

The Language of MUSIC

DERYCK COOKE

(Slow) Gibbons, 1612
p A — play — of — pas-sion



Adagio lamentoso Tchaikovsky 1893
(Strings) *f* *largo* *lamentoso*



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PREFACE

The impulse to produce this book arose out of the following considerations.

When we try to assess the achievement of a great literary artist, one of the chief ways in which we approach his work is to examine it as a report on human experience. We feel that, in his art, he has said something significant in relation to life as it is lived; and that what he has said—whether we call this a 'criticism of life' or a *Weltanschauung* or something else—is as important as the purely formal aspect of his writing. Or rather, these two main aspects of his art—'content' and 'form'—are realized to be ultimately inseparable: ~~what he has said is inextricably bound up with how he has said it; and how he has said it clearly cannot be considered separately from what he has said.~~

The same is unfortunately not felt to be true of the artist who makes his contribution to human culture, not in the language of speech, but in that of music. Music is widely regarded nowadays, not as ~~language~~ at all, but as a 'pure', inexpressive art, like architecture; and even those who do feel it to be some kind of language regard it as an imprecise one, incapable of conveying anything so tangible as an experience of life or an attitude towards it. Thus Albert Roussel spoke of 'the musician . . . alone in the world with his more or less unintelligible language'. And Aaron Copland has expressed a similar opinion, in a slightly less radical way: '*Is there a meaning to music?*'—My answer to that would be "Yes". *Can you state in so many words what the meaning is?*—My answer to that would be "No". Therein lies the difficulty.

Hence, at the present time, attempts to elucidate the 'content' of music are felt to be misguided, to say the least; the writer on musical matters is expected to ignore or only hunt at what the composer had to say, and to concentrate entirely on how he said it. Or, to put it in the contemporary way, he is expected to

Copland
The

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concentrate entirely on the 'form', which is not regarded as 'saying' anything at all. Thus the two inseparable aspects of an expressive art are separated, and one is utterly neglected—much to the detriment of our understanding of the other. Instead of responding to music as what it is—the expression of man's deepest self—we tend to regard it more and more as a purely decorative art; and by analysing the great works of musical expression purely as pieces of decoration, we misapprehend their true nature, purpose, and value. By regarding form as an end in itself, instead of as a means of expression, we make evaluations of composers' achievements which are largely irrelevant and worthless.

But there is another, more serious consequence of our attitude: one whole side of our culture is impoverished, since we deny ourselves the possibility of ~~enriching our understanding of~~ ^{enriching our understanding of} human experience ~~by a specifically musical view of it.~~ After all, if man is ever to fulfil the mission he undertook at the very start—when he first began to philosophize, as a Greek, and evolved the slogan 'Know thyself'—he will have to understand his unconscious self; and the most articulate language of the unconscious is music. But we musicians, instead of trying to understand this language, preach the virtues of refusing to consider it a language at all; when we should be attempting, as literary critics do, to expound and interpret the great masterpieces of our art for the benefit of humanity at large, we concern ourselves more and more with parochial affairs—technical analyses and musicological *minutiae*—and pride ourselves on our detached, de-humanized approach.

This used not to be so. Some years ago it was regarded as the normal procedure to evaluate composers—notably Mozart, Beethoven, and Brahms—according to what they expressed. But unfortunately this approach was too vague and unscientific: the interpretation soon strayed far away from the actual stuff of the music to become a kind of private transcendental self-intoxication with words. And it was no doubt the wild and baseless conclusions of some of the writers of those days that led the aestheticians of our own time to lay an embargo on the interpretation of musical works. Better ignore the whole vexatious question, they must have felt, than wallow in such a morass of subjectivity. What Goethe, Baudelaire, and Kafka said may be

valuable data for the final understanding of humanity; what Beethoven, Berlioz, and Mahler said is certainly not—simply because there is no way of agreeing as to exactly what they did say.

But perhaps we have given up the problem a little too easily. Perhaps, since music is the expression of emotion, and we so strongly distrust emotion nowadays, we have not been eager to come to grips with the problem at all. There is no reason why it should not prove capable of solution, as other problems are. If we cannot at present tell for certain what anything said in the language of music really means—if we continually argue about the 'emotional content' of this or that composition—we should not therefore despair of ever finding an objective basis to work on. It may be that we have just not yet found a way of understanding this language, and that much of our interpretation of it is simply misinterpretation. We too easily assume that our own private interpretations are fixed and immutable; we should remember that any one of us, at any time, may completely misinterpret the 'content' of a piece, and yet still enjoy his experience of it, even though it is based on a misapprehension. When this happens to the musically uninitiated, we smile, but it can just as easily happen to the musically sophisticated, for we none of us really understand the language. It may well be that if X declares that a certain piece is gay, and Y maintains that it is melancholy, then one or other, or even both, have failed to understand what the composer has said. If only we could come to understand the language better, we might well find ourselves agreeing more and more as to what any given piece expresses.

This book is an attempt to bring music back from the intellectual-aesthetic limbo in which it is now lost, and to reclaim it for humanity at large, by beginning the task of actually deciphering its language. It attempts to show that the conception of music as a language capable of expressing certain very definite things is not a romantic aberration, but has been the common unconscious assumption of composers for the past five-and-a-half centuries at least. It attempts to isolate the various means of expression available to the composer—the various procedures in the dimensions of pitch, time, and volume—and to discover what emotional effects these procedures can produce; but more

specifically, it tries to pinpoint the inherent emotional characters of the various notes of the major, minor, and chromatic scales, and of certain basic melodic patterns which have been used persistently throughout our musical history. It also investigates the problem of musical communication, through the various stages from the composer's unconscious to that of the listener; and it offers detailed interpretations of two non-programmatic symphonies—Mozart's Fortieth and Vaughan Williams's Sixth—as specimen examples of how it may perhaps be possible to come to some objective understanding of the 'emotional content' of 'pure' music.

It is hoped that this book will serve as a broad preliminary survey of the ground, and perhaps also as a foundation on which eventually to build a more comprehensive classification of most of the terms of musical language; and that it will thereby make it ultimately possible to understand and assess a composer's work as a report on human experience, just as we do that of a literary artist. It is not imagined, let me hasten to add, that such assessments will take the form of philosophical discussions of conceptual arguments, since music cannot express concepts; nor that they will be 'digests' of the 'meanings' of various works, for the same reason; rather, since music can only express feelings, it is thought that they will probably be in the nature of interpretations of emotional attitudes, somewhat akin to the type of analysis perfected by Wilson Knight for the elucidation of the 'content' of literary works—an examination of the 'images' used, and an interpretation of their emotional and psychological connotations.

The investigation of musical language is confined to Europe, since if music is an international language within a given continent, it is certainly not an inter-continental language. It has also been confined almost entirely to art-music (including modern popular music): although the roots of musical language must certainly lie in folk-music, this approach has been completely rejected, for the simple reason that it is impossible to verify the original emotional impulse of a folk-tune. Even in those many cases where a text has come down in conjunction with the tune, it is impossible to be sure that it is the original text; people are at any time only too capable of taking, say, a gay old tune and writing some melancholy new words for it.

The investigation is further confined to tonal music, i.e. to music in a key, in the widest sense of the word, whether written by Dufay in 1440, Byrd in 1611, Mozart in 1782, or Stravinsky in 1953. It does not in any way attempt to deal with the entirely new musical language which has arisen out of the abrogation of tonality by some composers during the last half-century; since this new language clearly bears little or no relation to the long-established one based on the tonal system.

Nevertheless, if the findings of this book are accepted, a certain widely-held view on the new non-tonal language would now seem, on the face of it, to amount to a logically inescapable conclusion, which can be briefly stated as follows. Since the new language is unrelievedly chromatic by nature, it must be restricted to expressing what chromaticism always was restricted to expressing—what indeed we feel even the very earliest chromaticism of the sixteenth-century Italians still to this day expresses—emotions of the most painful type (though a wide variety of expression can naturally be achieved by presenting these emotions in diverse ways—gently, fiercely, satirically, grotesquely, even jestingly). It may be objected that since this new music makes no use of tonal centres, its persistent chromaticism has not the same expressive connotations as that of tonal music; but expressive connotations it must have, and how else can they be interpreted except in relation to the (much-expanded) tonal system, which ultimately derives its expressive qualities from acoustical facts? Thus, from the purely negative point of view, the fact that the new music shuns the basic acoustical consonances of the octave, fifth, fourth, and triad, suggests that it does not express the simple fundamental sense of being at one with nature and life. This may by no means be the case, of course; it could be that we are just misapprehending the new language, as we have often tended to misapprehend the old. But the burden of proof that it is *not* the case should now be fairly and squarely on the shoulders of non-tonal composers and theorists. If this state of affairs calls for a clear and convincing outline of the *expressive* aims of the new language, with an account of some of the terms of its vocabulary and some of its forms of expression, to offset ever so slightly the present welter of aridly technical, not to say purely mathematical exegesis, no one will be more pleased than the present writer, who whole-heartedly

admires such of this music as he has found expressive of emotion.

I am greatly indebted to Mr. Denis Stevens for placing his vast knowledge of the earlier periods of musical history at my disposal, in the matter of the correct notation and approximate dating of the many musical examples taken from those periods; also to members of the Oxford University Press, for invaluable constructive criticism, which has most fruitfully affected the final shaping of the work. Many thanks also to Miss Virginia Harding and Miss Ruth Lachmann, for their so gladly-given secretarial assistance.

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1 June 1958

D. C.

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WHAT KIND OF AN ART IS MUSIC?

Although all the arts are essentially autonomous, owing to the different materials and techniques which they employ, there is clearly a kind of bond between them. We speak of the 'architecture' of a symphony, and call architecture, in its turn, 'frozen music'. Again, we say that certain writing has a 'sculptural' quality, and sometimes describe a piece of sculpture as 'a poem in stone'.

Admittedly, much of the phraseology which traffics between the arts is purely *metaphorical*, being concerned only with the effect of a work of art. Thus, in calling a statue 'a poem in stone', we merely indicate that its effect on us is of that impalpable kind we normally receive from poetry; we do not make an objective statement about the sculptor's intention or technical procedure. Such a metaphor, while useful for descriptive purposes, cannot help us to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of art.

On the other hand, comparison between one art and another can help towards this end, when the comparison is not *metaphorical*, but *analogical*, being concerned with the artist's *intention* and *technical procedure*. Thus, when we speak of the 'architecture' of a fugue, we are making an objective statement that its composer has constructed it by methods analogous to those of the architect—that he has grouped masses of non-representational material (tone instead of stone) into significant form, governed by the principles of proportion, balance, and symmetry; and this throws some light on a particular type of music. In using such analogies, of course, we must keep in mind the differences inherent in the use of different materials.

Analogies of this kind are continually being made between music and the other arts. Besides speaking of the 'architecture'

of a piece of music, we use the term 'tone-painting', and we say that composers who are preoccupied with expressing character, mood, and feeling, have a leaning towards the 'literary'. And there is no doubt that music can be analogically related to each of these three arts: to architecture, in its quasi-mathematical construction; to painting, in its representation of physical objects; and to literature, in its use of a language to express emotion.

In various periods of musical history, composers have concentrated on one of these three aspects to the partial exclusion of the others. Medieval music was largely architectural in conception: the romantics were much concerned with the literary, the impressionists with the pictorial; modern music has swung back again to the architectural. Yet all three aspects have persisted in all periods: tone-painting and emotionally expressive music date right back to plainsong; and some of the romantics, notably Bruckner and Reger, were nothing if not tonal architects. In a work like Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony, we find all three aspects in a single composition: inspired by a 'literary' idea (the expression of moods and feelings arising out of contact with the countryside), the work is full of tone-painting, and has a perfectly satisfactory 'architectural' design. And in a movement like 'Sind Blitze, sind Donner in Wolken verschwunden?' (Have lightnings and thunders vanished behind the clouds?) in Bach's St. Matthew Passion, the three aspects are actually fused: the whole chorus is at once a piece of musical architecture (imitative polyphony), a tone-painting (of a gathering storm), and a piece of emotional expression (a smouldering and erupting of anger).

Let us now relate music analogically to architecture, painting, and literature, in more detail, and see if this can help us to establish the true nature of music as an art.

We may turn first to the analogy with painting, since this would seem to be the least essential, existing only in the case of a limited number of works, and passages of works. It exists where the composer imitates physical objects in terms of sound, addressed to the ear, as the painter does in terms of light, addressed to the eye. (We need not concern ourselves with painting which does not represent objects, but abstract patterns,

imagination
 sound
 light
 form

since this is rather a case of painting's analogical relationship to music).

There are three ways in which music can represent physical objects. First, by direct imitation of something which emits a sound of definite pitch, such as a cuckoo, a shepherd's pipe, or a hunting horn. Here the parallel with painting is almost exact: the painter can represent the visual but not the aural aspect of the object, the composer the aural but not the visual. (In the case of a cuckoo, the composer may even be said to have the advantage, since to anyone but a naturalist it is a purely aural phenomenon!)

The second way is by approximate imitation of something which emits a sound of indefinite pitch, such as a thunderstorm, a rippling brook, or rustling branches. Here the composer's representation is inevitably less faithful than the painter's: a painting of a storm strikes the eye as a more or less exact reproduction of the appearance of a storm, but a musical representation of a storm strikes the ear as only an approximate reproduction of the sound of a storm. The definite sounds of music are different from the indefinite sounds of nature: rolls on the timpani do not sound exactly like thunder, nor chromatic scales on the violins exactly like the wind. Nevertheless, even here, the composer has a certain compensatory advantage: he can reproduce the sensation of physical movement which the painter can only suggest.

The third way in which music can represent physical objects is by the suggestion or symbolization of a purely visual thing, such as lightning, clouds or mountains, using sounds which have an effect on the ear similar to that which the appearance of the object has on the eye. Here music at once approaches closest to painting, and recedes farthest from it. In its attempt to stimulate the visual faculty, it seeks to usurp the very function of painting; but in so far as it lacks the power of direct communication—being unable to represent the object so that it can be immediately identified without recourse to an explanatory title—it is less analogous with painting than when it confines itself to the imitation of aural phenomena. Knowing, as we do, that the first of Debussy's Three Nocturnes is entitled *Nuages*, we are persuaded into interpreting the shifting patterns of sound in terms of the visual imagination—shifting patterns of light, such

imagination
 sound
 light
 form

clouds, in *Miages*, is achieved by shifting patterns of sound; but shifting patterns may be used to symbolize many things: it is the actual notes in which Debussy chose to embody these patterns that convey his subjective vision of clouds.

To sum up: tone-painting is a legitimate, if subsidiary function of music. Its value increases the more it is used as a vehicle for the composer's subjective experience of the object represented; and it is by means of the actual notes chosen by the composer that the experience is conveyed. Here the analogy with painting ends, since there is obviously no connection between the technical organization of notes and that of paint.¹ The composer's way of conveying his subjective experience is a different one from the painter's; it resides in the 'literary' aspect of music—its use of a tonal language to express moods and feelings—which will be discussed in the section concerned with the analogy between music and literature.

First, however, it should be said that any piece of tone-painting is of negligible value unless it is integrated into some kind of musical structure; and this brings us to our next section, an examination of the analogy between music and architecture.

The final realization of any work of art is achieved through structure, or form; hence each of the arts can be analogically related to architecture, which is itself the visible embodiment of pure form. The power of large-scale organization which made possible the poetry of Dante, the painting of Michelangelo, and the music of Bach, is obviously analogous to the monumental constructive genius needed in architecture; and it was clearly employed in each of the three cases to produce structures which would satisfy the desire of the aesthetic sense for formal harmony, in the way that architectural forms do.

In the case of music, the analogy would seem to be particularly close, in that, as has been mentioned, both composer and architect group masses of non-representational material (pure sound in time, and stone in space) into significant form, governed by the principles of proportion, balance, and symmetry. At first, our analogy looks to be a simple and conclusive

¹ Comparisons such as those of piano-writing with black-and-white drawing, of orchestration with colour, and of a certain type of impressionist orchestration with the *pointilliste* technique in painting, are clearly metaphorical, and cannot bring us a deeper understanding of the nature of music.

one: music is the audible, as architecture is the visible, embodiment of pure form. Stravinsky adheres to this view of the matter: 'One could not better define the sensation produced by music than by saying that it is identical with that evoked by the contemplation of the interplay of architectural forms'.¹

But let us look into the analogy a little more closely. How far can we apply it? To all music, or only to certain kinds of music? It is easy to justify the common application of it to some of the greatest music ever written—the contrapuntal masterpieces of the old polyphonic composers, down to and including Bach. In these, the themes are sometimes scarcely more emotionally expressive than bricks or blocks of stone (e.g. those of Bach's 'great' organ fugues in A minor and G minor), and are used simply as raw material capable of being built up into large-scale sound-constructions by means of interwoven lines, various sections being balanced one against another in size, until their combined mass makes possible a final climax, setting a seal on the whole like a tower or a dome. Moreover, the interwoven lines actually 'support' one another in a quasi-mathematical system of stresses and strains. The old polyphonic composers might truly be regarded as tonal architects, in that, when they wanted to write, say, invertible counterpoint at the twelfth, they had to work according to the following table if the result was to be satisfactory:

1	=	12	7	=	6
2	=	11	8	=	5
3	=	10	9	=	4
4	=	9	10	=	3
5	=	8	11	=	2
6	=	7	12	=	1

What is more, the experience provided by this kind of music is definitely akin to that provided by architecture—the enjoyment of the beauty of pure form. What attracts us is not so much the thematic material as the satisfying way in which it is woven together; not so much, say, the figure-subject, as the masterly working-out of it in *stretto*, to produce a sonorous climax.

The analogy holds good, of course, for all music that is

¹ *Chronicle of My Life*, translated from the French, p. 93.

primarily contrapuntal: for the non-expressive fugal music of later periods (lesser, both in amount and calibre), and for that limited amount of modern music in which non-expressive material is organized contrapuntally by means of quasi-mathematical 'laws' similar to those which governed the old-style polyphony (much *avant-garde* serial music, and the music of Hindemith, for example). In all these cases, the raw material is nothing, the intellectual construction everything, and the impact on the listener almost entirely a formal and aesthetic one. But once we step outside the limited world of polyphony, in which the intellect predominates, the analogy becomes vague and unprofitable, for two reasons. Firstly, the difference in the materials comes to the fore: the musical material of non-polyphonic music is not ~~in~~ expressive like that of architecture, but is charged with ~~human~~ feeling. Secondly, in the manipulation of such material, ~~purely intellectual~~ techniques are replaced by methods in which the intellect is to some extent at the service of the feelings.

If a theme of the type used in polyphonic music acts very much like a brick or a block of stone (as something of no importance in itself, only useful as raw material to be built into a structure), the thematic material of other types of music—opera, song, symphony—is important in itself, being emotionally expressive, as is the material of painting and literature. The experience derived from a piece of polyphony, like that derived from a piece of architecture, consists mainly of a perception and admiration of its form; but in most cases, the experience derived from a piece of non-polyphonic music, like that derived from a painting or a literary work, is only partly referable to an appreciation of its form: much of it derives from our emotional response to its actual material. A typical contrapuntal point or fugue-subject has no real significance until it takes its place in the construction as a whole; but a theme in a sonata, like a hand in a painting or a line in a poem, is already of absorbing emotional interest in itself, even if its full significance is only appreciated when its integration into the overall form is understood. Indeed, in music, as to a greater degree in literature, a work can be outstanding in spite of being cast into a most unsatisfying form: we listen to works like *Boris Godunov* and Delius's Violin Concerto, as we read books like *Tristram Shandy*.

and *Moby Dick*, not for their formal beauty, but for the fascination of their material.

Actually, in many cases, the thematic material of polyphony is itself expressive, even highly expressive: a few examples are the opening Kyrie of Bach's B minor Mass, several of Purcell's string fantasias, 'For with His Stripes' in *Messiah*, Mozart's C minor Fugue for two pianos and the Quam Olim Abrahæ in his Requiem Mass. Indeed, musical material (as it is hoped to show in this book) is by its very nature expressive; though of course its expressiveness can sometimes be extremely slight. Nevertheless, broadly speaking, the architectural analogy holds good for all polyphony, whether expressive or inexpressive, in that the construction is primarily intellectual and the impact primarily formal, and it breaks down outside polyphony because the construction is guided by feeling and the impact is to a considerable extent emotional.

Outside polyphony, in fact, it dwindles to the mere truism that a piece of music, no less than a piece of architecture, must have some kind of shape. Turning away from Bach's polyphony to another type of work by him, the St. Matthew Passion for example, we shall be hard put to it to discover any analogy with architectural construction at all. What small amount of polyphony it does contain is mostly 'free', and all of it is dramatic in conception—a portrayal of the hubbub of a crowd of people; and for the most part the work consists of operatic-type recitative, highly emotional arias of the melody-and-accompaniment kind, and traditional chorales in which the primitive emotions of folk-music are intensified by Bach's extraordinary command of deeply expressive harmony. Again, when we turn to the symphony (classical or romantic) we might just as well (more profitably, in fact) compare its structure to that of a drama, a succession of contrasted events in time following one another by a chain of cause and effect;¹ and an opera, of course, just is a sung drama. A work like Debussy's *L'après-midi d'un faune* is constructed (if so tough a word may be used) more like the poem to which it was intended to form a prelude—as a succession of changing moods melting in and out of one another according to the logic of emotion; and a song just is a sung poem.

¹ Brückner alone of the symphonists found an 'architectural' way of composing his symphonies—balancing masses of melodic harmony one against another; but this is an isolated phenomenon which need not concern us here.

Clearly then, we cannot press the architectural analogy too far (as many are intent on doing at the present juncture of musical history). It has really just as limited an application as the analogy with painting: only a certain type of music, to a certain degree, can legitimately be regarded as pure, quasi-mathematical form. Other music has a different kind of form, and has a wider significance than is imparted to us by its form alone, being expressive of the composer's subjective experience.

So we may say that, except within very closely defined limits, music is neither a representative art, like painting, nor a purely formal art, like architecture. What kind of an art is it, then?

In some way or other, we feel, it conveys to us the subjective experience of composers. But in what way? It is easy to see how the thing is done in painting (by direct but subjective representation of physical objects) and in literature (by direct but subjective description of physical objects, thoughts, characters, and emotions); but how can it be done in music, which can only represent a few physical objects, vaguely suggest a few others, and make no explicit description of anything at all? To try and answer this question, we must turn to a consideration of the analogy between music and literature, and an investigation of the problem of music as language.

But first, a fairly lengthy digression will be necessary, in order to try and settle a vexed point. So far, this book has been persistently begging the question whether music does in fact express composers' subjective experience—a question which everyone once assumed instinctively had an affirmative answer, but which is assumed equally instinctively by many modern musicians to have been answered once and for all in the negative. If we are to establish the right to make any analogy at all between music and literature, the question will have to be reopened, and some reasons sought to support an affirmative answer. Not that we can hope to find any clinching proof; what proof can there be in these matters? In an age which doubts every one of the old intuitive assumptions, there can be no definite answers—not even the new confident negative ones (a fact which may well serve as encouragement at the start). What

we may hope to do is to show that there is as much to be said on this side as on that; that the question is still open, whatever the fashionable opinion may be, and that one person's conviction is as good as another's.

It is not the intention here to investigate every theory of music considered as expression; theorists are notoriously limited by abstractions. I propose to deal with the matter in a more concrete way, setting forth the current case against the view of music as expression, in the words of two of our most outstanding present-day composers; and adducing several arguments on the other side—the views of other composers, the view of a poet, the experience of listeners in general, and the practice of composers in general.

First, the negative view, in the words of Stravinsky: 'I consider that music is, by its very nature, powerless to express anything at all, whether a feeling, an attitude of mind, a psychological mood, a phenomenon of nature, etc. . . . if, as is nearly always the case, music appears to express something, this is only an illusion, and not a reality'.¹ Obviously, everything depends on what Stravinsky means by 'express': if he means 'express explicitly, as words can', his remark is a truism; if he means 'convey to the listener in any way whatsoever', he is merely offering an expression of opinion, without adducing any proof.

Composers' theories tend to be based on their own artistic needs, and it is evident that Stravinsky, bent as he has been on removing music as far as possible from the romantic aesthetic, would naturally formulate a theory of this kind. It is an extremist theory, the product of an intensely individual composer's mind; but it has been widely accepted, as coming from such an eminent source, and its effect on contemporary aesthetic thought has been most harmful. Aaron Copland, himself a disciple of Stravinsky, and a composer who cannot by the wildest stretch of the imagination be called a romantic, has justly described Stravinsky's attitude in this matter as 'intransigent', saying that 'it may be due to the fact that so many people have tried to read different meanings into so many pieces'. He also adds the following: 'Heaven knows it is difficult enough to say what it is that a piece of music means, to say it finally so that

¹ Stravinsky, *Chronicle of My Life*, translated from the French, pp. 91-2.

everyone is satisfied with your explanation. But that should not lead one to the other extreme of denying to music the right to be expressive.¹

It is worth noting that, until Stravinsky came out with his flat statement to the contrary, everyone naturally assumed that music was expressive. Let us call in another, earlier composer, not an out-and-out romantic of the Wagnerian type, but one firmly grounded in the classical tradition.

Mendelssohn once wrote: 'People usually complain that music is so ambiguous; that it is so doubtful what they ought to think when they hear it; whereas everyone understands words. With me it is entirely the converse. And not only with regard to an entire speech, but also with individual words; these, too, seem to me to be so ambiguous, so vague, and so easily misunderstood in comparison with genuine music, which fills the soul with a thousand things better than words. The thoughts which are expressed to me by a piece of music which I love are not too indefinite to be put into words, but on the contrary too definite. And so I find, in every attempt to express such thoughts, that something is right, but at the same time something is unsatisfying in all of them. . . .'²

Now when Mendelssohn comes to give examples of *thoughts* (*Gedanken*) which music gives rise to, we find he is using the word in the generalized sense of 'mental activities', and in fact means *feelings*, rather; since he specifically mentions resignation, melancholy, and the praise of God. And those who have found music expressive of anything at all (the majority of mankind) have found it expressive of emotions. Let us here call in another witness, not even a semi-romantic composer this time, but one of the clearest-minded of classical poets.

Dryden, in his 'Song for St. Cecilia's Day', showed that he regarded music as emotionally expressive:

The soft complaining flute

In dying notes discovers

The woes of hopeless lovers,

Whose dirge is whisper'd by the warbling lute.

¹ Aaron Copland, *What to Listen For in Music*, Chap. 2.

² Mendelssohn, Letter to Marc André Souchay; Berlin, 5 October 1842.

Sharp violins proclaim

Their jealous pangs and desperation,

Fury, frantic indignation,

Depths of pains, and height of passion

For the fair disdainful dame.

No doubt in Dryden's mind at all! As he said earlier in the same poem: 'What passion cannot Music raise and quell?' And emotional reaction to music has been the experience of listeners everywhere. One has only to read descriptions of musical compositions in programmes or musical biographies, whether in English or any other language, to find the writers limping in their more pedestrian way after Dryden: confident themes, agonizing chords, wistful melodies, ferocious rhythms, jubilant climaxes. . . .

And the composers: what did they themselves think they were doing? Neither Stravinsky nor Mendelssohn tells us, but one of the most classical of all composers has done. Listen to Mozart: 'Now, as for Belmonte's aria in A major—'O wie ängstlich, O wie feurig'—do you know how it is expressed (*ausgedrückt*)?—even the throbbing of his loving heart is indicated (*angezeigt*)—the two violins in octaves. . . . One sees the trembling—the wavering—one sees how his swelling breast heaves—this is expressed (*exprimirt*) by a *crescendo*—one hears the whispering and the sighing—which is expressed (*ausgedrückt*) by the first violins, muted, and a flute in unison.¹ Nothing could be more definite than that.

Again, here is Schubert, writing home about the reception of his 'Ave Maria' at a private concert: 'They also wondered greatly at my picty, which I have expressed (*ausgedrückt*) in a Hymn to the Holy Virgin, and which, it appears, grips every soul and turns it to devotion. I think this is due to the fact that I never force devotion in myself and never compose hymns or prayers of that kind, unless I am overcome by it unawares; but then it is usually the right and true devotion.'²

In any case, it is undeniable (as Chapters 2 and 3 attempt to demonstrate) that composers have consciously or unconsciously

¹ Mozart, letter to his father, Vienna, 26 September 1781, concerning *The Seraglio*.

² Schubert, letter to his father and stepmother, Steyer, 25 (28?) July 1825.

used music as a language, from at least 1400 onwards—a language never formulated in a dictionary, because by its very nature it is incapable of such treatment. A few examples may suffice here. A phrase of two notes (the minor sixth of the scale falling to the fifth) is to be found expressing anguish in music by Josquin (*Déploration*); Morley ('Ah, break, alas!'); Bach (Crucifixus in the B minor Mass); Mozart (*Don Giovanni*—Donna Anna's grief at her father's death); Schubert (*The Erl King*—'my father, my father'); Mussorgsky (*Boris Godunov*—the Simpleton's Lament); Verdi (the end of *La Traviata*); Wagner (the so-called Servitude motive in *The Ring*); Schoenberg (*A Survivor from Warsaw*—'you had been separated from your children'); Stravinsky (*The Rake's Progress*—'In a foolish dream'); Britten (*Donne Sonnet* 'Oh might these sighs and tears'); and in innumerable other places in the music of these and practically all other composers.¹ Another example is a phrase of 1-3-5-6-5 in the major scale (sometimes with passing notes), used to express a simple, innocent, blessed joy: found in countless plainsong themes and Christmas carols; in Wilbye ('As fair as morn'); Handel (*Messiah*—Pastoral Symphony); Humperdinck (Children's Prayer in *Hansel and Gretel*); Busoni (Easter Hymn in *Doktor Faustus*); Vaughan Williams ('So shalt thou enter in' and 'Holy, holy, holy' in *The Pilgrim's Progress*); and in many other places.²

Again, we may note how the tragic subjects of the St. Matthew Passion and *Die Winterreise* forced on Bach and Schubert a heavy (almost too heavy) preponderance of minor keys; while the brighter subjects of the Easter Oratorio and most of *Die schöne Müllerin* turned them inevitably towards the major. Did anyone ever set the Resurrexit of the Mass to slow, soft, minor music? Or the Crucifixus to quick, loud, major strains? Try singing the word 'Crucifixus' to the music of Handel's Hallelujah Chorus, or the word 'Hallelujah' to the music of the Crucifixus in Bach's B minor Mass! Stravinsky himself has complied with the common practice in these matters. In the *Symphony of Psalms*, the first two movements (settings of sombre prayer-psalms) are in E minor and C minor respectively, while the last (a setting of a praise-psalm) moves between E flat major and C major. And his *Oedipus Rex* is mainly in minor keys, his *Rake's Progress*

¹ See Exs. 48, 50, and 62.

² See Ex. 64.

mainly in major ones. Within the orbit of tonality, composers have always been bound by certain expressive laws of the medium, laws which are analogous to those of language.¹

So we must admit that composers have set out to express emotion, and that listeners have felt it to be present in their music. But we must still consider Stravinsky's opinion that if, as is nearly always the case, music appears to express something, this is only an illusion, and not a reality.²

This point of view has been set forth in greater detail by Hindemith in his book *A Composer's World*. His theory is that music does have an emotive effect on the listener, but the apparent emotions are not those of the composer, nor do they arouse the real emotions of the listener; in Stravinsky's words 'this is only an illusion'. Hindemith says: 'Music cannot express the composer's feelings. Let us suppose a composer is writing an extremely funeral piece, which may require three months of intensive work. Is he, during this three-months period, thinking of nothing but funerals? Or can he, in those hours that are not devoted to his work because of his desire to eat and sleep, put his grief on ice, so to speak, and be gay until the moment when he resumes his sombre activity? If he really expressed his feelings accurately during the time of composing and writing, we would be presented with a horrible motley of expressions, among which the grievous part would necessarily occupy but a small space.'³ Later, he continues: 'If the composer himself thinks he is expressing his own feelings, we have to accuse him of lack of observation. Here is what he really does: he knows by experience that certain patterns of tone-setting correspond with certain emotional reactions on the listener's part. Writing these patterns frequently and finding his observations confirmed, in anticipating the listener's reaction he believes himself to be in the same mental situation.'⁴

The naïveté and illogicality of this analysis, coming from a composer of Hindemith's mental stature, is truly regrettable. But we have to remember again that composers write out of their own experience; and we know that Hindemith is, and sees himself as, a superior kind of craftsman, not an 'inspired genius'—

¹ The ambiguities of the major-minor opposition (as shown, for example, by the Dead March in *Saul* being in the major) are dealt with in Chapter 2.

² Hindemith, *A Composer's World*, pp. 3-5-6.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

that, in fact, he rather derisively denies the existence of inspiration: 'Melodies can, in our time, be constructed rationally. We do not need to believe in benign fairies, bestowing angelic tunes upon their favourites.'¹ Being this kind of a composer, he is unable, despite his intellectual insight into musical construction and his laudable concern for music's moral values, to understand the deep unconscious urges that gave birth to music of the deeply emotive kind—viz., most of the music written between 1400 and the present day.

There seems to be in Hindemith's analysis an almost wilful refusal to understand that an artist has two separate selves: the everyday, conscious self, which is a prey to many passing trivial emotions, and a deep, unconscious, creative self, which is always there to return to, 'inspiration' permitting, and which is apt to intrude itself intermittently, as 'inspiration', during his everyday life. If Hindemith has no personal experience of this, surely he has heard of the fits of 'absent-mindedness' that some great artists have been subject to, when this occurred? Surely he must have some conception of the way in which this unconscious creative self persists beneath the distractions of everyday life, concentrated on its all-important realities?² When we state that a composer, writing a lengthy piece over a long period, expresses his emotions in it, we really ought not to have to explain that we mean his deep, permanent, significant emotions, not the superficial fleeting ones called forth by trivial pleasures and disappointments.

There is only one way to make clear the superficiality of Hindemith's 'realistic' analysis, and that is to take a concrete example. Let us consider the *Eroica* Symphony, as it came to Beethoven. We know that Beethoven was intoxicated by the libertarian ideals of the French Revolution, and that, at first regarding Napoleon as the hero who would liberate mankind, he conceived the idea of composing a symphony in his honour.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

² 'So much in writing depends on the superficiality of one's days. One may be preoccupied with shopping and income-tax returns, but the stream of the unconscious continues to flow undisturbed, solving problems, planning ahead: one sits down sterile and dispirited at the desk, and suddenly the words come as though from the air. . . the work has been done while one slept or shopped or talked with friends.' (Graham Greene, speaking through the character of Maurice Bendrix, the narrator in *The End of the Affair*, Chap. 2.)

Now how would this state of mind function in Beethoven? The heroic, libertarian ideal was (as were 'nature', the 'immortal beloved' and 'fate') the subject of one of his most intense emotions, which was liable to flare up at the slightest provocation (as we know from several anecdotes). And we know that he conceived the symphony to express this burning, persistent emotion, apparently having a vision of the work as a whole, and no doubt being possessed with certain musical themes for various parts of it. Now how did these themes originate? Let us take the Funeral March, since Hindemith's example is 'an extremely funereal piece'.

One of the emotions aroused in Beethoven by the heroic, libertarian ideal was, as we know, a deep grief for the unhappy fate that awaited many and many a liberator—that of annihilation. Wherefore he must have felt the compulsion to express this feeling in his symphony, in the natural place: the slow movement would be a Funeral March. Now, the laws of the language of tonality demanded a slow march-tempo, the minor key (relative minor, obviously, C minor, which was the 'tragic' key of Beethoven's great predecessor, Mozart), and a mournful theme. To imagine that these necessities were formulated, one by one, by Beethoven's conscious mind, is ridiculous; they must have crystallized, unconsciously, into the main C minor theme, built around the classical tragic formula of the minor triad.¹ Beethoven's unconscious mind thus embodied his own personal emotion concerning the death of a hero in the time-honoured terms of musical language—but in his own personal way: gradually it stamped on the raw material—the C minor triad—the impress of his own individual emotion so strongly that the resultant theme was 'original' and 'characteristic', and not to be confused with the slow C minor world of Mozart's *Masonic Funeral Music* or Wagner's *Siegfried's Funeral March*, both in the same tradition. (I say 'gradually' since the theme had to be hacked into shape, as was so often the case with Beethoven: the conscious craftsman had to take over, working towards the ideal form of expression envisaged by the creative unconscious.)

Let us compare, for a moment, a similar case in literature: Tennyson, writing his *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington*. The same intense personal emotion (not in any way affected

¹ See Ex. 80.

by the fact that, as Poet Laureate, he was obliged to write the Ode, since one has to admit that Tennyson's heart and soul were obviously in the project, whatever one's personal reaction to the subject of the poem); and the same inevitable recourse to certain basic elements of language with time-honoured associations:

Bury the Great Duke

With an empire's lamentation,

Let us bury the Great Duke

To the noise of the mourning of a mighty nation.

There is the same heavy stress in the rhythm, the same obsessive repetition, the same unmistakably individual use of well-worn language (italicized here), and no doubt there was the same craftsman's struggle to hew the first inspiration into the dimly-apprehended ideal expression.

Now let us remember that, in both cases, the artist must have been disturbed by everyday distractions before the piece was completed; perhaps a visitor to entertain, or a business letter to write. Can it be conceived that the creative current (the be-all and end-all of these two different men's lives) would not be running along unchecked underneath, still concerned with the theme so dear to it? And on the (no doubt impatient) return to the manuscript, would not the old *personal* feeling of grief, concerned with the death of a hero, come flooding back as powerfully as ever, possibly giving a new impetus to continue with another aspect of that obsessive emotion?

Let us admit what is obvious to common sense: that Beethoven used the traditional language of music to express his own personal emotions, and that everyday interruptions did not prevent these emotions from persisting throughout the composition—and beyond it, indeed, for *Egmont* was still to come, and *Coriolan*.

We must now turn to the second part of Hindemith's theory—that concerning the emotional reaction of the listener. He says: 'If music does not express feelings, how then does it affect the listener's emotions? There is no doubt that listeners, performers, and composers alike can be profoundly moved by perceiving, performing, or imagining music, and consequently music must touch on something in their emotional life that

brings them into this state of excitation. But if these mental reactions were feelings, they would not change as rapidly as they do, and they would not begin and end precisely with the musical stimulus that aroused them. If we experience a real feeling of grief—that is, grief not caused or released by music—it is not possible to replace it at a moment's notice and without any plausible reason with the feeling of wild gaiety; and gaiety, in turn, cannot be replaced by complacency after a fraction of a second. . . . The reactions which music evokes are not feelings, but they are the images, memories of feelings. . . . We cannot have musical reactions of emotional significance, unless we have once had real feelings, the memory of which is revived by the musical impression. Reactions of a grievous nature can be aroused by music only if a former experience of real grief was stored up in our memory and is now again portrayed in a dream-like fashion. . . .¹ Again, he says: 'Paintings, poems, sculptures, works of architecture . . . do not—contrary to music—release images of feelings; instead they speak to the real, untransformed, and unmodified feelings.'²

It is difficult here to know where to start—there are so many fallacies. Let us return to the *Eroica* Funeral March, and consider the listener's reactions. In the slow, heavy, dragging rhythm, the minor key, and the mournful melody, he will recognize the type of the funeral march, and Beethoven's own individuality of expression, with its indefinable grandeur, will convey that it is a funeral march written by a noble mind in connection with a noble ideal. Will the music awaken 'former experience of real grief, stored-up in the memory, and now portrayed in a dream-like fashion? Surely nothing of the sort: the listener's capacity for feeling grief (certainly intensified by any strong personal grief he has experienced) will be aroused by the music into feeling (through the distorting medium of his own temperament, admittedly) the personal grief of Beethoven, made incarnate by him in that music. *He will feel as he has never felt before.* (In listening to Chopin's Funeral March, he will experience another quite different personal grief, belonging to a quite different man—a grief more loaded with despair—and again, he will feel as he never felt before.) The listener thus makes direct contact with the mind of a great artist, 'interpreting' his expres-

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

² *Ibid.*, p. 49.

sion of emotion in the same way that he will 'interpret' an emotional letter from a friend: in both cases, mind meets mind, as far as is possible. And if the listener has no capacity for feeling real grief (as opposed to petty chagrin), he will, of course, not really comprehend the Funeral March at all.

Hindemith's two reasons why musical emotions are not 'real' feelings will not hold water. In the first place, emotions called forth by music do *not* 'begin and end with the musical stimulus that aroused them': begin, yes, since a specific emotion cannot be awakened without a stimulus; but end, no, since it is many people's experience that the feelings aroused by a piece of music can persist for days afterwards, without memory of the actual notes that caused them. In the second place, the idea that diverse emotions cannot succeed one another swiftly is applicable only to placid temperaments: Hindemith himself is no doubt possessed of remarkable equanimity, but more volatile people often find themselves switching suddenly from depression to gaiety with or without external stimulus. And this is found quite commonly in art itself—in literature for example. One has only to consider the violent transitions of mood, from deep gloom to joyous ecstasy, in such a poem as Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale*.

In any case, what is meant by saying that the emotions aroused by the other arts are more 'real' than those of music? In what sense, for instance, is the feeling of grief evoked by the *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington* more 'real' than that evoked by the *Eroica* Funeral March? Surely not that Tennyson exhorts us, in explicit words, to 'bury the Great Duke', whereas Beethoven 'only' expresses the inner feeling of grief on a hero's death? In both cases, the feeling of grief is stimulated by the use of an emotionally affecting language in a particular way. And how far, in both cases, can the grief be said to be 'real'? Not in the sense that one's own grief for a personal loss is real, but in the sense that all great art stimulates our own real emotional capacities to partake vicariously of the artist's experience, as we do of our friends' experiences when they speak to us of them. In one sense, emotion conveyed through music is more real than that conveyed through the other arts—because it is more *pure*, less bound down to a 'local habitation and a name'. The true expressive difference between the arts is that painting conveys feeling through a visual image, and literature through a

rationally intelligible statement, but music conveys the naked feeling direct. As the composer felt, so we may hear, and feel: what he saw, or thought, does not interfere.

This brings us to a further difficulty; the supposed vagueness of the emotions expressed in music. Hindemith, like those of whom Mendelssohn spoke, finds music ambiguous. 'One given piece of music may cause remarkably diverse reactions in different listeners. As an illustration of this statement, I like to mention the second movement of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, which I have found leads some people into a pseudo feeling of profound melancholy, while another group takes it for a kind of scurrilous scherzo, and a third for a subdued kind of pastorate. Each group is justified in judging as it does.'¹

Hindemith is undoubtedly right in his observation that people react in different emotional ways to a given piece of music, but his statement that each reaction is equally justifiable fails to take a simple psychological point into account. Could it not be that some listeners are incapable of understanding the feeling of the music properly?² This can even happen in the explicit world of literature: I have seen Edmund in *King Lear* played as a superficially cynical butterfly, and the audience reacted accordingly, with giggles; but a close reading of Shakespeare's text does not justify this conception in the least. Similarly, the great German actor, Gründgens, plays Goethe's Mephistopheles as a self-tormenting fallen angel. And if actors can so distort the emotional make-up of a part, one wonders how many people read, say, Shelley's *Ode to a Skylark* as a pretty and pleasing piece of poetry, or take *Moby Dick* to be merely a stirring sea-story.

The fact is that people can only react to the emotions expressed in a work of art according to their own capacity to feel those emotions. Hindemith describes what too often happens (taking it as a general rule for all listeners): 'The difference in interpretation stems from the difference in memory-images [of emotions] the listeners provide, and the unconscious selection is made on the basis of the sentimental value or the degree

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

² The answer is, of course, yes; and this explains why 'tests', in which the reactions of a random collection of individuals are classified and analysed, prove nothing. Sympathetic understanding is a pre-requisite: what would be the use of applying such a test to, say, one of Blake's prophetic books?

of importance each image has: the listener chooses the one which is dearest and closest to his mental disposition, or which represents a most common, most easily accessible feeling.¹ Such people, whom one knows to exist, are just plainly unmusical: suppose that such a listener's 'memory-image' has no connection with the emotions expressed by the music at all? If someone were to declare the *Eroica* Funeral March to be a sanguine piece, we should unhesitatingly accuse him of being emotionally undeveloped. Such a person would understand *Hamlet* as a tragedy only by virtue of the explicit meaning of the words, and remain utterly oblivious of the dark emotional undertones of the poetry. The truly musical person, with a normal capacity to respond to emotion, immediately apprehends the emotional content of a piece of music to the degree that he can experience it.

Ought we not always to be trying to expand our capacity for comprehending what the composer is trying to express, rather than accept the first 'stock response' of our emotions? One is not entirely at the mercy of one's superficial feelings; it is always possible to penetrate deeper. For example, my own (and others') experience of Mozart's major-key music has been: (1) in childhood, pretty music; (2) in adolescence, graceful and elegant, but trivial music; (3) in maturity, graceful and elegant music, often shot through with deep and disturbing emotions. Here I would unhesitatingly maintain that in cases 1 and 2, we were not really understanding Mozart at all.

Let us now examine the second movement of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony. It is in the minor, has a heavy monotonous rhythm, and its theme opens with twelve repetitions of the same note, marking that rhythm; also, the movement has a 'trio' section in the major. It should hardly be necessary to point out that these are the emotive elements of the Funeral March. Consider Beethoven's own *Marcia Funebre* in the Piano Sonata in A flat, Op. 26, and that of Chopin in his Sonata in B flat minor. Consider also Schubert's later use of exactly the same rhythm (again to repeated notes) in his 'Death and the Maiden'. The two main differences between the *Allegretto* of the Seventh Symphony and the genuine funeral march is that the rhythm is not dotted, and the tempo is rather quicker. (Much depends on the con-

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

ductor's tempo, of course; Beethoven is reported to have said he should have marked the movement *Andante*, which would bring it nearer to the real funeral march tempo.) The absolute individuality of the movement is that it is a rather lighter, more gentle type of funeral march: it is, in fact, a restrained elegy, rather than a heavy lament. But a 'scurrious scherzo'? A 'subdued pastorage'? One is bound to regard anyone who reacts in this way as either superficial, unmusical, or unsympathetic to Beethoven. If anything is needed to clinch the argument, there is that forceful opening and closing minor chord, with the fifth uppermost—one of the most 'tragic' chords in music. Compare the *Marcia Funebre* in the Sonata in A flat, Op. 26, the 'Fate' motive in *The Ring*, the horn chord preceding Rudolph's outcry on Mimmi's death, in *La Bohème*, and the opening of 'Sanctus fortis' in *The Dream of Gerontius*: different colours, different registers, different dynamics, different contexts, but the essentially painful connotation is obvious in them all.

This interpretation of the *Allegretto* cannot be dismissed as being out of keeping with the mood of the symphony, since the movement fulfils a musical and 'extra-musical' function similar to that of the Funeral March in the *Eroica*. Of course, no words can ever describe precisely the emotion of this movement, or any other. The emotion is, in Mendelssohn's words, 'too definite' to be transcribed into the ambiguous medium of words. However, the emotion is there, is real; and unless the listener recognizes, consciously or unconsciously, the relationship of the movement to the basic conception of the funeral march, his experience of the music will be false; and once this relationship is pointed out to one who is quite unaware of it, it can revolutionize his whole emotional response to the work, unless he sincerely cannot (or obstinately will not) feel the connection.

Of course, to a more subtle degree, a piece of music does convey something different to each normally responsive listener. Here is how Aaron Copland puts it: 'Listen . . . to the forty-eight fugue themes of Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier [sic. Clavier]. Listen to each theme, one after another. You will soon realize that each theme mirrors a different world of feeling. You will also soon realize that the more beautiful a theme seems to you the harder it is to find any word that will describe it to your complete satisfaction. Yes, you will certainly know whether

it is a gay theme or a sad one. . . . Now study the sad one a little closer. Try to pin down the exact quality of its sadness. Is it pessimistically or resignedly sad; is it fatefully sad or smilingly sad? Let us suppose that you are fortunate and can describe to your own satisfaction in so many words the exact meaning of your chosen theme. There is still no guarantee that anyone else will be satisfied. Nor need they be. The important thing is that each one feel for himself the specific expressive quality of a theme, or, similarly, of an entire piece of music. And if it is a great work of art, don't expect it to mean exactly the same thing to you each time you return to it.¹

Indeed, the same applies in the more explicit field of literature: the idea that there are various layers of feeling and meaning in a poem, say, is a commonplace of literary criticism. Or again, listen to two actors of widely differing temperaments reciting the same poem: it will have quite a different emotional effect in each case. And are we not still arguing as to the precise emotional and intellectual significance of Goethe's *Faust* and Kafka's *The Trial*? Nevertheless, the broad general feeling, in both literature and music, gets over; and some, by intuitive sympathy, get nearer to it than others. *Faust* and Beethoven's Fifth Symphony are felt to be (using the broadest possible terms) 'optimistic', whereas Kafka's *The Trial* and Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony are felt to be 'pessimistic', and all four works have many facets to which all react differently, but in the same general way.

But anyone who conceives a quasi-funeral-march movement to be a 'kind of scurrilous scherzo' must be considered emotionally abnormal (or simply unmusical) to a degree.

One final difficulty remains. Is the traditional language of music, to which we have referred, a genuine emotional language, whose terms actually possess the inherent power to awaken certain definite emotions in the listener, or is it a collection of *formulae* attached by habit over a long period to certain verbally explicit emotions in masses, operas, and songs, which produce in the listener a series of conditioned reflexes?

It seems most likely that the answer is simply 'both'. It would be useless to deny that the continuous and consistent use of cer-

¹ Aaron Copland, *ibid.*, Chap. 2.

tain terms of musical language throughout five centuries or more must have conditioned us to accept them without question; and it must have helped to intensify their effect, pinpoint their character, and codify them clearly. But it is difficult to believe that there is no more to it than that. In the first place, one can only wonder how (to quote Hindemith) 'certain patterns of tone-setting' ever came in the first place to 'correspond with certain emotional reactions on the listener's part', unless the correspondences were inherent, as are, for example, those between certain faces that we pull and certain emotions we intend them to express—delight, scorn, or disgust. Again, it seems surprising that throughout five centuries or more all European composers without exception—some of them violently revolutionary in other respects—should have accepted the established connotations of the various terms without demur (see the music examples in Chapters 2 and 3), and that this has proved the only unchanging aspect of music. One might have expected a revolutionary composer to try and cut loose from these connotations—to insist on using, say, the major 1-3-5-6-5 of innocent joy to express some dark and evil emotion; but nothing of this kind has been attempted.¹ In fact, it is possible to discover, as Chapter 2 tries to show, close natural correspondences between the emotive effects of certain notes of the scale and their positions in the acoustic hierarchy known as the harmonic series; it seems improbable that the 'strength' of the fifth and the 'joy' of the major third, for example, should not be inherent in their 'basic' positions in the series.

Ultimately, it is for the reader to make up his own mind; in the meantime, the foregoing may perhaps be taken as reasonable support for the view that music is a language of the emotions, and we may proceed to consider in more detail the analogy between music and literature.

The analogy between music and literature, then, is that both make use of a language of sounds for the purpose of expression. But the analogy is only valid on the plane of emotional expression, since abstract intellectual statements such as 'I think,

¹ Actually, with the advent of atonal and twelve-note music, we have at last witnessed a revolution which implies a total break with the past, a repudiation of even the old terms of musical language, and an attempt to recondition the listener to a new set. Whether it will be successful is not yet clear.

therefore I am' are outside the scope of music, and the power to describe the outside world belongs to the analogy with painting in the case of both arts ('tone-painting' and 'word-painting').

The analogy can best be understood on the primitive level. The most feasible theory of the origin of language is that it began as inarticulate, purely emotional cries of pleasure and pain; and some of these utterances still survive in the two languages—speech and music—which have grown out of them. A groan of 'Ah!' uttered by a character in an opera on a two-note phrase of definite pitch is hardly different from a groan of 'Ah!' uttered by a character in a play at indefinite pitch; the effect is equally emotive in both cases. An example is the wailing of Mime in Scene 3 of *The Ringold*: transfer these notes to an instrument, as Wagner does, and one can say that here is a basic term in the emotional vocabulary of music, stemming from a basic term in the emotional vocabulary of speech. It is, in fact, our two-note figure mentioned earlier (flat sixth falling to fifth).¹

Beyond such simple cases, however, the analogy becomes less close, though still close enough to be fruitful. In literature, the inarticulate cries of primitive man have become elaborated into words, i.e., sounds which possess associations with objects, ideas and feelings—clear, rationally intelligible, but arbitrary associations; whereas in music, they have become elaborated into notes, i.e., sounds which have clear but not rationally intelligible associations, rather inherent associations, with the basic emotions of mankind. Nevertheless, the diverse effects of these two different kinds of sound have a close connection in that they both awaken in the hearer an emotional response: the difference is that a word awakens both an emotional response and a comprehension of its meaning, whereas a note, having no meaning, awakens only an emotional response.²

A note? A single note? Certainly. The capacity to react to an isolated musical sound is a testing-point for a listener's emotional apprehension of music. Hindemith's matter-of-fact indifference to music's mysterious emotive power is entirely explained

¹ See Ex. 6af.

² Actually, an unknown (foreign) word can awaken a purely emotional response: for example, hearing one foreigner abuse another by a single insulting word, one would react emotionally to the word without understanding its meaning. Here the purely emotional effect of language is isolated.

when one reads his flat statement that music cannot exist in a single note: he is completely impervious to the sensual and emotional impact of music's basic material—a single sound of definite pitch. He says: 'The truth is that as single tones they are mere acoustical facts which do not evoke any genuine musical reaction. No musical effect can be obtained unless the tension between at least two different single tones has been perceived'.¹

Of course, a piece of music cannot be made out of one note; but one note, like one word, can make an immediate artistic-emotional effect, before other notes or words follow. Let us take an example. Browning's poem *Pippa Passes* opens with a little mill-girl springing out of bed, crying 'Day! This is the first line of the poem, and anyone reading it aloud would make a pause before continuing 'Faster and more fast . . .'. In the listener, aware of the situation through the initial stage-direction, the single word calls forth at once an intellectual understanding that dawn has broken, and an emotional response to the ecstatic joy that the young girl feels at her experience of this natural phenomenon. There is poetry here already if not yet a poem.

Now turn to a musical equivalent—Wagner's *Rienzi*. The audience is sitting in the theatre, and the overture begins. A solo trumpet plays the single note A—starting it quietly, holding it, swelling out to a *forte*, and dying away again into silence. This sound is at once beautiful, mysterious, and thrilling—the tone-colour of the trumpet evokes military and heroic associations, the length of the note gives a sense of solemnity, the coming and going of the volume gives a sense of something growing out of nothing and fading whence it came. Not being a word, the sound has no intellectual associations, but merely awakens the emotions of awe and wonder, and a subdued expectancy of heroic events to come. There is music here already, if not a piece of music. (The fact that, in this case, the piece of music, when it does come, flagrantly disappoints the expectations aroused by the magical opening need not disturb us here, even if it does in the theatre.)²

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

² Cf. Aaron Copland, *What to Listen For in Music*, Chap. 2: 'You may be sitting in a room reading this book. Imagine one note struck on the piano. Immediately that one note is enough to change the atmosphere of the room—proving that the beyond element in music [a few lines earlier he calls it more explicitly 'the sensuous phrase'] is a powerful and mysterious agent, which it would be foolish to deride or belittle.'

Hindemith's main point is, of course, correct. A piece of music is made up of aggregations of notes, just as a poem is made up of aggregations of words. And here the analogy with literature breaks down completely in one sense, since there is no connection between the intellectual-emotional organization of words into coherent statements by means of the logic of verbal syntax, and the intellectual-emotional organization of notes into coherent statements by means of the logic of musical syntax. Nevertheless, the analogy is still valid in another sense, for the overall emotional organization of a piece of music is often quite similar to that of a poem or a drama. This can be seen clearly in the case of a song or an opera. Everyone can hear how Schubert, by the use of different types of melody, different rhythms, and subtle tonal modulations, follows the emotional progression of the poem, in such a song as *Gretchen at the Spinning-Wheel*; and, *pace* Hindemith, the conflicting emotions of poem and music follow in swift succession—restless anxiety, joyous ecstasy, a cry of pleasurable pain, restless anxiety—yet the emotions of the one are as 'real' as those of the other. Again, Wagner's musical construction, in such a work as *The Ring*, goes hand in hand with his verbal-dramatic construction; in fact, as is well-known, they were in places conceived as one indissoluble musico-dramatic whole.

But what of 'pure' music—music without words? Not music of the purely 'architectural' type, but music which is clearly intended as the expression of the composer's emotion? A more detailed comparison of the *Eroica* Funeral March and the *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington* will throw some light on this question.

The death of a hero arouses conflicting emotions in the artist who feels such an event deeply: grief at the plain fact of death; a feeling of tender consolation in the thought that death brings peace; joy and triumph at the memory of the great things the hero has done; a fierce, determined courage inspired by his example. (It need hardly be said that, treating a theme like this, an artist feels himself to be the mouthpiece of national or universal emotions.)

Now Tennyson's *Ode* begins with three brief stanzas expressing a heavy, universalized grief for the hero's death. In a longer fourth stanza, he turns to 'remembering all his greatness in the

past . . . great in council and great in war . . . that tower of strength which stood four-square to all the winds that blew'. In a fifth stanza of equal length, more tender feelings emerge: 'Under the cross of gold that shines over city and river, there shall he rest for ever among the wise and the bold'. The sixth and longest stanza is a proud and triumphant paean of praise of the hero's mighty deeds: 'with blare of bugle, clamour of men, roll of cannon and clash of arms'. The seventh and eighth stanzas bring the feeling of courageous determination: 'A people's voice! We are a people yet . . . not once or twice in our rough island-story, the path of duty was the way to glory'. The ninth and last stanza turns to a more serene grief: 'Peace, his triumph will be sung by some yet un moulded tongue . . . speak no more of his renown, lay your earthly fancies down, and in the vast cathedral leave him. God accept him, Christ receive him.'

This is necessarily a broad general outline of the poem: Tennyson weaves these conflicting emotions in and out of one another in the kaleidoscopic way which words permit. Take for example, the lines:

O peace, it is a day of pain

For one, upon whose hand and heart and brain

Once the weight and fate of Europe hung.

Ours the pain, be his the gain!

It can be seen that three 'real' feelings—grief, admiration, and a sense of triumph—here succeed one another with extreme rapidity; yet there is no sense of what Hindemith, speaking of the way emotions follow one another in music, calls 'their delirious, almost insane manner of appearance'.

Nor is there anything insane in the way in which Beethoven's similar emotions (devoid of any intellectual associations, any 'meaning') succeed one another in the *Eroica* Funeral March. As with Tennyson, the opening section (the Funeral March proper) presents the feeling of heavy, universalized grief, though taking in the tenderer, consoling emotion in the passage in E flat major, and in the momentary appearance of the chord of D flat major, which is immediately contradicted (cf. 'Peace, it is a day of pain'). The second section (the G major trio) moves from joy to triumph, backwards and forwards, and breaks off,

for the third section (the re-statement of the first section) to resume the feeling of grief. Here, however, after the first few bars, the mighty fugal passage begins, inverting the E flat 'consolation' theme, and putting it into the minor: this whole section presents the feelings of fierce determination—moving to an inspiring courage (horns in E flat) and back again, picking up the grievous feeling once more in the resumption of the funeral march proper. After a sudden switch to the tenderer feelings (strings in D flat), the movement ends in hushed grief, with broken references to the opening theme.

Words are poor things, except in the hands of a poet. The emotional adjectives I have used above are only feeble labels to indicate the general feeling of the music. To return to Mendelssohn, words are 'so ambiguous, so vague'; in every attempt to express the emotions of the music in words 'something is right, but something is unsatisfying'. No one, least of all myself, would want to attach verbal labels to the deep feelings aroused during a performance of the *Eroica* Symphony. Nor would I be misunderstood concerning my comparison with Tennyson's *Ode: the last thing*. I would think of when listening to Beethoven's *Funeral March* is this poem, which obviously expresses the same basic emotions, but through the agency of another man of another race with another attitude towards life, and through another artistic medium. Each says what it has to say in its own way, and there is no such thing as translation or equivalence. My only reason for a comparative verbal analysis of the two works is to endeavour to indicate that music functions very much like poetry in making a coherent and unified statement out of conflicting emotions. Nor am I concerned with the rights and wrongs of Beethoven's and Tennyson's conceptions of a hero, or with comparing the artistic value of the two works: I only chose the instances because of Hindemith's particular reference to 'an extremely funeral piece'.

We have another difficulty to meet here. It is usually objected, when one offers an analysis of the emotions expressed in a musical work, that music has a logic and constructive method of its own, that it ultimately has to stand or fall as a piece of music. With this no one would disagree, and one would hardly bother to make an emotional analysis of a work which one did not already know to be technically excellent. Actually, there is no

conflict of ideas here at all. Any artist has to weave the emotions he is expressing into an intellectually and emotionally coherent statement; and emotions woven together in this artistically formal way do not cease to be emotions because they do not float about vaguely as in everyday life; in fact, they become even more 'real' by their isolation and sensitive combination in a great work of art. The great artist makes a supremely 'right' statement of the emotions one feels oneself but cannot organize into a satisfying expression.

Music is no more incapable of being emotionally intelligible because it is bound by the laws of musical construction, than poetry is because it is bound by the laws of verbal grammatical construction. In fact, in both cases, it should be a truism to say that the construction of a work of art is guided both by the feelings and the intellect: the intellect brings craftsmanship to bear on realizing the overall shape which is felt before it is intellectually apprehended. Let us turn to the *Eroica* Funeral March once more. We have seen how the C minor tonality and the slow march-rhythm must have crystallized unconsciously in Beethoven as the main theme. Equally unconsciously, the tender feelings for the dead hero would give rise to a complex of notes in E flat (the natural key for the end of a first strain beginning in C minor); the feeling of joy would naturally find outlet in brighter complexes of notes in C major (the natural key for the Trio section); and the feelings of triumph in the G major and C major climaxes of the trio—the central point, farthest away from the mournful opening and ending. The conscious craftsman in Beethoven would see to it that these unconscious compulsions were realized to the full.

A single example will suffice to show that the laws of musical construction aid rather than impede emotional expression, exactly in the same way as the laws of poetical construction. Both a funeral march and an ode on a dead hero, by the logic of human feeling, will normally move from grief to triumph and back. In Beethoven's case, as we have seen, the triumph was bound by the laws of musical logic to be the G major and C major climaxes, with trumpets and drums, in his C major trio—the central point of the movement; and the result is supremely right and satisfying, formally and emotionally. In Tennyson's case, the laws of language demanded a climax word

ASK: CAEATZ A ?? VON SONN
Almond you

the last
no
before

to form his central point—and the finest word one can use to praise a dead hero in the English language is 'honour'. In the centre of Tennyson's Ode, the following lines appear twice on separate occasions, at a distance roughly proportionate to that between Beethoven's G major and C major climaxes, in so far as such a thing can be measured:

*With honour, honour, honour, honour to him,
Eternal honour to his name.*

I am not trying to say that these things could not have happened differently—in Chopin's Funeral March the brief moment of triumph is in the first section, in the relative major, and the consolation entirely in the trio, also in the relative major: I am only intent on demonstrating how a musician and a poet have obeyed the laws of their respective arts in a certain natural way, and in each case achieved a tremendous *formal* and *emotional* impact, *which are one and the same thing*.

In this way, one can explain how those who have a feeling for music but no technical knowledge can justifiably be said to 'understand' a piece of music—the form is apprehended as an emotional shape, as it must have originally been conceived by the composer. And one should not need to justify this approach to music (though the present *Zeigist* is utterly against it): music can hold up its head as the supreme expression of universal emotions by the great composers, and also be interesting from the point of view of craftsmanship to the technically-minded, in the way that a poem, emotionally absorbed by many readers, may be dissected by a student of poetic technique.

But still, it will be objected, we have not proved any inherent connection between the notes and the emotions they are supposed to express. That is, of course, the task of the rest of the book. At this point, we may sum up the foregoing, before proceeding to our examination of the way in which music functions as a language of the emotions.

The argument of this first part may be stated in brief as follows. Music naturally has its own technical laws, concerned with the organization of notes into coherent forms, but considered as expression, it has three separate aspects, related to the arts of architecture, painting, and literature. (1) The purely

'architectural' aspect is found in a limited number of contrapuntal works built out of material which is not emotionally expressive; though this 'inexpressiveness' is relative, scarcely ever absolute. The appeal of this kind of music is largely to the aesthetic appreciation of the beauty of pure form. (2) The purely 'pictorial' aspect of music is found in a limited number of works, and passages in works, which imitate external objects belonging to the natural world; and it is more valuable when the imitation is so approximate as to leave the composer considerable latitude to choose his own notes to embody his subjective experience of the object imitated. The appeal of this kind of music is through the aural imagination to the visual imagination and thence to the emotions. (3) The 'literary' aspect of music is to be found, to a greater or less extent, in most Western music written between 1400 and the present day, since music is, properly speaking, a language of the emotions, akin to speech. The appeal of this music is directly to the emotions and, to be fully appreciated, should be responded to in this way.

The widespread view of music as 'purely music' limits the listener's understanding of the great masterpieces to their purely aural beauty—i.e. to their surface attraction—and to their purely technical construction. This latter is no more (and no less) than the magnificent craftsmanship whereby composers express their emotions coherently: it is forever unintelligible to the layman, except emotionally, and ultimately inexplicable to almost anyone but a potential composer. Music is, in fact, 'extra-musical' in the sense that poetry is 'extra-verbal'; since notes, like words, have emotional connotations; it is, let us repeat, the supreme expression of universal emotions, in an entirely personal way, by the great composers.