great flexibility that allows him to move from a typically bass register to the high notes of the tenor. It is not a powerful voice, but always maintains a high quality. He stands out in his interpretations of the Italian composers of the 19th and early 20th centuries, especially Donizetti, Verdi, and Puccini. It would be interesting to hear Pons singing the Wagner parts mentioned above, but it seems that for now the Minorcan baritone will keep working the Italian roles that have given him so much fame. Nor does he seem to want to plunge into the 20th century with exciting roles like that of Berg's Wozzeck. In spite of everything, Pons always brings depth, complexity, and plurality to his parts in a world that seems, as I said, to be ruled by irreconcilable dichotomies.

Pons has arrived at the peak of his profession. There is no important theater where he has not worked; no country with an operatic tradition that he has not visited. He has sung under conductors of international prestige such as Riccardo Muti, Giuseppe Sinopoli, and Michael Tilson Thomas. He has

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collaborated with orchestras of the quality of the New York Philharmonic and the London Symphony Orchestra. Domingo and Samuel Ramey have sung with him. His version of *I Pagliacci* for Philipps has received the best possible reviews. This gentleman from Ciutadella who was supposed to be a bass wound up being one of the most respected and admired baritones in the world.

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### **Bellini: The man who made Chopin cry**

In our prosaic and Christian culture, the opera has become the last unique redoubt of paganism. *Norma*, the masterpiece of the composer Vincenzo Bellini (1801-1835), whose bicentenary we are celebrating this year, presents an artificial and improbable plot of false tacked-on situations; all the same, there is no doubt that when Maria Callas or Montserrat Caballé—both incomparable Normas—goes on stage dressed as a druidess in Roman-occupied Gaul to sing the aria “Casta diva,” all this unreal and illusory world, all this fantastical and perversely capricious muddle begins to seem real. What has happened? How have we come to accept the fact that the singers are singing instead of speaking to tell a story? Look: we have entered the world of bel canto, the operatic style established by Rossini, Donizetti, and Bellini, where the plot of the libretto and the orchestration—narrative cohesion and musical logic—helplessly yield in the face of the absolute dominion of melody and the soprano tessitura.

Vincenzo Bellini was born in Catania in Sicily. He received his first music lessons from his father and godfather, both professional composers but with little success. He then went to the Naples conservatory, where he distinguished himself as a vocal composer; indeed, *Adelson e Salvini*, the work that launched his career, was composed when he was still a student. From Naples he went to Milan, Paris, and London. In Paris in particular he frequented the intellectual and artistic circles of the period, Victor Hugo, Dumas, Heine, Liszt, George Sand, and Chopin. Bellini, like the protagonist of the New Testament, died at 33, but in less than 10 years he had managed to compose 10 operas of the highest quality, among them, in addition to those mentioned above, *Il Pirata*, *La Straniera*, *La Sonnambula*, and *I Puritani*.

Bellini's style has been the subject of harsh criticism. It has been said, for example, that he is less than original and too often recycles musical fragments from his earlier works. Rossini, despite being fond of him, complained that his orchestrations were poor and lacking in color, and brought no dramatic subtlety to the narration of the text, limited to the simple function of accompanying the melody. Nevertheless, Rossini could acknowledge Bellini's qualities, and once qualified his style as “philosophical.” Wagner as well attacked him, once saying (redundantly) that his music was “vacuous and empty”—but years later admitted that *Norma* had influenced his own operatic writing. Defending his work, Bellini exclaimed with romanticizing excess, “I vomit blood to compose!” But unlike many romantic artists, Bellini never meant to change music history: he wanted only to please the public and succeed. And this he certainly accomplished.

Bellini's *forte*—the great merit of his music—is doubtlessly his melodic invention, his capacity for saying everything in a tune. The typical Bellinian melody is long and undulating; with a just proportion of ornamentation, the sounds deploy snaking and zigzagging, reflectively, without ever revealing where they are going. As if in order not to interrupt or truncate the discourse, the orchestral accompaniment is of the simplest kind (a few discreet chords or subtle arpeggios). Sometimes Bellini creates a startling effect when the voice attacks the highest note in a phrase on a weak beat. As if out of fear of breaking or disturbing the logic implicit in the text, the notes almost always proceed in small intervals. And one of Bellini's idées fixes was to write a music that exactly reflects the meaning of the text, “a new music that perfectly unites word and sound,” he said. And this too he certainly accomplished.

There can be no doubt that these characteristics influenced the intensely personal pianistic language of one declared admirer, Chopin. Really, it is not difficult to recognize the affinity between Bellini and (to name just a few examples) Chopin's nocturnes, the C-sharp minor étude, and especially *Berceuse*. The relation between the two composers has been exaggerated to the point of historical falsification in some cases: for instance, it is not true that Chopin asked to be buried next to Bellini. One

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anecdote that seems to contain at least a drop of truth is told by the composer Ferdinand Hiller in his memoirs.

Hiller describes how once, at a performance of *La Sonnambula*, Chopin wept, overcome by the emotional charge of the opera. “Once,” he writes, “I went to a representation of this opera with Chopin, the same Chopin for whom the most original and extravagant harmonies were second nature. I had never seen him so profoundly moved: during the finale of the second act, when the tenor Rubini seemed to be in tears as he sang, Chopin too began to weep...” Chopin was naturally unaware that Bellini had written, in a letter to a friend, “opera should make people weep, should give them goose-flesh, should *kill* them with tears...” And indeed Chopin—the man who over four generations has reduced so many damsels to tears—wept at a performance of one of Bellini’s opera, even though, as we know, Bellini did not manage to “kill him with tears.”

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### *Elegy for a manager: The man with the trumpet*

Recently the cultural press has been exciting itself over a fact that may not seem of itself especially important: Luciano Pavarotti has split from his manager, Herbert J. Breslin. The news in itself, as I say, does not seem very significant, given that in the final analysis the business world is full of misunderstandings, quarrels, and breakups. But Pavarotti—"Pav" as he is called in the Anglo-American tabloids—is one of those artists that gets free publicity if he so much as sneezes; which, given his size, is probably an impressive event after all, spasmodic, vehement, and deafening as an out-of-tune C from the chest.

Anyone who has ever known Herbert Breslin or had any dealings with him knows that he is not just any manager, but *the most important manager of the second half of the 20th century*. To the character of an astute businessman he adds a whole series of idiosyncrasies and peculiarities that make him one of the most interesting figures—almost like a fictional character—in the world of contemporary music. Breslin is a man of over 70, probably nearly 80 (his age has always been kept a mystery). However old he may be, he always glows with an intense brown tan whose resplendent tones recall that of Donatella Versace. His manner of dress, on the other hand, does not follow the House of Versace; instead, thanks to 20 minutes per day of gymnastics, he has long worn a youthful collection of suits by Giorgio Armani, his favorite designer.

Added to this eternally young appearance is an energy, a vigor, a capacity for work that are unusual in a gray-haired adult. Breslin speaks rather like a machine gun; his logorrhea is not just abundant but often insolent, cheeky, sometimes even offensive. A journalist with the *Wall Street Journal* has called him an egomaniac, and Breslin has revealed that for years he spent large parts of his mornings looking in vain for mentions of his name in the New York dailies. Without going farther, I should say that I myself have had dealings with Herbert Breslin on numerous occasions, first because of my acquaintance with Alicia de Larrocha and later on account of Joan Pons. Like most people who have worked with Breslin, I can say that I did not escape these encounters unscathed, although I should point out that Breslin squirms under a team of collaborators who work night and day to repair the slights committed by their boss.

As a small demonstration, I will just mention that when Bartomeu Amengual and I were planning the book party for the launch of our book *Bravo Joan Pons*, we invited Luciano Pavarotti's secretary, who had been instrumental among other things in getting Pavarotti to write the preface (naturally the great tenor was invited as well). One day Breslin called me to demand—in fairly rude terms—an explanation for why a "secretary" had been invited. Naturally, rather than trying to justify myself as a matter of courtesy, I noted that he—that is, Breslin—had served Pav as a "secretary" as well when he was managing his U.S. concerts. No need to add that we have not spoken since.

All the same, Breslin has had a great predilection for Spanish musicians. It can be said that he is the maker of the international careers of most of the Spanish artists that have had international careers in the last decades: Domingo, Lorengar, Berganza, Larrocha, and Pons are just a few of the performers that have had the luck or bad luck of working with him. All of them, from then until the time of writing, have sent him packing... only Alicia de Larrocha remains on his team in a strange relationship that has lasted more than 30 years.

As the Catalan pianist has recounted on more than one occasion, Breslin first wrote her in 1965 after hearing one of her records to invite her to make a tour in the U.S., but she did not bother to reply. Breslin, stubborn and obstinate as he was (and remains), kept writing. Eventually, Larrocha's husband began saying, "There's another letter from the man with the trumpet." The trumpet was the logo of Breslin's agency, which appeared on all his correspondence. Finally, Larrocha accepted his invitation, beginning a musical and commercial relationship such as few duos have ever managed to achieve.

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It cannot be said that Breslin has changed at all over the last 30 or 40 years; the ill feelings go on and will continue to go on. The classical music market, in contrast, has transformed a good deal, getting much smaller, and this Breslin is unable to accept. When the idea of the Three Tenors arose, for example, Breslin, who had never taken any interest in popular concerts, was roundly opposed. In the end, seeing the possibility of earnings on a previously unimaginable scale, he concurred, but this has been his only incursion into the world of purely commercial concerts.

For good or for ill, Breslin is a man of another time, an age of small concert halls, classical radio broadcasts, vinyl records, and respect for classical music. Crossover, MTV, macro concerts, the pressures of the recording industry, television, and above all the reduced audience for serious music are things that Breslin has not known how or been able to adapt to. There are no doubt many reasons behind the break between Pavarotti and Breslin, but the main one is that he, the manager-king, knows that he has already done everything, musically speaking, that his “work” is finished. Breslin has been the most powerful manager of his time, but his time is gone, and is history now.

## Diva-ism, molto agitato

Opera plots are usually full of exaggerations and extravagances. Extreme emotions—love, jealousy, vengeance, arbitrary cruelty, death—are the order of the day. Taboos like that against incest are cheerfully violated. In *Tosca*, one of the least offensive works in the Italian repertoire, the audience must deal with murder, suicide, torture, rape, and political intrigue. What more could we ask for? No plot, however, can rival for absurdity that of the zarzuela *Los celos hacen estrellas* (1672, featuring some music by Francesc Guerau), in which the hero turns his jealous lover into a cow.

It is my impression that the only thing one can compare the baroque opera plot to would be that of the lives of those who put it on the stage—the singers, conductors, stage directors and all the rest of the troops of the world of opera. After having read *Molto agitato: The mayhem behind the music* (Doubleday, 2001) one is left with the feeling that in opera, life imitates art indeed, and that however peculiar the stories of the operas may be, those of the divas and divos of the stage are still more—much more—extravagant. The author of the book, Johanna Fiedler, served 15 years as the general press representative of the Metropolitan Opera in New York; during the years she observed the caprices of the divas, the manipulations of the management, the demands of the institution’s wealth patrons, and the strategies of singers, musicians, and directors for getting their contracts renewed. She saw everything, took notes, and now has set it down in print with all the details. This questionable loyalty to the institution that paid her salary could itself fit in an opera plot, in fact.

Some of the anecdotes are juicier than others, no doubt. Artists like Caruso, Toscanini, Mahler, and Callas passed through the Met. Which of them takes the prize? It is difficult to say, but consider the case of the soprano Kathleen Battle, known for her temperamental, explosive, exigent character. Before the Met management finally decided to get rid of her, and put an end to her operatic career, the members of the company’s orchestra and chorus (envious, perhaps, at not being themselves the stars of the show) gave her the nickname of the “Singing Mosquito” because of the ethereal buzz of her top register. At rehearsals, Battle required that nobody should look at her (I know, I know, the logic of this demand escapes me too). On one occasion, when Battle wanted the driver to turn down the air conditioning in her limo, she called her manager’s office by cell phone to ask them to ask the driver for her. Divas—genuine divas—do not speak to chauffeurs. Period.

The conductor James Levine is another victim of gossipy rumors, some more serious than others. I won’t repeat the most serious, because it would attract the notice of an army of attorneys, but among the most innocent, they say, is reports of I don’t know what on the subject of I don’t know which orgies... (Could it be jealousy on the part of those who were not invited to the said unrestrained bacchanals? Let’s leave it alone.) A common denominator in the lives of the stars seems to be the motto, “Think the worst and you’ll guess right.” For instance, after Plácido Domingo made his debut at the Met, in 1968, as a last-minute substitute for Franco Corelli, he always suspected that Corelli withdrew just for the purpose of making the Spaniard perform without adequate preparation, hoping he would have a fiasco. Later, when he received a series of malevolent anonymous letters, he believed that the author was another Italian rival, a famous consumer of pasta. After all this, it seems like a venial sin when Marcia Lewis (the mother of the more famous Monica Lewinsky), author of *The Private Lives of the Three Tenors*, claimed, then denied, that she had had an affair with Domingo herself.

A surprising aspect of Fiedler’s book is the way the audience comes off scot-free from the author’s gossip and scandal. After many years of going to the Met, I find that one of its most questionable aspects is the New York public, its cult like behavior, fetishism, fanaticism, exclusive focus on the soprano’s high notes. Unlike the audiences of orchestral concerts, the opera audience is in general a private club, a secretive religion, an obscurantist sect. Baseball-like statistics are one of its obsessions:

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How many times did Callas record *La Traviata*? How many octaves was Caballé’s range? How many seconds could de los Ángeles draw out a pianissimo? As I suggested above, let’s leave it alone.

The British writer Samuel Johnson, in his *Lives of the English Poets*, described opera as “an exotic and irrational entertainment, which has always been combated, and always has prevailed.” Unluckily, poor Dr. Johnson failed to realize that it is precisely because it is “exotic and irrational” that it continues to triumph. Who wants art to be made of the pedestrian and prosaic experience of everyday life? One thing remains clear: as long as books like this one keep being published, the opera will keep being a livin, animated, agitated art form—*molto agitato*, in fact.

### IV. Catalans

# Catalans

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## *Surinach, three years later*

At the time when the Catalan composer Carles Surinach died in New Haven on November 12, 1997, he retained all the elegance of bearing that had characterized him throughout his life. He lived near Yale University, and the proximity—although he had no connection to the institution—accentuated, in some eyes, his old-European aristocrat's aura. He spoke with great deliberateness, and both his Spanish (bookish, and not very colloquial) and his English (accented, but always correct) kept unchangeable tinges of his native Catalan. On one occasion, a woman friend who had gone with him to a concert invited him to come up to her apartment for a coffee or cold drink or something of the sort, and the composer, chivalrous though he was, declined, explaining that he disliked visiting ladies in their homes if their husbands were not present. Surinach was over 80 years old at the time.

Surinach was born in Barcelona in 1915. After finishing his studies at the Conservatori Municipal, instead of going off to Paris as almost everyone who could did in those days, he took advantage of an inheritance to continue his studies in Germany (Düsseldorf and Berlin, to be exact). There he worked with one of the last masters of the Germanic musical tradition, Richard Strauss. This Teutonic training was to be fundamental for his work, in which, it has been said, the palpitations of the Latin world combine with the precision of the German style in an especially original way.

After brief stays in Barcelona and Paris, Surinach arrived in New York in 1951. At first, he planned to go to Ecuador, where he had been offered the position of music director of the Quito symphony orchestra, but when he saw the opportunities that would open up to him in the United States, he decided to stay. Surinach and his partner Ramon Bell (who also served as his music copyist) rented two apartments, one on top of the other, in the same building in the middle of 59th Street, and there they lived for more than 30 years, civic examples of European formality. Surinach was a very disciplined artist and composed every day “as if it were a job like any other,” he used to say, demystifying his profession. The 59th Street domicile became, moreover, a Mecca for many Catalan artists passing through New York. Surinach was never much interested in cooking or social life, but Ramon Bell was another matter: he was an extremely good cook, and availed himself of every opportunity to invite friends for suppers and parties. Spanish-speaking and English-speaking friends alike gathered there on a weekly basis, but whenever there was a Catalan guest—Alicia de Larrocha was one of the habituées—that language dominated, and the Americans (and Spanish still more) would inevitably begin to grumble because they could not follow the conversation.

Within the Spanish artistic colony, Surinach’s apartment was also famous for another reason. His building was a four-story 19th-century townhouse at the very heart of Manhattan, and as the neighborhood changed in the course of time from a residential zone to being the favorite district (after Wall Street, of course) of the great banking and financial institutions of the world, presumptuous skyscrapers arose there, and Surinach’s and Bell’s building began to seem dwarfed and diminished, surrounded as it was by glass-and-steel giants. The moment arrived when the building’s owner found himself obliged to sell, so that yet another skyscraper could be built, and the composer was forced to abandon the place, though not without first trying a thousand and one ways of avoiding this shocking outcome.

Nowadays even serious aficionados and professional musicians are likely not to know Surinach’s music. In Spain in particular his works have fallen into an undeserved oblivion. For instance, on his death the Barcelona newspaper *La Vanguardia* and the Madrid monthly *Ritmo* were the only publications in Spain to take notice of this important loss. His death, quick and thus painless, came in an unexpected fashion: in the morning he had been complaining to friends over the telephone about his bad eyesight and

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the typical torments of old age, and in the afternoon, the building superintendent bringing him his groceries found him dead.

All the same, it would be wrong to forget that in the 1960s Surinach was one of the favorite composers of the New York avant-garde. As a composer for the dance works of Martha Graham and Robert Joffrey, Surinach participated in the creation of “modern” dance as we know it today. His music, rhythmic and “tribal,” was performed by the most famous soloists and conductors in the world (Larrocha, Ormandy, Stokowsky, and even Liza Minelli). The best-known institutions, too, programmed his works, from the Museum of Modern Art in New York to Covent Garden in London. With all that we are still wondering, three years after his death, what happened to his music in Spain.

Worthy authorities of Spain, do a favor for your voters; dear Spanish orchestra conductors, for your audiences: play some music by one of the most important creators of the 20th century, Carles Surinach.

## Xavier Montsalvatge, or, “Writing easy is very hard”

From a certain point of view, every creative or artistic achievement is an autobiographical act. “The great artists, the great writers,” as the French literary critic Georges Gusdorf has said, “live for their autobiography.” And so it is not surprising that, from time immemorial, some composers too have wanted to form their autobiographies from notes on the staff. Smetana, to go no further, wanted to reflect scenes from his childhood in one of his best known works, appropriately entitled *From my life*. Another example is that of the 18th-century composers Forqueray and Couperin, who made “self-portraits” in music, just as the painters Rembrandt and Dürer had done on canvas before them. The American Virgil Thomson made portraits in music as well, of friends such as Picasso, Dora Maar, and Gertrude Stein. Naturally my incredulous readers, steely advocates of common sense, will demand to know—and with cause, I must admit!—how it is possible to describe, portray, represent anything in music. Indeed, it is an old question, and truly unresolvable, but no less intriguing for that.

I would not dare to say of the music of Xavier Montsalvatge—the composer, born in 1912, who died just two weeks ago (May 2002)—was directly autobiographical, but it must be recognized that it is not difficult to find some interesting relationships between his life and his works. Montsalvatge began to be known as a composer in the years following the Spanish Civil War. These were—as has been said so often—dreary and at the same time very dangerous days. In the face of this fact some artists (especially writers) opted for a realistic aesthetic which would, in theory, help to bring the unhappy and unstable situation of daily life to readers’ consciousness. Other creators such as Montsalvatge, even though deeply aware of the terrible conditions of the country, chose to create forms of artistic expression that seemed escapist, frivolous, banal. Influenced by Ravel, Milhaud, and Villa-Lobos, the first works of Montsalvatge showed a personal, intimate, expressive style that critics were to call “Antillean Modernism,” after the composer’s predilection for the melodies and rhythms of the Caribbean. The most characteristic works of this period were the *Tres Divertimenti* (1941), *Cinco Canciones Negras* (1945), and the *Cuarteto Indiano* (1952).

Luckily for those who want to penetrate into his personal world, Montsalvatge put his memories into written form in the book *Papeles Autobiográficos* (Autobiographical Papers), published in Spanish in 1988 (a Catalan version appeared in 1991), an indispensable resource to be sure for reconstructing the process that led to the creation of many of his musical works. For instance, the origin of the *Tres Divertimenti*, according to the composer, goes back to his first youth, when the towns of his native Girona region used to organize “balls de casino” where the dance repertoire consisted of schottisches, waltzes, and “americanas” (that is, habaneras). Hence the three divertimenti consist of a schottisch, an americana or habanera, and a vals-jota. With his composition Montsalvatge wanted to reproduce that ambience of melodies from overseas and nostalgia for the lost American colonies. As the poet and Falangist politician Dionisio Ridruejo said long ago, one of the great merits of the composer was his being a “subtle discoverer of sonic equivalences for his ideas and sentiments.” And this is what Montsalvatge did in these pieces: creating sound equivalences for a transatlantic experience and transporting us to a better, ideal world, of sun and salt, sea and sand, of startling mixtures of races, languages, and cultures. Today, of course, we know that all this is fiction and pure invention—no impression of pleasurable exoticism can make us forget the abuses of colonialism—but even so, at least during the moments while the music lasts, it makes us happy.

Aside from his unarguable merits, Montsalvatge was a lucky composer; however, this luck also worked to his detriment. His popular *Cinco Canciones Negras* have been performed all over the world with overwhelming success. Victoria de los Angeles, Montserrat Caballé, Teresa Berganza, Pilar Lorengar—to mention only our own Iberian divas—have all triumphed with the lovely poems of Rafael

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Alberti, Nicolás Guillén, and Néstor Luján in the delicious settings of Montsalvatge. But these songs, with their ambrosiacal perfumes and breezes of Antillean palm trees, became so popular that the public never took an interest in tasting different dishes from the same magisterial chef. In any case, Stravinsky complained of the same thing: the popularity of his famous ballets, written at the beginning of his career, left the public uninterested in knowing the rest of his work.

Even though much of the audience can never hear enough of the Antillean pieces, it is worth the trouble of venturing into Montsalvatge's other pieces. There are, for example, a good number of compositions inspired by the world of children, in which under the appearance of innocence you can see the hand of a solid, mature composer; such as the *Sonatine pour Yvette* or the opera *El Gato con Botas* (Puss in Boots). In a third phase, he expanded his use of dissonances, though never to the point of abandoning tonality, as in the *Cinco Canciones al Crucificado* (1969). In everything, one of the characteristics that presides over all Montsalvatge's work is his firm belief—a very Catalan one—that music should be understood and should communicate easily, and that at bottom there is nothing more difficult than to simplify, or as he himself said, “*Escriure facil és molt difícil*” (Writing easy is very hard”).

## *Antillean encounters: Leo Brouwer and Xavier Montsalvatge*

Thanks to the thinker Edward Said, we know that the Orient is not a geographic region, or a territory delimited on maps and navigation charts: the Orient is the land where certain (white, male) imaginations situate the common locus of the exotic, the sensual, the feminine, in sum the Other. Spain, because of its position on the periphery of the map of Europe and also because it remained a unindustrialized for so many years, has been an object of Orientalism on the part of other European countries; for almost the whole of the 19th century, German, British, and especially French writers and artists did their best to see Spain as a remote, exotic region, a realm of brigands, extreme passions, and ancestral traditions. They spoke of the color, flavor, and even the odor of Spain, as if these were particular properties of the country, not to be found elsewhere on the continent. Washington Irving's *Tales of the Alhambra* provide a perfect picture of the idea: the civilized tourist (that is to say cultivated, and therefore smarter than the natives, but at the same time *contaminated* by culture) visits a southern latitude where Rousseau's good savage still lives in a state of purity, without any friction with nature.

This idea of Spain as an exotic country also filtered through music, and in the 19th century a kind of musical style was born, halfway between the cultivated and the popular, evoking this image of the country. This fashion of *espagnolisme* was created especially in France in the last third of the century, and its best known example is the opera *Carmen*. The success of Bizet's opera was so absolute that the public began to demand more and more Spanish music, and the result was a whole pile of works inspired by Spanish exoticism, among which we might mention Edouard Lalo's *Symphonie Espagnole*, Rimsky-Korsakov's *Capriccio Espagnol*, and Emmanuel Chabrier's orchestral rhapsody *España*. In addition Mozart, Chopin, Glinka, Liszt, Debussy, and Ravel all made use of the "Spanish" concept.

If, as we have seen, European composers of the 19th century imagined their Orient in Spain, what kind of Orient was created by composers in Spain itself? The answer is simple, in principle: for the Catalans Granados and Albéniz, the Orient was Andalusia. But for later generations the question becomes more complicated. Xavier Montsalvatge happened to be born at a time when a composer's options were not very diverse. On the one hand there was the nationalist tradition begun by Granados and Albéniz, but there is nothing to indicate that Montsalvatge was attracted to this path; on the other hand there was the modernist Germanic tradition, a path for which Montsalvatge was no better inclined, by temperament or training. Ultimately, as we know, the path that Montsalvatge chose, at least at the beginning of his career, was what the critics called "Antilleanism," that is an aesthetic that evokes the Caribbean islands (the Antilles), the tropics, and creolization or racial blending. His *Divertimento* (19410, *Cuarteto Indiano* (1952), and especially the very famous *Cinco Canciones Negras* (1945-49) are the clearest examples of this creative period in the Catalan composer's life.

Antilleanism is a form of Orientalism; it creates a remote and exotic region—so remote as to be altogether imaginary—and evokes ideal, distant latitudes where people still get along with nature, where there are no restraints, where the sensuality is always just below the surface. This is not to say that Montsalvatge has falsified the Antilles in any way: Antilleanism and Orientalism are poetic licenses that any poet can be allowed. Here reality is not distorted, only idealized for aesthetic reasons.

Leo Brouwer, who is an authentic Antillean himself (from Cuba, to be exact), has also created an Orient of his own. In his earliest works, one could already detect a nationalist character based mainly on indigenous Cuban elements (that is, pre-Hispanic, which means pre-European, which in turn is understood as pre-civilization). After 1962, Brouwer's music began to take on a modernist tinge. Key figures in European musical modernism, such as Nono and Henze, visited Cuba in this period, and like the rest of the European intellectuals enjoyed a brief but intense idyll with the Revolution. Brouwer, trained in the United States, thus came into contact with the music being made at the time in Europe.

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From this point on, the composer began experimenting with musical currents from post-serialism to aleatory music. From a philosophical point of view, Brouwer takes part in the preoccupation with the role of the contemporary composer in a revolutionary society; more concretely, in the problem of how it is possible to create a music that is aesthetically modernist (and thus remote from the public taste) and at the same time serves the revolutionary spirit. His 1970 *Sonata pian'e forte* for piano and tape brings together modernist and socialist ideas. The work refers to the myth of Atlantis, the vanished empire described by Greek historians said to have sunk into the sea. The music presents a sort of narration: at the beginning we hear quotations from the European classics (Beethoven, Scriabin, Szymanowski, and Gabrieli), and then the music changes to an aleatoric, bold, advanced style. The quotations from the European classics represent pre-revolutionary Cuba, while the avant-garde language imposes itself as the new Cuba. Brouwer, thus, recreates his earlier Oriental paradise by returning to an indigenist style and after invoking the myth of Atlantis and identifying it with Cuba.

Now the circle has closed. The Europeans orientalized Spain; Montsalvatge orientalized the Antilles; a Cuban of European lineage and North American training orientalized pre-Hispanic indigenous Cuba and the lost Atlantis. Orientalism, like certain harmonic processes, some melodic designs, and many rhythmic cells, is a technique from our own musical culture, a procedure that most composers have used.

## Pedrell: Scholar or composer?

If Felip Pedrell were still alive, he would be 160 years old as of last February 9. The fact that the anniversary went almost unnoticed should not surprise us: there is a marked tendency in our country to pay our dues to our artists, scholars, and scientists—and we can be grateful for this—but then to move on to forget all about it and regard the matter as settled. Pedrell has the obligatory street named after him by the people of his native Tortosa, a conservatory in his name, and a conference staged for his centenary in 1941 by Higinio Anglès and a group of colleagues. If we add to that that the Biblioteca de Catalunya has published a number of his works in the last years, we may say—with easy consciences, and fully satisfied—that our debt to Pedrell has been settled once and for all.

In the history of culture, there are people who, for good or ill, are not so much condemned to being forgotten or overlooked by the public (because, really, this is not Pedrell's case) as relegated to the status of a footnote, clearly important but in the last analysis marginal and circumstantial. No doubt Pedrell is one of the most quoted authors in histories of Spanish music; no doubt any review or critique, article or book on Albéniz, Granados, Falla, or Gerhard is sooner or later going to bring up Pedrell's name. Pedrell's influence is undeniable, but his music, his own work, continues to be the terra incognita in the musical map of Iberia.

Felip Pedrell was born in Tortosa in mainland Catalonia in 1841. He sang in the city's cathedral choir and thus came into contact with the rich Spanish tradition of sacred music. Apart from this brief apprenticeship, Pedrell was self-trained as a musician and remained so all his life. In 1876 he traveled in Italy and was there when he began to take an interest in what we now call musicology (the word did not as yet exist). Later, he spent two years in Paris, where he discovered the music and ideas of Wagner. Like Baudelaire, who defended Wagner's radically new aesthetic without having heard his music at all, Pedrell was captivated by the German composer's nationalistic and utopian theories. On his return to Spain, he lived ten years in Madrid, and then for the rest of his life in Barcelona, dedicating himself to the publication of early music (he transcribed and edited the complete works of Tomás Luis de Victoria, for example) and the compiling of Spanish folklore. One consequence of all this scholarly activity was that it led to a certain neglect of his initial vocation as composer.

Nevertheless, Pedrell always thought of himself as a composer dedicated to academia rather than an academic who also composed, which is the image we have of him today. In order to understand his work as composer or creator and as scholar or codifier, we must first understand the cultural and professional dislocation that already affected him during his lifetime: even as he was himself a quintessential Catalan, he created Spanish musical nationalism; even as he was a composer, he established the bases for the scientific study of Iberian music history and folklore. It was from the continual tension of this conflict between creativity and erudition that, in the end, his great contribution arose, that of a scholar who was a creator by nature.

One case of integration between thinking and creativity is his 1891 essay *Por Nuestra Música*. The text articulates Pedrell's ideas on the future of Spanish music taking his cue, up to a point, from the model of Wagner. He recognizes that 19th-century Spain did not have an outstanding musical profile and that in order to reconstruct the country musically it would be necessary to create a school of composers inspired by two traditions: on the one hand, that of Iberian folklore, and on the other the glorious Golden Age of the Renaissance polyphonists (mainly Victoria, Guerrero, and Morales).

Pedrell wanted to put his theories into practice with an immense opera entitled *Els Pirineus* (The Pyrenees), composed to a Catalan text by the poet Victor Balaguer. Like Wagner's *Ring*, the opera takes the form of a trilogy with a long prologue; it also follows the German composer in its frequent use of leitmotiv (that is, a melodic or harmonic gesture representing a particular idea or character). The work

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also makes direct use of medieval and Renaissance themes, harmonized in the manner of Pedrell's own time. If Wagner's operas aimed at being the "music of the future," *Els Pirineus* aspired to be the foundation and basis for the future of Spanish music.

In art, as in good cooking, recipes are a guide but not a guarantee of the outcome. Pedrell triumphed where his ambitions were not set particularly high, in his scholarly work, and came to grief in the field in which he would have been happiest to be recognized and renowned, in his compositions. Every 50 years or so, we must turn back to Pedrell and try to clarify whether his music speaks our language or is of interest only to the handful of academics who busy themselves with him. Meanwhile, we go on running across his name as in a footnote, a circumstantial and accessory reference, in the lives of other composers who, for now, seem more alive and captivating.

## *Casals, or the question of principle*

If the Vatican had done what was suggested by some progressive priests in the 1970s and sold its patrimony to distribute the profits among the poor, by now the Church would no longer have any property at all, the poor, we may say without fear of contradiction, would still be poor, Castel Gandolfo would be under Hilton management, and the Pope would have to buy a ticket to go swimming in his celebrated pool. Putting it another way, humanism, altruism, and good intentions are questions of principle but, unhappily, they do not always achieve the expected results.

Something similar happens with music: history is full of visionaries who believed they could use music to mitigate the afflictions with which the world is visited. And yet there is no doubt that very few of them were successful with this message of alleviation, because of the following dilemma: as George Steiner has explained convincingly enough, one of the great contradictions of humanist culture is that this very same culture has not merely done nothing to halt the terrors of the 20th century, but almost always been their accomplice, co-participant, enabler. We must never forget that the Nazi concentration camp officials would attend concerts, with music by Bach, after a day of condemning dozens of Jews, or Gypsies, or dissident artists, or homosexuals to execution. That Hitler was an art collector, and owned a number of Stradivari violins, no longer shocks us.

The recent long-awaited inauguration of the Casa Museu Pau Casals on the beach of Sant Salvador in El Vendrell, Tarragona, reminds us that often—though certainly not always—great art coincides with an irreproachable civic conscience and model ethical stance. No one can deny that Pau Casals, throughout his long life, was always on the side of the “good guys.” To tell the truth, Casals was not the only musician with a clear vision of the regenerative, idealist mission of music: Artur Rubinstein refused to perform in Germany at the start of World War I and never returned; Claudio Arrau gave up his Chilean citizenship after the Pinochet coup and stayed away from his homeland for 17 years. Such edifying cases can make us forget, if only momentarily, that the pianist Walter Gieseking, the soprano Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, and the conductor Herbert von Karajan, among many others, were all accused of collaborating with the Nazi regime.

Casals, however, is an entirely separate case, because of the perfect and impeccable balance between his moral status and his art as a musician. From 1917, he decided on principle that he would never play in a totalitarian country and therefore declined to go to the Soviet Union. In the same way, after Hitler’s seizure of power in the 1930s he refused to work in Germany, as well as Mussolini’s Italy and Franco’s Spain. After World War II, when the British and American governments failed to break off diplomatic relations with Spain, he vowed never to perform in public again—a vow, fortunately for us, that he ultimately broke.

Another aspect that completes his political profile is his Catalanism. Casals always believed in Catalonia’s right to self-determination, in the creation of its own institutions, and in a firm defense of the language. Up to now, musicians have largely ignored this Catalanism because of the still powerful idea that nationalist demands—and practically any other intellectual subject, for that matter—are not a musician’s concern. Casals’s perspicacity about the national question also distinguished him from Granados and Albéniz, almost his contemporaries, whose muddled perspective made them Catalans and incongruously the fathers of Spanish music at one and the same time.

However, any mediocre performer can harangue an audience with anti-totalitarian or pro-democracy speeches. If Casals’s message is more effective than that of others, it is owing in the first place to his value as an artist. He himself expressed it in a famous, often quoted phrase: “The only weapons I ever had were my cello and my baton.” Most likely, his famous BBC address to the people of Catalonia in 1945, his letters on the subject of human rights to Presidents Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Nixon,

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in sum his political personality, would have had no effect at all without the presence of the integral uprooted artist behind all the politics. For Casals, principles were important, but music was still more important than the principles, if such a thing is possible. This is why in art, often, it is not entirely a question of principles—or, putting it perhaps better, holding principles is not enough, one must really make art.

## The classics, Ramon Llull, and music

Everyone knows the definition of a “classic”: the author or the work that nobody ever reads, but everybody quotes, comments on, and glosses. Nevertheless, the debate on the role of the classics in society is one of the most important cultural arguments of our time. For good or for ill, there are questions that continue to have an enormous relevance in the dispute: Do secondary-school students really need to read Ausiàs March,<sup>1</sup> Cervantes, and Shakespeare? Is it important for the MTV generation to know the musical heritage of Palestrina, Sibelius, and Prokofiev? Should the public authorities work to ensure the continuity of this cultural legacy, or is it strong enough to preserve and regenerate itself without government intervention?

These are not simple rhetorical questions, and deserve that we should at least attempt to answer them. Some argue, for example, that popular culture—television, advertising, pop music in all its thousand and one forms, etc.—has helped to popularize the humanist culture of the past (it cannot be denied, after all that culture has become more democratic and reached more people through television and the Internet). But others would maintain that this popular culture has merely replaced the humanist culture of old in an effective, oppressive, and ultimately tyrannical way. I don’t want to be the one to write yet another obituary for the late, great humanism, because so many of them have been written already (since Spengler’s famous essay, the theme of the decline of Western culture has come to be a new literary genre all its own). Be that as it may, we have to admit that the appreciation of the classics has become polarized: there are more scholarly studies produced every day, but the works of the classic authors seem to have less and less resonance with people on the street.

Consider, however, the case of one of the most vigorous classics of Catalan thinking, the Mallorcan writer and philosopher Ramon Llull (ca. 1232-1316), master of Latin and virtual inventor of Catalan literary prose, best remembered nowadays outside Spain for his astonishing anticipations of information science and computers. Although his name hardly arises in the current journalistic debate about the classics, his name has come back into the news, for various reasons. For one thing, the Catalan government, Generalitat de Catalunya, and the government of the Balearic islands have come to an agreement on the creation of an Institut Ramon Llull, with the aim of projecting Catalan language and culture outside the Catalan-speaking countries. For another, Antoni Bonner and Lola Badia, among others, have created a new website dedicated to the Mallorcan writer (<http://orbita.bib.ub.es/llull>; there is also another website on Llull being produced in Brazil). We can kick out all we like and deplore the decadence of culture, weeping over this and that, but the fact is that this classic Catalan figure seems to be more alive than ever.

Even though Llull was a troubadour as a young man and is believed to have composed music, his real importance to musicologists lies in the musical topics he wrote about in his discursive and philosophical works. Unfortunately he never wrote a significant treatise on the subject, and his commentaries are scattered through almost all of his writings. Taken as a whole, Llull’s basic idea is that music should serve as a tool for the propagation of Christianity. In this and other respects, his thinking is not especially original, and mainly reflects the preoccupations and disputes of his time.

Musically speaking, the 13th century is the era of the great dichotomies between sacred and profane, monophonic and polyphonic, vocal and instrumental, and all these themes find resonance in Llull’s works. For example, in his *Ars magna* Llull defines music as “the art of organizing many voices so that they agree in a single song” (a definition that, considering it comes from the 13th century, seems far

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<sup>1</sup> A Valencian poet (ca. 1397-1459), one of the first and greatest to use the Catalan language as a medium of verse.  
Translator’s note.

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superior to those of many of the textbooks I studied, such as the aberrant volumes of the Sociedad Didáctico-Musical, or the outlandish harmony manuals of Arín and Fontanilla, authentic pedagogical monstrosities). This definition puts the typical transition of the time from monophonic to polyphonic music in relief.

Llull also gives a view of the dispute between sacred and profane music. Following the Franciscan concept of the holy minstrel, Llull proposes that there should be divine troubadours who put their abilities in poetry, singing, and instrumental playing in the service of God instead of dedicating them to worldly themes. The popular art of the jongleurs, thought Llull, precisely because of its popularity among the people, should be used to transmit Christian doctrine. Another theme treated by Llull, in the *Llibre de doctrina pueril*, is the transition from purely vocal style to singing accompanied by instruments. Here Llull compares the pure singing on religious subjects without accompaniment with the music of minstrels, with their songs on secular themes and accompanied. In his *Llibre de contemplació*, finally, Llull creates interesting comparisons between music and rhetoric. His own descendant Antoni Llull (ca. 1510-82) was to treat the same theme with a considerable resonance (the famous Gioseffo Zarlino commented on the passage).

One of the advantages of a website is the ability to organize the information content it contains on any given topic. “Lulism” in the 19th century and “Lulian” studies of the present have given rise to hundreds of scholarly works (duly cited by Bonner et al.). One should remember, though, that the life of the Blessed Ramon has also inspired novels and musical works (not cited on the Web). Three spring to mind, though there are probably more—a novel by Lluís Racionero, Jaume Mas Porcel’s *Cantata Luliana*, and various compositions by Xavier Benguerel. And indeed, websites, cultural institutions, novels, compositions... all this shows that there can be no doubt that after almost a thousand years some classics are in enviable health. Long may it last.

## ***The attraction of the past: Music and myth in the work of Verdaguer***

Sometimes what remains of an artist is more the anecdotes than the work in itself. This is certainly not the case with the great Catalan poet Jacint Verdaguer (1845-1902), and yet it is not easy to separate the man from the poet, or the eccentric priest from the brilliant verbal craftsman. Verdaguer's obsession with charity, for instance—or his enthusiasm for performing exorcisms on poor epileptics, whom he believed were glass-vomiting victims of demonic possession—cannot make us forget the resplendent, gleaming, magnificent language of his poetry. No doubt some of his mental lapses can be excused if we remember that, at the age of 20, competing in Barcelona's Jocs Florals, he recited his victorious poems in the costume of a rustic nobleman, in velvet coat and red barretina, the bag-shaped cap of the Catalan countryside—some humiliations, surely, can never be forgotten. The positive side, perhaps, is that a drop of madness—measured and moderated, if possible—is probably the best leavening for the artist's creativity, at least for some artists.

One of the characteristic features of Verdaguer's poetry is its musicality, the sound of the verses, and this goes some way to explaining why so many composers have set his works (Francesc Alio, Salvador Brotons, José Donostia, Xavier Montsalvatge, Antoni Massana, Enric Morera, Antoni Nicolau, etc.). But music is as well a constant reference in his poems. Verdaguer always cites music as an allusion to two types of an idealized past, the historical and the rural. In *L'empordà*, for example, he mentions “*lo ball de la sardana airòs i noble*” (the elegant, noble dance of the sardana), equating folkloric performance with a state of ideal purity; again, the great epic poem *Canigó* re-creates a medieval ambience of remote, mythical resonance with the naming of the instruments of medieval jongleurs: the bagpipe or *xeremia*, the pipe and tabor. Throughout the poem “*El Cel*” as well there are interesting musical references through the filter of Roman antiquity (Boethius) and the Golden Age of polyphonic music (Palestrina): “*Com vos sento sonar en mes orelles, harmòniques estrelles*” (As I hear you sound in my ears, harmonic stars), he writes, and, at the end, “*Com la nota melòdica amb la nota de Palestrina en lo solemne cant*” (Like the melodic note with the note of Palestrina in the solemn chant).

But as far as idealization of the past goes, nothing can surpass *L'Atlàntida*, the enormous epic of the Atlantic Ocean whose plot ranges from the myth of the lost continent of Atlantis to the European discovery of the Americas at the end of the 15th century. Manuel de Falla wrote music for this epic, and I would say that no composer seems to have grasped as well the essence of Verdaguer's work. The attraction of the Cadiz composer to Verdaguer's poetry may be explained in part (only in part, of course) by the psychological affinities between the two artists. Falla and Verdaguer never met, but their worlds are full of concordances from one to the other. Like Verdaguer, Falla was an obsessive person. Just to take one example, whenever he shook anyone's hand, he had a compulsive need to wash his hand afterwards. This obsession with hygiene led him to sterilize his hands with surgical spirit; but the rubbing alcohol dried his skin to the point that it erupted with horrible sores that, in daily contact with the elements, became scabbed and infected. Both artists, as well, shared a certain Franciscan asceticism, the preference for the austere life, for chastity, and for an uncontrolled, obsessive charity (in the south of France at the end of the Spanish Civil War, Falla gave money to the Republican refugees when he barely had enough to sustain himself in Argentina).

The musical version of *L'Atlàntida*, naturally, was the most durable obsession in all of Falla's career. At first, he meant only to write a pantomime on Christopher Columbus, with the painter Josep Lluis Sert preparing the scenography. Little by little, the idea grew into that of an enormous *cantata escènica* (while Sert ended up collaborating on the *Christophe Colomb* of Darius Milhaud and Paul Claudel). Verdaguer's text had exactly the qualities Falla needed: a great epic poem, in mythical, weighty tones, an archaic language with vibrant, throbbing literary images. The mixture of paganism, classic

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mythology, Christianity, and pseudo-history was at the same time a very attractive element for both: in the end, every Catalan of the *fin de siècle* felt in one way or another the influence of Wagner and his world of ghosts and mists (Gaudí, to take only the most obvious example, was another case).

Falla's music, in perfect symbiosis with Verdaguer's text, is a great musical frieze of epic proportions. As the sketches for the score show, the composer collected traditional Catalan and Andalusian tonadas, as well as sources of "Oriental" music (a possible hint of exoticism), in order to evoke the Iberian pre-history of the early parts of the work, and indigenous music of Peru and of medieval Europe to provide an ambience for the world of pre-Columbian America and the period of the discoveries. A fervent Catholic, Falla assigned special importance to the Christian references in Verdaguer's text, and Columbus, one of Falla's childhood heroes, is presented as the "bearer of Christ." The section "Salve en el mar," for example, is one of the most finished pages of religiously inspired music in all of Falla's work.

Falla left *L'Atlàntida* incomplete, and his heirs commissioned his disciple Ernesto Halffter to finish it according to the composer's sketches. After some years, Halffter reconstructed a very effective version that has been performed to considerable acclaim all over the world since the early 1960s. Nevertheless, with *L'Atlàntida*, Verdaguer succeeded in creating the great epic poem that Catalan literature required, whereas Falla, in spite of the 18 years he spent on this great stage cantata, left only an unfinished work (like Schubert's unfinished symphony or Puccini's *Turandot*), and one wonders if there is some reason for this.

## Gaudí's musics

It cannot be denied that the influence, resonance, echo that an art work and artist have on other creations and creators are good indices of their intrinsic quality. Most probably, neither the vagrants who picked up Gaudí's dying body after he was hit by an evil streetcar on a corner of the Gran Via in Barcelona, nor the anxious passersby who thought he was a vagabond or a tramp (it seems Gaudí's pockets were empty, and he carried no identification) ever imagined that this fragile, vegetarian body belonged to one of the most brilliant architects in the world and one of the most universal Catalans of all time. The above principle is clearly demonstrated by his influence in the plastic arts (think of Dalí and Miró), literature (his friends Joan Maragall and Jacint Verdaguer), and, as we will see, music.

Joan Guinjoan (b.1931), for example, has spent some years working on an opera entitled *Gaudí*, with a libretto by Josep Maria Carandell (b.1934). The opera is in two acts, with a duration of a little over two hours. According to the authors, it is inspired by the famous *trencadís* technique, a mosaic of fragments of broken tile, with which Gaudí loved to cover the surfaces of his structures. In anticipation of the staging of this ambitious work, scheduled for November 2004, last February Guinjoan presented a symphonic suite drawn from it, under the title *Trencadís*, as well as a brief *Sintonia "Gaudí"* for carillon (!), at the Palau de la Música in Barcelona. By the way, Guinjoan wrote the role of Gaudí for the baritone Joan Pons.

Then, the output of the prolific Mallorcan composer Romà Alis (b.1931) includes an *Homenatge a Antoni Gaudí: Càntic simfònic*, op. 149. The dedicatory note to this grandiose work is clear enough: "Musical tribute to the thinking, religiosity, and greatness of this Catalan from Riudoms." The work is a kind of symphonic poem, but without a program or direct literary argument. The composer has said that he wanted to express "structures, geometries, symbols, allegories, symphonies of stone and steel, the plasticity of forms, light, color, shine, polychromy, medievalism, neogothicism, and baroquism; and a deep-rooted Catalan romanticism, accentuated with the nostalgic and tender memory of the song of the earth, bathing it all in his love for all the things and creatures of nature, with the humanism and humility of the genius."

Narcís Bonet (b.1933), a Catalan composer who has lived in France for many years, has another *Homenatge a Gaudí*, for orchestra (1966). Bonet's music is marked by a certain neoclassicism in the footsteps of Stravinsky, but without giving up a direct and very communicative style rooted in the Catalan musical tradition. Outside the Spanish-speaking world, the English composer and musicologist John McCabe (b.1939) has written a piano piece inspired by the Catalan architect. *Gaudí (Study no. 3)*, composed in 1970, exploits all the piano's resources and displays a dramatic use of tonality. Finally, in 1984 the Japanese composer Toru Takemitsu wrote the soundtrack for a film directed by Hiroshi Teshigawara, *Antonio Gaudí*. The music is minimalist, full of changes, and always enjoyable to the ear.

However, just as Gaudí's work has served as a source of inspiration to many later composers, the architect was also inspired by music himself. Barcelona at the end of the 19th century fell under the sway of Wagner and the composers in his aesthetic orbit. Little by little, the Wagnerian fashion—the plots from Germanic mythology, the ambience of torchlit caverns, petrified gardens, misty forests populated by legendary beings, etc.—took over. Precisely in 1900, the Liceu theater mounted a production of the opera *Hänsel und Gretel* by Engelbert Humperdinck, a composer from Wagner's circle who had served some years before as professor at the Barcelona conservatory. The fad of the Catalan Renaissance had led as well to the Catalan translation of a number of opera texts, and the version of *Hänsel und Gretel* was by Gaudí's friend Joan Maragall, under the title *Ton i Guida*.

According to the art critic Robert Hughes, Gaudí's design for the entrance to Parc Güell in Barcelona was inspired by the stage designs for *Ton i Guida*, even though it cannot be proven that the

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architect ever attended a performance at the Liceu. The opera is set in the house of the child protagonists and the house of the witch, a clear allegory of the struggle between good and evil. The entrance of Parc Güell has two pavilions that also represent the dichotomy between good and evil. The one on the right, representing evil, is ominous-looking, and a poisonous toadstool, symbol of witchcraft, crowns the roof; that on the left, representing good, touches the sky with a holy cross atop a spire in blue and white checks, colors of Bavaria and its king Ludwig II, Wagner's patron. It is no coincidence that in *Parsifal* the knights protect the Holy Grail in a place called Montsalvat, a clear reference to Montserrat in Catalonia. But is it possible that Gaudí was inspired by Humperdinck's opera in his plans for Parc Güell? All the evidence points to a hesitant yes. It cannot be doubted that Wagner's troglodytic, medievalist work and Humperdinck's fantastical, hallucinatory settings had reverberations, if not in a direct way then at least indirectly, in Gaudí's architectural vocabulary.

Commenting on Manuel Mújica Lainez's libretto for Alberto Ginastera's opera *Bomarzo*, the critic R. McCullen has said that its story is "a chance encounter of genius with medieval revival, art nouveau, savagely erotic shape, and Spanish religiosity." The same words are certainly more than applicable to the work of Antoni Gaudí.

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### ***When Louis Armstrong blew....: Jazz as modern art***

There was a time when it became fashionable to say that, given the deplorable state of so-called “contemporary music”—more concerned with technical display and cultural shock than with the honest expression of feeling—the *real* contemporary music was jazz.

That contemporary classical music is a marginal phenomenon without much of a foothold in the cultural map is, as they say, an open secret (although it is also evident that marginality is not necessarily a bad thing). It is also irrefutable that jazz, in contrast, has been a cultural force of the first order throughout the 20th century, feeding the creativity of filmmakers, painters, and writers at the same time as it was able to create an audience eager for artistic challenges. If anyone still doubts this, here is a book that may finally convince you: *Jazz Modernism: Ellington and Armstrong to Matisse and Joyce* (Knopf, 2002) by Alfred Appel, a literary scholar hitherto specializing in Nabokov.

The thesis of the book, if I have understood it correctly, is in two parts. The first is simple, and many people will agree with it; the second is more complex and therefore questionable. Jazz, says Appel, is “modern art,” and both in its aesthetic ambition and technique and in its audience the work of Armstrong and Ellington is comparable to that of Matisse and Calder in visual arts or Joyce and Hemingway in literature. Appel offers many instances of the relationships among artists, writers, and jazz players and how they inspired one another. His arguments, though solid, are to elaborate to summarize here. In any case, the author reminds us of Matisse’s collages entitled *Jazz* and the *Broadway Boogie Woogie* of Mondrian. Moreover, Appel says, Joyce writes in a “syncopated” rhythm (that is, in a jazzy meter) and in Hemingway’s story “The Killers” the way the dialogue is broken up is like the instrumental conversation of a jam session.

His second thesis is more daring: contrary to what we are used to thinking, true modernity was not shaped by the hermetic, difficult, inaccessible, and elitist artistic languages of the radical avant-garde, but by the plain and simple idiom of Louis Armstrong, the sentimental and unforgettable melodies of Duke Ellington, the simplicity of the figures in Matisse’s collages, and Hemingway’s direct prose. Experimentalism had its moment, but its mission of shaking up our belief system is already a stale story, Appel says. The word that defines modernity is *accessibility*, and the king of accessibility in jazz is not an “artist” but an entertainer, Louis Armstrong.

Jazz, properly seen, has followed an evolution similar to that of classical music. Both styles passed from a direct and accessible language to brazen byzantinism. In the classics, the progression was from Bach and Mozart to Nono and Ligeti; in jazz, from Armstrong and Ellington to Ornette Coleman and Cecil Taylor. Classical music and jazz share multicultural origins: Mozarabic chant coexisted with the Gregorian in the same way as blues and marching bands are the roots of jazz. If the earliest classical music served well defined liturgical functions, the first jazz styles (Dixieland, New Orleans, and Chicago) had the simple mission of entertaining—training, education, “culturalizing” were never the objectives of jazz in the beginning.

With all that, following the inexorable law of the pendulum, in the 1950s Charlie Parker, Thelonious Monk, and others created bebop, a jazz style that aimed at being art, not only entertainment. This complex and intricate improvisatory style was praised by artists like Rothko, Pollock, Frankenthaler, etc. The musicians and the artists had one thing in common: the *ad libitum*, improvisation, liberty. Curiously, the original creators of jazz could not manage to understand bebop, as Giotto would probably

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not have understood Picasso. Armstrong memorably called it, “weird chords which don’t mean nothing... no melody to remember and no beat to dance to. So they’re all poor again and nobody is working, and that’s what that *modern malice* done for you” (my italics).

Whether you want to defend Armstrong’s “dance” jazz or you are a partisan of the “intellectual” jazz of bebop, artists, writers, and even classical composers could see from the beginning that this music was meaty, as you might say. Appel tells an interesting story. Years ago, he was in New York’s Birdland to hear a performance by Charlie Parker’s quintet when Igor Stravinsky entered with some friends to take their place at a reserved table. Parker knew that Stravinsky was there, and in the middle of a brilliant virtuoso improvisation on his famous *Koko* he broke into the opening theme of Stravinsky’s *Firebird*. It was a way of paying back the compliment Stravinsky had made in writing a few compositions inspired by jazz (such as his 1919 *Piano-Rag-Music*). The anecdote reminds us that what some may consider rivalry may be seen by others as mutual inspiration.

“Nowadays,” said Dizzy Gillespie on the subject of bebop, “we try to work out rhythms and things that they didn’t think about when *Louis Armstrong blew*. In his day all one did was play strictly from the soul—just strictly from the heart.” For this reason, Appel argues and dares to predict that Armstrong’s music, strictly from the heart and the soul, will last longer than Ornette Coleman’s ultra-intellectual showers of notes, as Matisse’s collages will survive when Pollock’s drip paintings are forgotten, and Hemingway’s sobriety has more of a future than the interior monologues of Joyce.

### ***John Coltrane's 75th birthday***

History is full of cases of the cruel indifference with which a premature death has cut off a brilliant artistic or musical career. Juan Crisóstomo Arriaga was 19 years old when he died; Schubert 31, Mozart 35, Chopin 39. Nevertheless, turbulent lives, late hours, or even the abuse of alcohol and drugs cannot explain how all these musicians died so young. As we know, John Coltrane was an affable person, generous and of a great human integrity. His character was on the reserved side, shy and quiet. When one thinks of the vindictiveness of Miles Davis or Charlie Parker's tendency to brusqueness, Coltrane seems mild and gentle. At the end of his life, he felt himself enlightened and believed he had discovered the religious Truth. And yet nothing could stop cancer of the liver from taking him away in 1967, when he had lived for barely 40 years.

In spite of his premature death, Coltrane had time to leave a musical legacy of surprising weight, quantitatively and qualitatively. Eclectic as he was, Coltrane was equally comfortable improvising a blues, making his own version of a Broadway hit (it was the success of his version of "My Favorite Things" that brought him to the attention of the wider public), or plunging into the forests of the most difficult and unconquerable styles like Thelonious Monk's bebop or the modal and cool jazz styles of Miles Davis. Often, the results of these experiments ended up disagreeable and hard to listen to (like his last recording, *The Olatunji Concert*, released in 2001 by Impulse!). Often, though, his continual research led him to unique trouvailles that ended up as part of a unique musical signature. His use of multiphonics, for instance, used the saxophone to produce two simultaneous sounds creating a chord (listen to his "Harmonique," from the 1958 album *Coltrane Jazz*). Another aspect of his style is the harmonic substitution, in which the saxophonist replaces the chords accompanying a melody by an entirely different set, creating such unexpected effects that the resulting piece seems to be a completely different composition from the original.

Few musicians better exemplify the dichotomy between the cerebral and the visceral than John Coltrane. His improvisations on scales and arpeggios are torrents, floods of notes exploding with dissonance and even cacophony, that may seem to come from a moment of passion, but are in reality perfectly controlled, studied musical fragments. Coltrane could never devote too much time to studying his instrument or harmonic theory: a tool of the trade he carried with him throughout his career was Nicolas Slonimsky's *Thesaurus of scales and melodic patterns*, a weighty and insufferably boring book of exercises. "I'm worried," he once said, "that sometimes what I'm doing sounds like just academic exercises."

One of his masterworks is the album *A Love Supreme* (1964). The title is not arbitrary: the supreme love it speaks of is a reference to God, but the placement of the adjective after the noun, against the usual rules of English syntax, reflects the syncopation of the recording's music. The disc shows Coltrane's artistic ambition in the way it is not the usual compilation of takes on familiar songs, but a full-scale suite organized in four movements, some 40 minutes long. The music follows the inflections of a poem of religious exaltation written by Coltrane himself. Some scholars have claimed that Coltrane's saxophone evokes the voice of a preacher reverberating through a church. The instrument, indeed, stops at certain moments, accentuates certain notes and elongates others, creates pauses, silences, minuscule spaces for meditation, only to return, later, to the beginning.

Jazz is a musical style that had to work powerfully to earn the respect of intellectuals. In the mid-20th century writers like Aldous Huxley mocked it as a fashion that would soon pass. The stubborn

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Theodor Adorno, blindly hostile to popular culture, thought that jazz's artistic pretensions were a delirium of Western capitalism. The French—and the frenchified, the existentialists of the *gauche divine* and exiles like Cortázar—idealized jazz, exalting its intuitive, empirical, sensual aspect, and in their writings they helped to accord it dignity and relevance on the cultural map. Today, universities offer classes in jazz and scholars and experts hold congresses and international meetings on the subject; the fear now is that the circle will have closed, and jazz music be reduced to its cerebral aspect. Meanwhile, in face of the question of whether jazz has a future, the discographic legacy of the saxophonist John Coltrane allows us to celebrate the birthday of one of the great masters of the past.

### **Miles Davis: “Leave the blues to white people”**

The best metaphor for Miles Davis’s artistic personality is when he is called a “chameleon.” And it is probably the case that there has never been a musician in the history of jazz to put as much hunger and avidity into the incorporation of as many musical languages as he did. Like an actor who incarnates dozens of roles but remains at the same time the same man of flesh and blood, Miles Davis’s music absorbed the Broadway musical of the 1940s, the bebop of the fifties, the cool of the sixties, the rock of the seventies, and the hip-hop of the eighties. That versatile, changeable temperament is shown as well in the way he was as ready to work with the filmmaker Louis Malle in the fifties (*L’Ascenseur pour l’Échafaud*) as to make a version in the sixties of Joaquín Rodrigo’s *Concierto de l’Aranjuez*, and to appear sporadically on the eighties television series *Miami Vice*. One can argue over how to interpret this artistic variability: a lack of artistic coherence for some is understood by others as a sign of adaptive genius.

Last May 26, this chameleon of jazz history would have turned 75. To celebrate the anniversary, Columbia Records has issued a magnificent double disc with recordings ranging from the beginning of his career in 1945 until almost his last sessions in 1986. (Davis died in 1989, but the record companies keep putting out albums, whether of previously unissued material or compilations, down to the present time.) This collection offers a splendid immersion into Davis’s sound world, not just because it covers his entire career, but because of the quality of the recordings and of the other musicians (Max Roach, Ron Carter, Gil Evans, Bill Evans, John Coltrane, Herbie Hancock, etc.)

The compilation also helps us distinguish the musician from the myth. In life, Davis made himself a cult figure. It has always startled me, for instance, how in the United States he is often known by his given name alone, “Miles,” like one of the Old Master painters (Raphael, Rembrandt). He added to this cult with a unique personal style: every picture of him betrays how much attention he paid to his “look.”

Looking through what we could call the iconography of Miles Davis, it is easy to see a particular form and finish in the way he dressed. Even when a heroin (and later cocaine) habit had left his face pitifully ravaged, his wardrobe was impeccable. In the same way, when those same drugs had made a complete fool of him, his speech and speaking style (as opposed to the content of what he said) had the tone of an omniscient oracle. In films made of him, one always notices the recherché, affected gestures: his walk is deliberate and studied; he wets his fingers on his lips before bringing the trumpet to his mouth; then closes his eyes and plays a note with an extended, oblong silhouette.

In the photographs, Davis rarely looks natural: pose, affectation, gesture, and attitude predominate over what we call spontaneity. At the beginning of his career, Davis wore jacket and tie, opened the door for ladies getting into a car, and always had a lighter at hand in case someone needed a light. Clever as he was, though, he changed the parting of his hair, as they say, to go along with the times, imitating the work pants and brilliantly colored flowered shirts of Jimi Hendrix.

It is my opinion that this, shall we say, dandyism is inseparable from his music. From the strictly musical point of view, his most genuine and personal contribution was what would come to be known as “cool” jazz (cool, and hence calculating and cerebral). Whether he is playing a simple Broadway show tune or a more complex piece, the sound of Davis’s muted trumpet is always a murmur, a seductive and studied whispering, like the precise phrase of a professional nightclub seducer in the movies. Whether it

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was the dandyism that filtered through the music or, to the contrary, the music that influenced the personal style, we will never know.

The muted trumpet—solitary and lyrical—unquestionably evokes vulnerable feelings and spirits wounded by everyday pain. Like a face seen among the shadows in a film noir, one of Miles Davis’s melodies insinuates, but never actually materializes; made of unresolved modal fragments, it does not lead to a conclusion. The harmonies are few, and carefully chosen, to the end of creating an ecstatic atmosphere characterized by great economy of means and minimalism of resources. Unlike other jazz styles, with their extroverted sound and explicit emotion, Miles Davis’s cool jazz shrinks from tears and turns to emotional control. Perhaps as a way of getting away from the emotional excesses of some jazz styles, he once said to the pianist Herbie Hancock that from now on they would avoid the blues, adding, “Leave the blues to white people.”

### **Nina Simone and the despots**

Nobody should be surprised by the musical tastes of Saddam Hussein. In one of his ostentatious palaces, between the smashed glass of the great windows, the fragments of bomb-wrecked furniture, and the smell of shit (which, I don't know why, reminds me of the old machine gun nests we sometimes stumbled across in Mallorca when I was a child, they have found cassettes of the mellifluous Julio Iglesias and the still more honeyed Johnny Mathis. It appears that the more bestial the tyrant, the more inoffensive is his music.

His son Uday, in contrast, more radically Muslim than the father, did not go for Western perversions and preferred the indigenous music of the singer and oud player Ismail Hussain. In recent statements to the press, speaking for the first time without fear of reprisals, Ismail tells how when Uday wanted to enjoy himself he did not play around, so to speak, and his legendary feasts could be as extravagant as those of Caligula himself. According to the singer, one day he was notified that Uday wanted him to sing and play for him in private, and with no further explanations summoned him to a Baghdad hotel. There, Uday's completely armed scouts stuffed him into a car with covered windows and, an hour later, he found himself in one of the infamous palaces of the Hussein family.

According to Ismail, Uday's feasts were all alike (and he knows, because he entertained at many of them). There would be five or six male guests and some fifty women. The women were not necessarily attractive: Uday seems to have enjoyed them all equally. Uday and his male friends drank Hennessy and served themselves abundant portions of roast meat. Uday knew all of Ismail's songs and frequently said, "Play this.... Sing that...." When the alcohol began to have its effect, the guests and the guards began taking shots and firing off their American machine guns. Sometimes, for fun, Uday would take direct aim at Ismail's head, or that of some other musician, and then "miss", instead putting a pattern of bullets in the wall behind. The feast was over when Uday was finally exhausted by his excesses; it was always already past daybreak.

The recent death of Nina Simone (1933-2003) reminds us that not all musicians have had empty heads or lacked a sense of political and moral rightness, and that many, indeed, have stood up to power with courage and heroism. Nina Simone was always haughty, arrogant, and angry, and the racism of her country, Western capitalism, and the slavery-like institutions of the recording industry sent her over the edge. Simone was a rebel not just with a cause, but with several. She never made concessions, and the most minuscule details took on the same importance as grand gestures. Occasionally, when she sang Jacques Brel's "Ne me quitte pas", for example, she worked to avoid the famous line about becoming "l'ombre de ton chien" ("the shadow of your dog"), unacceptable for a woman, and a black woman, to sing. It is beyond question: she would not have sung for Uday.

Her repertory was extensive: jazz, Broadway musicals, songs by Leonard Cohen, Bob Dylan, the Beatles, Brel, Brassens, Aznavour, Kurt Weill, and those of her own composition. Her voice was raspy, rough, and smoky, but with a large palette of theatrical effects. Strictly speaking, she did not so much speak as *interpret* her songs, with moans and groans, sobs and sighs, whistles and intimate whispers, and sudden changes in timbre and breaks from chest to head voice. This whole range of interpretive techniques served to communicate the message of the song. Whether it was a protest song ("Mississippi Goddam", a tribute to the victims of racist murder in 1963—the activist Medgar Evers in Jackson, Mississippi and the four black girls killed in the church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama) or a love song ("Ne me quitte pas"), the registers of her voice always went to the creation of a dramatic effect and

the provocation of a personal catharsis in the audience, which identified, understood, and appreciated this theatricality.

The same could be said for her piano accompaniment, always simple, repetitive, percussive, and full of extramusical effects (syncopated knocks on the instrument's lid, and kicks at the pedals). Nina Simone was no Art Tatum or Thelonious Monk, and never meant to be; her rudimentary technique was admirable for its dramatic effects, not for its virtuosity. "Pirate Jenny" by Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht is a perfect demonstration of the theatricality of her style of singing and piano playing both. The convincing "My baby don't care for me" (famous for its use in a Chanel ad) persuades with the simplicity of its chords (a harmony reminiscent of Xavier Cugat's pop standard "Perfidia") flatly accompanying the plaintive cry of the voice.

Nina Simone drank too much and smoked too much. Her excesses often put her on the defensive, in a bad humor, and furious with everyone and everything. Once she drew a pistol on a group of young people for being noisy early in the morning; in another unlucky blow, after a collision between her car and two motorcyclists she fled the scene, and the police had to arrest her. Her family, her friends, and even the audience, had to forgive her for much. It is beyond question that she deserved certain privileges because of her talent as grande dame of song, even that of mounting the stage completely drunk and giving a pathetic performance to a loyal audience that had properly paid its entry. As woman, as artist, she was, logically, incorrigible.

## ***Keith Jarrett as classical pianist***

It has been rightly said that one of the characteristics of the postmodern age is the fusion between what is usually called popular art and what the French call “*l’art savant*”, the “high” art of the grand tradition. An example of this is what is happening in the musical world: while opera singers lower themselves to a facile commercialism in recording all sorts of pop chansonettes, some musicians trained in the popular tradition take the plunge in the other direction. This is the case precisely of Keith Jarrett, principally known as a jazz pianist, but who in recent years has given us his versions of Bach’s Goldberg variations and the *Well-tempered Clavier*, and who now comes forward with the monumental *24 Preludes and Fugues*, op. 87, of Dmitri Shostakovich (ECM 1469/70, 1992).

In 1950 Shostakovich served as a member of the jury at the first International Bach Competition in Leipzig, held to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the composer’s death. Shostakovich decided to compose a cycle of piano pieces imitating the organization of the *Well-tempered Clavier*; that is to say, a sequence of 24 preludes and fugues in all keys. The cycle was to be a homage to the master Bach and at the same time an almost insuperable challenge for a contemporary composer, since the WTC is a key foundational work in the piano repertory. We should remember that many composers since Bach have tried to create cycles of piano pieces following a structure resembling that of the WTC: the most famous cases are those of Chopin’s preludes and études and Hindemith’s *Ludus Tonalis*. Today we can say that Shostakovich acquitted himself of the challenge with success, and there can be no doubt that his preludes and fugues measure up to those of his predecessors, Bach and Chopin.

Today there are two recorded versions of Shostakovich’s preludes and fugues on the market. The first is by the Russian pianist Tatiana Nikolayeva, to whom the work is dedicated; the second is Keith Jarrett’s. Both deserve to be listened to, and it would be all too easy to fall into the simplicity of recommending one over the other, because each has enough merits of its own to keep it on the market. Jarrett’s case is perhaps more interesting because he is a pianist known, at least until a few years ago, chiefly for his recordings of totally improvised solo jazz concerts. So what is a man trained in the total liberty of jazz improvisation doing with a work in strict counterpoint in which no freedom, or almost none, is permitted to the interpreter?

For years, Jarrett has been planning to record Bach’s keyboard works on piano and on harpsichord as well. The case recalls in certain respects that of the Canadian Glenn Gould, who recorded Bach’s complete works in versions that could be called idiosyncratic, but that would be putting it too mildly. One might ask the reason for the fixation of Shostakovich, Jarrett, and Gould on Bach. The Yale literary theorist Harold Bloom has written that artists often suffer from what he refers to as the “anxiety of influence”, that is, an internal force that makes them try to kill (artistically—that is, to surpass) their predecessors.

This would explain to some extent the case of Gould, as a pianist trying to liberate himself from the anxiety of Bach’s influence by recording his complete keyboard works. Applying the same idea, one might say that Keith Jarrett’s motivations are similar: confronting magistral cycles like Bach’s *Well-tempered Clavier* or Shostakovich’s preludes and fugues is no more than an attempt to surpass the most admirable monuments of *musique savante*. Jarrett, thus, measures himself at the same time against the memory of Bach, Shostakovich, and Gould. Shostakovich’s op. 87 preludes and fugues are a response in homage from one composer, Shostakovich, to another, Bach; and this version by Keith Jarrett can be considered as another unintentional homage to one of the great pianists of the 20th century, Glenn Gould,

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like him taking the path of excelling in everything he does. Whether it be improvising in total freedom or confining himself to the rigor of counterpoint, Keith Jarrett makes true music. The Shostakovich preludes and fugues in his interpretation thus leaves anyone who takes an interest in piano music in Jarrett's debt.

### *A music among many others*

When God made the world—and the experts have not yet managed to clarify just when that happened—among the wonders of his creation was Music. And when this God gave music to all the creatures of all the continents, just as he had created all men and women equal, it stands to reason that he made all the musics equal as well. If all musics are created equal, then they all deserve the same attention and the same respect, the same study and the same opportunities to disseminated and appreciated. Strangely enough, this simple and reasonable proposition has not had many practical consequences until very recently: pedagogical institutions, concert circuits, the recording industry, and, in short, all the elements that participate in the creation and diffusion of music—including, *mea culpa*, journalists like your humble servant—continue assigning a privileged position to the concert music of the West (to be explicit, the tradition of Bach and Mozart).

The publication almost a year ago of the *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music* is intended, among other things, to remedy and rectify this historical and methodological error. The 10 volumes of this magnum opus offer a musical survey of each and every one of the latitudes of the world without making any value judgments (at least not intentional ones) and simply considering each music from an ethnographic point of view, that is, as a cultural phenomenon and as a result and expression of forms of life, society, value systems, political and economic orders, religion and tradition. Thus, the encyclopedia is a multidisciplinary work bringing together the efforts of students of music (musicologists and ethnomusicologists) in particular but also anthropologists and sociologists, philosophers and theologians, and all whose research touches directly or indirectly on music. And no one has yet found a culture, a civilization, or a society that does not have music, or that does not use it to establish, to represent, or to reflect its values. Music is like the paste or glue that, in a more or less indirect way, gives society cohesion.

The *Garland* is primarily a work of synthesis and, as such, it offers a panoramic view, a world tour of all the possible musics: lost and living, remote and near, historical and current. All the styles are there: classical music, pop, jazz, folklore, military band music, religious music... As a result the work is more general than detailed. Nevertheless a rapid glance at the index shows immediately that details are also there. Volume I, for instance, is devoted to Africa, the fount of all culture and indeed, according to the paleontologists, the origin of the human race itself. It also includes the prefaces and prologues that one would expect from this kind of reference work. And here we find a surprise that shows that, in spite of its being a reference work, its details are admirable: the first illustration in the volume is no less and no more than a woman of Ibiza playing a drum at La Mola. The picture, in a black and white as expressive as can be imagined, comes from the collection of the American folklorist Alan Lomax, who recorded hundreds of hours of traditional Spanish music in the 1940s and 1950s and documented the practices of the time with photographs and interviews. Consulting the index, I see yet another reference to the Balearics, noting that, according to the authors, the *jota* of the islands is “formal and elegant.”

For methodological reasons, the encyclopedia is organized geographically (Africa in volume I, Europe in volume VIII, Oceania in volume IX, and so on) but the authors—aware, perhaps, that the movement of populations, dislocation, globalization, are particular characteristics of the 20th century—have given special attention as well to transnational music. One example of this is the musical culture of Gypsies (or Roma people), who gave birth to flamenco in Spain but developed entirely different forms in other parts of the world. Also to be seen here is the case of the Judeo-Spanish tradition which, after the expulsion of 1492, originated a religious and cultural diaspora with a musical tradition that connects the

Sephardim of Morocco with those of Turkey. A third example is that of the recording industry of today, which has created a truly transnational musical language of an undeniably transcendent character: hip-hop, techno, rock, and pop are not only consumed everywhere in the world but also created everywhere nowadays. An example close to us Majorcans is that of the discotheques of Ibiza, which 20 years ago offered music created in London and New York; nowadays there is an “Ibiza Sound,” a musical style that owes a great deal to northern European techno but already has a face of its own, recognizable to thousands of fans in New York, Stockholm, London, and Milan.

Within this hodgepodge of musics ancient and modern, distant and close, rural and urban, fiercely nationalistic and firmly stateless, how does the *Garland Encyclopedia* handle the tradition that we refer to for short as that of Bach and Mozart, the tradition that stubbornly continues to be taught in conservatories and music schools? Well, it is handled as exactly what it is: a music among other musics, an extraordinary music, to be sure, of genius and admirable complexity with overwhelming expressive power, but in the last analysis one possible music among all those that have existed and will exist in future. Duke Ellington, the unquestionable master of jazz who demanded for his own music the same respect and consideration that classical music had in his time, said it in another way. The ear doesn’t lead you wrong: “If it sounds good, it is good music, and it depends on who’s listening how good it sounds.”

### ***The barbers of the Taliban***

In Afghanistan, barbers have been finding themselves out of work, not just because the Taliban do not wish to trim their venerable beards, but because of the categorical and absolute prohibition of music. For centuries, the country's population has included a hereditary caste known as *dalak* or *dom* of barber-musicians, dedicated on the one hand to cutting the hair of their warlike customers and on the other to singing the glories of the motherland and the beauty of its women. Since the 1996 takeover of the Taliban, however, things have changed, by order of the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Suppression of Vice, whose portfolio includes the regulation of music, and the businesses of the *dalak* have closed down on a double count: no barbing and no music.

The ban on music is based on a hadith supposedly pronounced by the Prophet Muhammad, according to which on the day of the Last Judgment those who performed or listened to music will have molten lead poured in their ears. Music is permitted only in the exceptional form of religious chant without instrumental accompaniment. Radio and cinema have been forbidden as well, and the proscription goes further still: the folklore archives of the national broadcasting system, Radio Kabul, were destroyed, and cassette tapes and musical instruments have been hung from trees and rafters as a symbol of the punishment awaiting those who infringe the government-imposed norms. At the time of writing, the music of the past and of the present no longer exists.

The tradition of the barber-musicians was a long and deeply rooted one. Their songs were performed in private houses and public premises. In villages, for instance, there were improvisations in the *chaikhanas* (teahouses) on market days, and evenings after sunset during Ramadan, professional and amateur musicians sang, played, ate, and drank, with an audience made up of members of the ruling oligarchy as well as the working classes. Rituals such as circumcisions, weddings, and funerals were occasions for making music. Afghans nostalgically remember the days of the Ustads—like Ustad Qasem, the “father of Afghan music,” or more recently the singers of romantic, idyllic ghazals like Nashenas and Abdullah Muqurai, or the virtuosos of the rubab such as Ustad Mohammad Omar, who improvised for hours, bringing his followers to the point of rapture and ecstasy. There were also wedding and cradle songs sung by women, accompanying themselves with the only instruments permitted to them by tradition, the daira (tambourine) and chang (jew’s harp). All this is now lost.

Afghanistan is a multi-ethnic, multilingual country, and any attempt at describing its musical traditions must begin by recognizing that reality. Currently two ethnic groups dominate, with their respective languages: the Pashtuns (who call themselves “authentic Afghans” and speak Pashtun) and the Tajiks (who speak a variant of Persian called Dari). Up until the beginning of the 20th century, music reflected the ethnic variety of the country, but a major change in the musical physiognomy of Afghanistan took place from around 1920: the beginning of radio broadcasting, which popularized a style mixing elements from the two dominant ethnic groups. For example, poems in Dari, in classical Persian style, were sung in the Pashtun musical style. With the creation of these hybrid genres, musical taste became relatively homogenized and a “national style” came into existence.

Ghazal is one of the typical musical forms of this hybrid national style. It consists of a sung part, stanza and refrain, alternating with a quick instrumental part featuring the rebab, a three-string bowed lute. The influence of Indian music on ghazal is notable in the use of ragas and talas (characteristic Hindustani scale and rhythmic systems) and in the accompaniment of tabla and harmonium.

With the prohibition of music, many performers have taken refuge in poetry (not yet forbidden). The reciting of poems becomes a form of political resistance, cultural recovery, transmission of popular memory. Often, when circumstances allow, a home-style tape recording is made of a poem, which can be reproduced on simple cassettes. Now and again the poetic recital is accompanied by musical instruments, which may suggest that a new musical language is being recreated, bit by bit, so far undiscovered by the censors. Frequently the poems criticize the mujahedin leaders or give voice to some of the most repressed sectors of society under the Taliban, ethnic minorities and women. Once in a while, shotgun blasts are mixed with the poet's voice, and other performers who do not have a shotgun may use the tabla for a rhythmic drum roll reminiscent of a machine gun. It is apparent that yet another revolution has at last begun, manifested above all through music. As the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) puts it, "No revolution, no fundamental change can be achieved without women's participation"—nor, one might add, without music.

### Oscars

As far as I know, nobody has ever come to be regarded as an expert in art just for having a good collection of sticker albums. And this is because, however satisfactory a particular print copy of a work of art may be, we all know that in the end they are nothing more than precisely that, copies of an original work that hangs in a frame in some European museum, or sometimes a private collection in Texas.

In music, strangely, it is not like that: music lovers generally pass as real aficionados or even competent experts in musical matters just for having listened to several dozen records and collecting them and piously exhibiting them in some privileged corner of the house. But recordings are no more than reproductions of the original compositions and any opinion based uniquely on them works with a faulty logic. Most of the works of the classic repertory (Mozart and Bach and Albéniz) were not meant to be listened to on disc, but before an audience, with all the errors, false notes, bad intonations, and blunders we expect from a live concert, not forgetting the sneezes and coughs, squeaks of the damaged seats, and other adjacent harmonies. No one can deny that listening to recordings is a legitimate pleasure, but only as long as we remember that these are only “posters” of the original sound.

The annual ritual of the Oscars brings me to these reflections because music for the movies, in principle, is always written to serve the images on the screen and is thus by definition “canned” music, in opposition to concert music, written to be performed live, even though we nowadays know it mostly in a prerecorded or canned version. Philip Glass’s most recent work, for example, is a soundtrack for the film *The Hours*, and all the predictions say it could win itself a coveted Oscar.

In general Glass’s scores have had more success among lovers of the plastic arts than lovers of music. In fact most professional musicians find it simple and view it with Olympian disdain because it provides hardly any opportunity for virtuoso display. It must be admitted that Glass’s music all tends to sound the same, and the score for *The Hours* is no exception; in the beginning we hear a typical two-note figure, infinitely repeated (do-mi, do-mi, do-mi, etc.). The figure supplies an adequate ambience for the images, but soon enough the composer has added a melody for cello. And where have we heard it before? The answer is simple: some piece of Glass’s from the 1960s!

On the other hand, nobody should be surprised by this year’s outcome, because it can’t miss: John Williams, once again, is back as the number one rival for the Oscar for best soundtrack with the director Steven Spielberg. One thing about John Williams’s soundtracks—and he has written more than 80—cannot be denied: even when he is not a genius he is always a first-class professional. The score for *Schindler’s List*, for example, is too sentimental for my taste, and the violin of Itzhak Perlman wailing traditional Jewish melodies is a little excessive. Well: what often moves the viewer to tears is the soundtrack used at the exact moment, not the images. The latest Williams-Spielberg collaboration, *Catch Me if You Can*, tells the story of a criminal (Leonardo di Caprio) pursued by an FBI agent. The musical ambience for the chase is made of jazz harmonies and an abundance of saxophone solos. The ostinato repetition of a minor third signals the movement and action between “cop” and “robber.” I wouldn’t vote for this soundtrack, but I believe it will win.

*Road to Perdition* by Sam Mendes has received a nomination for Thomas Newman’s soundtrack. Director and composer have worked together before, in *American Beauty*. Newman’s father, as it happens, is the famous Alfred Newman, composer of the scores of a great many successful movies (*All about Eve*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, etc.). In this case, the score strikes ethnic notes (for instance, using some

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popular Irish tunes), but is music in the primarily American mold, that is, Copland's style, with some minimalist touches.

Roman Polanski's *The Pianist* is in a completely different league. The score for the film did not get the Oscar nomination many expected. The fault, I think, is the director's, for making a film about a musician almost entirely without music, outside a few fragments of Chopin here and there. *The Pianist* tells the true story of a Polish-Jewish pianist, Wladislaw Szpilman, persecuted by the Nazis. Musically speaking, the climax comes at the end of the film, when a Nazi official finds the protagonist's hiding place and forces him to play the Chopin G minor ballade.

Naturally, anyone who knows the least bit about piano playing is aware that it is impossible to play this piece unless one is in top form, and by simple plot logic it cannot be that this pianist is in top form (he is cold, he is sick, he has endured hunger, he has been persecuted, and he has been in hiding for years!). Here Polanski, instead of questioning the plausibility of the scene (which it entirely lacks), is asking us for a small suspension of disbelief and acceptance of the power of Chopin as a triumph of art over barbarity. It is worth mentioning that the scene in which the ballade is performed contains the longest musical fragment in the film; nevertheless it has been severely cut, something which, even if most mortals will not even notice it, is irritating, infuriating, and exasperating to the friends of Chopin—me among them.

### Madonna

At the beginning of the 1990s in the United States it became fashionable to write doctoral theses on Madonna. It was said in those days that the queen of pop was an icon of contemporaneity, and as such made it possible to carry out a detailed analysis of cultural trends and networks of signs of the currency of postmodernism, globalization, capitalism, feminism, immigrants' rights, sexual liberation, and a well-stretched etcetera. Some critics legitimately wondered what on earth it was about this woman that could capture the attention of so many grave and sensible thinkers and literati (not to mention the millions of fans who bought her CDs). Encountering her most recent recording, *American Life*, it seems certain that the singer will continue to stir up debate, and no doubt keep feeding the perplexities of her detractors.

Madonna does not, strictly speaking, have a very pleasant voice or knowledge of music, nor as far as that goes has she invented any new style. The sound of her first works (*Like a Virgin*, *Who's that Girl*, etc.) is more or less Pet Shop Boys (in its drum machine, simple and insistent chords, and so on). On the other hand, her song *Vogue* (1990) is a shameless use of the choreography of Harlem's drag ball culture (Malcolm MacLaren appropriated it before she did); and to take one last example, *Ray of Light* (1998) recycles the procedures of techno music ("techno with emotion," the singer has said). In the face of such a panorama it is not surprising that some should ask what Madonna's virtues are; and one possible answer is that her originality consists precisely of recycling procedures, styles, and fashions invented by other musicians before her and cleverly making them her own, appropriating them, transforming and commercializing them. This is her virtue.

*American Life*, for instance, is a work of persistent and continuous appropriation, recycling, and re-elaboration of well-known languages, which she has been able, however, to cut loose and metamorphose into something that sounds original, unheard, and unusual. Each song on the record has something for everyone: a little pop, a little hip-hop, a stubborn techno beat that makes it danceable, the voice electronically transformed to remind us of the mechanical voices of video games, or the voices of robots in the science fiction movies of our childhood. It must be admitted, though, that in Madonna's hands musical recycling works, in the first place, because of her ability to position her antennae, take hold of an undefined style, and materialize it in a package that includes both a sound and an image, but especially because she picks the best producers—in the case of *American Life*, the Paris-based Mirwais Ahmadzai.

In the recipe for Madonna's musical cuisine, three elements stand out: basic pop (simple, repetitive melody, clear danceable rhythm, a verse that always returns like a refrain); hip-hop (almost all the songs finish with a rap recitation); and techno (mainly the electronic transformations of the singer's voice and the synthesis of special, robotic or futuristic sounds). It should be said that the recipe never fails: since hearing the album I haven't stopped humming it, at the most unexpected moments. I'm not afraid to admit it: I like Madonna's records, but I like them with a sense of guilt, like someone who likes sweets but recognizes the dangers of excess.

Even if the music is fulsome, refreshing, optimistic, and cheerful (what more could one ask?), the lyrics approach the ridiculous, and endanger the music's obvious success. Here the recycling is not of sounds and musical styles, but of perilous stereotypes. The title song, "American Life", recycles the theme of discontent with reality on the part of a protagonist, young, male but androgynous—a persistent theme in her mythology—who admits to having tried everything ("I tried to be a boy/Tried to be a girl/...Tried to find a friend/Tried to stay ahead..."), but doesn't find satisfaction in anything. The song

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ends up saying that in spite of this disgust, “American Life” is the best of possible lives (!). In the song’s concluding rap, the protagonist (with Madonna’s voice skillfully transformed into that of the rebel Eminem) says, “I’d like to express my extreme point of view...!” Maybe you’re overdoing that a bit, some feel...

The foundational myths of the U.S. also play an important role in her lyrics. Religion, work, and personal success, for example, stand out as themes on the album. There are a good dozen references to the artist’s religiosity (“I’m not religious,” she says in one song, “but I feel so moved/Makes me want to pray”). The healthful effects and rewards of work are manifest in the theme of “Easy ride” (I want the good life/But I don’t want an easy ride/What I want is to work for it”). Finally, the triumph of being a celebrity or star appears in “Hollywood” (“Everybody comes to Hollywood/They want to make it in the neighborhood...”).

At bottom, Madonna may be the icon some critics say she is. Her secret seems to be that, through the song lyrics, the images of the videos that accompany them, and to a lesser extent the music itself, all transform and recycle the myths, allegories, elemental symbols of American life (liberty, religiosity, success, etc.) and each of these themes is a metaphor from the experience of a population sector of the U.S. and probably of the rest of the world. Personally, I’d rather listen to the music and get away with it without managing to understand the dear diva’s less appealing words. But everyone has a different sense of the ridiculous, right?

### ***Letter, telegram, fax, email: The future of music and the future of the Sonar festival***

I like getting letters and telegrams (especially telegrams, because at the present time it is only the king that sends them, to the family members of great artists who have passed away). But the reality is that like most people, I only get emails and, every once in a while, a fax either discolored into illegibility or else smudged with ink and equally illegible. I have resigned myself to this reality of everyday communication because I understand that the replacement of the pedestrian letter, the monarchical telegram, and the bureaucratic fax (of which I was never a fan, because of its dependence on unpredictable telephone wires) by the rapid, secure, effective, direct, and clean email is a good thing.

In this environment of continuous technological advances, of one technical conquest after another, the Sonar International Festival of Advanced Music and Multimedia Art in Barcelona has just wound up its tenth edition. The verdict on this year's festival is almost unanimous. The public success demonstrates that Sonar is more than a New Music festival, but the emblematic expression of the values of a new generation. On the other hand, now that it is established as an authentic reality, the first criticism is beginning to dribble out: some of the negative notes are accusations of artistic fatigue, commercialization, and institutionalization. I could add another criticism: the organizers of Sonar—and very probably most of its 90,000 participants—believe that, just as email has replaced the 19th-century letter and the more recent fax, so electronic music is about to replace acoustic music. My own crystal ball tells me that there may indeed be some degree of truth in this prediction, but not nearly as much as some people expect.

Debates over the future of music, it should be said, are as old as music itself. All artists think they are original, and every generation thinks that its values will supersede those of the previous one. Wagner made prophecies about the future of music (naturally that it would take the path he himself had pioneered); Schoenberg, when he invented the 12-tone method of composing, expected it to replace the traditional harmonic system. Luigi Russolo wanted to renew music with his orchestra of *intonarumori*, meant to replace the traditional instruments. Martenot, Theremin, Harry Partch, John Cage... all invented new instruments, now to be seen only in elegant museum displays. On the other hand, the hated critics have made as many predictions of their own: Jacques Attali, a former cultural adviser to President Mitterand, published a book in 1977 with the title *Bruits: Essai sur l'Economie Politique de la Musique* with which he made a bit of noise of his own. The thesis of the book has been partly borne out: technology will allow the elimination of the composer—"Yes, yes!" the crowd cried—and permit each of us to compose music by pressing a button or recompose the music created by others through the manipulation of earlier recordings (downloading them off the Internet and making loops, samples, etc.).

The Sonar festival has shown that, up to a point, Attali was right. The musicians that performed there this year—Matthew Herbert, Tujiko Noriko, Miss Kittin, Ensemble Sideral, and (already at another level) Björk—demonstrated that for making music today a simple portable computer can do more than a whole orchestra. The musics of Sonar are all different, but they have a good many characteristics in common. The base is formed on electronically synthesized sounds (there are exceptions such as that of Matthew Herbert, who ironically made himself ridiculous this year by presenting a jazz "big band" that sounded like that of a municipal music school). Rhythm dominates—that is, a constant, incessant, repetitive pulsing (harmony and melody are of less importance). The basic style of composition is the superimposition of sounds in layers: to an ostinato rhythm, for instance, you might add a melodic motive,

then another rhythm, and so on. Cutting, adding, splicing, overlapping, etc., are variations of the same technique. Finally, a very important element is the musicians' attempt to blur the borders between music, visual art, installation art, software programming, and so forth (some say that software is an art form in its own right). In this way being a musician does not mean just creating sounds, but spaces, images, objects, technologies, ambience, and feeling.

Up to this point, innovation and creativity, but there are also, well, aspects of what the adolescent's favorite philosopher would call an Eternal Return. In many ways, Sonar is no more than a new reincarnation of the same spirit of youth of every generation. Like the ARCO (International Contemporary Art Fair) in Madrid in the 1980s and 1990s, Sonar harks back to Woodstock, or in the Catalonian context to the 1970s festival of Canet Rock in the resort town of Canet de Mar north of Barcelona, or even our own rudimentary Selva Rock in Majorca 1978 (or was that 1979?). In the previous generation, they used to argue whether the best electric guitars were Gibsons or Fenders; now, the debate is over the relative merits of Mac and PC. Once they smoked joints and chewed on hallucinogenic mushrooms; now they have added Ecstasy, Super-K, and I don't know what else.... Today's youth movement also tries to keep a balance between commercialization (now known as globalization) and social protest; the earlier generation protested against capitalism even as they prepared for their entry into the system, with civil service exams and summer master's degrees in London. Those who attend Sonar talk about multiculturalism, whereas before it was the right to nationalist self-determination. And then there is the continual exploration of sexuality: Miss Kittin, who will be performing at Sonar, is not merely a DJ and composer, but also a dominatrix in the most classic sadomasochist style; once upon a time it was agreeing to a group grope....

Really, I am not worried about the future of music, but the future of Sonar is quite another matter. In its ten years of existence the creators have managed to formulate, manifest, and realize the values of the Apple generation: well done, and no more to say up to the point. Mission accomplished. Now it's time to gain a little weight, put on a necktie, take the exams, and make way for the offerings of the generation to come. We're waiting.

### **DJs**

At one time, if one wanted to be an artist, one could paint watercolors, write poems, construct durable buildings, sing opera arias (or compose them), and a limited number of things like that, but not any more. Little by little, the concept of art has broadened, and by now nobody, I would say, has any problem in accepting cinema and photography as art, even though it took a hundred years to admit these into the fold, as it has taken more than thirty years to admit the installation as a legitimate art form. A little while ago, as a matter of fact, I went to see the famous car by Joseph Beuys, with its chassis totally crushed and wrecked, not as a result of a five-somersault crash but of the artist's hand. One could maintain a degree of skepticism in the face of such artistic manifestations, but it would be absurd to contest whether they are art at all, since at this point they have already made their way into the circuit of museums, collectors, critics, doctoral dissertations, etc.

In music it is likely that the advance guard of experimentation—the battlefield where the molds and forms are being broken, and the future is being sketched out—are not conservatory composition classes or concert halls for the sleep-inducing sessions of what is not very appropriately known as “contemporary” music, with the limited and charitable presence of the composer's acquaintances and family members (being of an altruistic nature, I always hope that the musician has a very large family). No, today the most interesting new music is what is to be heard in dance clubs and discotheques at the hands of the new composers: the disc jockeys, DJs for short. Perhaps it is hard for us to recognize that these masters of the turntable, amplifier, and mixing board are true composers, but as with the movies, the photograph, and the installation, it is only a matter of time. It is in their favor that, thanks to the new technologies, DJs can transform not only musical art in itself but the very concept of music, widening and redefining it, accepting the old principles of counterpoint, for instance, but mixing it with effects that are possible only with the latest equipment.

The first DJs, in the North American radio broadcasting of the 1950s, presented programs in which they played records and commented on them. The radio stations soon saw that if the record selection of the DJs was good, the audiences grew, and the DJs themselves began becoming as famous as the musicians whose discs they announced and played. In the 1970s, with the advent of the disco, DJs moved from the radio studio to the club. Now the public could see the person who picked the music, and it was clear that the disc jockey was the creator of a good ambience in a discotheque, not just playing the right records but playing them at the right moment, with the right lighting, when the customers were just at the right level of alcohol and drug intake. By the beginning of the 1980s many discos took to making a big announcement of the DJ for the evening, with a metaphorical clash of cymbals, because it had become evident that they had as much drawing power as live musicians.

At the same time, in the Bronx, New York, groups of young African-Americans began getting together on a daily basis to organize block parties, installing turntables, an amplifier, a mixing board, and a pair of loudspeakers. Over background music, they recited rapid-fire verses with bold, rhythmic rhymes: this was the invention of rap. Some of their friends danced, in a robotic, mechanical style—break dancing—and others painted geometrical arabesques on the walls, bridges, and subway platforms: this was the surge of hip-hop culture. Meanwhile, DJs had no intention of remaining in the rear guard behind the rappers, break dancers, and graffiti writers, and this is when they turned from simply playing records to manipulating them, altering, changing, and retouching. At this point they became co-creators of the music, remaking, interpreting, and transforming it for a live audience.

The DJs recognize that their instrument is the turntable and that the basis of their music is music recorded on vinyl (nowadays there are DJs who work with CDs). The techniques for manipulating a vinyl record's sound are many, and constantly evolving. So, for example, there is the classic scratching, scraping the needle across the grooves for certain mainly rhythmic effects, or beat juggling, the amalgamation of two records to obtain very original echo and reverberation effects. The cross fader is a technique for fading the sound on one record while raising the volume on another, creating a gentle, smooth transition. Naturally, a good DJ always counts on the collaboration of lighting designers who use an infinity of colors and smoky atmospheres to re-create the sensations aroused (in theory, anyway) by the music.

Some DJs have become international celebrities: Junior Vasquez, Danny Tenaglia, John Blair, Roger Sanchez, etc., preside over New York's night life. In Barcelona, a mini-Woodstock of DJs, so to speak, has taken place at the All Stars DJ's Festival in the Palau de Sant Jordi, August 2003. Among the stars were Tania Vulcano from Uruguay, Erick Morillo from the U.S., and Alex Neri and Francesco Farfa from Italy. In the national panorama, one of the DJs with the greatest drawing power is the acclaimed Sideral, pseudonym for a good-old Catalan with a vulnerable and fragile adolescent's appearance, Aleix Vergés.

**VI. Composers and performers**

## Composers and performers

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### ***Between order and chaos: The 25th anniversary of the death of Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)***

There are two schools of thought on the relation between creator and work of art that seem irreconcilable. On the one side are those for whom the work has nothing to do with the life of the person that created it; on the other, those who claim that the work is the resonance—the echo, the reverberation—of the artist's life. Benjamin Britten, at the age of 14, had composed 12 piano sonatas, six string quartets, various pieces for violin, viola, and cello, a symphonic poem, a symphony, an oratorio, and numerous songs. With the collaboration of his devoted mother, a piano teacher who wanted her son to become the fourth “B” (after Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms), Britten wrote more music before his adolescence than many composers have finished by the ends of their careers. But, as might have been expected, this precocity—this imposed *order* through which he missed his own childhood—had grave consequences: throughout his life, Britten had an obsession with childhood that is expressed in music—a great deal of music—but also in the focusing of his sexual orientation on the boy he never had a chance to be.

Britten is certainly the most interesting figure in the British musical panorama of the 20th century. His artistic contribution is not only that of a distinguished composer but of a genuine visionary. With his *Paul Bunyan*, *Peter Grimes*, and *Billy Budd* he invigorated the moribund British opera of his time. The instrumental works *Simple Symphony* and *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* opened the doors of classical music to aficionados and young people alike, sections of the audience that were excluded by the traditional avant-garde. Britten founded festivals, classes, and schools; he nourished the creation of public and private institutions for the promotion of an accessible, direct, and democratic music. He declared himself a conscientious objector, pacifist, and leftist, and these political tendencies were brought over into his *War Requiem*.

His style is based on a technique of great fluidity, a characteristic he learned from his teacher Frank Bridge. The musical form is clear, concise, and highly economical: there is never a note too many, but rarely one too few. This austere style, generally based more on melodic than harmonic or rhythmic elements, has led some critics to label him ascetic and severe; Adorno, more habituated to the emotional excesses of Germanic music, described his music as an “apotheosis of meagerness.” In any case Britten’s musical language is always practical, ingenious, and resolute. He often included orientalist elements (such as the sound of the Indonesian gamelan), but never falls into cultural appropriation.

Many critics have tried to explain the roots of Britten’s creativity in terms of a more or less repressed homosexuality. In fact he openly lived with the tenor Peter Pears throughout his life, writing dozens of songs and operatic roles meant exclusively for him; moreover, the most important artistic influences in his work were the homosexual writers W.H. Auden, Christopher Isherwood, and E.M. Forster. It was Auden who recognized that there were two forces, order and chaos, struggling within Britten for dominance, as with all artists (it was Auden, too, who noted “your attraction to thin-as-a-board juveniles”). In spite of everything, Britten never acknowledged that his sexual orientation had any influence on his work. The public, nevertheless, is entitled to feel that the works speak for themselves.

Consider how in the opera *Peter Grimes* a sea-worn sailor is accused of murdering a pre-adolescent apprentice. According to the composer himself, the plot expresses the struggle of the individual against the masses; the protagonist is the victim of society, and, if he has committed any crime, it is because of the social circumstances that have made him what he is. Curiously, the fisherman Grimes

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is a social misfit like Britten himself; but Grimes is likely a pedophile, as Britten surely was himself. Another opera with autobiographical connotations is *Death in Venice*, based on the story by Thomas Mann and popularized by Visconti's film. Here as well the protagonist Aschenbach finds himself disturbed to the point, literally, of death by the beauty of the pre-adolescent Tadzio.

According to the most recent studies, Britten felt himself attracted to pre-adolescents, though never putting his desires into practice; rather, they were channeled into musical creation. Britten re-created in music what the law and society prevented him from living out. In addition to the plainly autobiographical operas like *Peter Grimes* and *Death in Venice*, it is worth noting how many of his operas have no female characters at all, or when they do relegate them to minor roles. Moreover, the *Young Person's Guide* is just one of a rather large number of works he composed for children. In sum, if we accept that Britten's biography provides clues that bring us closer to his work, then we must admit that the pedophilic aspect of his homosexuality was a decisive force in the process by which his music was created.

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### Xenakis: The perpetual immigrant

Consider the case of Iannis Xenakis (1922-2001), the composer who died two weeks ago, who remarked in a moment of lucidity and incomparable insight, “*Il faut être constamment un immigré*” (One must constantly be an immigrant). Certainly: Xenakis was Romanian, Greek, and French at the same time; he practiced as an architect, mathematician, musician, and theorist of the arts; he held onto old-fashioned rightist views at the same time as mostly defending views of the left; he fought the Germans, but the British as well when they occupied Greece. Undefinable, undescribably, ineffable—like his own music—Xenakis occupies a central place in the music of the 20th century.

Xenakis was born of Greek parents in Romania. At the age of ten, his family sent him to the isle of Spetsai in Greece. The first musical experiences to mark him were the velvety, atmospheric sonorities of the Byzantine liturgical chant, inseparable from the incense and the intermittently flaring candles that accompany it. On another side, he fell in love with the rugged harmonies and abrupt rhythms of the island’s folk music. At one point he came to believe that he might do for Greek music what Bartók had done for the Hungarian. Beethoven and Brahms, meanwhile, also formed part of his first musical training.

While he was studying engineering in Athens he participated in student movements against the international forces occupying Greece during the Second World War. During a demonstration a bomb exploded close to him and he lost an eye. Afterwards, because of his political affiliations, he was called before a court-martial and sentenced to death; the penalty was later commuted to ten years in prison, but he was forced to give up his Greek nationality. Clever and skilled with his hands, he managed to forge a passport and flee to Paris, where he stayed for many years as an undocumented immigrant. Even though he was eventually able to legalize his situation in France, as a musical creator Xenakis was always to be a stateless pariah—a perpetual immigrant.

As a composer, Xenakis does not fit into the conventional schemes of 20th-century music history. When his works began to be known in the 1950s and 1960s the dominant orthodoxy was the radical avant-garde, that is, the serialism of Pierre Boulez, Luigi Nono, and Karlheinz Stockhausen, the so-called Darmstadt School. Xenakis marked himself out from these composers in his writings as well as his works by defending a music in which the principle element was not the determining pitch (do, re, mi, etc.) but the timbre, in other words the sound mass, the general sonorous gesture.

This interest in “mass” and “volume” in music (as opposed to the precise determining pitch) came to him from his experience as engineer and architect in the studio of Le Corbusier. Xenakis had been living in penury when the great French architect offered him a job. It was an opportunity that Xenakis would exploit to the hilt: it not only allowed him to earn a living but also brought him into contact with one of the most powerful minds of the 20th century. One of the works that he planned from top to bottom with minimal interference from the master was the Philips pavilion at the Brussels World Fair of 1958.

When Xenakis established himself in Paris he also came into contact with some of the most admired composers of the moment, such as Messiaen, Honegger, and Milhaud. Once Xenakis asked Messiaen whether, at the age of 20-odd years, it would be worth the trouble for him to embark on the formal study of composition—of harmony, counterpoint, orchestration, and so on. Messiaen understood immediately that the aspiring composer was one of those who unfailingly remain an autodidact even if they work their way through the conservatory, and told him: “Keep your ingenuity, and your freedom.” Xenakis certainly took care to follow this concise piece of advice all his life. For example, when he uses

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conventional orchestral instruments he masses them into “sound clouds,” often based on colossal glissandi or on rhythmic and melodic ostinato phrases reminiscent of traditional ethnic musics. The music is of great complexity, but always maintains a uniquely primal character. This aspect is notable in *Metastasis*, one of his best known compositions.

The fact that Xenakis gave up the radicalism of the Darmstadt School does not mean that his music makes any facile turns or concessions. To the contrary, his works always make the most exigent artistic demands on performer and audience alike. But there is no doubt that in some of these works there is a basic, visceral, direct impulse that does not come from the Darmstadt composers. The music becomes more hermetic and astringent when the composer uses mathematical systems to calculate his sounds. In many cases, a computer creates the score on the basis of the laws of probability, set theory, and Boolean algebra. From my point of view, many of these electroacoustic works are experiments in the possible application of mathematics to music but do not go much beyond that, and the artistic results are, to be honest, painful. It comes as no surprise that Xenakis had the nerve to entitle a piece *ST/10=I-080262 for Ten Instruments*.

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### *Schoenberg: “How one becomes lonely”*

Anyone who still believes that the genuine artist must be someone who exudes eccentricity should have a taste (even if a rather superficial one) of the main events in the life and work of Arnold Schoenberg (Vienna 1874-Los Angeles 1951), whose death, 50 years ago, is being commemorated this year. Schoenberg certainly lived an anodyne and ordinary life, no doubt full of blows and slights against those who had injured him, but mainly dedicated to giving classes to poorly prepared pupils (with some notable exceptions: Berg, Webern, and our own Catalan Robert Gerhard), and composing for a public that from early on showed little interest in his works and made him feel lonely, isolated, and artistically an orphan.

His revolution, all the same, was an “interior” one: no bohemian life (unless the financial constraints of poverty count as bohemian); no grand gestures and conceits about being a genius (though in fact he was one); no elegant fin-de-siècle Paris, where American millionairesses like the Princesse de Polignac, heiress of the Singer Sewing Machine company, “protected” the local artists. Right from the beginning, Schoenberg took on a task that seemed inconceivable at the time, that of undoing and destroying the harmonic system on which European music had been based since the 17th century to substitute his own dodecaphonic system. If writers could write prose without any obvious narrative coherence (Joyce), if painters could paint without perspective (Picasso), composers as well should be able to compose without the traditional laws of harmony (Schoenberg).

Schoenberg was born in Vienna to poor parents, Jewish and originating from different parts of the Austrian empire. In his musical training he was basically an autodidact, though he did take violin lessons as a child. He married twice: his first wife betrayed him with her art instructor (who later killed himself); one of the children of his second was born in Barcelona and named Nuria (she married the composer Luigi Nono). Throughout his life his great tragedy, as with so many composers, was the difficulty of earning a living. As a composition teacher he had to contend with the problem that his classes—too frequent and not well enough paid—left him little time to compose. But he also had to contend with a more serious difficulty: in Vienna and Berlin, he was barred from an official teaching position because of his Jewish ancestry. This fate did not greatly improve when he immigrated to the United States and obtained a position at UCLA. Because of his age, he had to retire after just eight years of teaching, with a pension of only \$40 per month!

One of the most interesting aspects of Schoenberg is the fact that, in addition to composing, he was also a fairly prolific painter. Kandinsky encouraged him to participate in the group known as Der Blaue Reiter and often declared his admiration for the composer’s work. Most of Schoenberg’s paintings are visionary and utopian self-portraits, created with a monochromatic and monotonous palette. Often the figures appear unreal and phantasmagorical. Their reflection of the interior life follows the principles of expressionism and generally surpasses their technical skill.

I’ve just finished listening once again to Claude Helffer’s recording of Schoenberg’s complete piano music (Harmonia Mundi 190752). I have known the music for many years, but its dissonances still shock me. Do I like this music? I believe that, with time, I have come to understand it and it sounds less strange, but in any case it is more of an intellectual than a sensual pleasure. Now I change the record: the cries, moans, shrieking, and laughter of a mental patient flood the atmosphere. The instruments do not so much accompany the voice as work against it. Nor do they seem coordinated with one another: each note sounds of its own accord, without respect for the most basic laws of harmony. What is this cacophony

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about? It is *Pierrot Lunaire*, op. 21 (1912) in the version of the Contemporary Chamber Ensemble (Elektra Nonesuch 79237).

As the screeches of *Pierrot Lunaire* are playing, I'm thinking of a third of Schoenberg's masterpieces: *Verklärte Nacht* (Transfigured Night). We can well say that this is Schoenberg's first (and perhaps his only) public success. It belongs to the composer's first period, the post-Romantic. The music is melodic, with waves of the highest emotional expressivity; it might have been written by Wagner, Brahms, or Mahler. But no, it is the young Schoenberg, the Schoenberg that had not yet decided to break with the musical tradition of the past. There is no doubt that this is the Schoenberg preferred by most music lovers: 50 years have passed since his death, but most of us still cling to the early Schoenberg, the post-Romantic, pre-revolutionary, pre-dodecaphonic composer.

In a 1937 talk entitled “*Wie man einsam wird*” (How one becomes lonely), Schoenberg was already complaining that the public had failed to understand the aesthetic change of his music. Now there is no longer any doubt: Schoenberg, perhaps because he was one of the most innovative and revolutionary composers of the 20th century, continues to be alone and without an audience, more alone and isolated than ever. And there is probably nothing we can do about it.

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## Cimarosa, the tribal idol

This year marks 200 years since the death of Domenico Cimarosa (1749-1801). Has anybody—except, of course, for the specialists—noticed? The fate of the Italian composer, however, was not always like this. In his time, the audience idolized him the way we now idolize a fashion designer, or the way 80 years ago people adored the painters of the avant-garde. Cimarosa, indeed, was a tribal idol: he wrote more than 60 operas that were performed in Milan, Venice, Naples, Prague, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Saint Petersburg, Hamburg, London, and Berlin. The fact that his father was a construction worker and his mother a washerwoman for a convent did not stop him from being venerated at the courts of Naples, Saint Petersburg, and Vienna. Not that the aristocrats were always on his side: one cruel and barbarous Bourbon king, Ferdinand IV of Naples, ended up condemning him to death (luckily, without success), and the Russian empress Catherine the Great fired him not long after giving him a contract, to replace him with the Valencian Vicenç Martí i Soler. Even so, there can be no doubt: in the history of music, his fame during his lifetime can only be compared with that of Rossini, which is not a small thing.

If Cimarosa was famous in his lifetime, thanks to the admiration of the hordes in the stalls and of the aristocrats who financed the opera, his fame grew still further immediately after his death among the luminaries of the early 19th century: Goethe, Delacroix, Stendhal, and even the critic Hanslick—gruff and surly as he was—worshiped him as a true genius alongside Mozart, Beethoven, and Chopin. Haydn had to direct Cimarosa's operas for his demanding employer Prince Esterházy; Goethe organized theatrical productions based on Cimarosa's librettos, and even wrote a pasticcio mixing in music by Cimarosa and Mozart. It is not surprising that in his book *The Italian Journey*, as well as in a letter to his colleague Schiller, the writer declared without any hesitation his unconditional devotion to Cimarosa, ultimately claiming that his music was better than Mozart's. But Cimarosa had no more dedicated and faithful adherent than Stendhal, who referred to him as “divine,” adding that he would rather hang himself than choose between Cimarosa and Mozart.

One may well ask why the most clear-sighted and privileged minds of the 19th century had so much admiration for a composer who, in the music history textbooks, comes across distinctly as a figure of the second rank. One possible answer is the comic character of his operas, full of scenes of a relatively lubricious quality (by the strait-laced standards of the time) and ruses from the popular theater. This is the case, for instance, in the opera *Il Matrimonio Segreto*. In *Il Maestro di Cappella*, a parody of the opera world, the protagonist is a composer who writes music as he murmurs onomatopoeias: “Questo è il passo dei violini, lai, lai, la... Cosa fate oboè mio caro, bio, bio, bio...” (This is the melody of the violins, la, la, la... and what are you doing, my dear oboe, bio, bio, bio...) On the other hand, in *L'Impresario in Angustie*, an impresario and a diva, working together, subject a poet—with whom, curiously enough, Goethe identified—to their erratic caprices and demands.

Cimarosa and his librettists knew every trick of theatrical success and used them all whenever they could. Sometimes, for example, to add a bit of charming regionalism, some characters speak in Neapolitan dialect, while others mix in French, Spanish, and standard Italian to demarcate and define the character's cultural and social register. Yet again, Cimarosa often brought in personages of the *commedia dell'arte*, such as the Dottore Balanzoni and Pulcinella, adding a classic element to the somewhat wild plots.

From a strictly musical point of view, the strength of most of his operas is in their melodies, always beautiful, intelligent, rounded, and definitively in the Neapolitan and Mediterranean style. His

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harmonic vocabulary is not very bold, and his orchestration serves as accompaniment without any timbral or coloristic independence. All his instrumental music is adapted to what we now call the language of Viennese classicism (translation: greatly resembling Mozart and Haydn, but simpler). Cimarosa captivated the audiences of his time, and up to a certain point continues to captivate some aficionados today for a simple reason: his melodies, organized into a weak-minded but always amusing plot.

In the present market, there are many available versions of his best-known opera (*Il Matrimonio Segreto*) alongside recordings of less popular works. A highly recommended introduction to Cimarosa's musical world, to his instrumental composition as well as the operatic, is *Domenico Cimarosa*, performed by the group Ars Cantus under the baton of Riccardo Cirri (Bongiovanni, GB 2184-2). The recording features *Il Maestro di Cappella*, together with two instrumental concertos, one for two flutes and the other for harpsichord. One more point: the Minorcan Joan Pons has often sung the principal aria from the *Maestro di Cappella*, in a version translated into Catalan; it goes without saying that his version of this buffo role will not disappoint.

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### *Alma Mahler on film*

No doubt the notion that behind every great artist there is a great woman has been overdone. In honor to the truth, though, one might reformulate this commonplace to say that, in fact, behind a number of great artists, from time to time, is the *same* great woman. We are thinking of the case of Alma Mahler: there was no other woman in Vienna at the beginning of the 20th century who had more famous lovers in one way or another than she did. There were the men, of course, that made her their “real” wife: the composer Gustav Mahler, the architect Walter Gropius, and the novelist Franz Werfel. But then there were those as well who took her as mistress, her composition teacher the notorious composer Alexander Zemlinsky and the painter Oskar Kokoschka; and finally those to whom she was a companion (if not in bed, though anything is possible) like the architect Adolf Loos, Gustav Klimt (who made a number of portraits of her), Alban Berg, and the Mann family (Thomas, Heinrich, and Golo).

Now a film has been shown at this year’s Cannes Festival, and subsequently in various European and North American capitals, *Bride of the Wind*, recalling the highs and lows of Alma Mahler’s life. Directed by Bruce Beresford, with the Australian actress Sarah Wynter as the protagonist, the film is a tour through the life and career of Alma Mahler as woman, composer, and lover of some of the most influential artists of the 20th century. Let’s say, to start with, that the lives of musicians are rarely good points of departure for the making of a film. I don’t believe I can remember a single film on a composer that was a good film. From 1927, when Fritz Kortner starred in *Das Leben des Beethoven*, to Ken Russell’s experiments of the 1970s in depicting composers’ lives through a haze of LSD, the history of the filmed biography of composers has been almost an aberration. And this is because composers’ lives are normally prosaic and ordinary (Bach), their sex lives nonexistent (Falla) or pitiful (Brahms); almost all have financial problems (Mozart), but this particular does not distinguish them from most people. Putting it another way, the life of a composer does not lend itself to screen versions.

Alma Mahler, however, is another matter. Born in Vienna in 1879, she was the daughter of a reasonably reputed landscape painter. As a girl, she was a familiar of the artistic and intellectual circles of audacious fin-de-siècle Vienna—Freud here and Schoenberg there, Gustav Klimt everywhere—psychoanalysis, dodecaphonism, expressionism, rationalism... these were the words of her childhood vocabulary. But in spite of these breaths of modernism, when at 22 she married the almost 20 years older Gustav Mahler, he made her promise to stop composing music herself, and she submissively obeyed. All the surviving music of Alma Mahler is 14 lieder written before the age of 22, that is, before her marriage. That she might have been a great composer is beyond doubt: her lieder are marked by lovely chromatic melodies of the German post-Romantic manner, with harmonies at once tender and intense, and the poems are always of great quality (Rilke, Werfel, etc.). A failproof recipe.

With all this first-class material, it is hard to explain how a theoretically competent director like Beresford could have made such a deplorable, frankly lamentable pastiche. Often critics of films based on real characters complain that they fail to be true to life. This is not—is not even close to being—the principle defect of *Bride of the Wind*. The film overflows with exact details; there are times when you have the feeling of watching a documentary, or putting it better, one of those anomalous hybrid genres like the “docu-drama,” a documentary partly staged with actors and partly using authentic film. For example, in one scene of a concert, the producers took advantage of the collaboration of the diva Renée Fleming; and in another, when Alma and other characters are playing the piano, a closeup shows fingers that are really playing. Moreover, fragments of Gustav Mahler’s third and eighth symphonies are to be

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heard, and a good chunk of one of Alma's songs. The film, really, could not have been better documented or given a more authentic ambience.

So why, in spite of everything, is it a failure? I could not say with certainty, but it is perhaps an excess of documentation, an excess of realism, what has made the film more of a slipshod biography than a work of art. It should be repeated that one cannot expect too much of film biographies of composers (or of artists in general, for that matter). Inevitably, the specialists will find them flawed and the audience in general not very stimulating. I insist that they could have made a livelier film on the subject of a woman who, in addition to having been the bed-mate of many great men and an absolutely competent composer herself, was the first woman—as far as I know—who publicly acknowledged that she disliked wearing underwear! A great woman, surely, who stood behind a great many men who were great—at least in part—because of her.

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### (Re)discovering Chopin

It consists of 33 short measures and lasts barely 43 seconds: a prelude in E-flat minor, op. 28, no. 14, that the North American musicologist Jeffrey Kallberg has reconstructed on the basis of a messy autograph sketch written in Mallorca in 1838 or 1839, now held in the collections of the Morgan Library in New York. For some, this discovery is no doubt a fundamental piece of evidence for the better understanding of Chopin's work. Others, on the other hand, assign it little importance, arguing that if Chopin threw the score away, then there is no serious reason for us to retrieve it.

Everybody knows the story perfectly well: In 1838, the musician Chopin and the writer George Sand spent a season in Mallorca, the famous *Hiver à Majorque* of Sand's memoir, translated into English by Robert Graves, and transmuted into any number of films, one of them entitled *Impromptu*. Chopin and Sand were the most fashionable couple in Paris, according to the chronicles of the day, and their coming to Mallorca was in order to flee from the noise of the crowds and the public gaze, to shut themselves away so that they could work and so that Chopin might recover his endangered health. In reality, Chopin and Sand were complying with the requirement for every artist of the time, that they should visit some "exotic" land and then write about it, or convey it through pictures or music, to the inhabitants of the capital of the 19th century, Paris. Almost all the couple's friends had done the same, the painter Delacroix going to Morocco and the novelist Flaubert to Egypt.

While Chopin was waiting for his Pleyel piano to arrive from Paris, he had acquired an "indigenous" (or Mallorcan) instrument, as one of Sand's letters tells us, and taken up the study of the 48 preludes and fugues of J.S. Bach. Following Bach's model, Chopin began composing a collection of 24 preludes, each in a different key. He did not write the preludes in order, but rather transcribed them as his creativity dictated. At a certain point, he realized that in order to complete the tonal cycle as he had planned he was missing some preludes, one of them in E-flat minor. Immediately he sketched one, even though he was eventually to discard it and write another prelude in the same key, the one that has ended up as definitive in the authorized editions of the work.

The discarded draft in the Morgan Library (an institution in which dozens of Chopin's manuscripts are preserved) consists of a single oblong sheet of staff paper. Chopin folded it in half, creating a sort of little notebook. On one of the halves, he made an ordered list of the preludes he had composed so far, and their keys. On the other, he sketched out the above-mentioned draft. According to Professor Kallberg, this prelude is Chopin's most experimental work. The left hand plays a continuous trill over the piece's 33 measures. The right hand profiles a sequence of broken chords from which a feeble melody arises. The sketch has no bass or treble clefs, nor time signature (Kallberg transcribes it in 3/4). Kallberg could deduce many notes, alterations, accidentals, etc., only by dint of a good deal of creativity and cunning. Chopin's handwriting, which is in general a disaster, is entirely impenetrable in this case. Kallberg had to place a powerful light behind the manuscript in order to make the blotted-out notes and other corrections visible.

But to these purely philological problems we must add those of a philosophical aspect. For instance, we need to situate ourselves within the aesthetic mentality of the 19th century, and the difference between a "work," a "sketch," and an "improvisation." We know that Chopin, in addition to writing music for publication, was a great improviser. His friend Delacroix describes in his diaries how Chopin's finished scores, in comparison to the Polish musician's improvised performances, were nothing but "pale distillations of the improvisations," that is, from the torrent of powerful creative force that

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surged from his improvisations, Chopin “distilled” or selected only the best portions and transcribed them for publishing.

For her part, Sand wrote in her *Histoire de ma vie* that Chopin’s creativity was “spontaneous, miraculous. He found it without seeking it, without expecting it. It came to him sudden, complete, sublime at the piano, or sang in his head when he was taking a walk, and he hurried to force it to make itself audible, throwing himself at the instrument. But then began the most crushing labor I have ever witnessed. It was a whole series of efforts, irresolutions, and impatiences to recapture certain details of the theme he had heard....” Sketches, for Chopin, as such, were a kind of aide-mémoire for capturing in flight an immaterial, and therefore ephemeral idea, but unlike his improvisations, the sketches were notes toward the preparation of a finished work. It is certain that many artists of the 19th century idealized an epigrammatic, aphoristic, and “unfinished” work of art, like a draft, a sketch, or a rough note. The fashion is often seen in the visual arts, but also in music: Chopin’s preludes are, in fact, epigrams and aphorisms, but according to the testimony of George Sand there can be no doubt that they were highly worked and refined, all the while retaining an appearance of improvisation, sketching, pure inspiration. Chopin, interestingly enough, worked very hard to maintain this impression of an uncontaminated muse.

The sketch of the discarded prelude, luckily, allows us to snatch an intimate view of the great Chopin’s musical “laboratory.” It would be hard for it to change our opinions on the composer’s music: knowing this piano sketch does not make Chopin any better, or any worse, but this does not make it any the less interesting that his creative processes, thanks to Kallberg’s investigations, are now laid out for the contemplation of performers, aficionados, and scholars. And for Mallorcans as well, this valuable, if very modest, draft of music is also part of our history, of our heritage.

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### *The (hetero)sexual life of Toscanini and the (homo)sexual life of Handel*

According to a news item I saw recently, the forthcoming tour of the Rolling Stones is to be sponsored by Viagra. The information hardly surprises me: many of the faithful fans of the British band must be on the decrepit side by now, and it is only logical that the makers of that medication should want to bring the product to their attention. It is also a reminder that the music of the Stones—and of almost all the rock groups of the 1970s—was, and up to a certain point continues to be, an expression of sexual freedom. Undoubtedly, beginning with the sinuous and lubricious movements of the Elvis pelvis and carrying on through the androgynous images of David Bowie and more recently Boy George, sex has been positioned at the center of the popular music of the last 40 years.

A quite different matter is the aseptic and asexualized history of classical music. A simple glance at whatever text of music history you like makes it clear that the sexual lives of the personages of this history (composers, performers, patrons, scholars...) were miserable, if not altogether nonexistent. From time to time the historians make their narrative less dry with a comic anecdote on Wagner's promiscuity or Tchaikovsky's impotence (there is another candidate for a Viagra campaign). But these stories are told as subordinate to the main narrative, not as factors that might really affect the composer's musical work. However, one does not need to have studied psychology in Vienna to understand that a poorly channeled sexuality can perturb and agitate the artist's creative forces. Or, putting it another way: There can be no doubt that sexuality affects a musician's work.

It must be for that reason that music historians began, a few years ago, to include sexuality as an intrinsic and highly valuable part of the study of a composer's output. Two exemplary recent books illustrate the point: Harvey Sachs's edition of the letters of Arturo Toscanini (Faber & Faber, 2002) and *Handel as Orpheus* by Ellen T. Harris (Harvard University Press, 2002), a systematic study of Handel's chamber cantatas.

The most surprising aspect of Toscanini's letters is their sexual frankness. Toscanini had liaisons with famous operatic divas (Rosina Storchio and Geraldine Farrar), but specialized in the wives of his friends and colleagues in the musical world. One of these affairs was with Elsa Kurzbauer (whose husband was the composer and pianist Riccardo Pick-Mangiagalli); it was to her that Toscanini wrote in a very racy if not quite idiomatic English, "My lovely and loving Elsa... I long to finger every sensible and hidden doted spot of you. I will pass all over you like a river of fire... I feel something swelling and cooking..." In another letter, the conductor makes a detailed description of his preferred mode of pleasure, which was nothing less than oral sex in both ways, he for her and she for him.

But if Toscanini has left us resounding (as one might say) testimonies of his rabidly heterosexual preferences, Ellen Harris has not had such an easy time in investigating Handel's supposed homosexuality. According to an uncorroborated anecdote, King George II, Handel's patron in England, asked him once if he did not enjoy women. Handel, evasive, supposedly replied that he had time only for music. This affirmation was not exactly true. Handel very much enjoyed eating, drinking, and gambling, and we know that he frequented the aristocratic circles of princes and cardinals among whom sex between men was relatively normal, as long as it did not affect institutions like marriage, Church, or the transmission of inheritances. It is highly possible that in order to cover up Handel's homosexuality (since the tolerance of the aristocrats did not extend to society in general), his first biographers invented an affair for the composer with the diva Vittoria Tarquini, known as "La Bombace"—who, bomb or not, was married, devoted to her husband, and a good deal older than the composer of *Messiah*.

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Harris goes beyond the biographical detail. According to her, Handel's chamber cantatas contain numerous homosexual allusions. These works—essentially a kind of miniature opera, for a single singer with a small group of instruments—offered composers of the early 18th century one of the few opportunities to develop the “nonverbal” (irrational, absurd, visceral, inexplicable) aspects of human psychology. The Cantata's curious mixture of music, text, scenery, costumes, lights, special effects, and so on, certainly was an ideal field for the imagination. I would compare the spectacularity of 18th-century opera with the pomp and circumstance of the Church in Spain under Franco. In the face of a gray, wearisome, above all repressive society, Catholic ceremonial was a refuge for the homosexual psyche. Opera in the 18th century included many castrati, for example. In Spain, curiously enough, women played almost all the roles, both masculine and feminine. Moving a couple of centuries ahead, the best known case of operatic transvestism is that of Oktavian in Richard Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*, in which a woman plays the part of a boy who dresses as a girl in order to conceal his presence in the heroine's bedroom.

We will never know definitively whether Handel was gay or not. Really, one could wish that he had exteriorized his sexual preferences more, that he had written ardent missives like Toscanini, or at least “scientific” treatises like the anonymous French author of two delicious erotic memoirs from the early 20th century that have recently been reissued: *Pédérastie active* (1907), and it's still more juicily titled sequel, *Pédérastie passive: Mémoires d'un enculé* (1911). Too bad that Handel did not make it so far.

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### *The consolations of Arvo Pärt*

It is comforting to think that in the moments of the greatest confusion of soul, when internal disorder and turbulence dominate the spirit irrevocably, one can always find some consolation in a painting, a literary work, or a musical composition. Art stabilizes the unfair imbalances of reality, harmonizes the dissonances of daily life, and heals the wounds of the spirit. Velázquez painted the jesters of the royal Spanish household with dignity and humanity, not as grotesques or carnival freaks but as exemplary, noble figures, while his portraits of members of the royal family, though born aristocrats, often make them seem lacking in moral stature. Musical examples of the same thing are not wanting: in Mozart's operas it is normal for the lower classes to end triumphant over an unhinged and irresponsible nobility. In the same way, a simple Cuban bolero—with its deplorably repetitive harmony and lyrics full of commonplaces—can explain and clarify for us, in the most penetrating way, the most tempestuous disappointment in love and the most complex human relationship.

Those who seek consolation and comfort in music can now seek it in the works of the composer Arvo Pärt. His musical vocabulary is based on notions as old as humanity itself: stylistic simplicity and sobriety washed with a bit of religion. Born in an Estonian village in 1935, he emerged from a conventional Soviet-style training in a way that is reflected in his evolution as a composer. In reaction to the official Communist doctrine obliging composers to write music for the masses, Pärt tilted toward the Western avant-garde, passing with facility from the dodecaphonism of Arnold Schoenberg to the milieu of “happenings” influence by John Cage. But soon the composer came to feel disillusioned with the excessively intellectual and elitist musical languages of the 1960s and 1970s and quickly went over to an extraordinarily calm, simple, and above all slow style. He referred to this new musical language as *tintinnabuli*—that is, etymologically, the sounds of bells.

In 1977 came the premiere of his *Tabula rasa*—a title that could hardly be more explicit. The piece is indeed a totally empty slate, where nothing is happening: instead of evolving, narrating, moving, or developing, the music is completely static, immobile, stationary, and quiet. Precisely because the music is static, it is also *ecstatic*, like an Indian raga which, through the obsessive repetition of certain sounds, transports us beyond the limits of the body. Even without any direct religious content, the piece wells with ascetic harmonies and contemplative tones. With an obstinacy that comes close to insolence, the work never moves away from a D minor chord. Almost nothing.

In his early works, he has said, “I used to write too many notes; now every note is a treasure.” The treasuring of each note is amply demonstrated in the recent album *Orient & Occident* (ECM 2002), which shows once more the composer’s religious, meditative, mystic side. “Kanon Pokajenen” is based on the rite of the Orthodox church, as “Beatitudes” and “Litany” come from the Anglican liturgy. There is even Spanish, in “Como cierva sedienda,” an adaptation of psalms 42 and 43.

Popular success, as might have been expected, has given Pärt numerous adversaries. The most kindly of these have said that his compositions are simple background music, not rising to the status of concert music for critically attentive listening. A less benevolent attack is comparing his work to New Age music. Others classify him as a minimalist after the fashion of the Americans Philip Glass and Steve Reich. In any case, it would be more just to say that Pärt has taken a path of his own to a minimalist musical language, more concretely through the study of Gregorian and Orthodox chant styles, as well as the polyphony of the Renaissance. If one must make comparisons, Pärt’s works fall into the fashion of the sacred minimalism that came to the fore in the 1990s with the monks of Silos and the symphonies of the

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Polish composer Henryk Górecki. Surprisingly, Pärt declares his admiration only for Benjamin Britten. Nobody could have guessed.

All in all, the pillars of his work continue to be the solitude of a religious man in a secular world and a classic composer in a world dominated by popular music. And yet his millions of fans are precisely not typical followers of contemporary music who go to concerts or buy discs either because of a bad conscience or because they are friends of the composer. Thus, one of Pärt's great accomplishments, both in his music and in his life, is that he is unafraid to show his emotions or make himself vulnerable to ridicule. For example, he wears the venerable white beard of a prophet or hermit and never hesitates to utter a sentence that would sound idiotic on someone else's lips ("My life is like a river..."). In the same way, the simplicity of his music is directed toward slaking a thirst for sentiment without fear or panic of falling into sentimentality. Precisely because of all this, when his fans write to him they all acknowledge the same thing: that the deliberate palpitation of his music consoles them, gives them solace, and distracts them from the inevitable annoyances of reality.

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### ***The Passions according to Rihm, Gubaidulina, Golijov, and Tan Dun:***

#### ***Is the novel a young person's genre?***

“Is the novel a young person’s genre?” asks a writer friend struggling to finish a first novel of his own--because literary genres (as by extension those of the visual arts and music) have their own epochs and their own proper ages. I once read that according to the Catalan writer Josep Pla, the cynic of Palafrugell, reading novels after the age of 40 was a stupidity. And what could we say about writing them? A nonesense, a foolishness, a folly? Is it worth the trouble, for that matter, to compose operas when we know that the public prefers the ones that have already been composed? And why should anyone commission new symphonies when everybody knows that Mahler put a close to that chapter of music history? What is the sense, finally, of composing Passions (a religious genre more than 300 years old) in a secular age dominated by pop culture? Societies, like individuals, eventually mature, and the genres appropriate to our society’s fresh-faced and hopeful youth no longer fit what we have become.

Evidently quite a number of composers and a small, if fanatically loyal, audience believe that these genres are still valid. Operas, symphonies, and even Passions are not vestiges of the past, but musical genres that, practiced with taste and craftsmanship, speak our language, reveal something about our existence, provide light in our moments of uncertainty, and finally offer us a more pleasant life, not so odd and alienated, more human.

So in the year 2000, the musicologist and conductor Helmuth Rilling, in commemoration of the 250th anniversary of Bach’s death, commissioned four Passions from contemporary composers, each based on one of the gospels of the New Testament. Wolfgang Rihm wrote his *Deus Passus*, in German, on the gospel of St. Luke; Sofia Gubaidulina set a text from St. John in Russian; Osvaldo Golijov offered a *Pasión según San Marcos* in Spanish, with fragments in Aramaic; and Tan Dun wrote his *Water Passion* according to the text of St. Matthew. (Other Passions have been composed not so long ago by Mauricio Kagel and Henryk Górecki.)

Rihm’s composition (recorded on Hänssler 98397), for one, is, as was to be expected, the most Germanic of the four and the most directly related to the Passions of Bach. The instrumentation is spare and minimalistic, but the compositional techniques recall the Protestant chorale and, sporadically, imitative counterpoint. The composer mixes texts from the gospel with a poem by Paul Celan, thus relating the Passion of Christ with that of the Jews 2000 years later.

The Gubaidulina *Johannes-Passion* (Hänssler 98405) offers a bit of Russian color. The composer draws on the Orthodox tradition of a melodious, slow monodic cantilena sung by basso profondo (it is not surprising to hear echoes of *Boris Godunov*). The texts are taken for the gospel of St. John with fragments from *Revelations*. Premonitions of “revelation” and “catastrophe”—two indispensable elements of the Apocalypse of the New Testament’s last book—are made still more omnipresent with the intonings and declamations of the deep bass voices. If one did not know the music’s text one would hardly know that it is narrating the crucifixion story, but no one doubt that it is Russian music, one hundred percent.

Osvaldo Golijov, born in Argentina to a family of secular and indeed atheist Jews of Romanian origin, lived from the age of 20 in the U.S. This cultural, religious, and linguistic cocktail may be one of the most distinctive elements of his *Pasión según San Marcos* (Hänssler 98404). Golijov aims at a declared “Latin American” music. Now, how is it possible to reconcile Bach’s Protestantism, the

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composer's own Jewish roots, and the *latinoamericanismo* of his musical formation? Golijov shows a magisterial skill in harmonizing the lessons of Bach, Ginastera, and Piazzola with the Caribbean (appearing with the graciousness of the Cuban *tres*, a guitar of three double strings) and percussion elements reminiscent of Brazil. Making such a hodgepodge can be very dangerous, but Golijov handles it with taste, style, and personality. Of all the Passions discussed here, they say, this has become the most popular. I'm not surprised.

The *Water Passion* is a complete spectacle, and listening to it on disc cannot do it justice. Tan Dun is certainly the most famous classical composer in the world (he has an Oscar) and all his music has a "pop" sound, so to speak. His *Passion* is based on the generally improvised sounds of a number of percussion instruments submerged in water-filled glass receptacles. At the end of the piece, the singers splash themselves and bathe their skin in a beautiful, ritualistic staging. The choirs sing, roar, and declaim according to the requirements of the script, but always in nasal voices (this is done on purpose, of course). The underwater gongs give an "Oriental" character to the whole piece just as Rihm's counterpoint is Germanic, Gubaidulina's basses are Russian, and Golijov's rhythm is Latin American.

Here, then, are four composers that have been able to recycle the genre of the Passion, transforming its elements and materials for contemporary re-use, even if they are not presented in their original religious context. Four composers, certainly, that have been able to find an ample, informed, nonspecialist audience, not just offering charity by attending concerts of modern music out of a guilty conscience. In the end, my hesitant novelist friend, the novel is indeed a young person's genre, and after a certain age, one no longer reads or writes one. But then again: some firm and decisive minds get to the point of overcoming the doubts and uncertainties held by any honest writer. The victory, then, is all the sweeter because one is not merely creating a work of art but also showing that one can make an old genre respond to the exigencies of modern times, as the composers Rihm, Gubaidulina, Golijov, and Tan have done.

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### ***Musical necrophilia: Hugo Wolf and William Walton***

In our country we have a rather ugly vice, an unrestrained propensity for offering homages, encomia, and tributes to writers, artists, and musicians. This inclination is all the more disagreeable when we consider that virtually all the recipients of these tributes are dead or—what is still worse—have died because of the mistreatment and hassle of homages and public praise.

Luckily, nowadays, our fears are taken care of and we all know that homages, in many cases, are nothing but the maneuvers of a group of excitable troglodytes with an inclination to protagonism, to see the possibility of achieving their objectives by means of the exaltation of some supposed “master” who happens to be defunct. Tellingly, those who are most damaged by these commemorations are usually the ones being commemorated, whose work and historical image end up reduced to caricature or minimized to the barest of bones.

Up to a certain point, the musical world as well lives off of cultural necrophilia. The birthdays, commemorations, and celebrations of dead composers follow one after another in a chain of religious periodicity and end up being an integral aspect of the calendar for aficionados and music lovers. As in T.S. Eliot’s poem, time past, time present, and time future are all one, which is to say that time past dominates it all. What does it matter if we prefer dead composers to living ones? Who can stop musicologists from rescuing figures from the past who would be better left in the shadows of history? And, frankly, if remembering the anniversaries and centenaries of dead musicians is necessary to give some animation to our musical life, who is to blame?

As the year begins, it may be a good time to recall some commemorations of the year gone by and the one to come. We can start with the centenary of the birth of William Walton, a composer born in the sad, industrial, and very North English city of Oldham in 1902. A journalist once asked him how he came to dedicate himself to music and he replied, without hesitation, “to get away from Oldham.” And indeed he escaped from Oldham and, after passing through Oxford and London, ended up on the isle of Ischia, married to an Argentine beauty 24 years his junior (fate is hard for some artists!). In 1983, Walton died in his adopted country where his refuge, called La Mortella, is an unusual tourist attraction. The house and gardens can be visited, but it must be said that most tourists come for the magnificent view of the Bay of Naples and walk past his grave indifferent to the composer’s name and his artistic accomplishments.

In fact Walton is not at all well known outside the Anglo-Saxon world, but at the height of his powers (around 1940) he was compared with Stravinsky and Bartók. The conductor George Szell and the violinist Jascha Heifetz both premiered works of his, for example, and even the actor, musician, and writer Noel Coward parodied him. Today he is remembered chiefly for his *Façade*, for speaker and instrumental ensemble (revised into a number of versions), with a music full of rhythm and harmonies recalling the popular music of the time (in particular jazz and cabaret). On more traditional models, Walton composed three concertos, one each for violin, viola, and cello (the last of a grand Mediterranean lyricism, as if Ischia had permanently wiped the industrial fumes and ashes of Oldham out of his mind). On a more popular side we should remember his soundtrack for Laurence Olivier’s film of *Henry V*.

One of the surprises of 2003, no doubt, will be the centenary of the death of Hugo Wolf, another odd case in music history. I say odd because Wolf began composing late (at 27, according to some sources) and because practically all his work consists of exquisite songs for voice and piano. “I do not

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write for little aficionados,” he once said, “but for Epicureans.” And indeed musical sybarites greatly appreciate the refinement of these little jewels of just a few dense minutes.

Wolf’s *lieder* are truly delicious miniatures, *fruits saborosos* in the phrase of Josep Carner. They always set a poem of the highest quality (Goethe, Mörike, or the painter Michelangelo). On this foundation the composer builds a very subtle accompaniment (and the word “accompaniment” hardly does justice to the piano part, which is meant to reflect the poem’s content). Thus, if the text mentions drunkenness, the notes offer an irregular rhythm, out of phase and uncoordinated, like a tipsy recitative. On the other hand, his melodies are always unpredictable, taking unexpected paths. If one tries to hum them from memory one finds that they do not follow any model, and therefore their profile or contour is at first difficult to grasp. His harmonies are lugubrious and blurred; they are generally to be qualified as post-Wagnerian, because of the way they avoid the typical alternation from tonic to dominant and back.

The great masters of Wolf are the pianist Daniel Barenboim and the baritone Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau. Both will be presenting programs all over the world in 2003. From the new generation, two standout figures are the German bass-baritone Thomas Quasthoff and the American Thomas Hampson, who has already earned considerable recognition for his performances of Mahler’s songs with orchestra. Well, as you see, new versions of old music—musical necrophilia, indeed.

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### Berlioz: Concertos with cannon shots

There are composers who make a virtue of the small forms and little genres: Mompou's piano works or Webern's orchestral pieces are miniatures that, even though they speak in whispers, aspire to be colossal works of art, just because of their smallness. Other composers, on the other hand, aspire not only to compose great masterpieces, but to make them out of uncommonly large dimensions. When we speak of composers working on a monumental scale, we think of Wagner, and also of Hector Berlioz (1803-69), the bicentenary of whose birth is being celebrated this year.

The monumentalism of Berlioz's music is perfectly expressed in a caricature from 1846. The drawing represents the composer conducting a "concert à mitraille"—a "gunshot volley" concert—with an orchestra including, among many other instruments, a pair of cannons! And it is true that in Berlioz there is an excess of what we would nowadays call "special effects." For instance, his best known work, the *Symphonie Fantastique* (1830), is the story of a series of a protagonist's opium-inspired hallucinations, including visions of the dancing at a phantasmagorical ball and a witches' sabbath, and a well-sharpened guillotine that pitilessly decapitates the hero (luckily, it is all a nightmare, or a "bad trip"). At times one imagines that the percussionists are the ones who have taken the opium, with all the pandemonium they stir up with their drums.

From our modern point of view, all the same, one problem with Berlioz's music—which is always literary, programmatic, and frequently autobiographical—is that it is too spectacular, too driven by special effects; it is as if Beethoven were reincarnated as Cecil B. DeMille or Steven Spielberg (or maybe it is me who is getting too old for such things). I can't think of a better example than the opera *Les Troyens*, which not only requires more than a hundred performers (musicians, singers, extras, extras, and more extras... As I already said—Cecil B. DeMille!) but also lasts no less than six hours. The Metropolitan Opera in New York has just staged it and it will be some time before it returns to the boards. Those who have resigned themselves to living with a good Walkman can hear Colin Davis conducting the London Symphony in one of the few complete versions available on disc (Davis has recorded the opera twice: with Josephine Veasey and Jon Vickers, Philips 416-432-2, and with Michelle DeYoung and Ben Heppner, LSO Live 0010).

A recording that it would be almost obligatory to mention is the eight-disc compilation *Munch conducts Berlioz* (RCA Victor Gold Seal 09026-68444-2), recalling Charles Munch's tireless dedication to the French composer. One of the joys of this collection is the song cycle *Les Nuits d'Été* featuring the incomparable Victoria de los Angeles. We also find *Harold en Italie*, a work based on Lord Byron, which in spite of its literary title is nothing more than a concerto for viola, the Cinderella sister, because of its lack of repertoire, of the noble string family (the violist is William Primrose).

Following the law of the pendulum, which always swings back to where it started, the authentic performance movement, as if in reaction to the giganticism of certain versions, has brought a fresh breeze of renewal to the Berlioz canon. John Gardiner and Roger Norrington, starting in the 1980s, have released very free-and-easy versions of the key works, whose main merit is their lightening of the sound and toning down of the Hollywood tendency to special effects. This is accomplished with the use of original instruments of the composer's own period (using natural rather than valved horns, for example, or gut strings for the string instruments), reducing the size of the ensemble to reasonable proportions, and insisting on a more precise articulation of phrases. *Roméo et Juliette*, in Gardiner's version with the Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique (Philips 454-454-2) is a curiosity as well, offering up to three

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different versions of some of the movements in order to present the evolution of the work from its 1839 original through the 1846 “definitive” version to a compromise devised by Gardiner himself—the definitive version being not necessarily the best.

In spite of the innovating trend represented by Gardiner et al., the stubborn insistence on monumentality of some performers is still with us, leading to some dreadful aberrations and moments of insanity. In 1987 Jean-Pierre Loré recorded the poetic Requiem with a chorus of 600 voices and 200 instrumentalists (Esoldun Musica Opera Sacra MOS 1001). Others are still partial to Dennis Keene’s live recording of Berlioz’s Te Deum at the cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York, with “only” 400 performers (Delos DE3200). With all this, Mahler and his “symphony of 1000” might be envious.

All this reminds us that Berlioz, in addition to composing, was an excellent writer, again like Wagner (though it is never quite clear whether Wagner was actually a good writer or merely a prolific one). Among his numerous writings is a volume of memoirs, hundreds of concert reviews, a treatise on orchestration, and an exquisite and sarcastic volume entitled *Les Soirées de l’Orchestre*. This book collects the mordant commentary and gossip of the members of an imaginary opera orchestra who, lacking in artistic ambition and hardened by the routine of daily duties, care for nothing and worry only about when it will be time to go home. There is no doubt that if Berlioz were alive today to hear his works played by the thousand or so musicians that some conductors would like to foist on him, he would have a good deal to say about every one of them.

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### *The universality of Kurt Weill*

An acquaintance of mine with a propensity to gratuitous whimsy—to *boutade*—claims that he likes paella even when it isn’t in fact very good. In a parallel way, we might say that Bach’s music continues to sound good even when it is played badly, interpreted worse, detestably orchestrated, and abominably recorded, as if it had a solid armor of resistance against the mistreatments and abuses of whatever lunatic performer thinks, in a moment of mental disturbance, that he is Glenn Gould, Svyatoslav Richter, Pau Casals. No doubt Bach sounds good played on the piano as well as the harpsichord, with a symphony orchestra or a historicist Baroque band; jazz Bach, rock Bach, New Age Bach—as far as I know nobody has yet made a hip-hop Bach, but it’s surely only a matter of time.

Leaving aside the distances between the two, the case of Kurt Weill is comparable to that of Bach. Both composers are “universal” because of their stylistic malleability and flexibility. Like the Leipzig organist, Weill seems to have composed his music out of a material so ductile and pliable, so supple, that it can overcome any kind of performance. There is the Weill of the operas and of the musicals; the Weill of jazz and of *lied*; the composer of cabaret songs and of atonal symphonies, the German Weill and the American Weill, Weill the populist and Weill the composer of art music.

After a first phase in which he wrote two symphonies, a violin concerto, cantatas, etc., Weill discovered that his true talent lay in the socially conscious musical theater rather than standard concert music. With Bertolt Brecht, he collaborated in the famous *Threepenny Opera*—though Brecht, to be sure, circulated a rumor that he himself had provided all the melodies, by dictation, as well as writing the text. Later, living in exile in New York, Weill began composing musicals, first for the Broadway theaters, then for Hollywood.

Weill wanted to create a musical theater that would speak a more contemporary language than traditional opera, but not as populist as the American musical. The story, following Brecht’s theories, would have to be direct and contain a social content; the tunes, without descending into simplicity, would have to be memorable. In a text of 1929, the composer explicitly declared his intention of “creating a new, simple, popular musical theater.” Weill’s models were not those of Wagner’s pretentious grandiosity or the embellished tunes of the Italian opera, but Mozart and his more direct, simple operas like *The Magic Flute*. Naturally, Weill also drank from the well of the popular music of his time: especially American music, jazz, and cabaret.

Among the great interpreters of Weill’s songs, Lotte Lenya, his wife, stands out. An Austrian actress and singer, of variegated training and unclassifiable talents, Lenya came to know Weill in the mythic libertine Berlin of the Weimar era. It is not surprising that one of the most successful roles of her career was that of Frau Schneider in the musical *Cabaret*. Lenya also played the villainess in the James Bond film *From Russia with Love*, among many other Hollywood parts. From her husband’s death in 1950 until her final days, Lenya’s great “task” was to preserve Weill’s memory and artistic legacy through the Kurt Weill Foundation for Music, which she founded in 1962.

It has been said that Lenya did not sing so much as declaim, in the style of the great cabaret *diseuses* of Paris and Berlin, and this is perfectly demonstrated in the available recordings (*Lenya sings Weill*, for instance, on Sony Classical, MHK 60647, 1999, is indispensable listening). Her voice—somewhat baritonal in her later years—quavers in a unique style: words combine with the simple melody in such a way that the hearer can imagine the performance taking place on the little stage of some smoke-

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infested bar and that the *diseaseuse* is sarcastically teasing the timid audience, and where the songs are always sarcastic and sentimental at the same time.

Near the end of her life, Lotte Lenya entrusted her task to the great soprano Teresa Stratas. The Greek-Canadian diva has admitted that at first she had no interest in promulgating Weill's music. Very soon, however, she came to discover her affinities with this music: its direct tone, the socially responsible texts, the re-creation of a nearly lost Europe (the cultural effervescence of Berlin in the 1920s), etc. *Stratas sings Weill* (Elektra-Nonesuch 79131-2, 1986) displays this opera singer's tenacious dedication to Weill's music. Finally, another highly recommendable recording is that of Ute Lemper *Ute Lemper sings Kurt Weill*, London/Decca 425 204-2, 1988). What stands out most with Lemper is her theatricality, very much in the manner of the Parisian *diseaseuse*—quite unlike the frankly unfortunate Spanish versions released by Ana Belén and Miguel Ríos in 1999.

The brimming populism of Weill's works has meant that his fame and reputation have gone up and down through the years, as fashions have changed. Today more than ever, in a musical scene dominated by crossover and heterogeneous, even anachronistic mixtures of style, Weill's music seems to have been a harbinger of what was to come. Certainly, it would be possible to think of Weill as postmodern, eclectic and mutable. Still better, we can say that the fact that he was so adaptable to the needs of each era is what makes him unquestionably universal.

## Composers and performers

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### *Syntax: The centenary of Rudolf Serkin*

They say that Ravel aspired to write a music that was *complex* but not *complicated*. In matters of art, indeed, simplicity and sobriety are more difficult goals to achieve than difficulty and complication. The most transparent prose, the most elemental drawing, the cleanest, purest melody frequently hide many hours of labor. Knowing how to hide the amount of work one invested in a piece is an elusive art that few artists manage to grasp. I would say that one of these few cases was that of Rudolf Serkin (Austria, 1903-U.S.A., 1991), a pianist who always managed to express all the complexity of a musical work while maintaining an appearance of innate simplicity and naturalness.

Serkin's musical style is deeply rooted in the Austrian-German tradition of the 19th century. In the last years of his life, for instance, his repertoire in solo recitals sometimes seemed to consist exclusively of works by Bach, Beethoven and Schubert, though as a young man he had played a good deal of Chopin. But this is not to say, of course, that he lacked respect for other tendencies. At the Vienna Conservatory, for example, he came to know Arnold Schoenberg, who influenced him to such a degree that Serkin would later call Schoenberg the most important musical thinker of the 20th century. On the other hand, even though as a recitalist he offered little variation in his repertoire, as a soloist with orchestra, in almost inexplicable fashion, he programmed rare and unknown pieces, such as Strauss's *Burleske* and the concertos of MacDowell and Reger. He was also one of the first pianists to bring Bartók's concerto no. 1 and Prokofiev's no. 4 for left hand to a wide public.

Another aspect that distinguishes Serkin from other great pianists is his dedication to chamber music. In his youth, in Vienna, he became acquainted with the violinist Adolf Busch, who taught him the absolute necessity of playing with other musicians. Serkin, in fact, married Busch's daughter Irene (who played violin and viola), and continued playing chamber concerts with her and their friends for the rest of his career. Another very fruitful collaboration was his friendship with Pau Casals. I could be wrong, but the aficionados of my generation in Spain, for some time, fed, musically speaking, on free records given by La Caixa bank to all account holders as a present. One of these legendary LPs was a selection of Bach's Brandenburg concertos with the orchestra of the Marlboro Festival conducted by Casals, with Serkin at the keyboard (the same recording has been reissued by Sony Classics). Trevor Pinnock and other leaders of the authentic performance practice movement might provide a more historically accurate Bach, but the Bach of Casals and Serkin blazed with musicality and emotion.

The collaboration between Casals and Serkin produced another excellent result: a recording of Beethoven's sonatas for cello and piano (Sony Classics 45682). In this case we can also say that it does not compare at all unfavorable to the many very fine versions currently available of these sonatas. In the 1930s, Serkin recorded the violin and piano sonatas of Beethoven and Brahms as well, with his father-in-law Adolf Busch, for the mythic company HMV (these also are reissued by Sony Classics).

This constant dedication of Serkin's to chamber music speaks clearly of the way *music* was more important for him than pure pianistic virtuosity. Consider his recording of Beethoven's *Hammerklavier*, which sparkles with its ardent, luminous execution (Sony 47666). The famous *Pathétique*—battered and smashed by generations of students trained with the aberrant *Solfeo de los Solfeos*, an old-fashioned *solfège* text-book recovers its original splendor and luster in his hands and makes us forget the usual interpretive clichés.

## Composers and performers

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I hardly know how to interpret the fact that the centenary of one of the great pianists of the 20th century is passing *sense pena ni glòria*—with neither sorrow nor glory, as we say. It may be from a lack of interest in pianism in general, or a disdain for Serkin’s piano style in particular; neither one nor the other would surprise me. Clearly, the seriousness and excessive formality of someone like Serkin makes his recordings harder to commercialize than, let’s say, Gould. But if his character was not very extroverted, his way of playing was warm, especially heard live. Serkin was an anti-sentimental pianist, but he did not lack sentiment when he played. His technique was impeccable, transparent, and clean. His attack was very precise and controlled, but with a round, Romantic sound.

With all that, I believe that beyond these characteristics, Serkin’s greatest contribution to the pianism of the 20th century was his sense of musical syntax, that is, the way he organized and created hierarchies among all the elements of a composition (the melody, the accompaniment, the metrics, the sonority, etc.). At the piano, Serkin always enounced his phrases clearly and avoided confusion, a tumult of ideas, at all costs. Putting it another way, his musical conception is based on the spontaneous, simple, and unaffected presentation of ideas of great complexity, a characteristic that is certainly missing nowadays in many pianists. In his hands the most difficult and virtuosic piece could be complex, but never sounded complicated.

# Composers and performers

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## *Richter: The performer as creator*

I know a lot of people who would like to have a life like Liszt's—that is, of dissipation in one's twenties, amorous highs and lows in the thirties, and squandering the fortunes of Austro-Hungarian countesses in the forties, to turn suddenly towards the fifties to retirement from the world, joining the Franciscans, taking holy orders, making friends with the Pope, and composing a series of works with titles like *Harmonies Poétiques et Religieuses* and *Via Crucis*. Anecdotes aside, Liszt's mastery as an interpreter created a model that many future musicians would have to follow: on the one hand, of the performer as iconoclastic and insatiable consumer of vital experiences, but on the other as artist in his own right—the interpreter as creator, in sum.

Bruno Monsaingeon's *Sviatoslav Richter: Notebooks and Conversations* (originally published in French as *Richter: Écrits et Conversations*, Paris 1998) is not only a document of the first quality for understanding the fascinating figure of this marvelous pianist, but especially, in my opinion, a genuine investigation into the role of the musical performer: of how some instrumentalists and conductors (really only a very small number) are endowed with the ability to create a work of art not from a tabula rasa (like the composer or the novelist) but from another creation. The tense relationship between creator and interpreter is perfectly defined in a scene of Proust's *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, in which the narrator, recalling the actress Berma in a performance of Racine's *Phèdre*, comes to wonder about the source of his fetishistic worship of the great actress, asking himself whose genius exactly, the playwright's or her own, he is admiring, whether the performance is a “chef-d'œuvre d'interprétation” or simply a “chef-d'œuvre.” Or the question can be formulated in another way: Up to what point can a performance be a work of genius, being as it necessarily is a work at second hand?

A characteristic of some interpreters is their intangibility: While a composition is visible in a score or audible on disc, the work of the performer is in principle imperceptible, impalpable. In appearance, a symphony conducted by Toscanini or by Furtwängler is the same thing. When critics try to define the aspects that make them different, they often fall into an esoteric and contradictory language, stuffed with metaphysical and illogical arguments that are in any case hard to defend on their merits. The discussion is of “tone,” “atmosphere,” “ambience,” but little in the way of really demonstrable qualities. And yet, it goes without saying, there truly are differences between one version of a musical work and another—it is only that these differences are found in a limbo of ambiguity and ineffability because the critical vocabulary is not adequate to describing them.

Sometimes because of the immateriality of their art, performers find themselves tempted, more than other kinds of artists, to develop tics, manias, idiosyncrasies that function as a signature or stamp of their “interpretive work.” Sergiu Celibadache notoriously hated making recordings. His prestige is based as much on the fact that he did not want to cut records as the fact that he really did have a profound understanding of certain works in the orchestral repertoire. Celibadache remains forever “the conductor who did not want to cut records.” But the dislike of one performer can be the passion of another: thus Glenn Gould, who hated live concerts and believed that the disc was the road for the performer to follow. Which of the two was right? It really does not matter: what is interesting is that both artists have a label, a stamp of their own: one for not cutting records, and the other for cutting them.

From the beginning of his career, Richter stood out not just as an interpreter with magnificent technique—a simple translator of a composer's score—but as the kind of musician who put his own signature on the music he played. His idiosyncrasies, as Monsaingeon's book records, were many, and

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today they are part of his mythology. He never played from memory, for example; according to him, most pianists constantly play the same repertoire because they spend too much time memorizing the music instead of learning new pieces and playing them from the score. Also, he was fond of presenting “surprise” concerts, in Ukrainian village churches or in lost hamlets of the Siberian steppes. These recitals used to take place in near darkness, to enhance the pianist’s, and the audience’s, concentration. Another peculiarity of Richter is that he detested (and the word is no exaggeration, because he was an extremist in everything) the fashion of concert cycles, in which all of a given composer’s works in a particular genre are presented, with a single exception: Bach’s *Well-tempered Clavier*. Shostakovich himself bore a grudge against Richter for refusing to play his 24 preludes and fugues as a unitary work.

But Richter’s most flagrant eccentricity is this: Asked by the interviewer, in these *Conversations*, to define the role and function of the performer the colossal pianist replies: “The interpreter is really an executant, carrying out the composer’s intentions to the letter. He doesn’t add anything that isn’t already in the work. If he is talented, he allows us to glimpse the truth of the work that is in itself a thing of genius and that is reflected in him. He shouldn’t dominate the music, but should dissolve into it.” Indeed: exactly the opposite of what he did.

## Composers and performers

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### *The last of the great ones: Isaac Stern*

When we talk about great performers, it is not hard to fall into cliché, convenient, simple, and false. It is argued, for example, that any period in the history of music was better than our own. And it may well be so: it does not cost anything to recognize the glories of the past and overlook the successes of the present, and if we look, we will always find a better time, an era when society, politics, and arts had a happier, kinder, luckier look, and everything was wittier, and more gracious, and agreeable, and pleasant. What we can never clarify is whether this impression of a distant Golden Age is a demonstrable reality or, more likely, a mirage, an illusion, a consequence of the distortion of our own present-day point of view. When the violinist Isaac Stern died some weeks ago, the buzz in the world of music was that we had just lost “the last of the great ones,” a performer with whom an age in music history would close, one in which the leading role was taken, curiously, not by composers but by virtuoso instrumentalists.

Born in Ukraine in 1920, Isaac Stern arrived in the USA when he was scarcely one year old. Unlike his contemporary Yehudi Menuhin, Stern was not a child prodigy, which is not to say that he did not show unquestionable musicality when he was still very young. He studied at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, and soon appeared as a soloist with the San Francisco Symphony. During the 1940s and 1950s, he conquered New York and Europe with the repertoire that is today considered standard: Beethoven’s chamber music, Mozart’s violin sonatas, the concertos of Bach, Vivaldi, Tchaikovsky, Sibelius, Mendelssohn, Lalo, Ravel, Bruch, Sarasate, etc. (SONY has issued a collection of 44 CDs with the majority of his recordings.)

With tireless energy, by means of concert tours and recordings, Stern did for the violin repertoire what Casals and Rubinstein had done for the cello and piano respectively. The affinity among these three instrumental masters is unmistakeable. All three established the standard repertoire for their respective instruments (the hodge-podge of works in concerts of the beginning of the 20th century would seem, to our trained eyes, extravagant and even ridiculous). But what linked them firmly was their vocation as popularizers, great communicators and explicators. The occasional false note or incorrect phrasing mattered little because, before anything else, they were guided by the principle of interpretive freedom.

It is an open secret that Stern as a violinist would have sacrificed anything for emotional effect. His tone was round, warm, full; his attack passionate, uninhibited and direct. His sound quality in the high register was criticized as strident and unrefined, but as always the final effect was what counted. His great achievement, however, was his ability to start a recital and create an arc of sound that carried on uninterruptedly until the end of the performance. Stern knew as few others did how to effectively maintain the tension, and attention, of the audience. His credo was the one he preached to his students when he told them to “use the violin to make music, never to use music just to play the violin.” These populist characteristics (and excellent feeling for words) made him an ideal performer for Hollywood. Indeed, he dubbed the fiddle in *Fiddler on the Roof* as well as working in other films such as *Humoresque* and *Tonight we sing*—not to mention his turn as protagonist of the documentary *From Mao to Mozart*.

In the case of Stern, ethics and aesthetics always went hand in hand. Until quite recently, he would not play in Germany, remembering the disaster of the water-colorist and Stradivari collector Adolf Hitler. The Soviet Union of the dictators and the Greece of the military junta were also on his black list. His favorite country, naturally, was Israel. In the US, he promoted the creation of the National Endowment for the Arts, meant to play a role like that of a European ministry of culture, telling the

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representatives and senators that unless the government participated in promoting culture the US could wind up as “an industrial complex without a soul.” In his last 20 years his philanthropic efforts saved the venerable Carnegie Hall from being destroyed to make room for an office building. Obviously some of those funds came from his own pocket.

Because of all this it is not strange that now, in the face of his death, there should be those who not only mourn his loss but proclaim the closing and the epilogue of an epoch in music history. And it is, to some degree, the end of the age of the performers who benefited from the diffusion of music by disc. For an instrumentalist, the invention of recording enabled the performer to conserve and preserve work that was ephemeral by definition. This new capacity of giving permanence to what is essentially fleeting and transient—musical interpretation—is what allowed instrumentalists to pass from being a simple executer to an authentic musician and co-creator of the musical work. The propagation of the disc also explains why performers in the 20th century gave up composing (as they had always done in the past), to specialize in pure reproduction.

No doubt there are still interpreters of great stature—Larrocha comes to mind, if only because of her cultural proximity to me and my Majorcan readers—but they are all of the old school, the school of wrong notes, occasional intonational blunders, and other technical weaknesses. They are disciples, all the same, of emotion and interpretive freedom, followers of the belief in the interpreter as co-author of the musical work. Isaac Stern exemplified these qualities because he understood, as he himself said, simply playing was enough of a contribution to the artist’s responsibility to “continue the search for beauty and humanity. That is what survives...”

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## *The Gould Variations*

Some skeptics from San Diego, mistrustful and incredulous about the esoteric science of wine tasting, decided to organize an experiment. They presented a selection of white and red wines to a panel of experts; the wines were all served at the same temperature, and in opaque cups, which not only prevented them from seeing the wine's color but also hid its smell. They took additional measures to prevent cheating—it would be an excessively cruel punishment to detail them all here—and asked the experts to separate the whites from the reds. The majority of the experts, surprisingly, failed the test. The most serious point of the anecdote is not that they missed the year or grape variety, but could not even distinguish this most basic of classes.

A few weeks ago, the Canadian Cultural Center in Paris commemorated the 70th anniversary of the birth and the 20th anniversary of the death of the pianist Glenn Gould. For the same occasion, Sony Records issued a disc including both of the recordings Gould made of Bach's *Goldberg* variations, one from 1955, when the pianist was 22 years old, and one from 1981 (a kind of "testament" given that Gould died shortly afterwards). Fans and record collectors have been discussing which of the two is better, or whether there is any drastic difference between them at all, for years now. Thanks to the new Sony disc, there is no need to go to San Diego to get to the bottom of this mystery: the two versions are there, one after the other, and now there is no room for doubt—both are unique, both are performances of genius, and both are very different indeed.

Gould was born in Toronto in 1932. Even as a child prodigy on the piano, he stood out both for his exceptional technique and for his oddity. As an adult, he wore winter clothing year round and sang, moaned, and trembled as he played, contorting himself at the keyboard, making peculiar faces such as the professors at the conservatory strictly forbid. Like John Cage, Gould is known as much or more for his ideas, polemics, and eccentricities; like Erik Satie, his influence is greater among intellectuals than musicians. He regarded the concert as a dead institution and, as a result, retired from the concert circuit at the age of 32. He once wrote a pamphlet in favor of prohibiting applause, without much success, as the audiences still clap even today. He detested Mozart, and played his music badly on purpose—he hated Schubert as well (and what can you do about it?). Beyond Bach, he idolized Richard Strauss, who wrote hardly any music for piano, and the English composer William Byrd, who lived in the Renaissance, before the piano was invented.

It was the *Goldberg* variations, indeed, that propelled him to fame at 22. In this recording one could already see the very personal marks of his piano playing: the speed of the tempos, accompanied by an unheard-of cleanliness (Gould scarcely made any use of the pedal) and a great rhythmic precision, with accents in unusual places that often surprised and disconcerted the listener. But the most relevant characteristic of his playing was the detailed, almost precious treatment of polyphony, which allows a hearer to follow each voice independently, so that the secondary voices, normally hidden in the contrapuntal texture, stand out like principal melodies with a striking naturalness. (This peculiarity has in fact led to a large number of imitators who bring out a bass or internal voice without any apparent logic, just because.)

The 1981 *Goldberg* set shows the pianist's age: here, Gould is no longer a young eccentric who wants to devour the world, but a mature artist who remains eccentric—really, he couldn't do anything about this—but who knows his limitations. The Aria with which the work begins is played not only more slowly, but more majestic and solemn, and like the vocal piece it ideally is, creates a more cantabile,

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operatic effect, melodious and dramatic at the same time. The 1955 version does not take all the sectional repeats, even though the score makes it clear that they are not optional; in 1981, there are enough repeats to make the work last 13 minutes longer. Variations 13 (which according to Gould possesses the magic of Good Friday) and 25, are enthralling with their sense of tragedy, almost of cataclysm (and indeed Gould died only a few months after recording them).

At the moment, the public has at its disposal some 100 recordings of the *Goldberg* variations, for harpsichord, piano, orchestra, and practically any instrumental combination you can imagine. The harpsichordist Wanda Landowska's version from 1934 remains an inescapable reference point. Barenboim, Hewitt (very worth hearing), Nikolayeva, Perahia, Schiff, Tiro, and Tureck are some of the great pianists who have taken on this masterpiece of Bach's. But some of these discs recall the polemic of the white and the red wine—at moments they are indistinguishable from one another. This is clearly not the case with Gould's versions, which have remained forever, as the new Sony disc makes evident, not just as an unrepeatable version of the Goldbergs, but as two recordings unique in the history of discography.

## **Matters Pending**

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### **VII. Matters pending**

## Beginnings

The beginning of the year makes me think about beginnings in general. Certainly people like me, who suffer the consequences of a scattering of interests and attachments, start something new almost every day (from pottery classes to resolutions and Spartan diets for slimming). For another thing, this New Year (unless this plan too becomes scattered) I have thought of ruminating on musical beginnings, or, more concretely, the formulas generally used for starting a piece of music. Are there any models or types that musical beginnings normally follow? Are there preestablished forms for starting a composition?

As usual, literary critics seem to have things clearer than their musical colleagues, which is because, as is well known, the author's intentions in a literary text are generally more explicit and manifest than those of a musical work, and thus their meanings are more accessible. Certainly the beginning of Proust's *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* can hardly be imagined in any other way than that of its famous first sentence, "Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure" (For a long time, I went to bed early), whose classical undulation establishes the curvilinear, sinuous throb of the whole novel. It has been said that Proust, when he wrote, took musical form as a model; the architecture that holds and sustains the particular universe of a composition, and on this subject we know that he referred to the opening section of his long and stately novel as an "ouverture."

Wagner influenced Proust's work in some respects, such as the novel's uncommon dimensions, or its calm, very slow pulse and rhythm. If Wagner's leitmotivs elaborate themselves throughout a given music drama, so do Proustian motifs recur throughout his novel from start to finish. Proust and Wagner have in common that whatever they have to say they are never rushed or hurried in saying it. Both artists, as well, can be given credit (or, sometimes, discredit) for having written one of the longest novels or operas in the respective histories of literature and music. But if Wagner's operas are extensive, spacious, and vast, their beginnings are equally dilated, ample, and extremely wide: consider the case of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, an opera that begins with the repetition of an E-flat chord for 136 measures!

At a length of almost 15 hours, the *Ring* must be the longest opera in the history of music. Instead of beginning his musical narration with the usual overture, he starts it with *another opera* as a preamble to what will follow. Often music history textbooks refer to the *Ring* as a tetralogy because it comes in four parts, but this designation is incorrect: the *Ring* consists of three parts and one prelude in the form of an independent opera (*Das Rheingold*), and is better called a trilogy (consisting of *Die Walküre*, *Siegfried*, and *Götterdämmerung*), given that the first opera, strictly speaking, is only an introduction, a *beginning*.

In general, the Viennese classicists (Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert) began their works without beating around the bush, sons of the Enlightenment as they were; often one vigorous chord establishes the composition's tonality, or one stubborn motive is asserted, to be developed and elaborated as the work progresses (Beethoven's third and fifth symphonies exemplify both cases). Beethoven, however, abandoned this tradition with his ninth symphony, whose beginning, instead of assertive and concise, is misty, diffuse, and atmospheric. It might be said that it is a beginning that does not dare to begin, since the strings sound as if they are still tuning instead of having begun to play.

Then there are musical genres that originated as the beginnings of other more complex or involved compositions. The overture, obviously, serves to introduce an opera, a purely instrumental work of only ten minutes or so. The opera that follows it, with a duration of more than two hours and with soloists, chorus, dancing, etc., is the overture's finality or goal. This logic is often turned upside down when the overtures of Rossini or Beethoven are performed in orchestral concerts: what was meant to be in principle a preamble to the opera, a beginning, ends up as a complete work in its own right. In the same way the prelude, which began as an introduction to a weightier piece such as a fugue, turned in Chopin's

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hands into an independent composition that did not serve as proem or preparation for anything, but is integral and autonomous.

Altogether different is the case of Erik Satie, master of the iconoclasts when iconoclasm still existed. His piano piece *Vexations* can provide exactly what its title indicates when performed as the composer intended: it consists of a melody—charming, as all of Satie's are—of about 30 seconds that is to be repeated neither more nor less than 840 times! The piece evidently *begins*, but it does not go anywhere, neither advancing nor developing. Apparently, for Satie the problem was never beginning, but rather continuing, and especially knowing when to stop. Like me...

## *A bella història*

Here are a few ideas that were traditionally considered axiomatic and unquestionable by the historians of former times: everything is born, grows, and dies (like the Roman Empire); it is the art of quality that survives and persists (a Darwinian explanation of the fact that Beethoven is still famous while the Spice Girls passed into oblivion in a matter of months); history is an intertwining of causes and effects (as the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand inexorably led to World War I); the history of art, literature, and music is written on the basis of the life stories of certain men and their works (and my Christian and politically correct heart wants to know whether there are any women in history as well...); the only legitimate starting point of history is the written document (and what about oral tradition and other unwritten traces?). These were some of the “bad habits” of the history of the past, but they are also questions that disturb the historians of the present, and thus one might ask oneself: Is it still possible to write general histories of politics and society, and of art, literature, and music as well?

The critics and historians of today move among forces that pull them in two different directions: on the one hand, the impossibility of writing general histories, and on the other, the necessity (as much intellectual as practical, given the public appetite) of writing them nevertheless. In a new work in Catalan, *Introducció a la música: De l'antiguitat als nostres dies* (Introduction to music: From antiquity to our times, Quaderns Crema, Assaig, 2001), Anna Cazurra demonstrates that in spite of the fact that we have nowadays largely lost our faith in grand historical narratives and general global accounts, there is at the same time a real need for these comprehensive, totalizing surveys. After all, all readers—the present writer first of all—feel a nostalgia for the secondary-school teacher who, with a couple of broad brushstrokes in class, could keep us entertained all afternoon just retelling us the “movie” of the intrigues between the Bourbons and Austrians, or the reasons behind the ecclesiastical confiscations instituted by Juan Álvarez Mendizábal as Spanish finance minister in the 1830s. The difference is that now we are aware of the limitations of these grand narratives which we once took to be beyond question.

As a general history and overall view of the history of music, Cazurra’s book is unsurpassable. With a prose style that could rouse envy in quite a number of self-described writers, Cazurra begins her account with “the Greek heritage,” and ends it with a “Musical panorama of Spain” that includes composers born in the 1960s. As you see, a whole epic of composers and works, trends, fashions, and styles... in a word, an account that covers the most important facts of the history of Western concert music (or what we used to call “música culta,” when I was a student—cultivated as opposed, presumably, to music growing in the wild).

In addition, the book includes numerous images, drawings, and photographs to illustrate the text (facsimiles of scores, musical scenes, composers’ portraits, etc.). The general reader will be gratified by the inclusion of a “Musical glossary” to clarify a number of points in the critical-musical terminology; but the more musically trained reader as well will find concise definitions there that are very handy in moments of doubt (What is the exact difference between “rhythm,” “meter,” and “measure”?). I need hardly mention that the Catalan reader has a special need for these general works: I, for example, have never known how to spell the names of the Russian composers in Catalan, and now I have an authoritative source to tell me that Shostakovich is Xostakòvitx and Rachmaninoff is Rakhmàninov. (And it is with good reason that the proofreaders are listed on the credits page—they deserve it!)

The author (a composer, musicologist, and university teacher) says in her preface that the book’s limited space does not allow many critical reflections on “the most sublime pages of the musical repertoire.” Nevertheless, the book is indeed an essay, and the description of works, composers, and styles is often punctuated by highly relevant critical remarks. Very helpfully, especially for the audience the

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book appears to be aimed at, the bibliography cites sources in versions most accessible to the Catalan reader, predominantly translations into Spanish or Catalan of Anglo-American studies.

I think one of the greatest strengths of the essay is the fact that each of its sections includes separate chapters devoted to Iberian music. Thus, for example, the section on the Renaissance features chapters on “Vocal music of the Iberian peninsula” and “Instrumental music of the Iberian peninsula”; in the section on Romanticism one finds “Stage music in Spain” and at the end of the book a chapter headed “Contemporary Catalan music.” This effort to draw the connections between music history in general (primarily Germanic, of course) with the courses followed by our own composers shows how every writing of history is in reality—luckily—a rewriting.

Although the title suggests a much broader content than the relatively limited range that the book actually covers (there is no discussion of theory, for instance, nor does it go into folk or popular musics), Anna Cazurra’s *Introduction to Music* has the great virtue of combining a magisterial capacity for synthesis with an enviable prose. Both the scholar looking for an overall view of music history and the general reader aiming at engaging with this absorbing world will find it useful, informative, and discerning. It is undoubtedly, as the Mallorcan poet said, *una bella història*—both a lovely story and a fine history.

## ***Forbidden to forbid***

Prohibit, interdict, ban, proscribe, enjoin, forbid, disallow—a simple consultation of the thesaurus gives us a whole series of synonyms for the same verb. The nuances may be different, but at bottom the meaning is always the same: to censor.

I've always wondered why, throughout history and certainly across every geographic region, there have always been individuals and institutions with an interest in censoring musical expression. Censorship of music surprises me, not because I am puzzled by despotism or the antidemocratic spirit in general—we have all more or less had to get used to that—but because when I was a student, there was one point, and in fact only one, on which my pedestrian manuals of music theory and music history were not confused: music, they agreed, is notes, intervallic relations, chord progressions, rhythmic relations, and little else.

And yet, if music were nothing but music, why would anybody bother to prohibit or censor it? Nowadays, I no longer doubt it; those 19th-century textbooks, *vuicentistes* as we call them in Catalan, ill-bound and made of paper that always seemed on the point of crumbling, published by the comically named Sociedad Didáctico-Musical, were in error. Music, more than notes, chords, measures, and hemiolas, is a system for transmitting and reinforcing social values, and it is for this reason that political and religious leaders have struggled to put a stop to it.

Some were surprised a few months ago when we began hearing news of the prohibition against music carried out by the wicked Taliban in Afghanistan. In this, though, as in so many things, the Taliban were hardly being original. They took the idea from the late Ayatollah Khomeini, the Iranian cleric who affirmed, with a Marxistoid echo, that music is “no different from opium. Music affects the human mind in a way that makes people think of nothing but music and sensual matters.”

Embarrassingly, Christianity has not shown itself any more benevolent toward certain types of music than the Muslim neighbors. Saint Augustine acknowledged feeling guilty when he listened to music. “Sometimes it seems to me,” he wrote, “that I grant more honor than is proper.... so much so that I wish every melody of those sweet chants to which the songs of David are set, to be banished from my ears and from the very Church.” In the 12th century, St. John of Salisbury feared that polyphonic church music would “more easily occasion titillation between the legs than devotion in the brain.” By the same token the patriarch of Orthodox Christianity, St. John Chrysostom, complained of the prevalence of instrumental music, dancing, and the bride’s makeup in weddings: “For dancing, and cymbals, and flutes, and shameful words and songs, and drunkenness and revelings, and all the Devil’s great heap of dung, is then introduced.” And right here at home in Mallorca, we must consider ourselves lucky to have our Christmas *Cant de la Sibil.la*, the Song of the Sibyl, because it was banned everywhere else in the Iberian Christian world.

I don’t give all the blame to the clerics, because the seculars have been vituperative on the subject of music as well. Plato, for example, putting the words in the mouth of Socrates, as usual, rather than taking responsibility for them himself, condemns certain modes and scales for the effect they can have on the human mind. The infamous Joseph Goebbels wanted to contribute his own bit of hatred against music: “Art in an absolute sense,” he wrote to the conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler, “as liberal democracy knows it, has no right to exist.” And here one must take a step back, take a breath, let it out slowly, and dare to ask: *no right to exist?* And why? However, a rational thinking process offers no answer. The Nazis, in theory enemies of the Communists, had many things in common with them (as the Sunni Taliban do after all with their enemy the Shiite Khomeini), beginning with the condemnation of the same composers: except that the Nazis called them “degenerate,” while Stalin’s followers rejected them as “cosmopolitan,”

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“modern,” and “bourgeois.” Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Webern, all had to be put through the sieve.

The debate on censorship is not a closed question, not even close. The music of Wagner and Strauss is still forbidden in Israel, not surprisingly: Wagner was an anti-Semite, and Strauss collaborated with the Nazi regime. Some months ago, Daniel Barenboim offered the prelude to Wagner’s *Tristan* as an encore in a performance in Israel. In the audience were dozens of octogenarian survivors of the German concentration camps. Once more the wound was to be opened. Some thought their memory should be respected and that censorship was a good way of protecting the right not to listen to the music preferred by their torturers; others believed that it was time to recognize that Wagner was a great composer, in spite of the evil of his ideology. On the other hand, just after the catastrophe of September 11, the Boston Symphony cancelled (censored?) a production of John Adams’s opera *The Death of Klinghoffer*. The opera (written long before the attack on the Twin Towers) tells the true story of the murder of an American Jew by Palestinian hijackers. Since the librettist favored the Palestinian side, the management thought it prudent to call the opera off.

For my part, I’d prohibit Christmas carols in shopping centers—I can’t stand them! But since we live in a democracy, I don’t expect my proposal to go forward. In the face of these disagreements, it’s clear that the norm that ought to govern us (at least in principle) is the motto, now somewhat out of fashion, of the Paris students in May 1968: *C'est défendu de défendre!* It is forbidden to forbid! And then to be open to dialogue, because that is the only guarantee that we can understand one another a little.

## Criticizing the critics

I never cease to be surprised to see the adoration of artists growing enormously, while the disinterested appreciation of art continues on its expected catastrophic decline. Anyone who has been devoted to teaching, like the present author, knows that students yawn in the face of the critical evaluation of an art work (whether visual art, music, literature, dance, film, fashion...) but snap out of their somnolence when the professor begins telling anecdotes from the artist's life ("he died young, he took opium, he was a misanthrope, he went off to Africa..."), thus avoiding critical commentary or technical dissection. We should not underestimate the importance of such experiences, because, beyond revealing the fact that there is more passion for artists than for art in itself, they show up a prejudice that is powerfully rooted in most people's mentality: the belief that the critic's task (intellectual analysis) is absurd and that critics are a bunch of incompetents.

This mistrust should not be surprising. It is legitimate for the professional musician to ask—Who is this cultural mandarin, who judges, pontificates, arbitrates, and passes sentence on things he himself is incapable of producing? And the audience as well has a right to wonder who has given the critic the authority to have opinions while other voices, possibly just as valid, are silenced. The critic automatically replies to the professional musician that you don't have to be sick to be a doctor, and you are not offended by a negative diagnosis. It is also worth recalling that when the critique is a favorable one, the musician cites it verbatim in his or her résumé; it's only in the other case that they want to burn it in a Haitian voodoo ritual. And to the audience, who doubts the value of the critic's opinion, it may be said that he is a professional with training in music and journalism both, and perhaps many years of concert attendance. The weightiest argument, however, is a simple one: there are critics because there are innumerable readers of criticism.

Some great composers, sickened by the incompetence and wickedness of the critics, have taken up composing pamphlets against their adversaries. Already in the 18th century Quantz denounced the critics as arbitrary and subjective. Schumann, a century later, went to the extreme of founding his own review to combat the critical style of his time and condemned music journalism as "an ossified system...without a sage, a reliquary of outdated doctrines full of eccentric, subjective, partisan opinions." Critics, thought Schumann, should all be musicians, an opinion that Liszt, too, certainly shared. The Hungarian composer, who also wrote a good deal of criticism, wanted to go still further and require an examination in musical competence for all active critics. Stravinsky, in the 20th century, was even clearer: the only valid criticism, he held, was to write another composition better than the one being criticized.

We all have a right to our own particular dislikes, but we must admit that criticism has always existed and always will. Criticism is a response to art, the first throb of an emotion, and an integral part in the transmission of art. Wanting to censor and suppress criticism shows the tyrannical and inordinate ambitions of some musicians, their *folie de grandeur* and deeply despotic thinking. With all that, it is the reader's right to demand that criticism be done in a responsible, competent fashion—the right of the concert audience, and the musicians as well.

The horrifying truth is that criticism is inevitable. When you think about it, criticizing the critics is an obvious, flagrant act of criticism. So is the advice of a professor to a student or the indications of a conductor to the orchestra. The comments of the audience during a concert intermission are criticism too—and, I'd say some of the crudest and most pitiless. During the concert, the listeners have remained passive for nearly an hour, stirring themselves only to cough or to rearrange their bottoms on the seat or sporadically to applaud in lamentably predetermined places. In concerts of classical music (for various reasons into which we need not enter at the moment) spontaneity and immediate reaction to the music has

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been entirely eliminated. The intermission is the first chance to respond in a natural way. A whole rainbow grows between the standard “I like it” and “I don’t like it” with all the nuances and tonalities of possible tastes and preferences. It is the opportunity to escape categorical judgments to propose all the possible “buts” (“It was fine, *but...*”). This interchange of varied opinions provides an armature and articulation for society itself. Criticism, therefore, is not always a neutral practice.

In any case, let us not deceive ourselves. The criticism that arouses the most antipathy is that in the press. For some reason, anything in print seems to have authority and prestige. But these traditional prerogatives of criticism will be relativized and democratized a good deal in the future. On the Internet, for instance, criticism is open, changing, and by its very nature unstable. An “internaut” leaves a comment on a recording and someone else adds commentaries that are instantly refined or contradicted by a third and a fourth. With the Internet, there is nothing left for us to do but admit that henceforth it will be impossible even to try to fix a critical judgment in a final and definitive form. With its constant flux of opinions, the Internet makes the work of art more than ever an *opera aperta*, an open work.

## *The musical canon: Steak and potatoes*

Proust's grandmother (as affectionately described in his 1905 essay "Sur la lecture") was clear on the subject: Beethoven's sonatas, and the *Pathétique* in particular, were the "steak and potatoes" of music. For her, the sonatas are not only an inescapable source of musical nutrition, but, startlingly, simple and ordinary, like steak and potatoes. With all that, she said, and precisely because of their simplicity, they were very difficult to play, just the thing to perform at a competition. Listen to Madame Proust: "Le bifteck aux pommes! morceau de concours idéal, difficile par sa simplicité même, sorte de 'Sonate Pathétique' de la cuisine..." The assault on Beethoven, the sacred cow of the classical music repertoire for the last 200 years and thus the center of the Western musical canon, has surprised more than one reader of the French classic. Is it possible to question Beethoven, and, in consequence, the canon itself?

The canon is the group of musical works and composers more or less agreed on as the best expression of what the culture has produced. Generally, the artistic value of the works of the canon is regarded as universal and atemporal. That is to say, the aesthetic values of Beethoven's *Pathétique*, following Proust, could have spoken as well to the population of Sumatra in the 17th century as to that of Europe in the 19th. For some, the fact that certain canonical works have stood the test of time shows in an absolute way that they have such universal, atemporal values, assuring them their place in the pantheon of the great. Others would say, to the contrary, that if these canonical works have stood the test of time, it is not because of their intrinsic value but because of the cultural, social, and political mechanisms that protected them. For instance, if fragments of 10th-century Gregorian chant are part of the musical canon it is not because this music is any better than other possible musics, but because the Church exerted its decisive will to transmit, copy, and conserve this repertoire; other musics, no doubt, were not so lucky.

Over the past 20 years, the canon has been a topic of hot debate in the fields of literature, art, and last but not least music. In literature, scholars like George Steiner and popularizers such as Harold Bloom have laid out their meditations on the problem in an armload of books. Music is always the most hesitant, doubtful, and problematic of the arts when it comes to making theoretical formulations, and here the debate emerged late and timid. The polemic did not originate with musicians, or even critics, both groups apparently contented with the same works and performers as ever (and if you like steak and potatoes, why should you change your diet?). Bit by bit, though, musicologists under the influence of new intellectual paradigms such as that of today's feminism have brought the discussion to the world of music. This trend of thinking has forced us to confront a question so basic that we can hardly help blushing that we haven't considered it before: why is the canon composed almost exclusively by men (certainly very few women) from dominant cultures and countries?

In a first phase, musical feminism tried to recover and discover the names of women who composed. Starting in the 1960s, various histories and encyclopedias were published on the role of women in classical music. Now this stage seems to have come to a close, and more theoretical than historical questions are being raised. One of these is how pedagogical vocabulary and terminology can determine and reaffirm concepts like masculinity and femininity by equating them with categories such as strong and weak, or dominant and submissive.

Schoenberg, for example, speaks of the tonic triad, the chord to which a piece of tonal music always returns in the end, as a "reigning patriarch." Vincent d'Indy, in his composition textbooks, affirms that the first theme of a sonata movement needs to be "masculine" and the second "feminine." Many other authors of pedagogical treatises divide the cadences (the chords with which a phase in a composition ends) into the masculine and the feminine. Some feminist musicologists have tried to explain the Western tonal system as an evolution from the imitation of the male orgasm (preparation, expansion, and climax or resolution to the tonic).

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All this is not merely a matter of pompous theoretical chitchat, because the vocabulary students pick up from books can influence highly consequential political decisions. The Vienna Philharmonic, for example, until just two years ago, never gave a permanent position to a woman instrumentalist, and the Liceu in Barcelona still restricts the role of women. The fact that even today male students dominate composition programs, while female students are nearly all relegated to performance, shows that traditional roles have not changed as much as we might wish.

Meanwhile, the diet of most musicians in training continues to be steak and potatoes, though there is usually fish on Fridays—that is, Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, and a bit of homegrown local color and contemporaneity every now and again. Proust’s grandmother, at bottom, admired Beethoven’s *Pathétique*, and we cannot accuse her of having fomented a rebellious incredulity among the fans. Madame Proust hated it when a cook abused the condiments and seasonings for an essentially simple dish like the *bifteck aux pommes frites*. She also compared the abuse of condiments to the overuse of the pedal in certain pianists—just like my own first piano teacher, Sister Catalina Rotger, certainly.... Therefore, speaking of an affected pianist, Proust’s grandmother remarks, “Elle peut avoir beaucoup plus de doigts que moi, mais elle manque de goût en jouant avec tant d’emphase cet andante si simple...” (She may have a lot more fingers than I have, but she *lacks taste* in playing such a simple andante with so much emphasis.) And the thing is that when it comes to questioning or expanding the musical canon we must be guided not only by political ideologies but also by good taste and artistic standards.

## *Directors and dictators*

If we can believe what we read in the papers, the world of orchestra conductors is passing through a period of serious turbulence. To start with, in a matter of months, a good number of hallowed batons will be abandoning their orchestras, voluntarily or otherwise. Lorin Maazel, for example, will leave Vienna to take possession of the New York Philharmonic, and Seiji Ozawa will give up the Boston podium to James Levine, to take the reins at the Vienna State Opera. But this is not all: lately, the crisis in the rarefied and anachronistic world of conducting has manifested itself especially in the tone and manners that their musical quarrels have taken on, and this is rather more worrisome.

Cutting straight to the subject, recently the musicians of the Montreal Symphony Orchestra publicly denounced their music director, Charles Dutoit, for “years and years of verbal and psychological abuse,” alleging that their situation can be compared to that of a “battered woman” in a violent relationship. Also not long ago merciless critiques appeared in the papers against Valery Gergiev, explicitly denouncing his lack of musicianship and calling him a fraud. In Berlin, a full-scale feud has erupted between Daniel Barenboim at the Staatsoper and Christian Thielemann at the Deutsch Oper. Observers of the musical scene cannot agree on what caused the squabble: some say that Thielemann is a racist who said publicly that there are too many foreign conductors in Germany (Barenboim is Jewish, and Thielemann, who denies the remarks, has sued his accuser for defamation); others say the real issue is the shrinking territory the two conductors are forced to share as budgetary constraints limit the opera in Berlin.

In the face of all these tumultuous episodes, it is not at all surprising that some orchestras have opted for the simplest solution: do without the conductor! No doubt, for an orchestra of 30 to 40 players the substitution of the director by a “leader” (normally the first-chair violin or, in a concerto performance, the soloist) is already a reality and the idea is by no means new: there was already a conductorless orchestra in Moscow in the 1920s. The Prague Chamber Orchestra has been playing without a conductor for years, and New York’s Orpheus Chamber Orchestra has managed to create a respectable audience for itself without having a music director. Instrumentalists can play on their own, after all. In the early 1970s, the conductor István Kertész drowned in a swimming accident between sessions recording Brahms’s Haydn Variations with the Vienna Philharmonic: the orchestra finished the recording without him. Did anybody notice the difference? (Curiously, the story is told in the jacket copy of the Decca/London version of 1973, but the CD reissue of 1996 says nothing about it.)

Historically, the figure of the conductor can be justified. As far back as we can learn, there have always been conductors of one kind and another in the musical world. Already in Greek and Roman texts we read of the need for a person to “mark the beat so that all can play together.” It was in the 19th century that the figure of the conductor as we understand it today appeared (Bülow, Wagner, and Weber were among the first music directors in the modern sense of the word). In the mid-20th century, the exuberant reception of the long-playing record, which put recorded music within everyone’s reach at a moderate price for the first time, led to the vogue of collectionism, and as a consequence to the cult of the conductor-as-myth; Furtwängler and Toscanini were the first conductors to achieve fame without having to be composers or instrumental performers. In the 1960s and 1970s, two figures dominated the international scene, Bernstein and Karajan, and even though they were two very different conductors (one populist, the other elitist), they held one thing in common: both were products of the media of mass communication. Currently, the tendency—apart from that of eliminating the conductor altogether—is for specialist conductors, such as William Christie for the French Baroque, or Giuseppe Sinopoli for Italian opera.

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The role and functions of conductors, logically enough, have evolved over the course of time. Up until now, generally speaking, they have had two functions. First, they must present a competent performance of the music, which is to say: to maintain the beat, indicate the musicians' entries, identify mistakes in the score, correct out-of-tune and wrong notes, etc. In the second place, the conductor must provide an "interpretation" of the music, deciding on the tempo and the balance among instrumental sections, establishing the articulation of phrases, watching out for sound quality, achieving a coherence between the soloist and the other musicians, and finally re-creating the score not only by correcting it but also to the end of communicating its artistic vision. (Interestingly enough, on recordings, this second function has passed more and more into the hands of the sound engineers or producers.)

The third function of the conductor is meant to be purely administrative and, if I may make predictions here, I believe that the conductors of the future are going to have to spend more time on management than their predecessors. When the Boston Symphony Orchestra and Seiji Ozawa offered their last concerts together a couple of weeks ago, some musicians heaved deep sighs of relief at getting rid of a tyrant: Ozawa had held them by the throat for 29 years! But gradually, with the certainty that he really was not coming back, everyone accepted that Ozawa was not just an extraordinary musician but an extraordinary political animal, who knew not only how to direct an orchestra but also how to "direct" the magnificent generosity of the Japanese entrepreneurs—the orchestra's principle patrons—toward Boston. And thus even the most cynical can see that conductors will always be a necessity, even if it is only to capitalize, in a literal sense, on their charisma and popularity.

## *Curriculum ridiculum*

I know a good many undignified methods of reaching the age of 40 (not that I, dear ladies, have arrived to such respectable age). One of them, inescapably, is that of wandering from town to town giving concerts subsidized by some obscure little office in the labyrinths of the local, or autonomous regional, or central administration (like the itinerant actors in the precarious and uncertain Italy of *La Strada*). These musical soirées generally attract a wretched audience of retirees, the musicians' families, and the politician who hopes to get some votes at the next election in return (while his wife takes advantage of the occasion to show off the “simple frock” on which she has just spent a fortune at some fashionable boutique).

But it is at these concerts and recitals that I—out of pure perversion, I have to admit—take special delight in reading the programs that come along with the listening experience. The juiciest part of such programs is definitely that dedicated to the artists’ biographies, an authentic literary genre that is rarely a waste of time. They are vague and ambiguous texts, full of affirmations that cannot be supported, not so much lies as exaggerations, aggrandizements, inflations, along with a degree of pardonable nonsense, of the lives and miracles of the local performer of modest status. The fact that these hagiographical publications, of no more than four pages, hardly include any commentaries on the music but rather weigh us down with the supposed merits of the players is something that should put us in a state of high alert.

It should be said at the outset that the curricula vitae found in programs of this kind are in actuality not biographies, but rather shameless *autobiographies*, disguised by their use of the third person singular. In general, the protagonists have taken the trouble to make their own evaluation of their talents and written up the results with their own hands. If the interested parties had left the task to some less partial person, the audience would gain not only a more objective and neutral picture, but also somewhat more fluent prose. In any case, the curricula, flagrant autobiographies as they are, do not so much reflect the life and accomplishments of a person as they are, but as in the way the person would like to project them to the readers and listeners at the concert. Thus, when we read in a curriculum that Mr. X is “internationally recognized as a specialist in...” we can always wonder what kind of “recognition” is at issue, if the subject of the statement is also its author.

The modern age has led to excess in everything, not least in claims of excellence. The surplus has meant—precisely because of the abundance—that these claims are devalued, subject like an overissued currency to a kind of critical hyperinflation. Ten or fifteen years ago, it could be regarded as a merit if an artist had studied outside his or her native country; nowadays, it would no longer be so clear. Nevertheless, foreign names abound in the autocurriculum. For example, one often gets the sensation that the city of Cambridge will be mentioned even if the author has only passed through its green fields in a tour group. There is an extraordinary wealth of summer courses, *stages*, and master classes through practically the entire terrestrial orb, which could mean nothing more than that the person has paid the fee to enrich the coffers of the professors who organized the event. In certain countries and at certain institutions a master’s degree means a minimum of 30 academic credits and the writing of a thesis; others, unfortunately, give the same title for a summer course in the sun and on the beach, where the smart student is the one who is literally in bed with the professor, if he or she is lucky. But when the author of the program notes claims to have a “master’s” we cannot tell whether it came from study or the exchange of sexual favors.

The texts also pullulate with catchphrases, stereotypes, and clichés. One of the most frequently found set expressions in Catalan is that Senyor X “*Ha rebut consells de...*”—that he “received advice” from this or that musical celebrity. What exactly is that supposed to mean? Consider two historical examples. For years, it was said that Albéniz had “received advice” from Liszt, while the most recent

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studies have shown that it was not like that, that they may never have met at all. Similarly, Pere Miquel Marqués, the great 19th-century Majorcan composer of symphonies and zarzuelas “received advice” from Berlioz, but I would bet any sum you like that they never stood in the same room at the same time. “Receive advice” is obviously meant to conceal a half-truth or complete lie. Another Catalan phrase that irritates me with its vagueness—if I may be allowed some personal antipathies—is when the autobiographer claims that he “*va perfeccionar estudis*,” or “perfected his studies,” a statement that assumes that one already “knows.” So much perfection is more than a little suspicious, like, to my way of thinking, most of those orchestras that call themselves “I Solisti di...” or “Els Virtuosos de...” and so forth.

In view of the disorder of most musical autocurricula, I thought of taking a look at the formulas used by visual artists and writers. The first, as is well known, generally give a chronological list of their exhibitions, while the second offer a brief list of their principle publications. This seems like an acceptable formula, too; in any case, either model seems more suitable than what we see in the musical realm. Nevertheless it is clear enough that the fact that someone has had international shows is hardly as impressive as it used to be (everyone has been there). As to writers, it must be said that in the English-speaking world the authors of the literary blurb take a fairly casual attitude toward their readers. Thus it is absolutely commonplace to read, after the list of published works, “Mr. X lives in Connecticut with his wife and children and three terrier puppies.” It is only when you have learned to admire, adore, venerate a writer that you can take any satisfaction from knowing that he is a family man, that he has managed to procreate, and that he entertains himself with the puppies after an intense day of creative labor.

### *El solfeo de los solfeos: Or, a double dose of Orfidal ®Wyeth*

According to a friend of mine, artists are overvalued. I have never doubted it, but it should be added for the sake of precision that not all workers in the arts receive the same considerations and privileges: while painters and sculptors typically take the greatest honors—which is after all because the members of the tribe really do “eat with their eyes”—musicians normally occupy the lowest rank in the pantheon of the muses. This disadvantage of musicians in comparison to other artists is already an accomplished fact in the first years of their training at the conservatory, an institution that, in my time (as in the seminary or in military service), marked a person forever, and offered a small demonstration of the humiliations and ignominies to which musicians would find themselves subjected for the rest of their lives.

These anxieties came back to me a little less than a month ago, when our brand-new, modern Conservatori Superior in Palma invited me to teach a unit on the composer Antoni Llitteres. Even the most incredulous must admit that the conservatory of today has little in common with that of twenty-five or thirty years ago, and the differences are not just in the buildings and the faculty; everything is a little more complicated and confused. The 1970s were a difficult time in our country and, in the last analysis, the conservatory reflected a time when Franco’s Guardia Civil, with their shiny patent-leather three-cornered hats, dominated Spanish daily life.

I remember three or four consecutive buildings where Mallorca’s Conservatory was hosted. First there were the lugubrious, dark and dank premises of the old Catholic Seminary, soon to be replaced by other premises in the Auditòrium. I say “premises” because, as far as I can recall, there were no classrooms or lecture halls as such, only premises, rooms, and chambers that served *as* classrooms without actually attaining that status. With the Auditòrium things began to change: the rooms were clean, they had been painted, there were windows and even an elevator. When the conservatory moved some years later to the Casa de la Misericòrdia, the fact that the institution now had its own building clearly counted as a step forward, but also in a certain sense a step back, since in those days the Misericòrdia was an almost half abandoned building, with peeling walls and perennially damp. The building which had once taken in the poor and despised now housed the most unfortunate of artists, the musicians!

And it was not only the building that created a lamentable, gloomy educational atmosphere. The conservatory was peopled with a teaching staff that doubtlessly did what it could with these wretched conditions, but left much to be desired. There were sinister, gangsterish characters that everyone knew, but also beloved teachers who disarmed with their good-heartedness and made one forget their pedagogical insufficiencies. For example, there was the kindly priest who always had stains of coffee with milk on his threadbare sweater. Even we students wondered whether that sweater in its clerical gray was always the same or whether the fellow had a series that he changed on a daily, weekly, or perhaps monthly basis... But the stains were permanent and always in the same spot.

If some professors were benevolent and indulgent, others were implacable with their teaching. From time to time, and without warning, an idea that no one could justify became an authentic dogma of the faith. For a time, for instance, the piano professors dictated that all ornaments in Bach’s music must begin with the upper note, and woe to anyone who tried to find exceptions to the rule! At another point word went around that harmonizations in a minor key must always end in the major, and for months it was unsafe to violate this law.

Textbooks were one of the most pathetic aspects of our training, starting with their very titles. The solfège text, for instance, was absurdly entitled *El Solfeo de los Solfeos*, and packed with exercises of impossible pitch and ridiculous rhythm. In those days most civilized countries had abandoned the teaching of solfège, regarding it as a worthless, and even insane, waste of time, but in our training solfège

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was regarded as the spinal column of a musical upbringing, even though, in reality, it was a way of providing work to dozens of professors who lived off these appointments.

The most lunatic collection of theory and solfège books was that published by an incongruous and illogical publisher called the Sociedad Didáctico-Musical. The title was an absolute anacoluthon, given that none of its volumes was educational in any way. And who exactly was Señor Arín y Fontanilla? Or was he actually two different people, one Arín and one Fontanilla? And what could one say about the books of the noble Hilarión Eslava? What had we done, lads of the 1970s, what sin had we committed that we should be punished with their books written a hundred years before?

My visit to the Conservatori Superior awoke some of these memories. But I remained convinced that the new generations will probably not have to go to group therapy to overcome the emotional conflicts that were caused for us by the inadequate and error-prone musical pedagogy of those days. I really believe, in fact, that it has gotten much better, but—putting it in a less than original fashion—there remains much to do. But there is no question in my mind that the musicians of the future will not need to resort as often as we do to Orfidal ® Wyeth to resolve, solve, and make peace with the inner conflicts and traumas caused by an imperfect and deficient training, to put it, let us say, amiably.

## Codifying lives

"It is the fate of those who toil at the lower employments of life, to be rather driven by the fear of evil, than attracted by the prospect of good; to be exposed to censure, without hope of praise; to be disgraced by miscarriage, or punished for neglect, where success would have been without applause, and diligence without reward. Among these unhappy mortals is the writer of dictionaries; whom mankind have considered not as the pupil, but the slave of science... Every other author may aspire to praise; the lexicographer can only hope to escape reproach, and even this negative recompense has been granted to a very few." (Samuel Johnson, *Dictionary*, 1755.)

The impulse to write about the lives of others goes back a long way: the ancient Egyptians were already sculpting stones memorializing the lives of their dead, and in the Greco-Roman world Diogenes Laertius, Pliny the Elder, Plutarch, Suetonius, and Tacitus, among many others, applied their knowledge to the art of biography. The Middle Ages left us numerous hagiographies, from the *Legenda Aurea* of Jacobus de Voragine to the *Acta Sanctorum* of Johannes Bollandus, while Renaissance humanism, through the clever permutation of saint to artist, offered such extraordinary works as the marvelous *Lives* of Giorgio Vasari, which in turn inspired Dr. Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*.

Outside a few exceptions, it was not until near the end of the 18th century that lexicographers like Mattheson, Walther, Burney, and Du Tillet began publishing the first biographical dictionaries of musicians. The explanation might be that the writing of a biographical dictionary can happen only if two conditions are met, both of which coincided precisely with the Enlightenment: first, an interest in human life, in the person as a unique, singular, and unrepeatable individual, plus an irrepressible curiosity about its particular, private, intimate facts; second, a soul with an affinity for the systematization and codification of knowledge, an appetite for organizing information, an eagerness for erudition and an excessive faith in the tools of rationality. A biographical dictionary, moreover, must be the work promised in its title: it necessarily includes *lives* (*bios*), but that's the end: no more gossip and entering into the personal aspects of the subject should be allowed. Then the lives are to be organized in alphabetical order and according to strict scientific criteria, to be codified.

If the propensity for writing biographies is, as we have seen, a tradition with deep roots, the need to *read* them is just as old and inveterate. The quotation at the head of this text is not only the sharp sarcasm and spite that marks so much of Dr. Johnson's writings, but also a concise and acute meditation on the difficult and disagreeable task of the lexicographer; but—even as it leaves us somewhat disconcerted—it cannot fool us: Johnson's cynicism was just a façade which shouldn't deceive us, because he knew at the deepest level that his work was necessary, and in time would become indispensable. And in their collective biographies, Diogenes, Vasari, and Johnson all knew with certainty that the lives they had gathered up and codified in their imposing volumes would fill library shelves, be published and republished, would be translated into many languages, would come out in paperback and in luxury bindings, in sum, would be read. Indeed Dr. Johnson's work has penetrated into cyberspace, where both the *Dictionary* and *Lives of the Poets* are available to be browsed or downloaded. I don't know what the perennially ill-humored Doctor would think of his work being transmitted on the Internet.

Something similar might be said of the latest edition (2000) of the *Diccionari de Compositors Mallorquins* (Dictionary of Mallorcan composers) by Joan Pareds, Pere Estelrich, and Biel Massot. It is indisputable that a book of this type deserves to be published: it will be indispensable for musicians, historians, and students of the culture of the Balearic Islands. Further, it has the virtue of including information that has really never been published before, but always presented in such a way that the nonspecialist reader can use it. It is an insuperable letter of introduction on an aspect of Balearic culture to the outside (the rest of Spain, and the rest of the world), setting forth in crystallized form the

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achievements of a good many musicians whose works might otherwise disappear from human memory as well as from the concert hall.

It is also an improvement in a number of ways over the previous edition of 1987. For one thing, it includes references to musicians from modern times, whereas the older edition stopped in 1900. Moreover, in addition to the composers of so-called classical music, it includes singer-songwriters, jazz musicians, and folk performers, among others. Finally, it is not limited to Majorca, but covers the other islands of the archipelago, Minorca, Ibiza, and Formentera, as well.

I will say, *entre nous*, that this new dictionary poses a bit of a dilemma for me. Owing to my itinerant life I have been forced to live for many years without a collection of books, or, putting it better, with a collection of just the books I absolutely can't do without (almost all of them reference works). One of these indispensable volumes has been the 1987 *Diccionari de compositors*. The problem is that with the publication of this new *Diccionari* I will have no need to keep the old version and for reasons of space I may feel obliged to get rid of it. It is a harsh law of life that the new substitutes for the old, and was ever thus. The difficulty is that after having lived together with it for so many years I have developed a certain affection for it, which it will be painful to give up (and it is well known that books acquire a degree of fetishistic attachment going beyond their textual content). And it is possible that I will end up making a little corner where the old edition of the *Diccionari* and leaving the new edition there—if only just to keep it company. Which is a suggestion I could gladly make to others, that they should make a little space in their libraries, however modest, for this new member of the collection; they won't regret it.

## *Works of Cabanilles*

Even the most ambitious and monumental projects—whose completion seems impossibly distant if not actually impossible—may end up getting done. A few months ago, the American Institute of Musicology published the first part of a formidable edition in five volumes of two manuscripts held in the Fundació Cosme Bauçà, Felanitx, of works by the Valencian composer Joan Cabanilles (1644-1712), laying the first stone of an editorial project that, if it is ever completed—and one wants nothing less—will be an essential step in the musicology of our country, and in the general bibliography of Majorca.

The publication of these manuscripts is of the highest importance, for a number of reasons. In the first place, as a source of music by Cabanilles: this first volume includes 519 pieces for organ, among which 207 have absolutely never been published before. As such, without this edition we would never have a complete works of Cabanilles. In the second place, as a source for music by other composers: even though almost all the pieces are by Cabanilles, there are also works by Correa de Arauxo (1548-1654), Johann Kaspar Kerll (1627-93), Jakob Froberger (1616-67), Pablo Bruna, and Josep Esteve (not to be confused with Pau Esteve). According to the principle editor, Nelson Lee (a former Yale student and organist currently living in Norway), the Felanitx manuscripts are the only source of music by the practically unknown Josep Esteve, and one of very few documentary sources from Spanish territory of German organ music of the 17th and 18th century.

Lee claims that the two manuscripts must have been copied by a single hand around 1695. It is a clear copy, but one made for the use of an organist, as is shown by the annotations of a later hand, containing somebody's very rudimentary poetry, here freely translated:

Es decoro es un ple  
En aquest no li plangan es paper  
Ell es fet de ma de mestre  
Suposat que sou tan llest  
*Ornamenting is a pleasure*  
*Do not skimp on paper when doing it*  
*It is indeed a master's job*  
*Supposing you have the wits!*

\*\*\*

Solfas son fetes de gran primor, no son fetes de mana.  
*These notes show great grace, they are not just barren ones.*

\*\*\*

¿Per que ells duen es cant pa lligats un si saltre no?  
*Why is the plainchant slurred every other note?*

Another annotation consists of exercises in Latin (declensions), and yet another of the names “Juan Ferregut” and “Salvador del Olmo.” So far, nothing is known of these scholiasts or of the identity of the named persons.

Nelson Lee’s work is generally irreproachable, and deserves the most sincere respect and admiration, but I cannot resist noting a few aspects that left me unsatisfied. To begin with, Lee has decided not to transcribe some pieces, on the basis of their supposed musical quality: he finds them “mediocre.” One of the merits of this kind of publication is normally what one might call its integrality, putting the complete works of a particular composer within reach, but if one gives way to subjective

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criteria then a great part of the book's value is lost. It would have been more appropriate to leave it to organists, musicians, and aficionados to determine the music's quality.

In principle, the musicologist is not obligated to make artistic judgments, even though I personally have always defended the role of the intuitive musicologist who uses his artistic taste, not just the documentary proofs, to arrive at his or her conclusions. Music, art, and literature are not exact sciences, and when it is time to make a decision, the artistically trained musicologist will do a better job of sifting true knowledge out of the pure and irrelevant information. What is disconcerting, precisely, is when an edition that presents itself as objective in character (without the compiler's subjective participation) should pronounce in favor of certain works and against others.

In general, Lee's work lacks a historical and musical context. The author has limited himself (and this does not make the job in itself any less meritorious) to transcribing the music and presenting it with a typical preface explaining the editorial criteria, but leaves aside anything that might help to contextualize the work being presented. For example, nothing is said about how the manuscripts might have come into the hands of Cosme Bauçà, an issue that has already been studied by Pere Xamena (in the symposium *IV Trobada de Documentalistes Musicals*, Muro, 1997) and which could easily have been summed up in a brief paragraph. It would also have been valuable to try to clarify how it was that such an important compilation arrived in Majorca, who brought it there, whether it was copied in Majorca or elsewhere (according to Lee it was brought to Majorca in the 18th century), why it is that the manuscripts bring together music by such a diversity of composers, from the very well known Cabanilles to the totally unknown Esteve, etc. It is to be hoped that some of these questions will be resolved in the subsequent volumes.

Transcribing a musical manuscript is a Draconian task, but it is only doing the task by halves, because the meaning of a transcribed text can be radically different depending on the historical context in which it is situated. Also this is not to say that we should stop making critical editions, but their limitations must be recognized. The old dream of the positivist philology of the 19th century, of establishing one unique text from a variety of texts, has ended up as exactly what it always was: nothing but a dream, an illusion. If one wants to know what the original source says, a facsimile edition is the best solution. If what one wants, on the other hand, is a modernization of the text by means of transcription, then it is an inexorable necessity that the music should be put in its context.

It must be said that this edition is meticulously done in the spirit of the American Institute of Musicology (not to be confused with the American Musicological Society, an organization of official character and an affiliate of the International Musicological Society). Let me explain: The Institute, founded in 1944 by Armen Carapetyan, is a private entity that has been located successively in Cambridge (Massachusetts), Rome, Texas, and currently at the publishing firm of Hänsler in Stuttgart. Carapetyan, an idiosyncratic man but one of great vision, just after taking his doctorate in musicology at Harvard, saw the necessity of creating an organism to encourage the publication of early music (in particular of the Renaissance and Baroque). His idea of the musicologist's task was typical for his time: find a manuscript in original notation, turn it into modern notation, and write a preface explaining the editorial criteria. It is worth noting that in those days (unlike now), very few performers knew how to read notation from earlier than the 18th century, and for this reason the job of transcribing earlier music was enormously appreciated. Nowadays, many performers of older music prefer reading from a facsimile reproduction rather than a transcription.

In spite of these respectful reservations, the edition on the whole is an enormously positive accomplishment. The fact that it is Nelson Lee and the Institute of American Musicology that took on this imposing labor should teach us at least two things: first, that if we Catalans do not preserve our own patrimony, then foreigners will happily take care of it for us; second, when it is one of our institutions that takes on the task of this scope, it must be transmitted and diffused outside our little territory. In the same

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way as this work has come to us, our research will have to come to other places. This last point is of the highest importance: How many official books are published here with no ISBN? How many works by local authors are never distributed at all? How many publicly founded books never reach the public nor are sold in regular bookstores? How many public libraries do not even have copies of editions from the very institutions that support them? In short, it is not enough to recover the national heritage; we have to propagate its knowledge. And it is not enough to distribute it here; we have to distribute it outside as well, as Nelson Lee's valuable work shows once again.

### ***Musicological debates: Intellectuals and music in the U.S. in the 1980s***

Fashions come and go among the intelligentsia just as they do elsewhere; to be sure their arbiters of taste are not designers of Italian lineage or internationally acclaimed painters but university professors, researchers, bookworms of archives and libraries, authors of books that pass in the course of a day from obscurity to a total recognition among the initiates. It would be overly ambitious (and certainly absurd) to try to draw up a schematization of the fashions currently operating among the intellectuals of North America. The United States is a heterogeneous country in every sense of the word, and tracing the paths followed by the academic community is an almost impossible task, such is the variety of positions and points of view. All the same, it is possible to sketch out something of the momentary trends.

In the fields of the humanities and social sciences, for instance, it seems that behind every superspecialized investigation, behind every research area, no matter how concrete, there is a question that predominates over all the rest, a question every intellectual hopes to resolve as the culmination of his or her work: a profound reevaluation of what we call “Western culture,” or the conjunction of those values that make the countries of Europe and America what they are. Western culture, it is said, is the cultural tradition begun by the Greeks and transmitted down to the present day, the ideas and creations of Plato, Beethoven, and Freud; whereas pre-Columbian art of the Americas, say, or the Carnatic musical tradition of South India, participate in other cultural traditions of their own.

Thus, the question for many intellectuals in the U.S. is not so much how to reinterpret our cultural tradition one more time as whether it is really worth the trouble to do so. This new way of putting it, as we will see, has attracted a good many adherents and some detractors.

One can distinguish at least two main positions within the polemic. The first is represented by the figure and the work of Alan Bloom, professor of philosophy at the University of Chicago. In 1987, Bloom published his book *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), in which he criticized the educational system of North American universities and accused them of having partially abandoned the cultural tradition of the West, surrendering to popular culture and to the revolutions of the 1960s (especially the movements for the civil rights of blacks, women, and gays) that had so radically questioned the white, male, heterosexual basis of European culture. In consequence, Bloom held popular culture, in particular rock and television, responsible for many of the social ills of the times, and proposed a return to the “eternal” values of the classic—of Plato and of Beethoven, for instance, figures Bloom intensely revered.

Another university professor, E.D. Hirsch, published a book with similar objectives a year after Bloom’s in the *Dictionary of Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), which takes a related stance: popular culture, claims Hirsch, has made us lose the traditional Western culture and we must return to it. To this end he proposes his dictionary of culture, a compendium of everything one needs (!) to know in order to function socially. The dictionary is different from an encyclopedia, in that the concepts included are just those everyone needs (?) to know. Thus it would be like a return to the bourgeois concept of “general culture.” Something that deviates from this general culture naturally does not deserve so much commentary, and indeed it is only in a country as enormous and diverse as the U.S. that such aberrations are even possible.

The point of view opposed to Bloom and Hirsch is represented by a group of literary critics known as deconstructionists, inspired by the work of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida. Among these literary critics, one who stands out is Jonathan Culler, and his *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1982). One of Derrida’s most polemical ideas (*De la Grammatologie*, Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1967) is that the meaning of a word or a text is indeterminate, because the contexts that fix the meaning are never stable.

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Deconstruction, therefore, is no more than the analysis of a text done in such a way that the text changes meaning totally according to context. The significance of a text is thus entirely relative.

The idea that a word or a text can signify practically anything according to the context in which it is found has fundamental consequences for when we want to evaluate the importance of Western culture, considering that the Western European tradition itself is thus substantially relativized. Contrary to what Bloom and Hirsch believe, the ills of our society may not be caused by our having gone a little outside our rigid cultural tradition, but precisely by our neglect of other traditions, imposing our own in their places through colonialism and imperialism. But if, as the deconstructionists claim, a word, a text, an entire corpus of texts have no determined significance—and a cultural tradition is at bottom basically a corpus of texts—then the value of our own cultural tradition is relative, questionable, and in this way subject to doubt and even denial.

This intellectual panorama has had important consequences within the world of musicology. It should be noted, to begin with, that in the U.S. music counts as an intellectual discipline just as much as philosophy or biology, instead of being relegated to the ranks in the rear, in the meager intellectual environment of the conservatories as it happens in our country.

One of the most representative figures in American musicology is Leo Treitler, whose book *Music and the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989) reflects the panorama referred to above. Treitler's work questions the concept of history and, more concretely, history of music, insinuating that history is not an independent reality but the invention of historiography. Thus, musicology does not just explain music, but invents a whole series of reasons to justify a certain musical tradition, the European tradition starting with Gregorian chant and proceeding to minimalism. Treitler insists that an objectively narrated history of music does not really exist: it is more than a relative invention of the historians. Gregorian chant, for instance, is normally identified as the start of the Western musical tradition, ignoring, shamefully enough, all its Eastern elements. In consequence, one can say that musicology has appropriated a partly Asian cultural manifestation in order to invent a starting point for what we call Western art music. In this way Treitler criticizes the ambitious claims of musicology, that it collects historical documents in an objective procedure, or that it realizes formal analyses of musical works in order to identify a set of evolutionary laws for music history. To the contrary, he hints that these claims add nothing to a better appreciation of the music.

Another radical critique of traditional musicology is proposed by Joseph Kerman in his *Contemplating Music: Challenges to Musicology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985). One of Kerman's ideas is that conventional musicology (the collection of historical data and elaboration of formal analyses) is of little help in the understanding of music, and that it would be better to develop a kind of musicology and criticism that, instead of being occupied with history and musical style, would encourage aesthetic judgment and explain the place of music in human society.

Both Treitler and Kerman direct their criticism at conventional musicology. This, naturally, cannot be imagined here in Catalonia, where musicology exists only in an embryonic state. Kerman, for example, brutally attacks the school of analysis founded by Heinrich Schenker, regarded as enormously advanced in many American music departments—but how can we criticize Schenkerism here if it hardly exists? Furthermore, Kerman advocated the development of a musical aesthetic comparable to those of students of art and literature—but how can we think of aesthetics here, when there are still so many archives to catalogue, and when analysis in our conservatories continues to be regarded as an easy A, or what Catalan students call a *maria*?

Finally, it should be said that both Treitler and Kerman, in spite of taking Western art music as their point of departure, question its preponderance in modern society in a very fundamental way. When one questions the role and the value of conventional musicology, one puts the value of our musical tradition into question as well. In this Treitler and Kerman are truly radical. Doubting the absolute value

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of Western art music does not mean that Mahler, today, is of no use; but it does mean that more consideration should be given to popular music (rock, pop), European folklore, and non-European musics, musics traditionally regarded as aesthetically inferior.

On the other hand, from a feminist perspective, Marcia J. Citron has seriously called into question what is known to American musicologists as the “canon”—the group of musical works that comprise the Western tradition (artificially and arbitrarily invented, Treitler would say), that is, Dufay, Corelli, Stravinsky, and so on. In her essay “Gender, Professionalism, and the Musical Canon” (*The Journal of Musicology* VIII/1, 1988), Citron studies the process through which the canon of the standard repertoire was formed. Is it the music’s intrinsic quality that determines a work’s membership in the canon, or is it other social factors? Citron comes to the conclusion that the canon is basically arbitrary, and that the selection of works is determined for social rather than aesthetic reasons. A clear example is that of the extreme rarity of works by women composers in the conventional concert repertoire.

At bottom, what is being said both by deconstructionists and by radical musicologists such as Treitler, Kerman, and Citron is that there is no reason to maintain the Western cultural ethnocentrism, because thanks to technology it is now possible to appreciate all the musics in the world. In addition, there is much music created by members of less favored social sectors—women, for example, or composers from less developed countries—that is discriminated against. Music criticism (and with it, the tastes of the public) is burdened with prejudices: Who would dare to say that a composer of the Southern Hemisphere like Villa-Lobos has the same stature as that of a Germanic like Mahler? Who would dare to claim that the music of Marianne Martínez or some other female composer is of the same quality as that of Beethoven, the prototype of artistic masculinity? Music criticism up until now has been stuffed with sexist and ethnocentric prejudices, but if one hopes to survive and, especially, to honor the truth, one will have to accept the relative value of our pretentious “Western art music”.

## ***Bad news***

We often seek consolation in art, and in particular in music. I talked about the subject some months ago, in reference to Passion oratorios by contemporary composers (see “The Passions according to Rihm, Gubaidulina, Golijov, and Tan Dun,” this volume). Just recently, though, it occurred to me that, however true it may be that looking to music brings rest and repair from the insults of daily life—and it is surely true that the internal structure of the musical work placates the convulsions of a disturbed mind—it is also true that the world of music, of concerts, the recording industry, the conservatories, is in terrible shape everywhere. Wherever I look, and especially if I look steadily and with careful attention, I find nothing but bad news. And, things being as they are, what is the sense in looking for comfort in a world that is almost crushed under the weight of its problems?

The world of music today has two main problems, naturally interrelated: lack of money and lack of audience. Classical music is a very expensive business. Institutions like conservatories and orchestras require the investment of millions, producing no tangible economic benefits. The American economist William Bauman has explained that in most industries (let’s say shoes, for example), productivity is continually increasing (making a shoe costs less today than it did 20 years ago, and 20 years ago it cost less than 40 years ago). There are industries, however, in which productivity never increases: to play a Mozart symphony, for instance, takes exactly the same number of workers (30 or 40 musicians) as it did in the composer’s lifetime. Cutting payroll, cutting expenses, and all the other solutions that are normally applied are not practicable in music. Indeed, playing a symphony is more expensive today than it was in Mozart’s time, since the musicians now get benefits in addition to salaries. The example may seem absurd, but it shows that classical music evolves in the opposite direction from other social realms, since it cannot be required to improve productivity.

There are two ways of paying for an unprofitable product: by going to the public coffers, or by relying on the patronage of private entities (obviously one can also combine the two sources of financing). Public financing works well enough for health care; everyone gets sick, sooner or later, and therefore everyone benefits. But only a minority of taxpayers appreciates classical music, and public financing means that a majority of taxpayers is paying for the pleasures of a few, and this is a political problem. On the other hand, if the money comes from private entities, these often come to the conclusion that it is better to invest in other cultural activities, such as museums, because they have more popular acceptance. By this logic, it is clear that the root of the problem is not so much that of money as that of the audience—if the audiences are there, public and private institutions alike will be happy to contribute.

Some say that classical music has lost much of its audience because the musicians always play the same repertoire; others that the new repertoire was boring, unfriendly or frightening... A lot of things have been said, in fact, but while the diagnosis is clear (simply: there is not enough demand to match the existing supply), a cure is harder to envision. One idea that has lately gained in strength is that of *training* the audience. Once upon a time, teaching institutions were devoted to the training of professionals, and if they produced aficionados, it was only as an indirect consequence. Now it is thought that the most important mission of conservatories is the direct training of potential members of the concert audience and customers for the recording industry. It is not hard to see that, if the music business itself is in a bad way, the business of teaching music is doing very well. The great irony is that it is dedicated to the training of professionals who will almost all be dedicated to training yet more professional trainers of yet more... Would it not be more normal to train an audience to pay for the concert tickets, music school fees, recordings, to support enterprises investing in classical music, and above all, not protest when some of their taxes are spent on the art?

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"My dear Mr. Writer," some readers will object, "concerts are standing room only, and every time I try to buy a CD it's sold out."

Well, dear reader, what you have noticed is a deceptive impression, especially on the broad scale. Summer festivals in places like Majorca present a false idea. The audience that basically keeps the musical institutions alive is not made of those who go sporadically to the Cartoixa de Valdemossa to listen to the Chopin, or the Pollença festival, but the ones who go every week through the winters season, such as those who subscribe to a particular orchestra, and those that buy more than one CD per month, those who don't whine when a concert is not free, or when they have to pay out of their own pockets for music lessons...

Interestingly enough, the problem of an audience shortage, until recently almost exclusively hurting the classical music world, has now begun to affect non-classical musics. In this case the problem is not exactly that there is no audience, but that the public has alternative ways of consuming music for free, and divided itself into so many groups and subgroups of style preference that it is impossible for any of these styles to survive economically. In 1999, 700 million CDs were sold around the world. In 2002 the number was only 100 million. How can one explain this decline in the number of consumers? Mainly on the basis of the Internet, which allows you to "burn" discs on your own without purchasing them or paying copyright. But the Internet cannot be blamed for everything. In Spain, the popular television singing competition series *Operación Triunfo*—similar to *American Idol*—has absolutely destroyed the national recording industry. On the other hand, on a global scale, some 85 percent of all recording production is controlled by five companies (Universal, Warner, Sony, BMG, and EMI). The remaining 15 percent is divided among 10,000—that's right, 10,000—little organizations. In the face of this kind of monopolization, I can't say whether the aforesaid destruction of the recording industry is even undesirable.

This is all, as I said at the outset, discouraging news. But it is bad news for the world of music, not for music itself. This "world" has some importance to music, but should not be confused with it. It has to do with the teaching, distribution, and diffusion of music, not with the musical work in its own right. As I write this obituary for the world of music, someone is avidly opening the plastic wrapper of a CD, and using his or her teeth out of anxiety to listen to it right away. Someone else, full of hope, is buying tickets for the opera, debating the interpretive style of this or that pianist, gossiping about a composer's intimate life, and so on. Indeed, for a certain world of music, *requiescat in pace*, but welcome to the uncertain order of things in which we don't know what role public institutions, educational institutions, and the recording industry will end up playing.

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