Music-ology

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Although this may not be the place to say it, I have never really believed that the study of music was, or even could be, divorced from its performance or perception. The question may be one of emphasis. Sometimes it is very clear that one person feels drawn to a theoretical, or analytic, view of music; other times the pull is toward the understanding of music from the point of view of history. In my own case, theory, history, performance, and composition have become so intermingled that it is almost impossible to know where one ends and the other begins. Far from simplifying matters, this mélange of considerations can create enormous difficulties.

Take composition, for example. No one living in the 20th century can be unaware of what has happened in music in the past 400 years if, during his education, he has ever taken even one course in music history. Furthermore, the proliferation of recorded "authentic" performances of early music makes older styles available, even outside an academic setting. However, knowing *everything* can be quite a burden. It may be stimulating, but at the same time it can put a strain on the creative impulse by making the novice composer terribly self-conscious if he finds himself imitating music of the past. One wishes to find his own voice, but in the tumult of the past which constantly surrounds a person, the finding of one's voice may become more important than its cultivation.

Today, it is impossible to grow up in blissful ignorance of all music except that of the immediate past. And one owes this somewhat questionable blessing to what is usually referred to as musicology. Douglas Moore once called composition "irrepressible invention." I think that, ideally, this is true. But I consider it very hard, indeed, to be "irrepressibly inventive" in the presence of the enormous amount of music already in existence. I think this explains, in part, why so much music today is as deliberately antihistoric (i.e., eccentric) as it is. It represents a complete rejection of the concept of a mainstream of music and may be called a denial of history and of the concepts of music in other times as explained to us by historical students of the art.

Certainly, not everyone feels this way. In my case, as I have grown older and more experienced, I have found that the music I write is a little less deliberately "original." I do not mind if, occasionally, it is somewhat reminiscent of what has gone before. I feel less intimidated by "other people's" music, but I do wonder, sometimes, what it would have been like to grow up as Chopin did, without the weight of historical knowledge on my shoulders.

All this does not mean that learning about music of the past is not enthralling. Having studied with some excellent scholars, first at Harvard and then at Columbia, I am aware of how deeply enriching to the present an understanding of the past can be. It is wonderful to know what happened, to try to see why it happened. These studies were to me a little like the apple was to

Adam. I would not be what I am today without them, but one sometimes longs for innocence.

As for performance, I think musicology is invaluable. Perhaps the speed with which the music of the past was forgotten was due as much to changing performance practice as to the desire for novelty. Occasionally, of course, a work considered monumental for one reason or another, like Handel's *Messiah,* was reinterpreted by its admirers in later times. But a work in modern dress, as it were, can never be as satisfying as the original, even though it may retain some of its quality.

Like nearly every other pianist of my generation, I began with the *Well-Tempered Clavier* (*Clavichord* in those days) as edited by Carl Czerny. I discovered, when I arrived at college, that what I had been accepting as the "Bach style," fortified by Bruno Walter's annual performance of the *St. Matthew Passion* at the Philharmonic, and Stokowski's *Toccata and Fugue in D Minor,* while rich in certain pleasures, was far less gratifying than the real thing. My thoughts on how the music went, on what propelled it from one instant to the next, were completely changed. Without the desire for authenticity, for seeing things as they really were, which is one of the great contributions of musicology, we would be even more like Plato's cave dwellers than we are.

I do not wish to imply that no musician's home is complete without clavichord, harpsichord, organ, lute, and piano. I still like the way Horowitz plays Scarlatti, even though I realize that I am perceiving Scarlatti's essence from a different angle. No one would say that, because it is outdated, in the wrong language, and mistranslated, that the King James version of the Bible is worthless. The truth is that the more we know about a work, the richer our total understanding and experience of it become.

When I was twenty I went to France to study with Nadia Boulanger. I thought I was going to study composition. Little did I know! I discovered that I was unaware of so much music and so much about music: I was overwhelmed by a feeling of hopelessness. How could one ever spend enough time studying so that, by the time one had reached her age, one would possess even half the knowledge which she seemed always to have at her fingertips? In time I realized that mere study could never produce such expertise.

To Mademoiselle Boulanger absolutely anything that has to do with music is relevant. Even more, anything that has to do with communicating a thought *about* music, or with its performance or creation, is relevant. Through experience, through constant awareness, the material needed to make a point or open the mind and eyes of another presents itself almost of its own accord. I learned to understand music of many periods, of many styles, by performing it at sight, analyzing it, having it explained by a person whose natural insight had been sharpened by an insatiable curiosity about *all* music, not just that of Western Europe.

Through her insight into the very essence of a musical style, Mademoiselle Boulanger is able to communicate the sense of what composers must have

thought about their music and what they must have been trying to do. This, in my opinion, is the very essence of musicology. It can lead us to an understanding of human thought and belief outside our own time. Like all other aspects of historical study, it can make us aware of our fellowship with men of the past, who, though outwardly very different from us, were engaged in much the same activities.

Without study, application, and empathy, how can we hope to understand a world before Darwin and Freud? In turn, how will our children be able to understand a world that existed before television and automobiles? The recreation of these worlds, which, except for their attempts at permanence, are lost to us, can be achieved only through speculation based on these attempts. This can be done through music, but it is a difficult task, since music is, in essence, neither a visual nor a verbal manifestation of the human spirit, though it often uses sight and word as aids in communicating itself. What I learned from Nadia Boulanger is the use of scholarship. Though others might not call her a musicologist, how many knew the beauties of Monteverdi before her recordings of 1938? How many people, apparently quite numerous now, had even the faintest idea of the realization of a figured bass or of its function?

This wedding of scholarship and performance is what I strive to achieve. As a teacher, I try to show my students that it is important not to separate theory from practice, or literary knowledge from musical understanding. Each discipline, though valuable in itself, is a tool to enrich one's understanding of the very stuff that makes such distinct disciplines possible: music.

In all honesty, however, I must say that sometimes one does not have to be much of a scholar to be an accomplished musician. After two years with Nadia Boulanger, and while I was working for my M.A. in composition at Columbia, I studied with Pierre Monteux. He was a man who could not have cared less about what was going on in the world of Bach, of Mozart, or even of Stravinsky. It was his job to perform the music as clearly as he could; and if anybody was ever motivated by pure musical instinct, and a fantastic one at that, it was Monteux. But one really could not ask him his reasons. It was done a certain way because in that way it would be clearest. What an instinctive understanding of style Monteux possessed! That, too, however, was the product of immense care and tremendous application, two of the most important criteria of good scholarship.

What I have been attempting to show is my belief that every aspect of music, every tool that helps one enter more deeply into its heart, should be used. At times, one tool is more useful than another; if one tool does not work, another should be tried. I feel fortunate to have so many means available to me and less daunted by what seemed an impossible undertaking when I was younger.

In the course of my life I have performed, conducted, taught, composed, written criticism, arranged, created the music and lyrics for what used to be called popular tunes, sung, and danced. I suppose that explains my multifaceted approach. I know no other. Every means is useful to me in its own

way, and many of them are either directly related to, or stem from, musicology, which I find inestimable as a means, as well as fascinating in itself. Would there were really world enough and time—I might even become a musicologist!