

THE NATURE OF MUSICAL EXPERIENCE IN THE LIGHT OF ANTHROPOSOPHY

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Music does not originate in the physical world surrounding us and its nature is not the same as that of the other Arts. Music must first be brought into this world. Painting and sculpture, for instance, can find models in landscapes and people whereby artistic creations may be expressed, but musical motifs are not to be found 'ready-made' in the physical world. They well up in the human soul independently, as a rule, of any external stimuli. Intellectualism, which enters into everything at the present day cannot really touch music, for music cannot be grasped by the ordinary concepts which otherwise explain our world.

Musical experience has not so much to do with the ear as is usually imagined. It really involves the whole being of man. Rudolf Steiner tells us that there is nothing more false than to say, "I hear sound with the ear." The ear only provides the medium through which a musical experience comes into our consciousness. The medium for sound is the air. The ear merely separates the sound from the air. It throws back the sound, living in the air, into the inmost part of our being by separating the airy element from the sound in such a way that the tones we hear are really living in the element of ether. In musical experience sense impressions are not present in the same way as in the other Arts because the ear is only an organ of reflection. The ear does not bring man into the same direct connection with the outer world as the eye, for instance. In musical experience one is more of a 'nerve-man' than a 'sense-man,' because the ear is not the immediate sense organ, but is only a medium which leads inwards and is not a direct channel for the outer world.

Music is really connected with that part of man which does not belong to the everyday consciousness at all, but is bound up with the elements descending from the spiritual worlds which pass on from incarnation to incarnation. It has the characteristic of not being able really to be led up to concepts - for a music that could be understood through concepts would immediately cease to be music - nor of sinking down entirely into the region of the will. It must be supported on both sides, as it were, and is therefore experienced in the feeling nature of man. The feeling nature of man is, moreover, the seat of the harmonic element in music. Musical experience must run its course in the realm lying between concepts and will. It does not reach as far as concepts and will, but the tendency to both is there, for the harmonic element rays out towards the conceptual world, and this raying-out into the sphere of the spirit where we otherwise form concepts, is the work of the melody in music. The melodic element leads music out of the realm of feeling towards that of concepts. Melody leads upwards, as it were, in such a way that feeling is experienced in the head of man, and it is significant in melodic experience that through melody the heart is really experienced in the head.

Now just as the feeling element can incline towards the conceptual realm, so can it also descend towards the will. It must not, however, sink entirely down into the element of will, and this is effected through rhythm. We are all reminded of the intimate connection between music and the limb-system when we hear music with a rhythm which in any way suggests the dance element. It is really difficult to restrain one's limbs at such times from breaking forth into movements suggested by the music. We may therefore say that whereas the melody is carried from the heart to the head through the stream of the breath, the rhythm is driven from the heart to the limbs on the waves of the blood circulation. All the three systems of man's being are thus involved in musical experience. In the head, man can become melodious; in the chest system he can experience harmonically; in the metabolic and limb system he can experience rhythmically.

Schopenhauer says some very remarkable things about music; for instance, that music is the inner life of the Cosmos, is something fundamental and archetypal. He says that music is on a higher level than all the other Arts because they merely put together the ideas which the secret intentions of Nature reveal; music, on the contrary, is the direct expression of Nature herself; the musician hears the direct pulse of the Divine Will through the world; he perceives how this Will expresses itself in sounds. Thus the musician stands nearer to the heart of the world than all other artists; in him there lives the ability to represent the World-Will. Music is the expression of the Will in Nature, whereas the other Arts are the expression of the Idea in Nature. Because music flows nearer to the heart of the world, because it is so directly the expression of cosmic surge and flow, it also works directly upon the human soul. It streams into the soul as the Divine in its various forms, and thus we can understand why it works so powerfully and fundamentally upon the soul.

Dr. Steiner throws further light on the reason why sounds, harmonies and melodies work so powerfully upon man by referring us to the waking and sleeping states of consciousness. When the astral body and Ego

leave the physical body in sleep they are immediately plunged into a world of living colour and light whether man is conscious of it or not. Before man can *consciously* realise this astral world he must have experienced the Great Silence, and this Silence becomes more intense as he passes into dreamless sleep. Then the colours in the astral world become more and more transparent, the light ever clearer and more spiritual. Man has the feeling as if he himself were living in this colour and this light, as if he were immersed in profound, deep peace. Then from out this deep silence there gradually come forth sounds, spiritual sounds. This is Devachan, the region beyond the astral world. Devachan is a world which is also streaming with colour but it is essentially a world of *sound*. What was light in the Great Silence now begins to sound. As I have already said, everyone passes through this experience during sleep, whether consciously or not. The artist has a more distinct feeling on awaking of what he has experienced during sleep and he tries to reproduce in light and colour some of his subconscious impressions. Thus in painting we have on the physical plane a shadow picture of the astral world. The musician, on the other hand, charms a still higher world, the Devachanic, into the physical. If we are able to receive a shadow, an echo of the spiritual world, it is through music, in its workings on the human soul. Every night man has been living in a sea of tones, and if on awaking he can sense, however dimly, the impressions that have poured into him, he possesses what is called a 'musical nature.' The feeling of musical 'well-being' depends on the sense of which man brings with him from the spiritual world. If these tones from without harmonise with the tones within the human soul, musical feeling arises.

Speaking as a musician I may add that if these impressions are sufficiently strong they gradually define themselves and rise into the consciousness as fragments of music, and if one can mould these together into a flowing continuity in such a way that they form a sequential whole, one is on the road to becoming a composer. It is a curious thing that these fragments do not necessarily filter into the consciousness in the order in which they eventually appear in the musical composition – the middle or final themes are very often heard before the early ones, for instance. It is the correct understanding of the musical idea which flows into the consciousness from the Devachanic world that gives us the right feeling for the continuity of the composition and the key to the order of the flow.

Dr. Steiner leads us on still further in regard to the significance of music when he tells us that in the Devachanic world man finds the images of his incarnations. The Devachanic world is man's true home, the home of his Ego, and the musician captures reminiscences from this home-world and embodies them in sound. Painting speaks to the astral man, but the tone-world speaks to the inmost being of man, the Ego; the Devachanic world is the 'home-world' sounding forth to man in music. Music pours forth its melodies in undulations and waves as an image of the soul which must be experienced. In music we experience the flow of the ages. They flow downwards from their spiritual home, Devachan, and flow back to it in shadows through the music of the physical plane. Hence its intimate working on the soul. Truly a primeval relationship exists between music and the soul. We may say that echoes of home break forth in the soul in music. The tones of music sing to us from their original home, from the spiritual world, and speak comfortingly and exaltingly to us in the wave of melodies and harmonies.

Anthroposophy teaches us that in far remote ages in the history of mankind the constitution of human beings was quite different from what it is to-day. Before the Lemurian age, for instance, men were only dumb, toneless creatures. The air had first to be conquered before man could give forth sounds. This happened in the Lemurian age when song and speech arose in their first elementary beginnings. Men absorbed sounds from the Cosmos and poured them forth again in tones into the environment. In their experience of music men were really living in the Cosmos, not in their physical bodies at all. They felt that the Gods were expressing themselves through them in music. In those early times a man would never have said: 'I am making music.' He could only say: 'I am living in the music created by the Gods.' The smallest musical interval which man could experience was the ninth, and it was only later in Atlantean times that he could become aware of the seventh. We shall see how, as the higher vehicles penetrated ever further into the physical body, man was able to experience smaller and smaller intervals.

When the Atlanteans experienced the seventh they felt themselves in the great comprehensive spirituality of the universe, and freed from their connection with the earth. They were living in the Cosmos without, and music was to them a direct religious experience. Man's consciousness was carried right away from the physical plane so that he could say: 'The world of tones draws my Ego and astral body away from my physical and etheric bodies; I interweave my earthly experience with that of the divine-spiritual world.'

This was still experienced in the early Post-Atlantean epochs when man began to feel more at home, as it were, in the experience of the fifth. In the age of the fifth, man felt that music lived in his breath, in its

incoming and outgoing. Singing was a kind of 'oration' from the spiritual worlds. Man felt that if he were speaking of the Gods he must sing; he was conscious in his singing of the Divine World Order. To-day we no longer have a living experience of the fifth, for this interval now gives the impression of emptiness. Dr Steiner tells us that since the 4th century A.D. the third has become the chief interval of experience, and man began then to associate music to a far greater extent with his own destiny. At the same time much of the spiritual content of the fifth passed out of it; to-day the fifth is empty because the Gods have withdrawn from it.

Before this, however, in the Graeco-Latin age, the age of the development of the Intellectual Soul, the fourth, was the chief interval of experience. This is very significant, as we know from Greek treatises that the structure of the ancient Greek musical system was tetrachordal, that is to say, each octave was divided into two distinct tetrachords or fourths. Up to this epoch, music was still experienced outside the physical body. It was far more of a cosmic experience than it is to-day, but in the fourth, man stood on the boundary, as it were, of his human organism. He beheld himself from without but felt himself as *man* within the divine world. He stood exactly at the boundary of his humanity and gazed at it from the other side. In the fourth, man felt himself to be amongst Gods, whereas in the experience of the fifth he had to forget himself in order to exist among the Gods. In the interval of the fourth the experience is really that of the etheric man. A melody is heard, a harmony is sounded, a rhythm is beaten, but they are so interwoven that it is no longer possible to differentiate them. The whole being of man is experienced at the spiritual boundary.

Now the interval that characterises our own age is the third, and it is experienced within the physical body itself. The third is linked with man's feeling of exaltation and joy, of depression and sorrow, and for this reason we can appreciate the difference between major and minor. Man's musical experience is transferred from the Cosmos to his own world experience, and he feels that music has a connection with his own physical organisation. Formerly, in the age of the fifth he said, 'the angel in me is beginning to make music.' With the experience of the third the subjective element in man, deepened and strengthened and he begins to connect his own destiny with music. For this reason a subjective major or minor experience - which would have had no meaning in the age of the fifth - begins to be felt.

Now this is not to say that the Ancients had no experience of major and minor. They had indeed, but it was of an objective order. The world of tones drew out the Ego and astral body from their physical sheaths, and man became in music one with the divine-spiritual world. At that time major and minor were the expression of a soul experience of the Gods. The man of the Lemurian age did not experience exhilaration and depression, but the tones of rejoicing and the cosmic laments of the Gods, What we describe to-day as an inner major experience was perceived in Lemurian times as the expression of the joy of the Gods over their world creation; the minor experiences of to-day were felt in that epoch as the tragic lament of the Gods at what is known as the 'Fall of Man' in Biblical history.

The time has now come when these things must again enter into the consciousness of man. He must develop a consciousness through which he can again find the way upwards to the divine-spiritual worlds. He will then be able to experience the interval of the second and, later on still, the single tone itself.

Dr. Steiner has told us that the spiritual content of an interval does not lie in the two notes which form this interval: but in what lies between them. For instance, in a major third, say from C to E on the piano, the musical experience should not lie so much in the C and in the E as in the spiritual experience *in time* which lies between these two notes. It is the spiritual experience in time which lies between the two notes that is of real importance, not so much the two notes which merely define the interval.

In the distant future we shall be able to experience a whole melody in one single note. Just as in the future we shall not merely behold a flower but also its spiritual counterpart, so in music we shall be able to hear not only a note, but also what is behind the note, its spiritual content. Man will experience a single tone as an opening which the Gods have made into the physical world, and he will rise through the single tone from the physical world of sense into the spiritual world beyond. Now as he rises he is threatened with the danger of being caught up entirely, of being drawn through a window, as it were, with a tremendous suction which might wholly dissipate him in the spiritual world. He must strengthen himself inwardly if he is to be strong enough to withstand this force which threatens the Ego with annihilation in the spiritual world. When a man rises to the spiritual world through the interval of the second - and I assume here that Dr. Steiner means the second in relation to the tonic - it seems as if a mass of tones were enveloping him in their sound. He becomes aware of soft high tones of a different pitch which would fain comfort him in his weakness; he feels how very weak he is in relation to the spiritual content of the physical world. At the same time, in

experiencing the third, man feels that he has himself become sound; he has *become* the third, and he feels that friendly spirits approach him according to how he has prepared himself in the physical world. Whereas in penetrating through the second, man feels himself enveloped in a sea of many tones, through the third he feels the approach of distinctly friendly tones. If he enters the spiritual world through the interval of the fourth he will have the unexpected experience that here no fresh tones are welling up, but that what has already appeared is living in the soul in gentle memories which take on varied colourings, now developing into the brightest transparency and gaiety, now toning down into the depths of sadness, now sunny and bright, now sinking into the peace of the grave. The fifth yields still more subjective experiences which have a stimulating and fruitful effect upon the soul. The fifth works as a magic wand which charms forth from unfathomable depths the secrets of the tone-world beyond. In the fifth, man rises to the experience of true Imagination; in the sixth to that of Inspiration, while through the seventh he learns to know the nature of Intuition. And if he succeeds in hearing the life of the Cosmos in the dissonances of the seventh, when the seventh speaks of all that man can experience in the Cosmos through feeling, as he passes through different spiritual regions, and if he allows the dissonances of the seventh to vibrate in such a way that they take definite form, they appear to musical experience as something which may be called a musical firmament.

With the true experience of the Octave, man rises to the experience of the Ego itself. Here he must find himself anew, reborn at a higher level. Man has not yet found in musical experience the union of his higher Ego with the physical world. That will only come when the octave is able to be truly experienced. It will be the proof to man of the existence of the Gods, because he will experience the Ego first as the physical Ego within and then as the Spiritual Ego without. All the other intervals are experienced in their relation to the tonic, but quite a different experience appears with the octave, for it really is the tonic experienced at a higher level.

Thus we see what an importance Dr. Steiner attaches to Art as a means of spiritual development. There is no question of 'Art for Art's sake,' of which we hear so much nowadays. According to the teachings of Spiritual Science, Art is the living expression of man in his relation to the Cosmos. It is a direct message from the spiritual worlds; it speaks to man of his true being, and leads him through Initiation to the experience of the spiritual worlds and of his own Higher Self.

Dr. Steiner has told us that the old Goetheanum was conceived 'musically.' For that reason its architecture, form and painting were very little understood. The new Goetheanum will also be difficult to understand, for the musical element will have to be introduced into its plastic, artistic and sculptural forms in a way which will be in accordance with the future development of humanity. If man contemplates architecture in the true sense he is led back to the laws of ancient Saturn as described in Dr. Steiner's book "An Outline of Occult Science." He really becomes a Saturn man again. True architecture is an embodiment of the Saturn laws which, as we know, are also the laws underlying the physical organisation of man. In architecture the laws underlying the construction of the physical body are pushed out, as it were, into spatial form. Architecture thus embodies the laws of Space.

A true sense of sculpture really separates us from the astral body and Ego and enables us to experience the laws of the etheric body within the physical organisation. Here we live in the element of Time, and are really drawing upon what the ancient Sun existence gave to man.

If we pass on to painting, we realise that it is the result of the inner impulses of the astral body being pushed down into the etheric body. We experience ourselves in all the astral elements implanted within us during the old Moon existence, and thus become the true astral man. Then we come to the Earth existence, when the Ego was first bestowed upon man. When the Ego sinks down, as it were, into the astral man, we then experience music.

It must be remembered that the astral body is not a simple unit, but is divided into seven parts, each one of which coincides with one of the other vehicles of man. For instance, there is a part of the astral body which we may describe as specially moulded and formed for the physical body, another part which corresponds to the etheric body, and so on; and these seven divisions stand to each other in a relationship similar to that of the notes of the scale, tonic, second, third, fourth, etc. Thus if we give ourselves wholly up to a melody we experience it in such a way that when this or that tone occurs, it is experienced inwardly in the corresponding part of the astral body. A third, for instance, is experienced in that part of the astral body where the astral body itself is rooted; a fourth in that part which corresponds to the intellectual soul. This is an interesting point, for in the Graeco-Latin epoch, which was the age of the development of the intellectual

soul, the characteristic interval was certainly the fourth - in fact, the whole structure of the Greek musical system was tetrachordal, as I have already said.

The tonic is experienced in the part of the astral body which corresponds to the physical body; the second in the part corresponding to the etheric body, and the third in the part corresponding to the astral body itself. But we have two kinds of thirds in our modern musical system, the major and the minor. The major third is experienced in the astral body, the minor third in the sentient soul.

As a matter of fact the experience of any musical work of art depends upon the inner musical working of the astral body; only that as we are listening to the musical work with our Ego it sinks down at the same time into our astral body, into certain subconscious regions of it. This leads us to a very significant fact.

Man, as an astral being, is created out of the Cosmos according to musical laws. Inasmuch as we are astral beings we have a musical connection with the Cosmos. We are ourselves musical instruments. Let us try to imagine for a moment that we did not need the physical sounding of notes, but that we could hear the creative activity in the Cosmos which has fashioned our astral organisation. If this happened we should hear the world-music sounding - the cosmic harmonies which have always been spoken of as the 'music of the spheres.'

Dr. Steiner tells us that man does not only sleep by night but that certain elements within him are in a state of sleep during the daytime. By night the thoughtlife is asleep, by day the life of will and the life of feeling are in a dream state. We dip down into this life of will and feeling when the Ego sinks into the astral body. So that what happens when we listen to a musical work of art is that we sink down with our Ego nature into that which otherwise sleeps by day. When we are listening to a symphony, for instance, this means that we are deadening the process of the ordinary life of thought, and that we are dipping down into elements which during waking consciousness are otherwise asleep. This requires the collaboration of all the living forces of the human organisation with the musical experience. During sleep the life of thought is deadened within an element which we have not yet mastered in ordinary life. But if we succeed in bringing into the ordinary daily consciousness that element in which we live unconsciously in sleep we have Poetry. Thus in musical experience the Ego is immersed in a world that is otherwise one of sleep during the daytime; if we sink our unconscious experiences of sleep during the night into the waking consciousness, the result is poetry. Plato, indeed, had a perception of this truth when he called poetry a 'divine dreaming.'

Anthroposophy teaches that we must raise ourselves from a mere intellectual conception of the terms 'physical body,' 'etheric body,' and so on, to a living experience of what they really are. Then we shall gain a true understanding of the significance of Art, for without such a knowledge of the human organisation this is impossible.

When man has a true experience of music he really gives up his Ego to all the divine-spiritual forces which will work on his astral body in a future period of the earth's existence. True creative music is a striving towards the path of Initiation, and the same may be said, to an even greater extent, of poetry. The divine dreams which were embodied by the ancient poets belong to the last remnants of the existence of the old Gods. The Art of to-day is too subjective, it is derived far too often from the physical plane and its happenings. The Art of the future, towards which we are striving, will tell us of Cosmic happenings which man experiences when he does not draw on his own Ego alone, but when he lives together with the Gods of the Higher Hierarchies. The

experience of artistic creation will be much more living and intense than it is to-day, for the artist will speak to us of his experiences in the Cosmos, on the path of Initiation.

And that which is of supreme importance for the - development of humanity, the experience of the Christ Figure, of the Living Christ Himself, is something which has been successfully expressed in the sphere of painting, especially by the artists of the Renaissance and the epoch preceding it, but this has not yet been attained in the realm of music. The urge was there in Richard Wagner, but Dr. Steiner tells us that Parsifal is still only a symbolic indication of the magical advent of the Christ Impulse into the physical world. Where Wagner would most wish to attain the Christ element he is led away into symbolism. What really constitutes the Christ Impulse in the Cosmos and on Earth has not yet been attained in the element of music. Music, however, is capable of placing the Christ Impulse before the world in tones, in ordered, ensouled, spiritualised tones. If music is inspired by Spiritual Science it will find the means to express the Christ Impulse, for it will reveal in a pure, artistic, and sentient manner how that which lives in the Cosmic-Tellurian world as the Christ Impulse, can be embodied in sound.

What magnificent hopes are awakened in us by the knowledge that life, science, religion, and even art itself can all receive regenerating impulses from Spiritual Science, if rightly understood. All the plastic arts will receive them from what we know artistically about the past; all arts speaking to us musically - and Dr. Steiner says that the musical element will have to enter into all the arts of the future - will lead us up to the experience of Initiation, and indeed to the understanding of the Incarnation of the Christ Himself.

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“ . . . By giving form and shape to what lives in cosmic laws, by dint of inner penetration of spiritual connections, man creates Art that is born from the depths of the universe and his own being. This is not a mere harkening to the secret of Nature ; it is a fathoming of the hidden spirituality active behind Nature.”

- Marie Steiner in the Foreword to *Ways to a New Style in Architecture* By Rudolf Steiner.

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