

4: *About Music Today*

- R.C. What do you mean when you say that critics are incompetent?
- I.S. I mean that they are not even equipped to judge one's grammar. They do not see how a musical phrase is constructed, do not know how music is written; they are incompetent in the technique of the contemporary musical language. Critics misinform the public and delay comprehension. Because of critics many valuable things come too late. Also, how often we read criticisms of first performances of new music—in which the critic praises or blames (but usually praises) performance. Performances are of something; they do not exist in the abstract, apart from the music they purport to perform. How can the critic know whether a piece of music he does not know is well or ill performed?
- R.C. What does "genius" mean to you?
- I.S. A "pathetic" term strictly; or, in literature, a propaganda word used by people who do not deserve rational opposition. I detest it literarily and cannot read it in descriptive works without pain. If it doesn't already appear in the *Dictionnaire des Idées Reçues*, it should be put there, with, as its automatic responses, "Michelangelo" and "Beethoven."

R.C. What does "sincerity" mean to you?

I.S. It is a *sine qua non* that at the same time guarantees nothing. Most artists are sincere anyway, and most art is bad—though, of course, some insincere art (sincerely insincere) is quite good. One's belief that one is sincere is not so dangerous, however, as one's conviction that one is right. We all feel we are right; but we felt the same way twenty years ago and today we know we weren't always right then.

R.C. Would you "draw" your recent music? For example:

PLAIN CHANT

Polyphony

HARMONIC
Polyphony
(BACH)

HARMONY
(WAGNER)

WEBER

NEW SERIALISTS

I.S. This is *my* music:



HARMONY, MELODY, RHYTHM

R.C. You have often remarked that the period of harmonic discovery is over, that harmony is no longer open to exploration and exploitation. Would you explain?

I.S. Harmony, a doctrine dealing with chords and chord relations, has had a brilliant but short history. This history shows that chords gradually abandoned their direct function of harmonic guidance and began to seduce with the individual splendors of their harmonic effects. Today harmonic novelty is at an end. As a medium of musical construction, harmony offers no further resources into which to inquire and from which to seek profit. The contemporary ear requires a completely different approach to music. It is one of nature's ways that we often feel closer to distant generations than to the generation immediately preceding us. Therefore, the present generation's interests are directed toward music before the "harmonic age." Rhythm, rhythmic polyphony, melodic or intervallic construction are the elements of musical building to be explored today. When I say that I still compose "harmonically" I mean to use the word in a special sense and without reference to chord relations.

R.C. Isn't Busoni's famous "attempted definition of melody" (1922) a fairly accurate prophecy of the melodic conception of many young composers today? "Melody," he said, "is a series of repeated rising and falling intervals, which are subdivided and given movement by rhythm; containing a latent harmony within itself and giving out a mood-feeling; it can and does

exist independently of words as an expression and independently of accompanying parts as a form; in its performance the choice of pitch and of the instrument makes no difference to its essence."

I.S. The last two points are the most remarkable, coming from Busoni. The idea that the actual pitch of the note is not so important in an absolute sense has been supplanted, to my mind, by the idea that pitch matters only because of the interval. Today the composer does not think of notes in isolation but of notes in their intervallic position in the series, in their dynamic, their octave, and their timbre. Apart from the series, notes are nothing; but in the series their recurrence, their pitch, their dynamic, their timbre, and their rhythmic relation determine form. The note functions only in the series. The form is serial, not only some or all of the musical elements that compose it. The individual note determines the form only as part of its group or order.

R.C. Has any new development in the domain of rhythm caught your attention?

I.S. The tempo controls—if tempo comes under the heading of rhythm—in the central movement of *Le marteau sans maître* are an important innovation. In this movement the beat is accelerated or retarded to basic fast or slow metronome speeds with indications en route of exactly the speed one should be traveling. This amounts to controlled retard and accelerando. Used systematically, as in the *Marteau*, where you are never in a tempo but always going to one, these controls are able to effect a new and wonderfully supple kind of music.

The free-but-co-ordinated cadenzas in Stock-

hausen's *Zeitmasse* (I have not yet heard his *Gruppen* for three orchestras) are also a rhythmic innovation of great value.

In exploring the possibilities of variable meters young composers have contributed but little. In fact, I have seen no advance on the *Sacre du Printemps*, if I may mention that work, in all the half century since it was written.

R.C. Do you know that a whole school of *Klangfarbenmelodie* composers is flourishing at present?

I.S. Most of that is the merest stylistic imitation, of course, and nothing could be more ephemeral. But the German word needs definition; it has come to mean too many things. For example, I don't think the "melodie" part of it is good or useful applied to a work such as Webern's *Concerto* and I am sure that in the same piece *farben* is less important than *klang*-design which isn't the same thing.

If by *Klangfarbenmelodie* you mean no more than a line of music which is divided among two or more instruments, that habit has already reached a *reductio ad absurdum*. Looking at a ridiculously difficult score recently—it was really the map of an idea that had begun not in musical composition but before it—I was reminded of a Russian band I knew in my childhood. This band was made up of twelve open—that is, valveless—horns. Each horn had one note to play and together they could produce the chromatic scale. They would practice hours and hours in order to surmount the rhythmic problems presented by simple melodies. I do not see the difference between the idea of this band of hunting horns and the idea of some of the *Klangfarben* scores I have seen.

If a serious composer intends the lines of two or more instruments to produce one melodic line, I advise him to follow Elliott Carter's practice in his string Quartet and write out the one-line reduction as a guide.

ELECTRONIC MUSIC

R.C. Do you have an opinion about electronic music?

I.S. I think that the *matière* is limited; more exactly, the composers have demonstrated but a very limited *matière* in all the examples of electronic music I have heard. This is surprising because the possibilities as we know are astronomical. Another criticism I have is that the shortest pieces of electronic music seem endless, and within those pieces we feel no time control.

Therefore, the amount of repetition, imaginary or real, is excessive.

Electronic composers are making a mistake, in my opinion, when they continue to employ significant noises in the manner of *musique concrète*. In Stockhausen's *Gesang der Jünglinge*, a work manifesting a strong personality and an indigenous feeling for the medium, I like the way the sound descends as though from auras, but the burbling fade-out noises and especially the organ are, I find, incongruous elements. Noises can be music, of course, but they ought not to be significant; music itself does not signify anything.

What interests me most in electronic music so far is the notation, the "score."

R.C. In the music of Stockhausen and others of his generation the elements of pitch, density, dynamics, duration, frequency (register), rhythm, timbre have been subjected to the serial-variation principle. How will the nonserial element of "surprise" be introduced in the rigid planning of this music?

I.S. The problem that now besets the totalitarian serialist is how to compose "surprise" since by electronic computer it doesn't exist (though in fact it does, even if every case is computable; even at its worst, we listen to music as music and not as a computing game). Some composers are inclined to turn the problem over to the performer—as Stockhausen does in *Piano Piece No. XI*. I myself am inclined to leave very little to the performers. I would not give them margin to play only half or selected fragments of my pieces. Also, I think it inconsistent to have controlled everything so minutely and then leave the ultimate shape of the piece to a performer (while pretending that all possible shapes have been allowed for).

R.C. Do you think there is a danger at present of novelty for its own sake?

I.S. Not really. Nevertheless, certain festivals of contemporary music by their very nature cannot help but encourage mere novelty. And by a curious reversal of tradition, some critics encourage it too. The classic situation in which conservative and academic critics deride the composer's innovations is no more. Now composers can hardly keep up with the demands of some critics to "make it new." Novelty sometimes result that could not interest anyone twice. I am more cautious of the power of the acclaimers than of the disclaimers, of those critics who hail on principle what they cannot possibly contact directly with their own ears or understanding. This is musical politics, not music. Critics, like composers, must know what they love. Anything else is pose and propaganda, or what D. H. Lawrence called, "would-be."

CONTEMPORARY MUSIC AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC

R.C. Isn't the general public everywhere just as isolated from contemporary music since about 1909 as the Soviet Union?

I.S. Not everywhere; not in Germany where, for example, my own later music is performed almost as frequently for the general public as are Strauss and Sibelius in the U.S. But the year 1909 means "atonality," and "atonality" did create a hiatus which Marxists explain as a problem of social pressures when in fact it was an irresistible pull within the art.

R.C. Do you wish to say anything about patronage?

I.S. Haphazard patronage, whether or not it is better than systematic patronage, is extremely inadequate. It called into being all of the music of Schoenberg, Berg, Webern, Bartók, and myself, though most of our music was not called into being at all but only written and left to compete against more conventional types of music in the commercial market. This is part of the reason why four of those composers died in mid-twentieth century in humiliating circumstances, or at least in circumstances that were far from affluent. This kind of patronage has not changed in a hundred and fifty years except that today there seems to be less of it.

R.C. Do you know the present status of your music east of NATO?

I.S. Friends who attended the Warsaw Conference of Contemporary Music in October 1956 say that my

music was officially boycotted there but enthusiastically received, nevertheless, by composers from the Soviet sphere. My music is unobtainable—all of it and in any form, disc or printed score—east of NATO; not only my music but Webern's, Schoenberg's, Berg's, as well. Russia's musical isolation—she will call it our isolation—is at least thirty years old. We hear much about Russian virtuoso violinists, pianists, orchestras. The point is, of what are they virtuosi? Instruments are nothing in themselves; the literature they play creates them. The mandolin and guitar, for instance, did not exist until Schoenberg imagined them in an entirely new way in his *Serenade*. A new musical masterpiece of that kind is a demand that musicians be created to play it. The Soviet virtuoso has no literature beyond the nineteenth century.

I am often asked if I would consent to conduct in the Soviet Union. For purely musical reasons I could not. Their orchestras do not perform the music of the three Viennese and myself, and they would be, I am sure, unable to cope with the simplest problems of rhythmic execution that we introduced to music fifty years ago. The style of my music would also be alien to them. These difficulties are not to be overcome in a few rehearsals; they require a twenty- or thirty-year tradition. I discovered something of the same situation in Germany at the end of the war. After so many years of Hitler, in which my *Histoire du Soldat*, Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*, Berg's and Webern's music were banned, the musicians were unable for a long time to play the new music, though they have certainly more than made up for it since.

It is the same thing with ballet. A ballet exists in its repertoire as much as, or more than, in the tech-

nical perfection of its dancers. The repertoire is a few nineteenth-century ballets. These and sentimental, realist, Technicolor *Kitsch* are all the Soviets do. Ballet in this century means the Diaghilev repertory and the creations of the very few good choreographers since.

R.C. You have known American musical life since 1925; would you comment on any aspect of its development since then?

I.S. I hope I am wrong, but I fear that in some ways the American composer is more isolated today than he was in 1925. He has at present a strong tendency to say, "We'll leave all of that *avant garde* stuff to Europe and develop our own musical style, an American style." The result of having already done that is now clear in the way the "intellectual advanced stuff" (some of it, that is, for at least 99 per cent of all *avant garde* products are transparent puerilities) is embarrassing everybody; compared to Webern, for example, most of our simple homespun "American style" is fatuous in expression and in technique the vilest cliché. In the phrase "American Music," "American" not only robs emphasis from "music" but it asks for lower standards. Of course, good music that has grown up here will be American.

We have no capital for new music as New York was a capital in 1925. Look at the League of Composers' programs of the 1920s and see if anything comparable is taking place in New York at the present. Of course, more contemporary music is played there now, and more American music, but the really consequential, controversial, new music is not played and it *was* then. True, we have those wonderful orchestras, but they are growing flabby on their diet of repertoire

and second-rate new music—too much sugar. Recently I was asked to conduct two programs with one of the glamorous American orchestras. But my programs were rejected and the engagement canceled because I refused to play Tchaikovsky instead of a program entirely of my own music. This could not happen in Europe and at this date it shouldn't happen here. Boards of directors and managers must stop assuming that their limited educations and tastes are reliable gauges for an audience's. An audience is an abstraction; it has no taste. It must depend on the only person who has (pardon, should have), the conductor.

The United States as a whole has certainly a far richer musical life today, with first-rate orchestras everywhere and good opera production in places like San Francisco, Santa Fe, Chicago, and the universities. But the crux of a vital musical society is new music.

JAZZ

R.C. What is your attitude to jazz?

I.S. Jazz is a different fraternity altogether, a wholly different kind of music making. It has nothing to do with composed music and when it seeks to be influenced by contemporary music it isn't jazz and it isn't good. Improvisation has its own time world, necessarily a loose and large one, since only in an imprecisely limited time could real improvisation be worked up to; the stage has to be set, and there must be heat. The percussion and bass (not the piano; that instrument is too hybrid, and besides most of the players have just discovered Debussy) function as a central heating system. They must keep the temperature "cool," not cool. It is a kind of masturbation that never arrives anywhere (of course) but that supplies the "artificial" genesis the art requires. The point of interest is instrumental virtuosity, instrumental personality, not melody, not harmony, and certainly not rhythm. Rhythm doesn't exist really because no rhythmic proportion or relaxation exists. Instead of rhythm there is "beat." The players beat all the time, merely to keep up and to know which side of the beat they are on. The ideas are instrumental, or, rather, they aren't ideas because they come after, come from the instruments. Shorty Rogers's trumpet playing is an example of what I mean by instrumental derivation, though his trumpet is really a deep-bored, bugle-sounding instrument which reminds me of the keyed bugles I liked so much and

wrote for in the first version of *Les Noces*.^{*} His patterns are instrumental: half-valve effects with lip glissandi, intervals and runs that derive from the fingers, "trills" on one note, for example, G to G on a B-flat instrument (between open and first-and-third fingers), etc.

As an example of what I have said about timing, I can listen to Shorty Rogers's good style, with its dotted-note tradition, for stretches of fifteen minutes and more and not feel the time at all, whereas the weight of every "serious" virtuoso I know depresses me beyond the counteraction of Equanil in about five. Has jazz influenced me? Jazz patterns and especially jazz instrumental combinations did influence me forty years ago, of course, but not the idea of jazz. As I say, that is another world. I don't follow it but I respect it. It can be an art of very touching dignity, as it is in the New Orleans jazz funerals. And, at its rare best, it is certainly the best musical entertainment in the U.S.

^{*} Hearing Mr. Rogers play this instrument in Los Angeles last year perhaps influenced me to use it in *Threni*.

THE PERFORMANCE OF MUSIC

R.C. Do you agree that in some cases the composer should indicate how he wishes the conductor to beat his music?

I.S. I think he should always indicate the unit of the beat and whether or not a subdivision is to be felt. Also, he should show whether the conductor is to beat the beat or the rhythmic shape of the music, if that shape is against the beat. For example, the triplets, three in the time of four, in Webern's *Das Augenlicht* and in my *Surge Aquilo*: I contend that to beat three here (in other words, to beat the music) is to lose the "in the time of four" feeling, and instead of a triplet feeling you have merely a three-beat bar *in a new tempo*.

R.C. Do you agree with Schoenberg's premise that a good composition is playable in only one tempo? (Schoenberg's example of a piece of music of uncertain tempo was the Austrian hymn from Haydn's *Emperor Quartet*).

I.S. I think that any musical composition must necessarily possess its unique tempo (pulsation): the variety of tempi comes from performers who often are not very familiar with the composition they perform or feel a personal interest in interpreting it. In the case of Haydn's famous melody, if there is any uncertainty in the tempo the fault is in the alarming behavior of its numerous interpreters.

R.C. Have you ever considered whether a piece of "classic"

music is more difficult to kill by misperformance than a "romantic" piece?

I.S. It depends, of course, on what we decide to mean by those divisions and also on the kinds and degrees of misperformance. Let us take refuge in examples, contemporary ones, preferably. My *Agon* and Berg's *Kammerkonzert* divide, I should think, on most of the characteristic issues we imagine to determine those categories.

The *Kammerkonzert* depends strongly on mood or interpretation. Unless mood dominates the whole, the parts do not relate, the form is not achieved, detail is not suffused, and the music fails to say what it has to say—for "romantic" pieces are presumed to have messages beyond the purely musical messages of their notes. The romantic piece is always in need of a "perfect" performance. By "perfect" one means inspired—rather than strict or correct. In fact, considerable fluctuations in tempo are possible in a "romantic" piece (metronomes are marked *circa* in the Berg, and performance times sometimes diverge as much as ten minutes). There are other freedoms as well, and "freedom" itself must be conveyed by the performer of a "romantic" piece.

It is interesting to note that conductors' careers are made for the most part with "romantic" music. "Classic" music eliminates the conductor; we do not remember him in it and we think we need him for his *métier* alone, not for his mediumistic abilities—I am speaking of my music.

But does all of this turned around fit the contrary? Perhaps, though the question of degree is important, for the characteristics of each category apply at some point to both. For example, when a conductor has

ruined a piece of mine, having failed to convey a sense of "freedom" and "mood," let him not tell me that these things are joined exclusively to another kind of music.

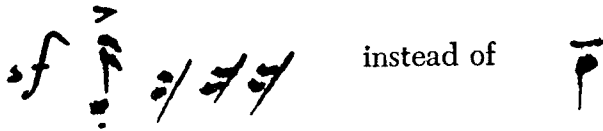
R.C. What do you regard as the principal performance problems of your music?

I.S. Tempo is the principal item. A piece of mine can survive almost anything but wrong or uncertain tempo. (To anticipate your next question, yes, a tempo can be metronomically wrong but right in spirit, though obviously the metronomic margin cannot be very great.) And not only my music, of course. What does it matter if the trills, the ornamentation, and the instruments themselves are all correct in the performance of a Bach concerto if the tempo is absurd? I have often said that my music is to be "read," to be "executed," but not to be "interpreted." I will say it still, because I see in it nothing that requires interpretation (I am trying to sound immodest, not modest). But, you will protest, stylistic questions in my music are not conclusively indicated by the notation; my style requires interpretation. This is true and it is also why I regard my recordings as indispensable supplements to the printed music. But that isn't the kind of "interpretation" my critics mean. What they would like to know is whether the bass clarinet repeated notes at the end of the first movement of my *Symphony in Three Movements* might be interpreted as "laughter." Let us suppose I agree that it is meant to be "laughter"; what difference could this make to the performer? Notes are still intangible. They are not symbols but signs.

The stylistic performance problem in my music is one of articulation and rhythmic diction. Nuance

depends on these. Articulation is mainly separation, and I can give no better example of what I mean by it than to refer the reader to W. B. Yeats's recording of three of his poems. Yeats pauses at the end of each line, he dwells a precise time on and in between each word—one could as easily notate his verses in musical rhythm as scan them in poetic meters.

For fifty years I have endeavored to teach musicians to play



in certain cases, depending on the style. I have also labored to teach them to accent syncopated notes and to phrase before them in order to do so. (German orchestras are as unable to do this, so far, as the Japanese are unable to pronounce "L".) In the performance of my music, simple questions like this consume half of my rehearsals: when will musicians learn to abandon the tied-into note, to lift from it, and not to rush the sixteenth notes afterwards? These are elementary things, but solfeggio is still at an elementary level. And why should solfeggio be taught, when it is taught, as a thing apart from style? Isn't this why Mozart concertos are still played as though they were Tchaikovsky concertos?

The chief performance problem of new music is rhythmic. For example, a piece like Dallapiccola's *Cinque Canti* contains no interval problems of instrumental technique (its cross shapes in the manner of George Herbert are for the eye and present no aural problems; one does not hear musically shaped crosses). The difficulties are entirely rhythmic, and

the average musician has to learn such a piece bar by bar. He has not got beyond *Le Sacre du Printemps*, if he has got that far. He cannot play simple triplets, much less subdivisions of them. Difficult new music must be studied in schools, even if only as exercises in reading.

Myself as a conductor? Well, reviewers have certainly resisted me in that capacity for forty years, in spite of my recordings, in spite of my special qualifications for knowing what the composer wants, and my perhaps one thousand times greater experience conducting my music than anyone else. Last year *Time* called my San Marco performance of my *Canticum Sacrum* "Murder in the Cathedral." Now I don't mind my music going on trial, for if I'm to keep my position as a promising young composer I must accept that; but how could *Time* or anybody know whether I ably conducted a work I alone knew? (In London, shortly after the *Time* episode, I was at tea one day with Mr. Eliot, being tweaked by a story of his, when my wife asked that kindest, wisest, and gentlest of men did he know what he had in common with me. Mr. Eliot examined his nose; he regarded me and then reflected on himself—tall, hunched, and with an American gait; he pondered the possible communalities of our arts. When my wife said "Murder in the Cathedral," the great poet was so disconcerted he made me feel he would rather not have written this *opus theatricum* than have its title loaned to insult me.)

R.C. Do you agree that perhaps the composer should try to notate "style" more precisely? For example, in the finale of your *Octuor*, the bassoons play eighth notes

with dots; wouldn't it have been more exact to write sixteenth notes followed by rests?

I.S. I do not believe that it is possible to convey a complete or lasting conception of style purely by notation. Some elements must always be transmitted by the performer, bless him. In the case of the *Octuor*, for example, if I had written sixteenth notes, the problem of their length, whether they should be cut off on or before the rests would be substituted for the original problem, and imagine reading all those flags!

R.C. Have you noticed any influence of electronic technique on the compositions by the new serial composers?

I.S. Yes, in several ways; and the electronic technique of certain composers interests me far more in their "live" compositions than in their electronic ones. To mention only one influence, electronic music has made composers more aware of range problems (in electronic music, after all, an octave higher *does* mean twice as fast). But here again, Webern was ahead in realizing that the same material, if it is to be worked out on equal levels, must be limited to four or five octaves (Webern extended beyond that only for important outlines of the form). But electronic music has influenced rhythm (for example, that curious sound which trails off into slower and slower dots), articulation, and many items of texture, dynamics, etc.

R.C. Which of your recorded performances do you prefer; which do you consider definitive?

I.S. I cannot evaluate my records for the reason that I am always too busy with new works to have time to listen to them. However, a composer is not as easily

satisfied with recordings of his works as a performer is satisfied for him, in his name, and this is true even when the composer and the performer are the same person. The composer fears that errors will become authentic copy and that one possible performance, one set of variables will be accepted as the only one. First recordings are standard-setting and we are too quickly accustomed to them. But to the composer-conductor the advantage of being able to anticipate performances of his new works with his own recordings outweighs all complaints. For one thing, the danger of the middle musician is reduced. For another, the time lag in disseminating new music has been cut from a generation or two to six months or a year. If a work like *Le Marteau sans Maître* had been written before the present era of recording it would have reached young musicians outside of the principal cities only years later. As it is, this same *Marteau*, considered so difficult to perform a few years ago, is now within the technique of many players, thanks to their being taught by record.

But the public is still too little aware that the word "performance" applied to recording is often extremely euphemistic. Instead of "performing" a piece, the recording artist "breaks it down." He records according to the size (cost) of the orchestra. Thus Haydn's *Farewell* Symphony would be recorded from the beginning to the end in order; but *Bolero* would be done backwards, so to speak, if it were sectionally divisible. Another problem is that the orchestra is seated according to the acoustical arrangement required by the engineering. This means that the orchestra does not always sound like an orchestra to the orchestra.

I still prefer productions to reproductions. (No

photograph matches the colors of the original, nor is any phonographed sound the same as live sound; and we know from experience that in five years new processes and equipment will make us despise what we now accept as good enough imitations.) But the reproduced repertoire is so much greater than the produced, concerts are no longer any competition at all.

MUSIC AND THE CHURCH

R.C. Your *Mass*, *Canticum Sacrum*, and *Threni* are the strongest challenges in two hundred years to the decline of the Church as a musical institution.

I.S. I wish they were effective challenges. I had hoped my *Mass* would be used liturgically, but I have no such aspiration for the *Threni*, which is why I call it, not *Tenebrae Service* but *Lamentations*. Whether or not the Church was the wisest patron—though I think it was; we commit fewer musical sins in church—it was rich in musical forms. How much poorer we are without the sacred musical services, without the Masses, the Passions, the round-the-calendar cantatas of the Protestants, the motets and sacred concerts, and vespers and so many others. These are not merely defunct forms but parts of the musical spirit in disuse.

The Church knew what the Psalmist knew: music praises God. Music is as well or better able to praise Him than the building of the church and all its decoration; it is the Church's greatest ornament. Glory, glory, glory; the music of Orlando Lasso's motet praises God, and this particular "glory" does not exist in secular music. And not only glory—though I think of it first because the glory of the Laudate, the joy of the Doxology, are all but extinct—but prayer and penitence and many others cannot be secularized. The spirit disappears with the form. I am not comparing "emotional range" or "variety" in sacred and secular music. The music of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—it is all secular—is "expressively"

and "emotionally" beyond anything in the music of the earlier centuries: the *Angst* in *Lulu*, for instance—gory, gory, gory—or the tension, the perpetuation of the moment of epitasis, in Schoenberg's music. I say simply that, without the Church, "left to our own devices," we are poorer by many musical forms.

When I call the nineteenth century "secular" I mean by it to distinguish between religious-religious music and secular-religious music. The latter is inspired by humanity in general, by art, by *Übermensch*, by goodness, and by goodness knows what. Religious music without religion is almost always vulgar. It can also be dull. There is dull church music from Hucbald to Haydn, but not vulgar church music. (Of course there is vulgar church music now, but it is not really of or for the Church.) I hope, too, that my sacred music is a protest against the Platonic tradition, which has been the Church's tradition through Plotinus and Erigena, of music as antimoral. Of course Lucifer had music. Ezekiel refers to his "tabrets and pipes" and Isaiah to the "noise of his viols." But Lucifer took his music with him from Paradise, and even in Hell, as Bosch shows, music is able to represent Paradise and become the "bride of the cosmos."

"It has been corrupted by musicians," is the Church's answer, the Church, whose musical history is a series of attacks against polyphony, the true musical expression of Western Christendom, until music retires from it in the eighteenth century or confounds it with the theater. The corrupting musicians Bosch means are probably Josquin and Okeghem, the corrupting artifacts the polyphonic marvels of Josquin, Ockeghem, Compère, Brumel.

R.C. Must one be a believer to compose in these forms?
I.S. Certainly, and not merely a believer in "symbolic figures," but in the Person of the Lord, the Person of the Devil, and the Miracles of the Church.

THE YOUNGER GENERATION

R.C. Of your works, the young *avant-garde* admire *Le Sacre du Printemps*, the *Three Japanese Lyrics*, various of the Russian songs, *Renard*, and the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*. They react strongly against your so-called neoclassic music, however (*Apollo*, the piano Concerto, *Jeu de Cartes*, etc.), and though they affirm your more recent music they complain that triadic harmonies and tonic cadences are solecisms in the backward direction of the tonal system. What do you say to all this?

I.S. Let me answer the latter complaint first: my recent works *are* composed in the—my—tonal system. These composers are more concerned with direction than with realistic judgments of music. This is as it should be. But in any case they could not have followed the twenty years of their immediate forebears, they had to find new antecedents. A change in direction does not mean that the out-of-influence is worthless, however. In science, where each new scientific truth corrects some prior truth, it does sometimes mean that. But in music advance is only in the sense of developing the instrument of the language—we are able to do new things in rhythm, in sound, in structure. We claim greater concentration in certain ways and therefore contend that we have evolved, in this one sense, progressively. But a step in this evolution does not cancel the one before. Mondrian's series of trees can be seen as a study of progress from the more "*resemblant*" to the more abstract; but no one would be so silly as to call any of the trees more or less beautiful

than any other for the reason that it is more or less abstract. If my music from *Apollo* and *Oedipus* to *The Rake's Progress* did not continue to explore in the direction that interests the younger generation today, these pieces will nonetheless continue to exist.

Every age is an historical unity. It may never appear as anything but either/or to its partisan contemporaries, of course, but semblance is gradual, and in time either and or come to be components of the same thing. For instance, "neoclassic" now begins to apply to all of the between-the-war composers (not that notion of the neoclassic composer as someone who rifles his predecessors and each other and then arranges the theft in a new "style"). The music of Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern in the twenties was considered extremely iconoclastic at that time but the composers now appear to have used musical form as I did, "historically." My use of it was overt, however, and theirs elaborately disguised. (Take, for example, the Rondo of Webern's *Trio*; the music is wonderfully interesting but no one hears it as a Rondo.) We all explored and discovered new music in the twenties, of course, but we attached it to the very tradition we were so busily outgrowing a decade before.

R.C. What music delights you most today?

I.S. I play the English virginalists with never-failing delight. I also play Couperin, Bach cantatas too numerous to distinguish, Italian madrigals even more numerous, Schütz *sinfoniae sacrae* pieces, and masses by Josquin, Ockeghem, Obrecht, and others. Haydn quartets and symphonies, Beethoven quartets, sonatas, and especially symphonies like the Second, Fourth, and Eighth, are sometimes wholly fresh and

delightful to me. Of the music of this century I am still most attracted by two periods of Webern: the later instrumental works, and the songs he wrote after the first twelve opus numbers and before the *Trio*—music which escaped the danger of the too great preciousness of the earlier pieces and which is perhaps the richest Webern ever wrote. I do not say that the late cantatas are a decline—quite the contrary—but their sentiment is alien to me, and I prefer the instrumental works. People who do not share my feeling for this music will wonder at my attitude. So I explain: Webern is for me the *juste de la musique*, and I do not hesitate to shelter myself by the beneficent protection of his not yet canonized art.

R.C. What piece of music has most attracted you from a composer of the younger generation?

I.S. *Le Marteau sans Maître*, by Pierre Boulez. The ordinary musician's trouble in judging composers like Boulez and the young German Stockhausen is that he doesn't see their roots. These composers have sprung full-grown. With Webern, for example, we trace his origins back to the musical traditions of the nineteenth and earlier centuries. But the ordinary musician is not aware of Webern. He asks questions like, "What sort of music would Boulez and Stockhausen write if they were asked to write tonal music?" It will be a considerable time before the value of *Le Marteau sans Maître* is recognized. Meanwhile I shall not explain my admiration for it but adapt Gertrude Stein's answer when asked why she liked Picasso's paintings: "I like to look at them." I like to listen to Boulez.

R.C. What do you actually "hear" vertically in music such

as Boulez's *Deux Improvisations sur Mallarmé* or *Le Marteau sans Maître*?

I.S. "Hear" is a very complicated word. In a purely acoustical sense I hear everything played or sounded. In another sense, too, I am aware of everything played. But you mean, really, what tonal relationships am I conscious of, what does my ear analyze, and does it filter the pitches of all the individual notes? Your question implies that you still seek to relate the notes tonally; that you are looking for a "key" that will enable you to do so (like Hardy's Jude, who imagined that Greek was only a different pronunciation of English). However, all that the ear can be aware of in this sense is density (nobody under thirty—and only rare antediluvians like myself over thirty—uses the word "harmony" any more but only "density"). And density has become a strict serial matter, an element for variation and permutation like any other; according to one's system one gets from two to twelve notes in the vertical aggregation. (Is this mathematical? Of course it is, but the composer composes the mathematics.) All of this goes back to Webern, who understood the whole problem of variable densities (a fact so remarkable that I wonder if even Webern knew who Webern was). But the question of harmonic hearing is an older one, of course. Every ordinary listener (if there is any such extraordinary creature) has been troubled by harmonic hearing in the music of the Vienna school from *circa* 1909—in *Erwartung*, for example. He hears all of the notes acoustically but cannot analyze their harmonic structure. The reason is, of course, that this music isn't harmonic in the same way. (In the case of the

Erwartung recording there is another reason too; the vocal part is sung off pitch most of the time.)

Do I hear the chord structure of these nonharmonic-bass chords? It is difficult to say exactly what I do hear. For one thing it is a question of practice (while perhaps not entirely a question of practice). But whatever the limits of hearing and awareness are, I shouldn't like to have to define them. We already hear a great deal more in the harmony of these non-tonal-system harmonic pieces. For example, I now hear the whole first movement of Webern's *Symphony* tonally (not just the famous C-minor place), and melodically I think everyone hears it more nearly tonally now than twenty years ago. Also, young people born to this music are able to hear more of it than we are.

The Boulez music? Parts of the *Marteau* are not difficult to hear *in toto*; the "bourreaux de solitude," for instance, which resembles the first movement of the Webern *Symphony*. With a piece like "après l'artisanat furieux," however, one follows the line of only a single instrument and is content to be "aware of" the others. Perhaps later the second line and the third will be familiar, but one mustn't try to hear them in the tonal-harmonic sense. What is "aware of?" Instrumentalists often ask that question: "If we leave out such and such bits, who will know?" The answer is that one does know. Many people today are too ready to condemn a composer for "not being able to hear what he has written." In fact, if he is a real composer, he always does hear, at least by calculation, everything he writes. Tallis calculated the forty parts of his *Spem in Alium Nunquam Habui*, he did not hear them; and even in twelve-part polyphony such

as Orlando's, vertically we hear only four-part music. I even wonder if in complicated Renaissance polyphony the singers knew where they were in relation to each other—which shows how good their rhythmic training must have been (to maintain such independence).

- R.C. How do you understand Anton Webern's remark: "Don't write music entirely by ears. Your ears will always guide you all right, but you must know why."
- I.S. Webern was not satisfied with the—from one point of view—passive act of hearing: his music requires that the hearer, whether composer or listener, make cognizant relations of what he hears: "You must know why." It obliges the *hearer* to become a *listener*, summons him to active relations with music.

THE FUTURE OF MUSIC

R.C. Young composers are exploring dynamics; what kind of new use of them may we expect?

I.S. An example of the kind of dynamic use we might anticipate is in Stockhausen's *Zeitmasse*. In that piece, at bar 187, a chord is sustained in all five instruments, but the intensities of the individual instruments continue to change throughout the duration of the chord: the oboe begins *ppp* and makes a short crescendo to *p* at the end; the flute diminuendos slowly from *p*, then crescendos a little more quickly to *p*, where it remains through the last third of the bar; the English horn crescendos slowly, then more quickly, from *ppp* to *mp*, and diminuendos symmetrically; the clarinet sustains *p*, then slowly diminuendos from it.

Such dynamic exploitation is not new, of course—a serial use of dynamics as well as of articulation, a related subject and just as important, is already clearly indicated in Webern's *Concerto for Nine Instruments*—but I think electronic instruments, and especially electronic control might carry it much farther. I myself employ dynamics for various purposes and in various ways, but always to emphasize and articulate musical ideas: I have never regarded them as exploitable in themselves. In places such as the tenor *ricercare* in my *Cantata* I ignore volume almost altogether. Perhaps my experience as a performer has persuaded me that circumstances are so different as to require every score to be re-marked for every performance. However, a general scale of dy-

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dynamic relationships—there are no absolute dynamics—must be clear in the performer's mind.

The inflections of a constantly changing dynamic register are alien to my music. I do not breathe in *ritardandos* or *accelerandos*, *diminuendos* or *crescendos*, in every phrase. And infinitely subtle gradations—*pianissimi* at the limits of audibility and beyond—are suspect to me. My musical structure does not depend on dynamics—though my “expression” employs them. I stand on this point in contrast to Webern.

R.C. Will you make any prediction about the “music of the future?”

I.S. There may be add-a-part electronic sonatas, of course, and precomposed symphonies (“Symphonies for the Imagination”—you buy a tone row, complete with slide rules for duration, pitch, timbre, rhythm, and calculus tables to chart what happens in bar 12 or 73 or 200), and certainly all music will be mood-classified (kaleidoscopic montages for contortuplicate personalities, simultaneous concerts binaurally disaligned to soothe both men in the schizophrenic, etc.), but mostly it will very much resemble “the music of the present”: for the man in the satellite—super-hi-fi Rachmaninov.

R.C. Do you think it likely that the masterpiece of the next decade will be composed in serial technique?

I.S. Nothing is likely about masterpieces, least of all whether there will be any. Nevertheless, a masterpiece is more likely to happen to the composer with the most highly developed language. This language is serial at present, and though our contemporary development of it could be tangential to an evolution

we do not yet see, for us this doesn't matter. Its resources have enlarged the present language and changed our perspective in it. Developments in language are not easily abandoned, and the composer who fails to take account of them may lose the mainstream. Masterpieces aside, it seems to me the new music will be serial.

ADVICE TO YOUNG COMPOSERS

R.C. Will you offer any cautions to young composers?

I.S. A composer is or isn't; he cannot learn to acquire the gift that makes him one, and whether he has it or not, in either case, he will not need anything I can tell him. The composer will know that he is one if composition creates exact appetites in him and if in satisfying them he is aware of their exact limits. Similarly, he will know he is not one if he has only a "desire to compose" or "wish to express himself in music." These appetites determine weight and size. They are more than manifestations of personality, are in fact indispensable human measurements. In much new music, however, we do not feel these dimensions, which is why it seems to "flee music," to touch it and rush away, like the mujik who, when asked what he would do if he was made Tsar, said, "I would steal one hundred roubles and run as fast as I can."

I would warn young composers too, Americans especially, against university teaching. However pleasant and profitable to teach counterpoint at a rich American Gymnasium like Smith or Vassar, I am not sure that that is the right background for a composer. The numerous young people on university faculties who write music and who fail to develop into composers cannot blame their university careers, of course, and there is no pattern for the real composer, anyway. The point is, however, that teaching is academic (Webster: "Literary . . . rather than technical or professional . . . Conforming to . . . rules . . .

conventional . . . Theoretical and not expected to produce . . . a practical result”), which means that it may not be the right contrast for a composer’s noncomposing time. The real composer thinks about his work the whole time; he is not always conscious of this but he is aware of it later, when he suddenly knows what he will do.

R.C. Do you allow that some of the new “experimental” composers might be going “too far?”

I.S. “Experiment” means something in the sciences; it means nothing at all in musical composition. No good musical composition could be merely “experimental”; it is music or it isn’t. It must be heard and judged like any other. A successful “experiment” in musical composition would be as great a failure as an unsuccessful one, if it were no more than an experiment. But in your question, the question that interests me is the one which implies the drawing of lines: “Thus far and no farther; beyond this point music cannot go.” I suppose psychology has studied the effects of various types of challenges on various groups and I suppose it knows what are normal responses and when they occur—in this case, when one begins to seek defense from new ideas and to rationalize them away. I have no information about this. But, I have all around me the spectacle of composers who, after their generation has had its decade of influence and fashion, seal themselves off from further development and from the next generation. (As I say this, exceptions come to mind—Krenek, for instance.) Of course, it requires greater effort to learn from one’s juniors, and their manners are not invariably good. But when you are seventy-five and your generation has overlapped with four younger ones, it behooves

you not to decide in advance “how far composers can go,” but to try to discover whatever new thing it is makes the new generation new.

The very people who have done the breaking through are themselves often the first to try to put a scab on their achievement. What fear tells them to cry halt? What security do they seek, and how can it be secure if it is limited? How can they forget that they once fought against what they have become?