

WANTED:
A NEW SONG UNTO THE LORD

wanted:

*A new
song unto
the Lord*

By D.L. ROPER

**A publication of the
Foundation for Christian Studies
Wellington New Zealand**

Published by Foundation for Christian Studies, P.O. Box 28-056, Kelburn,
Wellington, New Zealand. Distributed by Seed Educational Enterprises,
17 Chambers Street, No Design Kees Verburg. Cover

Seed Educational
Enterprises,
P.O. Box ~~628~~ 6212
Dunedin North, N.Z.

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PREFACE

*"There is today a widespread belief that music — and the civilization of which music is a part — has reached some kind of crisis. We live, we say, in an age of transition; and while every age is a transition from one era to another, it is true that at some times we are more aware than at other times not only of the pace of, but also the necessity for, change. The awareness of crisis is not, in music, peculiar to our times; we may point, as parallels, to the end of the 14th and the beginning of the 17th centuries, and we can learn something from considering in what ways our own crisis resembles, and in what ways it differs from, those earlier crises. There are however, reasons for believing that the crisis in our own time is more acute than similar crises in Europe's past, if only because the process of change — or our ability to deal psychologically with so much physical change in so short a time — may literally lead to our extinction."*¹

In all kinds of ways the deep problems of Western culture are revealed in our lives. The state of music-making in Western culture reflects this state of crisis, as Wilfred Mellers and many others have pointed out. Never before in our history have we had access to the range of music that is so readily available to us — *from the past*. From Medieval Motets to Renaissance wind ensembles; from Baroque organ recitals to Wagner's operas our culture 'Keeps up the appearances' of a rich and glorious heritage that is a living reality. The fact is, however, that most people have little or no appreciation of the *present* state of the art as it is practised by men such as Boulez and Stockhausen. By contrast, for example, the only music performed in the time of Beethoven was *contemporary* music — music written by figures like Schubert and Beethoven. Even the work of the great J. S. Bach had temporarily been lost in oblivion. Again, for the vast majority of people today, music may virtually be equated with 'pop'. This is especially true of youth — brought up as they are into a culture that derives from the rock 'n' roll era of the mid-1950s.

1. W. Mellers 'Caliban Reborn' Gollancz (1968).

These are just a few of the problems confronting those who are concerned to develop and promote some aesthetic sensitivity and awareness towards the whole range of life's issues as they are and should be reflected in our musical life. The purpose of this booklet is twofold. First to give some Christian insight into the nature and background of the cultural situation in which we find ourselves, with special reference to its musical life; second, to give some preliminary suggestions on what it means to study and make music within a Christian perspective. To embark upon these formidable goals requires both an effective critique of the spiritual roots of the shaping forces that have moulded our culture and a positive appreciation of the musical calling as it should be vigorously pursued by a community concerned to live richly before the face of God. Needless to say, in a booklet of the present size, these matters cannot be given the treatment they deserve. However, it is my hope that it will open up avenues for further study and reflection that might result in a new song to the Lord.

Duncan L. Roper,
Dunedin, November, 1979.

CHAPTER ONE

THE COMMITMENT OF STANDPOINT

It may be that for some the very idea of introducing religion, let alone Christianity, into consideration of such a subject is being either presumptuous or irrelevant. Considering the general thought of our culture, such a reaction is understandable. I shall therefore begin by trying to clarify why this unashamed commitment of standpoint is taken.

By contrast with the situation in the West, and especially with Western Christianity over recent centuries, when one studies or considers the life and culture of the East one finds no division into religious and secular compartments. The whole of life is lived out within an acknowledged view of life and the universe which has unified a religious root. Thus the numerous books that have been appearing on Indian music in recent years almost always contain an introductory section on the Hindu view of life, without which Indian music would not be what it is and may not be truly understood or appreciated. Gopal Sharman, as an Indian, makes this point rather polemically in his book *'Filigree In Sound'*², and it is beginning to be recognised as true by Western scholars. Arnold Bake writes in the first volume of the *New Oxford History of Music*:

*"It is impossible to divorce Indian music from the whole structure of Indian culture and philosophy with which it is interwoven in a number of ways from the earliest times of which we have records. To the Indian student, music is not an isolated phenomenon but one directly and inextricably linked with philosophy and religion, and of cosmic importance. The right kind of music — that is to say, the only kind of music worth considering — is that which deserves the epithet VIMUKTIDA (bestowing liberation), that is the music which, when properly practised, serves to break the cycle of birth, death and rebirth."*³

2. Andre Deutsch (1970).

3. *'New Oxford History of Music'* Oxford (1957) Vol. 1 p. 196.

Ravi Shankar writes in his book, 'My Music, My Life':

*"Our tradition teaches us that sound is God — NADA BRAHMA. That is, musical sound and musical experience are steps to the realization of the self. We view music as a kind of spiritual discipline that raises one's inner being to divine peacefulness and bliss. We are taught that one of the fundamental goals a Hindu works toward in his lifetime is a knowledge of the true meaning of the universe — its unchanging, eternal essence — and this is realized first by a complete knowledge of one's self and one's own nature. The highest aim of our music is to reveal the essence of the universe it reflects, and the RAGAS are among the means by which this essence can be apprehended. Thus through music, one can reach God."*⁴

This attitude to life and music stands in contrast to that found in the West within recent centuries. Especially within Anglo-Saxon countries, a typically empiricistic and utilitarian attitude to life has been carried over into our music. Interested in what is new as opposed to what is old, in aesthetic niceties of form, in technical proficiency, in sentimental feeling, we flit from flower to flower according to taste. Fundamentally, however, we are not in the habit of penetrating into the deeper religious dispositions toward life — from which the characteristic shaping spirits of cultural life actually spring. We are content rather to remain on the surface, and our contentment so to live is undoubtedly one of the basic roots of the current crisis in Western culture.

I am convinced that the Christian community within the Western world has been generally as guilty of this superficiality as anyone else. We too have succumbed to this empiricistic, utilitarian spirit in our contribution to the development of Western culture over the last two hundred years. We therefore have very little to say to the deep needs of our present culture, with the result that many who seek a depth, a profundity, a mystery and total outlook upon life turn to the wisdom of the East to satisfy their quest. In seeking a Christian perspective from which to view the realities of cultural development I therefore do not necessarily wish to place the stamp of approval upon contemporary or past Christianity. I wish to repudiate the viewpoint that is satisfied with remaining merely at the level of the technical, the aesthetic, the feeling functions of our knowing experience in an effort to point out and appreciate the motivating forces that drive and direct the ways in which men and women exercise their formative power in the various cultural fields, and in this way to re-evaluate some of the ways in which we think about and contribute to music making in particular. In this regard I shall claim that the West is characterised by religious commitments every bit as much as the East, and that the Christian community within the Western world has all too often uncritically accepted points of departure for contributing to cultural life that are in fact opposed to the religious root of its own commitment.

4. Ravi Shankar, 'My Music, My Life' Jonathan Cape (1969), p. 17.

The Christian Perspective on Life

In the beginning, God spoke and it came to be. By the same Word God continues to uphold the world and bring all creation to its fulfilment⁵. In the unfolding of His creation, God made man His co-worker. Right from the beginning He charged man:

*“Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and all living animals on the earth.”*⁶

And so Adam cultivated and cared for the garden, and named the animals. In obedient response to God’s mandate, he had taken up the task given to him before God within the context of creation. The purpose of man’s existence was to love God and to develop the earth in accordance with every word spoken by God for his creation, and so to help bring creation to its fulfilment.

All that is involved with this task of cultivating and giving form to the creation structure is what we call **culture**. So culture is a God-given task that is fundamental to the purpose of man’s existence. However, it is a task to be undertaken in obedience to every Word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord. The rich and obedient response to every word of the creator should result in the creation resounding a shalom of joy, praise and excitement.

From the Biblical point of view, divine revelation has a certain total character about it. Not that the Bible tells us about everything about the world we live in. Rather it sets a perspective within which the whole creation is to function in obedience to God. This total revelatory character of revelation sets the norms for man’s cultivating activity as well as the lawful character of the non-human portion of creation. At root the Word of God is the moment-by-moment rule of God over His creation and, as such is centred in Christ the Logos who abides for ever⁷. Scripture reveals God as creator, as the sole origin of all that is. No force that has any power in its own right can be legitimately opposed to Him. There is therefore no possibility of establishing any area of life over which God does not rule by right. He, as our creator, has the right to all our life, to all our thought, and to all our action. No sphere of man’s life can be divorced from the service of God.

Thus from the Biblical point of view man is a religious creature, called to live out a life of worship and service to God. This worship and service is part and parcel of the way he exercises his cultural calling before the face of the Lord God, and is to be developed and executed in obedience to the rule of the Word of God as law and norm. The direction of all aspects of man’s life flow from a central heart commitment, and, in turning from the true God, he turns to some aspect of the creation and treats it ‘as God’, so committing idolatry.

5. Heb. 1:2-4. Col. 1:17.

6. Gen. 1:28.

7. John 1:1; 5, Heb. 1:2-4.

This idolatry unleashes real spiritual forces over the hearts and lives of men, redirecting cultural development according to the particular false gods enthroned. For example, through an absolutization of the natural forces created by God, man may strive towards achieving 'a simple harmony with nature' making this into an idol, rather than exercising a responsible stewardship in fulfilment of his calling to have dominion over it. In the extreme case of cultures in the spiritual grip of animism, man thereby becomes totally enslaved to natural forces through such idolatry. Again through a religious absolutization of man as the measure of all things, he worships and serves a humanistic ideal in which not only nature but also God Himself is transformed into the fabrication of an idolatrous imagination.

The fall of man leaves him in an estranged condition. Man continues to exercise his God-given calling of caring for and developing creation, but he does so according to the imaginations of an idolatrous heart, thereby bringing disharmony, disintegration and disobedience upon creation. That does not mean to say that much of what he can and does achieve has many excellent features. It is simply to say that evil creeps into all that he does, and that his cultural activities are envisioned by the spirit that motivates his heart.

In Jesus Christ all creation is redeemed. Those who own him as Lord are called to witness and proclaim a new order in which man has been brought to a life of renewed obedience to him. He is Lord of all authority⁸.

We are called to proclaim that all things hang together in Christ⁹, and are made new by him¹⁰. He restores us to our original calling and in him our work — the meaningful fulfilment of our cultural calling will no longer be in vain, but will be done unto the One who abides for ever¹¹. This is our reasonable service¹², in this in-between time: to proclaim God's great deeds in Jesus Christ in all that we do¹³, making our very lives an offering of Praise. In all activities, Christ's disciples are therefore required to call men back to God's good order for creation and to find 'Shalom' in Christ.

A Diversity of Cultures

God's creation is rich in diversity. In the way men and women communally shape their way of life in the form of language, artefacts, traditions and ways of thinking, we should therefore expect a legitimate expression of diversity. We should therefore take great care not to identify any one cultural tradition as exemplifying the Kingdom of God over against the darkness embodied in others. Equally, however, we should not be blind to the way in which religious forces are active in the way men and women have given form to this legitimate cultural diversity. Generally speaking we should

8. Matt. 28:18.

9. Col. 1:17.

10. 2 Cor. 5:17.

11. 1 Cor. 15; Rev. 14.

12. Romans 12:1-2.

13. 1 Peter 2.

therefore recognise that within the way of life of people there is a unifying foundation and direction that is of a religious character. Insight into this religious root gives an appreciation of the way in which the diverse details of the tradition function as to significance and meaning.

In this light, music-making cannot be isolated from other cultural areas. Although it has unique features that set it apart from painting, poetry, philosophy, physics and politics, nevertheless within a particular culture it will usually share the same spiritual orientation as those other areas. Each of the diverse cultural fields is part of a unified tradition and way of life of people. Either it is in **living** development, or it merely **acts out** past traditions. The former of these is characterised by a living faith that gives an edge to historical development, whilst the latter is either characterised by a rootlessness that lacks any such faith leading it, or else is not one that opens up the process of historical development. A living Christian or Humanistic faith stimulates the process of historical development whereas stagnant Christian or Humanistic faith lead to rootlessness. Animism on the other hand tends to close off the process of historical development.

In what follows, I shall be giving prime attention to the spiritual foundations of the forces which have made Western music what it is. I have given some attention to the more elementary pointers on the *aesthetic* principles involved elsewhere.¹⁴

14. Refer 'The Christian Task in the Arts'. FCS publication, P.O. Box 25026, Hataitai, Wellington.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SPIRITUAL DIRECTIONS OF WESTERN CULTURE REFLECTED IN ITS MUSIC

Writing in the introduction to the first volume of the New Oxford History of Music, Egon Wellesz says:

“There is a unifying idea in the volume. It deals with the music of the non-Christian world, a world in which music is regarded as a power creating a magic upon the listener. This magic character of music ranges, according to the state of civilisation of the people who produce it, from totemistic connotation to music which represents a certain rite or a certain ceremony and creates in the listener the proper mood to participate in it. The rigid attitude of the Church in its first centuries shows that she was aware of the magic power of music in the surrounding pagan world. When the Christian faith was established as the acknowledged religion all over the Roman Empire, it was no longer necessary; the magic spell was broken. Music could now be used primarily as ‘laus Dei’ to heighten the splendour of the service, and, in our Western civilization, the way was opened for its development as an art”¹⁵.

The manner in which the men of the of the ancient Near East thought about the world and acted in relation to it was very different from that which has characterised the last century or so of Western man. It is necessary that we appreciate what this involves if we are to understand the development of Western music. Ancient Near Eastern man, like tribal man, saw himself as always part of society, and also saw society as always embedded in nature, and so dependent upon cosmic forces that were not reliable in their operation. Nature and man did not stand in opposition, but were considered very much a part of one cosmic reality. Nature was not contemplated as an IT, to be spoken and thought about as fundamentally impersonal and alien to man. Rather, nature was considered to be full of personal forces that acted in the wind, thunder, floods, etc. In the terms introduced in Chapter One, this view of life arises from a deification of *nature*.

The way of thinking about the world as cast in these terms has been described as ‘mythopoeic’¹⁶. Its characteristic literary form is myth, and, as such this form

15. New Oxford History of Music, Vol. 1, p. xxii.

16. Refer, for example, to ‘Before Philosophy’ ed. by H. and H. A. Frankfort. Pelican (1949).

embodies personalized forces and everyday problems of life universalised in a way that reflects the religious orientation already mentioned. As such 'mythopoeic thought' is neither abstract nor isolated from the ongoing experience of life. It is a confrontation of life with life, with the whole experience interpreted as the interplay of personal forces within an undifferentiated cosmos, in which men are at one with nature. The natural forces — interpreted as personal gods — were assumed to be capricious like men. The whole cosmic balance or harmony had therefore to be maintained through religious sacrifice.

The Hebrews

If Hellenism was one of the main sources of the culture of the early centuries of our era, then Judaism was the other. The Biblical world view of the Jews is one in which the hearts of men are confronted with the Lord God speaking from beyond the imminent temporality of created things to the fullness of life, calling for a whole-hearted love and service on the part of mankind, and, especially of his covenant people.

It is instructive to compare the sacrifice and worship of the general Ancient Near Eastern Culture with that of the Hebrews. There are two points of significant contrast. First religious observance on the part of the Hebrews was not related to the recurring cycles of nature, but rather to the historic events of deliverance: covenants that were rooted in the past, and held out a rebuke in the present and promise for the future. Thus we tend to have a linear time sequence associated with the acts of God in relation to the affairs of men rather than the cyclic one of the Ancient Near Eastern environment.

Although somewhat distanced from the Near East geographically, there is probably a great similarity between this standpoint and that taken by the Aryan Priests in India. To this day the Brahmans perform sacrifices and chant the Vedas in a manner that is seen as helping to maintain the cosmic forces in their proper balance¹⁷. The whole rite is surrounded by secrecy and passed on from generation to generation. Great importance is attached to the precise manner of chanting — for the very harmony of the cosmic order depends upon it. In this way, music has magic power.

The roots of Greek culture are also found within this Mythopoeic outlook. The religious background of the Greeks tended to polarize in two directions — the Apollonian and Dionysiac. The Apollonian was associated with a music of noble, formal design, its mystic association with numbers deriving from Pythagoras, and continuing through Plato and others into the Hellenistic world of the early centuries of our era. The Dionysiac, on the other hand, was associated with a music that gave pleasure to the senses, as was associated with the wild and impassioned worship of Dionysus, the God of Wine¹⁸.

17. Refer to the discussion of Vedic Music by Arnold Bake in 'New Oxford History of Music', Vol. 1, pp. 199-204.

18. For the religious significance of the Apollonian and Dionysiac strains in Greek culture, refer to the discussion of the Form-Matter Motive in 'Roots of Western Culture', by H. Dooyeweerd; Wedge 1979.

Second, sacrifice was not related to keeping the harmony of nature. Rather it was related to the need for propitiating wrongdoing and disobedience before a holy God. Thus, the religious background is that of a righteous personal relationship of the Covenant Creator with his people, rather than a magical power over the cosmic order.

At every stage of the history of the Covenant people, the Scriptures make reference to their musical activities. In the Patriarchal period we find Laban reproaching Jacob on his departure with the words:

"Why did you flee secretly, and cheat me, and did not tell me, so that I might have sent you away with mirth and songs, with tambourine and lyre"¹⁹.

The Hebrews' escape from the Egyptians is celebrated in song, sung by Moses and the people to the accompaniment of Miriam's dancing and timbrel playing²⁰. The entry of the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem was accompanied by dancing, shouting and music-making²¹.

In the temple of Solomon, we read that

'All the Levitical singers, Asaph, Heman and Jeduthan, their sons and kinsmen, arrayed in fine linen, with cymbals, harps and lyres, stood east of the altar with a hundred and twenty priests who were trumpeters, and it was the duty of the trumpeters and singers to make themselves heard in unison in praise and thanksgiving to the Lord'²².

Throughout their history, the Hebrew people gave musical expression to their way of life in all its aspects: popular rejoicings; returning conquerors; marriages; prophetic utterances; the temple worship. Despite this diversity, it is nonetheless the case that their music-making had a central feature. This is to be found in the Psalms. Twentieth century musicology has done a great deal to enable us to rediscover the roots of this great tradition of psalm singing. We are specially indebted to the labours of A. Z. Idelsohn in comparing the psalm singing in more remote Jewish congregations in Yemen, Babylonia and Persia. Each of these groups had been separated from Palestine since the destruction of the First Temple and the Babylonian Exile. Since remarkable similarities to a number of Gregorian melodies were found in each tradition, this not only established the Jewish origin of the Gregorian melodies, but also gave access to Jewish music dating from very early times²³.

19. Gen. 31:27.

20. Exodus 15:1-21.

21. II Sam. 6:14, 15; I Chron. 15:25-29.

22. II Chron. 5:12-13.

23. Ref. for example, to C. Sachs "The Rise of Music in the Ancient World". Dent (1943). pp. 79-100.

The Growth of Western Music

The Hellenic and Hebrew backgrounds are the seeds from which Western Music has sprung. Initially the psalm singing and general music of the early Church was very firmly rooted in the Hebrew tradition. However, with the expansion of Christianity and its confrontation with Hellenism, there developed an evergrowing layer of Hellenism to its music. The theory and practice of the music of the Middle Ages is strongly influenced by Pythagoreanism and Neo-Platonism, both in their mystical attachment to numbers and in their attempt to create an other-worldly music fit for the contemplative life.

The period usually described as the Renaissance saw a breakdown of this other worldly contemplation into a world that was 'more human'. As such its primary spiritual motivation was to a new man — one who could find within himself the spiritual resources to renew his cultural and social pursuits after the model of the classical world. The more human face to the developments is illustrated in a music that was based upon the polyphony of 3rds and 6ths that influenced the Masses and Motets of Church Music, as well as the musical styles and forms associated with 'secular' life. An example is the Caccia, a lively polyphonic song connected with hunting.

The Reformation also has a profound impact upon the music life of Western culture. In the first place the Reformers insisted that the music associated with the Church should be sung by the people in the vernacular. Secondly, they insisted that it be a music in which the people themselves would play a prominent part. This was typified, for example, by the Genevan Psalter in the Calvinist tradition, and by the chorales in the Lutheran tradition. Again the Roman Catholic Church was quick to try to correct both its own evils and also to meet the challenges of the opposing forces. This led to a renewal of music-making along with other fields of culture, and can be identified with the Counter-Reformation. Thus, by the sixteenth century there were three main spiritual currents giving direction to Western culture: *Humanism*, the *Reformation* and the *Counter-Reformation*. These forces are not to be identified with any one country or any particular people. Rather they are to be seen as motivating powers giving direction to the culture and people of this time. They interact, and people primarily under the influence of one, learn a great deal from people who are primarily under the influence of another.

Humanism was strongest in Italy. Under its guidance the seventeenth century saw the birth of opera. However, the early operas of Monteverdi and others were still strongly under the spell of a Platonized Christianity, invariably taking Greek myths for their subjects. Effective drama, embodied in the ideal of opera, could not be expressed in the homogeneous polyphony typical of Renaissance style with the result that the Italian experimenters developed a style that more effectively expressed the dramatic qualities of human emotion. This was *Recitative* — a form that involved solo vocal lines supported by a continuo, or accompaniment. The latter embodied a variety of instruments in a manner that was partly polyphic, and is best referred to by the term 'continuo' given to it by those who developed the styles. This musical style was incorporated into the 'sacred' counterpart of opera, the oratorio, which dealt

with Biblical subjects in much the same way that opera dealt with the myths of ancient Greece. It was also incorporated into the Church Cantatas of the German Reformation.

The impact of the Reformation was strongest upon music in Lutheran Germany. As already mentioned the music that forms the central core of this tradition is the chorale, the hymns of the people. These are rugged tunes of great strength that derived from a variety of sources. They embodied the ideals of the Reformation to a high degree, and as the culture of Lutheran Germany unfolded these chorales formed the basis for an art music: Organ Preludes, Church Cantatas and Passions. However, although these forms were typically associated with church, all the music making of people in Germany was affected by the movement. It culminates in the music of J. S. Bach.

The Counter Reformation was strong in Italy and later in Austria. In the late 16th century, it is associated with the music of Palestrina. Its impact in Austria of the 17th and 18th centuries is in part connected with the classicism of Mozart and Haydn.

During the 18th century the spiritual roots of Western culture shifted in the humanistic direction. Whilst the humanism of the Renaissance period was generally willing to have Christianity as a partner, the ideals of the 18th century Enlightenment included a freedom from all religious bondage. Reason, Science and Freedom were enthroned as its ideals in a way that betrayed a more radically humanistic spirit. Man was now the final judge and he set the criteria of truth — that which was in accord with Reason and Science. Reality was defined in the terms of what could be perceived by the senses and discussed in the light of Reason, with Revelation being required to comply with these demands. This new movement can be said in many ways to have had its apogee in the French Revolution.

The general outlook of the 17th century was a world of classical ideals that showed features from both streams of Europe's heritage. The gods of the Greek myths, demythologised, tended to be viewed as ideals of universal love, beauty, harmony and justice. However, whilst these ideals were believed to exist apart from man, and that man should strive to imitate them in life and art, there was one major problem with the way they were viewed. They didn't really touch the reality of human history, and tended to be used to justify the existing order of things. They did not really allow for a struggle for freedom and justice within the context of this life. The static character of the ideals is expressed, for example, in the balance and order of the instrumental music of the period from 1680 through to the classical period of Haydn and Mozart.

The contribution of the music of Beethoven is very significant at this particular point. Beethoven is a very complex character, in that he was a faithful Roman Catholic and yet was also a very ardent supporter of the new principles of freedom and equality that were enunciated during his time. His opera 'Fidelio' provides a clue to understanding his basic outlook. The subject is historical, not mythical. It concerns the imprisonment of a freedom-fighter. For exposing the unjust, cruel practices of a governor, he is kept imprisoned, slowly starving to death. However the drama involves the wife of the prisoner securing his release by disguising herself as an assistant jailer. Significantly, too, the opera concludes with the release of the prisoner and a victory for the principles of freedom and equality in a way that receives divine

sanction.

In view of the problems cited above, regarding the relationship of universal principles to human history, this opera is significant. It recognises the reality of ideals apart from man, yet there is also the due recognition that the realisation of these ideals amongst the affairs of men and women is a matter that involves struggle and conflict. In some ways therefore Beethoven may be said to be working from a Christian outlook. In other ways, however, his outlook was stamped with the more humanistic spirit evidenced in the way that the ideals of the French Revolution were brought into effect. The latter note, for example, is more dominant in the Ninth Symphony, especially in the last movement. Its aesthetic character is strongly characterised by a struggle and a restless striving but there is very little of rest, of peace, giving the impression that it is man's own efforts alone that will realize the ideals of liberty and equality.

Romanticism and the Modern Era

The Romanticism of the 19th century marks something of a new departure in the development of modern culture. It shifts from an earlier concern to express objective principles or formal design to a *feeling* for the quest of destiny in relation to the Infinite. As such it constitutes a reaction against the rationalism of the 18th century Enlightenment; and despite the fact that there was a strong pietistic contribution to its development, because it endeavoured to build upon the foundations of feeling its dominant religious meaning was humanistic, albeit that it drew from nature mysticism and the various Christian traditions. The spiritual roots of Romanticism can therefore be found in a religious commitment in which man is basically divided between man and nature. This involves a struggle for unity and reality; a search for personal significance and destiny in relation to the Infinite World Spirit. In its first phase, represented by Schumann, for example, it is the nature pole which dominates, whereas in the second phase (for example Wagner) it is the personal ego pole that dominates. With the latter phase, of course, there develops the 'Byronic Fallacy' (as it was called by Charles Ives) in which the artist as prophet leads the rest of mankind into the truths of life through his own inner experience. There are, of course, parallels in the other arts. The Romanticism of Keats, Shelley and Byron embodied a relatively clear statement of the ego-phase of romanticism in the early 19th century²⁴.

There is no better beginning to Romanticism in music than Schubert's song cycle 'Winterreise'. It explores the depths of unrequited love within the context of a variety of natural scenes during a journey in winter. It is deep and it is melancholic. There is no more fitting witness to its conclusion than Wagner's 'Tristan and Isolde', a work which sets forth human erotic love as the universal of life that may be achieved only in death. Wagner's music is immense in its scope and in its seductive power. His operas return once again to myth for their subject matter (although they are now Teutonic myths) which gives the operas much of their universal erotic power. His centre at Bayreuth

24. For a valuable study in the roots, principles and ideals of the Romantic Movement, refer to 'The Mind of the European Romantics' by H. G. Schenk. Constable (1966), that contains a valuable preface by Sir Isaiah Berlin.

was conceived literally as a new religious centre at which the New Humanity might be inspired upon its road to destiny through the artistic efforts of the Prophet. The power of Wagner over the musical world at the end of the 19th century was immense, rivalled only by Brahms, and to a very minor degree by Verdi in Italy and Rimsky-Korsakov and others in Russia. It is significant that two of the major architects of 20th century music were initially very strong Wagnerians: Debussy and Schonberg. Each of them, in different ways, radically broke with Wagner and with the Romanticism he stood for.

It is important to realise that this break was not simply a matter of technique. It reached back into the spiritual realities and commitments from which men live out their lives. The precise issues involved were related to similar movements in painting and literature. They are helpfully discussed in H. R. Rookmaakers' 'Gauguin and Nineteenth Century Art Theory'²⁵, and 'Modern Art and the Death of Culture'²⁶. In a somewhat oversimplified way we can understand the situation as follows: romanticism was at root a humanistic affirmation of personal freedom and feeling. Insofar as it espoused universal ideals to which man could attain, they were put forward as the creations of man himself. Thus, although there was always a more popular, sentimental and shallowly optimistic strain to romanticism, its fuller and more mature expression involved a vision of man that was noble but tragic. With the 20th century developments the hoped for unity between man and nature, pessimism and optimism, subjective realization of truth and its objective universality break down, heralding a profound sense of futility in man. There is an excellent discussion of some of the more specifically aesthetic features of this situation in Rookmaakers' 'Gauguin and Nineteenth Century Art Theory'. Whilst this is written from a perspective closely akin to that developed in the present booklet, it does not discuss anything specifically related to music. In this latter respect some of the more specifically musical details are discussed very helpfully in 'Caliban Reborn' by Wilfred Mellers²⁷. Mellers works from a very different perspective from that espoused here, and his terminology is apt to be somewhat confusing. However, his book is probably one of the best available for giving such detailed insight into the spirit of 20th century music.

Debussy is often classed as an impressionist, with many books on modern music citing him as a parallel to such figures as Monet in painting²⁸. Whilst there are some points to be made in favour of this view, the aesthetic issues surrounding it are seldom given the attention they deserve. In the first place, for example, Impressionism, as an artistic outlook is closely tied to painting — since the painter is trying to reproduce what he sees directly, with the subject of the painting being less significant. Doubtless there are and have always been parallels in music, whereby sounds have been attempted to be reproduced in this way. However, the positivistic priority to sense-impressions as access reality has never had the same consequences for sound as it

25. Swets and Zeitlinger. Amsterdam (1959-72).

26. IVP (1970).

27. Op. Cit.

28. For example P. A. Scholes 'The Oxford Companion to Music' (Oxford, 1947): the article on 'Impressionism'.

has for sight. Thus these parallels alone do not suffice to warrant Debussy being described as an impressionist without further comment. Secondly, Debussy was part of a circle of French symbolist writers and painters such as Verlaine and Maeterlinck, with his important opera 'Pelleas and Melisande' based upon a play by Maeterlinck. The symbolist painters and writers tried to give direct expression to a negative sense of reality, a feeling of estrangement from reality. However they did so in the main without bold innovations of style. The significance of Debussy and of Monet in his later period was that they sought to embody the artistic ideals of symbolism in new styles that in the latter's case were directly related to those of impressionism. In Debussy's case, however, he was the stylistic innovator²⁹.

Schonberg took the expressionist direction, along with much of the German culture of his day. This finds its spiritual roots in terms of an intense feeling of inner lostness and an alienation with the human condition. In this respect Schonberg's whole life was concerned with religious and artistic struggles that involved the problem of giving concrete expression or form to the transcendent and life-giving vision. As such the last sung line of his opera 'Moses and Aaron' gives vent to a despair of ever solving this problem. "Word, O Word that I lack."

Stravinsky, the other formative figure in shaping 20th century music, was part of the so-called neo-classical phase of Western music in the 1920s. During this period he wrote an opera on the 'classical' theme 'Oedipus Rex'. However, it is entirely different in spirit to operas of the earlier classical period. Although the characters are in costume, they remain stationary throughout the performance. Furthermore, the text is in Latin. Reading a book on the life of Francis of Assisi, Stravinsky was struck by the passage:

*"French was, for St. Francis, the language of poetry, the language of religion, the language of his best memories and most solemn hours, the language to which he had recourse when his heart was too full to express itself in his native Italian, which had become vulgarised and debased by daily use. French was essentially the language of his soul. Every time he spoke French, those who knew him realised he was happy"*³⁰.

This gave Stravinsky the idea that if he were to choose a sublime subject for his new work, he would express it not in the vernacular but in a special language, something older and partly sanctified, which might contain an incantatory element he could exploit in music. Latin seemed to offer the required qualities. Stravinsky states that:

*"This choice had the great advantage of giving me a medium not dead, but turned to stone and so monumentalized as to be immune from all risk of vulgarization"*³¹.

29. Rookmaaker 'Gauguin and Nineteenth Century Art Theory' op. cit. pp. 52-89.

30. E. W. White 'Stravinsky: the composer and his Works'. Faber and Faber (1969) p. 289.

31. Ibid p. 290.

Many other works of Stravinsky, such as 'The Symphony of Psalms' are composed in this spirit.

Thus in these various ways we may see that the major architects of 20th century music work from a view of life which sets the truth of reality beyond the pale of the human world in which we live our daily lives. They point to it in symbols, but they have no means of comprehending it or setting it forth in a manner that speaks to the day-to-day life of mankind. In overtly Christian terminology, this amounts to an assertion of the view that the Word of God is forever veiled behind a cloud of unknowing, and does not give direction to the everyday task of mankind. The tragedy is that the Christian community has either limited the Word of God or else tended to echo the same general viewpoint that has just been cited. Either way, this view scarcely creates a ripple of comprehending protest within the general life of the Church. Yet one only needs to listen to Bach's 'St. Matthew Passion' or to Handel's 'Messiah' with fresh ears to realize that these works were written out of a view of life that differs significantly from that of the Romantics and of the architects of modern music. This view involved the genuine ability of the Word of God to speak to the fallen and frail condition of humankind, giving grace, judgement, direction to its affairs.

Recent Trends

The more recent trends in contemporary music have seen a further development of the 'symbolic', 'mystical' usage of religious language. Stockhausen, in 'Gesang der Junglinge' employs children's voices mixed with electronic sounds. When the former become audible they are heard singing snippets from the Book of Daniel. Again, the same composer's 'Stimmung' employs 'magic' words (i.e., 'God' words from all different languages) that burst in upon the otherwise static chant of voices. In his 'Celtic Requiem', John Taverner attempts to overcome the problem of the chasm between the truth of reality and the truth of everyday life, by employing Latin texts from the Requiem Mass together with children's songs on the theme of death. The same composer's 'Nomine Jesus' is based on a single chord and a single name — Jesus. Of it he says:

"The name 'Jesus' I believe has a magic power when called out and sung. In the first section, five European languages are used, and in the middle section, which I call 'cycles', the main Asiatic and Negro languages are employed. The last section contains verses from 'St. John of the Cross', sung by the soprano soloist, under which 'the chord' and 'the name' 'evaporate'!"³²

It is important from these remarks that, although the word 'Jesus' may be continued to be used in music, its meaning would appear to be closer to the magical views which, to a large extent were exhorting by the reforming power of the Word of God in the growth of the West. Doubtless the new magic is very different from the old. Nonetheless it should be cause for some very deep reflection at the general spiritual condition of the West, the more so because there are many well-meaning Christians

32. John Taverner. Record Cover. Apple Records.

who would be sincerely, yet uncomprehendingly, using the name of Jesus in a way that does not differ fundamentally from that cited by Taverner.

Within the present chapter I have endeavoured to give something of an overview of the spiritual impulses that have stimulated and directed the music of the West, with particular reference to what might be called its 'art music'. However, to get something of a rounded picture of this overview, particularly insofar as the contemporary situation is concerned, some attention needs to be focussed upon popular music.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CRISIS OF THE WEST: A CALL FOR CHRISTIAN REFORMATION

*"Traditional culture is a 'wine culture' and pop culture is a 'coke culture'. Until pop the tendency of most artists in every medium was to work within the tradition of a wine culture while living increasingly in what was a coke culture. Even those artists who did use modern imagery were for the most part out to shock, or to demonstrate the spiritual desert of modern life in contrast to the certainties of the past"*³³.

Within the history of Western music, what we might call 'High art' has generally been associated with giving symbolic expression in music to the most important things of life. This is as true of the Organum of the Middle Ages, the Masses of the Renaissance, the Cantatas of the Reformation as it is of the operas of 17th-19th century humanism. However, throughout most of Western history, the popular or folk music that sprang from the fullness of life made and lived by the people had a close relationship to these 'higher' artistic developments. Very often, of course, it was the folk music associated with the religious faith of the people that provided what might be called 'the basic language' whereby the larger population would be able to understand and appreciate these developments. This was particularly so in the German Reformation. The chorales provided the basis from which both the organ music and the choral and instrumental music of the cantatas and passions could develop into a 'high art' that was yet appreciated and enjoyed by a wide public, who, in turn, were able to gain some insight into the other areas of musical culture.

One of the more significant features of the contemporary situation is the decline of this tradition of 'high' art through the failure of its contemporary exponents to maintain contact with any significant group of the population. At the same time we have witnessed a new cultural development that goes loosely under the name of 'Pop'. For some time this has dictated the aesthetic tastes of contemporary mass culture. Not only that; it expresses a spirit underlying a way of life that has both old and distinctively contemporary features. The various spiritual and historical roots of these developments are by no means simple, although the broad outlines are relatively

33. David Sylvester, quoted by E. Molly in 'Revolt into style', Penguin (1970).

clear. The details (too numerous to relate here) show a complex interaction between European and American Negro musics, as well as the influence of a variety of spiritual directions in the life of America over a period of two or three centuries. The general situation may be depicted diagrammatically as in Figure 1.

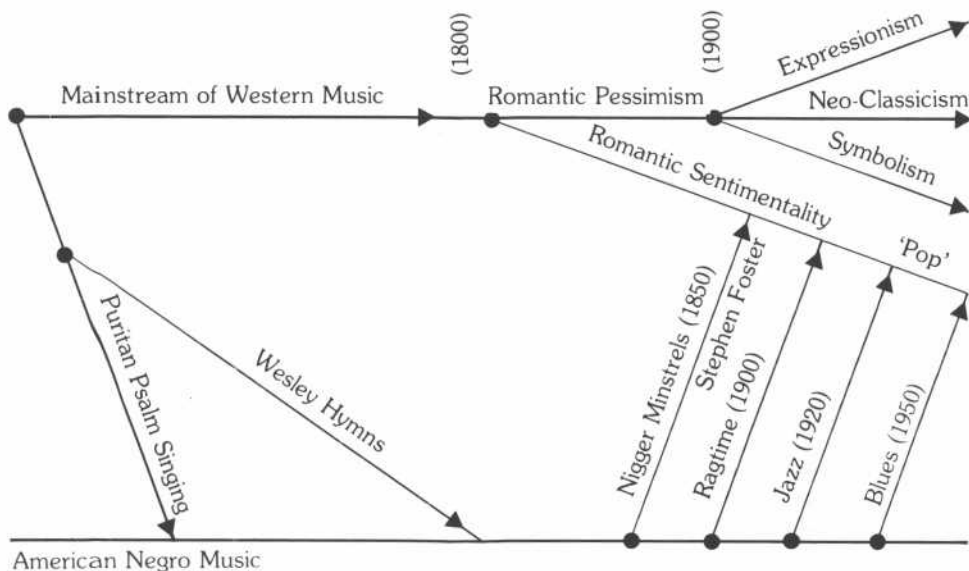


Figure 1

The influence of humanism was strongly felt upon the 18th century enlightenment, sowing the seeds of the scientific World View. It was also strongly felt upon the French Revolution, Romanticism and the subsequent gradual parting of the ways between serious and popular music. To grasp something of what this relationship can be, consider 'The Beggar's Opera', by John Gay, first produced in London in 1728. Musically, this work draws both from the 'classical' styles of the day and from popular English folk-song. The subject matter of the opera is the ethically dubious, but nevertheless human intrigues of very ordinary but underprivileged people. The dialogue is subtle, rich in allusions to the 'fundamental equalities of all men' under the 'masks of social class and station', and the aesthetics of 'Opera Seria', with its habit of turning tragedy into a story in which 'everyone lived happily ever after'. It was a truly popular work, full of interest for the whole spectrum of society. It confronted and exposed the full realities of life. It did not try to escape from them by trying to pretend that things were other than they really were.

It is precisely this element of escaping the full realities of life that begins to characterise the popular music of the West during the 19th and 20th centuries. The beginning of this development can be traced to one of the very centres of European culture of the time — Vienna. In the early 19th century, with such figures as Schubert and Weber, Vienna saw the beginnings of the deep and pessimistic version of

Romanticism that became the major formative influence upon the tradition of 'high' art in the West. With the music of Johann Strauss, it also saw the development of a popular music (associated initially with the 'upper' social classes) that embodied the sentimental, life-avoiding version of Romanticism which has been characteristic of Western popular music ever since. Of Strauss's 'Die Fledermaus', Mellers writes:

*"In 'Die Fledermaus' the centre of the action is a ball, which hints at the contrast between appearance and reality. The story deals with petty deceptions and adulteries, the masquerade of human passions; yet the point is that none the less, everyone loves everyone else: except for the Bat, who, in a fit of petty spite, wants to reveal the truth about themselves to these charming people. Because he invokes Reality, the Bat is the villain; but it turns out that he invokes reality only in order to defeat it. The Grand Finale looks as though it has achieved a degree of honesty, for along with the dominant hedonistic motive it shows us the military theme, the prison theme, even the death-fear-all of which permeated Viennese life, as we can see from the music of Schubert and Mahler. The Bat admits that everyone deceives everyone else, that the military shadow darkens the charms of Lilac Time, that one may end up not in a palace but in a prison; he even admits that we may ultimately die. Having done so, however, he would then persuade us that all this is exquisitely funny. While there is true grace, vivacity and ebullience in Strauss the Waltz King, celebrating physically the passing moment, we can understand why it was his soft evasion, rather than Rossini's or Offenbach's effervescent cynicism, that degenerated into the tabloid feeling of Lehar, Oscar Strauss and Leo Fall. Tin Pan Alley was spawned in the gutters of Vienna."*³⁴

Celebration of the passing moment; a shallow sentimentality; an awareness of lost innocence; a taunting sexuality characteristic of Vaudeville; pious religious sentiment; narrow moralism: these are all different and in many ways contradictory features of the more popular romantic spirit that flourished in the 19th century, and which, in many respects has continued into the 20th century. This spirit has by and large come to oppose reality to sentimental diversion in such a way that 'entertainment' has come to mean a release from the bitter or everyday realities of life to a diversionary world of happy, sentimental optimism that helps sustain the day-to-day existence, but which at the same time is recognised to be a fragile balloon of candy-floss that may either burst or go flat at a moment's notice.

The separate paths followed by the traditions of 'high' art and 'popular' art during the last one hundred and fifty years can be viewed as the two sides of the dialectical dilemmas posed by the humanistic spirit that has increasingly come to dominate modern culture since the Age of Enlightenment. These dilemmas include, for example, optimism as opposed to pessimism, joy as opposed to sorrow, depth as opposed to shallowness, a life-confronting as opposed to a life-avoiding attitude to art.

34. W. Mellers. 'Music in a New Found Land.' Barrie and Rockliff (1964), pp. 243-244.

The deep, pessimistic romanticism that characterised the development of high art reacted deeply against the Rationalism of the Enlightenment in a way that sought to bring the freedom of personality as experienced in feeling, to the fore. It was a reaction that, in its noblest and highest aims, sought to find a centre for life in the deep strivings of the romantic personality. On the other hand, the more shallow sentimental romanticism that was characteristic of the more popular music was afraid to look too deeply at the conditions of human life. It preferred to dwell optimistically upon sentiment, to avoid talking or thinking about matters that came too close to dealing with the more basic realities of life.

The Afro—American Contribution

In the light of this understanding of the problematics within the roots of Western music over the last one hundred and fifty years, it is easy to understand the attraction which the music of the American Negro holds for many Europeans. The development of Afro-American music is a fascinating story in itself, one which can only be touched upon here. It is one which brings together the background of African music, the reforming power of Christian faith, Puritan psalm-singing, the hymns of Isaac Watts and Charles Wesley, European ballad singing and mountain fiddling, as well as the realities of cultural, social and spiritual alienation. These all produce a music that faces life in a brutally honest fashion, with the honesty including the grace of God and the hope of renewal and redemption that it provides.

The true Negro Spirituals (from which the more Europeanized versions made accessible to European culture by the Fisk Jubilee Singers, derive) are a great lesson in what Christian singing can be. They arise from a faith in Christ that is simple yet total in its impact. The music reflects a joy that arises from the fullness of a life which is nevertheless full of tribulation. The Ragtime of Scott Joplin and the Jazz of 'King' Joe Oliver is a music rich in formal design, polyrhythm and polyphony. It is a music reflecting a liveliness and a depth of joy that was conceived in a full confrontation with life that was neither superficial nor wildly out of control.

The Blues have a complex background, deriving in part from the field holler and the ballad, together with a background in the spirituals. They began as an essentially solo music, speaking of the alienation of the singer and of all those who would identify with him. Although the lyrics of the blues are invariably related to the problems of love-life, in reality there are several layers of meaning involved. It is this feature which lends to the Blues a spiritual depth that is almost unmatched by any other folk music. Apart from estranged love-life, there is also the theme of the cultural and social alienation of the *Black* man with respect to the *White* man, and further, a background of an acute awareness of man alienated from God. This latter aspect is sometimes explicitly touched upon in the Blues lyrics, and even when no explicit reference is made, the Blues invariably have something of this spirit about them. Within the culture of the American Negro, the Blues underwent a considerable development during the first half of this century. One aspect of this was the post-war development of 'Rhythm and Blues' — a commercial music made in the big cities, for Negro audiences only. It was from this source that Rock and Roll burst upon the scene of European popular music in the mid-1950s.

It needs to be appreciated that this contribution of 'Rhythm and Blues' to European popular music is just the most recent of a number of 'waves' in which the music of the American Negro has been assimilated into white popular culture. The first of these was the Nigger Minstrel shows of the mid-nineteenth century. These involved a deliberate stereotyping of the Negro as Jim Crow or Zip Coon, and were coupled with music that tried to imitate certain 'Negro features'. The use of the Negro image was in part one of genuine sentiment, and part one of vulgar throw-off. Given the situation of the Negro in the America of the 19th century, however, the whole thing is typical of the way in which shallow sentimentality combined with European arrogance can be blind to the realities of life. Stephen Foster had associations with the Christy Minstrel shows, involving white men with blackened faces singing music that was generally closer to the English ballad, march and hymn than to anything genuinely Afro-American. Nonetheless, through the strange combination of features that belongs to the outlook of European popular music, the characterization of the Negro spoke to the needs of Europeans in America. Foster's songs divide roughly into two categories: those which betray no 'negro' influence, and those in which the 'negro' influence of the Christy Minstrels is quite evident. 'Beautiful Dreamer' is an example of the former whilst 'De Camptown Races' is an example of the latter. The songs of the former type exemplify the spirit of shallow sentimentality in European popular music whilst those of the latter type possess an element of realism that may well be related to their Afro-American influence albeit one that is full of imitative and romanticised features.

The second 'wave' was Ragtime. The Ragtime of Scott Joplin and of other negro composers (not to mention the contributions of the European Joseph Lamb) was not just a music rich in formal design. It was a music that also had a depth of joy and liveliness about it. But once more, as this was incorporated into white popular music, the bourgeois spirit of shallow sentimentality, of the sensate enjoyment of the present fleeting moment, the avoiding of the deep realities of life, transformed into a honky-tonk piano and slick syncopated song rhythms.

The third 'wave' was Jazz. This music developed from the city and environs of New Orleans and was a unique contribution of Afro-American culture. As developed by its early exponents such as King Joe Oliver it bespoke a contented joy and liveliness. It was moreover a music in which no single individual stood out among others. Rather, it was a music-making that was finely balanced and in which each player had his place in the whole. In hands that were directed largely by the spirit of romantic sentiment and the sensate enjoyment of the passing moment, this music too degenerated — eventually into the swing style of 1935-45, associated with the names of Benny Goodman and Arty Shaw.

The story of European popular music since 1800 may be seen, therefore, as one in which the basic direction has been set by shallow sentimentality and the sensate enjoyment of the fleeting moment. As such it continually lacks depth and reality. The incorporation of Negro idiom into this musical tradition has invariably functioned to make up for this unreality. The initial result has generally been to regain some semblance of reality and thereby avoid the dialectical dilemmas that were mentioned above. However, the longer term effect has invariably been a transformation of the Afro-American styles in accordance with the dictates of the sentimental, sensate

spirit that dominates European popular culture.

It is a sad reflection on the Christian Church that it has not really broken free of the spirit of romantic sentimentality in its music during the period under discussion. Indeed much of the music-making within Revivalist and other such more orthodox traditions has tended to be cast in this romantically sentimental vein. The hymns of Moody and Sankey are a good case in point. Although this music is certainly other than sensate or a celebration of the passing moment, it nonetheless belongs to the more sentimental brand of popular music precisely because its style is an attempt to symbolize or express the inner condition and feeling of the believer. Although other examples may not be as clearly related to this aesthetic aim as that of Moody and Sankey, I still think it is true to say that all too much of the popular music-making of the Christian Church has been too little aware of the roots and character of the styles that it has generally supported and allowed to express and symbolise its faith and life.

Of all people Christians should have protested against a culture dominated by the spirits of sentimentality and sensate enjoyment of the passing moment. Instead, the protest was made by the Youth Culture of the 1950's and 1960's, in which youth revolted against the sentimental, bourgeois culture represented by Rosemary Clooney and Frank Sinatra.

The style which expressed the revolt derived from Rhythm and Blues. As such it contained many features that were inappropriate for a popular music that had its spiritual roots nurtured by the gospel of Christ. However, as I've tried to point out, much the same could be said for the dominant and mainstream direction of 'European' popular music as it has been developed in America and elsewhere during the 20th century. The result of the revolt expressed in Rock and Roll has been a further 'wave' of Afro-American music involving a compensating realism contributing to a tradition founded upon shallow sentiment, sensate enjoyment and escapist features. In many ways the music of the early Rock and Roll period was still very much part of this tradition. The lyrics (consider for example The Beatles' 'She Loves You; Yeah, Yeah, Yeah'), were frequently shallow and sentimental, whilst its main innovation was to accentuate that feature of the sensate enjoyment of the passing moment. However, this accentuation involved something of a new departure in that one no longer really 'listened' to the music as such, but rather became sensually if not hypnotically involved with its sensate character. The stylistic features derived from Rhythm and Blues were already functioning in this way in the American Negro culture of Big Cities. To that extent it communicated to and spoke for a whole generation of people who were without cultural or spiritual roots, and has since become one of the main strands of popular music all over the globe.

However, not all the innovations to the popular music of the 1960's can be seen in the above way. Some were expressive of the deepest problems of our culture. There was the contribution of Bob Dylan with his lyrics of social protest. There was the dark shades of existential despair evident in the music and lyrics of Simon and Garfunkel, and there were the rather bizarre developments in Pop culture dating from the Beatles' 'Sergeant Pepper', resulting from an interaction of open sexuality with the quest for mystical experience in a revolt against bourgeois sentimentality and technocratic conformity to the establishment. Then there were the developments of

Hard Rock, seeking for a continuous 'druglike' experience in a musical high. Although the latter was therefore sensate in character, contrary to the 'more bourgeois' Rock and Roll, it was concerned to seek for the permanent, the transcendent or to be 'one with the universe'. Hence, it was not surprising to find a link between Pop culture and the mystical aspirations of music and culture as expressed in Hinduism.

During the 1970's, however, there has been a considerable change in the overall mood of the 'Pop' scene. Whilst there have continued to be a large number of more bizarre contributions, David Bowie, the Sex Pistols, Punk Rock and the like, the dominant trend would appear to be a more conservative one, emphasising those features of sentiment, sensate celebration of the passing moment, and lost innocence that have constituted the main-stream of European popular culture during the 19th and 20th centuries. These features are evident, for example, in the music of ABBA, in the return of the interest and cultivation of the styles of the 1950's, and the almost reverencing of the memory of Elvis Presley.

A Call for Christian Reformation

All these developments have met with varying reactions from Christians. This in itself is not surprising since the Christian community itself has been so shaped and fashioned by the various spirits and traditions that I have variously sought to expose in this booklet that, to quote Harry Blamires — 'There is no Christian mind'³⁵ — on this or on any other subject.

One reaction typical of many is that of Bob Larsen, an American evangelical preacher. In his books 'Hippies, Hindus and Rock and Roll', 'Rock and Roll: The Devil's Diversion' and 'Cursed Shalt Thou be in the Cities'³⁶, this author seems to place Hippies, Drugs, Rock and Roll, Indian Music and Philosophy all at the feet of the devil, currently undermining the fibre of Christian America. He says:

"The only Christian thing for you, young person, is total abstinence from rock music stations and the destruction of every hard rock record you own."

Whilst this reaction is desirous of being discerning, appreciating that there are religious forces at work in the shaping of human culture, it exemplifies that the view that would seek to identify one culture with an expression of the devil; and another with the work of the goodness of God. From the point of view presented in the present booklet, such views are lacking in both cultural and aesthetic insight with the consequence that the ways in which religious forces are at work in the shaping of human culture are presented in a manner which is too simplistic. The consequence of Christians working with such views can only be either to uncomprehendingly affirm the 'nice', sentimental strain present in European popular music, or else to leave them impoverished and lacking a genuine Christian depth with which to grapple with the problems.

35. S.P.C.K. (1963).

36. Bob Larson, McCook, Nebraska, 1969.

An example of another reaction is represented by Harold Myra and Dean Merrill in their book 'Rock, Bach and Superschlock', subtitled 'a Christian book about a beautiful thing called music'³⁷. This advocates the view that any Christian assessment of music should be based upon the morals of whatever lyrics might be involved. The music itself is regarded as 'a neutral bag of tricks' on which anyone may draw, as they wish. There are equally serious problems with the views presented in this book. In the first place there seems to be little appreciation that the aesthetic features of style associated with music or other artistic media embody, or are designed to embody, are a means of symbolising reality according to some particular perspective. The latter has spiritual roots and is able to be expressed in a variety of ways in different media.

This raises the whole issue of a Christian aesthetic critique over against an ethical assessment of what might or might not be implied in the lyrics. In the second place, an assessment based simply upon the content of the words may be misleading. The work entitled 'Nomine Jesu' by John Taverner, discussed at the end of the last chapter³⁸ for example, employs little but the word Jesus, and passages from the New Testament in a variety of languages, supplemented by quotes from St. John of the Cross. Yet, there can be little doubt that the aesthetic symbolisation is cast in a gnosticism that seeks to reach the magic of eternal symbols by means of the words of the New Testament.

The view presented in this paper is that the present condition of our culture should cause radical reflection as to its shaping forces and their roots. The Scriptures have always called men and women to this kind of radicalism, and it is unfortunate that much recent Christianity has been deficient in appreciating the religious roots involved in the exercise of cultural formation. Once spirituality is restricted to dealing with the more limited areas of life — church-going, personal morals and piety, then the Sword of the Word is effectively withdrawn from social, cultural and political life. A truly Christian radicalism must see that Christ is now the Lord of Creation, and must be resolved to serve Him as such in all areas of life³⁹. This involves a fundamental spiritual struggle within our hearts and lives, moving into all aspects of cultural and social life. To accomplish this task a spiritual discernment that is neither anti-intellectualism nor rationalistic is needed. Rather, a discernment based upon the Biblical view that 'out of the heart of man flows the issues of life'⁴⁰ should recognise that cultural development is given direction by the way the commitment of men's hearts relates to the True or a Pretended Origin of all things.

To begin to accomplish this Task, all should exercise this discernment in trying to sympathetically understand the concerns and the forces of contemporary music, whether of the pop or more serious variety. The young, teachers, parents, rock fans and classical fans should not just 'get into their thing' but should be willing to self-critically examine their music and other sorts of music with this end in view. In doing so it should open up new and fascinating vistas for all to explore with the same discernment, for, although, in many ways I have tended to adopt a critical stance in

37. Holman (1972).

38. See page 14 of Chapter 2 of this booklet.

39. Matt. 28:18-20; Col. 1:15-20.

40. Prov. 4:23.

this booklet, I would not wish to underestimate the very many valuable contributions that have surfaced in the many musical examples that have been cited or touched upon.

There exists today, for example, a vast range of recorded folk music from an almost incredible range of sources. The Folkways Company, for example, offers a wide variety of examples for studying not only the culture of the American Negro, but also a great deal of lesser known folk music of the United States, and, indeed, of other countries too. Considering both the extent to which the heritage of Afro-American music has influenced the contemporary pop scene, and also the depth of the impact of the Christian faith upon Negro culture, cultivating an interest in genuine Negro music is important if we are to develop our music in a spirit of obedience to Christ. In this respect our goals should be high. To think merely in terms of trying to express the Christian message in the styles and media of whatever age we happen to live in fails fundamentally to recognise the extent of the problem. These very styles are themselves a product of the spirits which have made them what they are. Only a radicalism that begins from this point will be able to offer a positive alternative for the future. A spirit is embodied in a style by means of what is aesthetically symbolised in the style. This opens up the whole discussion of Christian aesthetics, a matter that is of great importance if a new vision of the sort I've tried to suggest, is to take root and flower. Although it would take me too far afield to discuss this subject within the present booklet, I think that it needs emphasising that I do not use the word 'spirit' in a vague and mystical way. The spirit shapes and is embodied in the style, so that the latter is able to symbolise or stand-for and communicate that which the author or composer intends. Thus the style cannot be truly appreciated outside of its spiritual roots, and the spirit cannot be discerned apart from a careful examination and appreciation of the style⁴¹. In these and in other ways the Body of Christ must recover the call to a total life-style of obedience to her Lord if the needed degree of change is to be effected. It is only as our cultural and social lives are really driven by a spirit of obedience to the Word of God in aesthetic life that we will see any significant change in our music-making. Given such a wholehearted commitment, together with a real willingness to work together at the task in a communal way, then by the grace of God we may indeed see a renewal of our cultural and social lives — including our musical lives. Indeed a vision for such communal obedience should have a high priority in the way that we educate our children, for given the powerful forces that continue to shape our culture, and the relative weakness of the Christian community, they will need encouragement and an ability to work together at the task if they are to move toward a realization of the vision. Not only is this the only way in which we can faithfully serve Christ as parents and teachers in our educational responsibility. It is also the only way in which we can offer our children genuinely challenging and positive goals of Christian discipleship for the future.

By way of conclusion I make the following suggestions to aid this task in music making:

41. For a more extensive discussion of these matters, refer to my 'The Christian Task in the Arts' F.C.S. Publication

- (i) We Christians should take the time and effort to come to terms, sympathetically, yet critically, with the culture of our day. Only in this way can we come to an adequate appreciation of how radical the Christian message is in offering renewal and reformation in the present, as well as offering a hope in the future consummated by Christ's return.
- (ii) We should also reflect very critically upon the state of our own contemporary music-making. By far the greater part of it is an embodiment of the spirit of sentimental romanticism, thereby severely lacking an aesthetic strength to its style.
- (iii) In recovering an authentic Christian music-making, we need to study the best of the Christian musical heritage. Thus, in regard to Psalms and hymns, we should turn to have a fresh look at the Genevan Psalter, the Lutheran Chorales, Wesley Hymns, Negro Spirituals, Sacred Harp Singing and Plain Song. In regard to an elaborated art music, we should make a careful study of the cantatas and passions of the Lutheran Reformation, including such figures as Heinrich Schutz as well as the mighty figure of J. S. Bach.
- (iv) We need to study Jewish music. There is much in Jewish heritage of music, both past and present, that could be of immense value to a renewed Christian music-making. Jewish music is generally conceived in the fullness of life, not in an other-worldly flight.
- (v) As already indicated, we need to study the development of Negro music. This is an extremely complicated matter, precisely because of the complexities that have been involved, and the difficulties involved in its documentation. However, not only has the heritage had a great influence upon contemporary music-making especially in its more popular form, but also it is a tradition which has in many ways had a strong stamp of authentic Christian faith placed upon its styles.
- (vi) We need to undertake a critical study of the more significant musical contributions within recent years, both with a view to understanding the spiritual character of their aesthetic roots and also with a view to learning from the ways in which the composers have developed and innovated new stylistic features. Such a list would be very long. However, in the Tradition of Western Art Music I would single out the works of Penderecki, especially his 'St. Luke Passion' as worthy of study, along with those of Benjamin Britten and Igor Stravinsky. In the more popular tradition works like 'Truth is Fallen' by Dave Brubeck, and 'Superstar' by Rice and Weber, along with a host of others could be cited. I mention the former two as these, in different ways, draw directly upon Biblical materials and although the overall aesthetic they imply may be of doubtful Biblical integrity they nonetheless embody stylistic features that are worthy of some profitable study.

If this overall task is undertaken with a reformational vision that is both honest in respect to its aspirations and humble with respect to its efforts, then we could again see a music made to the honour and glory of God. We should remember, however, that perhaps the greatest Christian contribution to music — that of J. S. Bach — came forth only after 150 years of cultural reformation. Our task is to be faithful to our calling, not to expect great things out of nothing. May God help us to do that in our day and age.

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