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Edited by D. W. Harding, L. C. Knights and F. R. Leavis

Excerpt

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# SCRUTINY

## A Quarterly Review

*Edited by*

D. W. HARDING

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F. R. LEAVIS

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## CORRESPONDENCE

Dear Sir,—

You have kindly invited me to make some answer to Mr. Hill's criticism of my *Marxism: A Postmortem* in the December issue of *Scrutiny*. After reading Mr. Hill's review, however, I feel that any adequate reply would take up more of your space than the subject deserves. Mr. Hill's review consists chiefly of quotations torn out of their contexts; and to defend myself adequately on each of the counts which he raises would virtually involve a rewriting of the entire book.

What I find most surprising both in Mr. Hill's review and in other criticisms of the book which have been written by Marxists is that they do not make the slightest attempt to answer my two chief contentions. They content themselves with arguing that I have misunderstood Marx. I remarked in a note on Chapter Four that 'in order to anticipate criticisms, it should perhaps be pointed out that every argument used in this and the following section has been used many times before. Readers will find all these arguments discussed in books written in defence of Communism: for example, in the Webbs' *Soviet Communism*. They will find also, however, that Communists have made no serious effort to confute them.' I can only repeat this statement with reference to Mr. Hill's review. My main theses, which were supported both by theoretical arguments and by historical evidence, were: firstly, that the likelihood of a proletarian revolution in any industrialized nation was so small that it could be dismissed from practical consideration; and secondly, that any attempt to realize the Marxist ideal of a planned economic system would mean, in practice tyranny, inequality, inefficiency, and imperialist war. Mr. Hill does not merely fail to present any plausible reply to these two contentions; he does not even give any indication that this was what my book was about. The first duty of a reviewer, I should have thought, was to state fairly the subject matter of the book which he was reviewing.

Mr. Hill's complaints that I have misunderstood Marx appear to be due chiefly to the fact that he approaches the text of the Marxist gospels with the attitude of a believer in verbal inspiration; any deviation from the orthodox phraseology causes him to howl

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with indignation. One example will suffice. Mr. Hill objects to my statement that 'inequalities of distribution cause struggles between the different classes'; what Marx said, he insists, was that class struggles were provoked by questions not of distribution but of ownership. He fails to realize (the point being nowhere made plain in the Marxist gospels for the guidance of the naive believer) that ownership is important only because it involves control of distribution; where it does not include such control it is an empty legal formula. When ownership is at stake in a class struggle between peasants and landlords or workers and capitalists, it is because a change in ownership will mean a change of distribution. By refusing to look beyond the legal formula of ownership the Marxist is able to argue that there can be no class conflict in the Soviet Union; industry is 'owned' by the workers. My contention is that such 'ownership' is meaningless as long as distribution is controlled (to their own advantage) by the Stalinist bureaucracy.

A number of Mr. Hill's other complaints are provoked by my attempts to show that Marxist dogma contains a number of contradictions. He objects, for example, to the fact that I use both the Second and the Third International to illustrate the practical consequences of Marxism. My argument was that each International had developed a different side of Marxism, and that the reasons for their opposition was to be found in the theoretical deficiencies of the original doctrine. Similarly, Mr. Hill accuses me of 'either deliberate misrepresentation or mere ignorance' because I could discover no justification in terms of Marxist theory for enjoying Dante and Shakespeare. Obviously I was aware that Marx liked Dante and Shakespeare and that Lenin liked Pushkin and Tolstoy. My point was that in liking feudal and bourgeois poets Marx and Lenin were being inconsistent with their own theories.

These examples of Mr. Hill's methods of argument will perhaps be sufficient to convince readers of *Scrutiny* that his review was not wholly fair. As to the other points which he raises, I can only suggest that anybody who is sufficiently interested should read the book. Meanwhile, I am still waiting for some believer in a Communist revolution to present answers to my main arguments.

H. B. PARKES.

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## TOWARDS A MUSICAL ACADEMY

### I.

**N**OW that the function of education needs increasingly precise definition—now that we more than ever need to understand clearly what we expect from education and what we might do to ensure the fulfilment of these expectations—it seems pertinent to add to those considerations of the educational needs of the liberal spirit (particularly in their literary applications) which have already appeared in this periodical a few comments on the meaning of the phrase ‘musical education,’ with specific reference to the place such education ought to occupy in a civilized society.

There is to-day fairly uniform agreement that musical education isn't all it might be: but this healthy dissatisfaction has proved unavailing partly because those who uphold the present system have forestalled complaints by pointing out that things aren't as bad as they used (ten, twenty, thirty years ago?) to be, as though this were adequate ground for complacency; and partly because those who condemn the present system are prone to indulge in the sentimental reflection that musical education as it was (to take the stock example) to the Elizabethans—musical education as a participating activity, part and parcel of everyday life—is dead and done for anyway. This notion is sentimental because it ignores the fact that, whether or no our civilization is inferior to, it is fundamentally distinct from, that of the Elizabethans, that it has its own problems which are not incapable of solution. If it is true that our approach to musical education must necessarily be more self-conscious, then for that very reason it becomes not less, but more urgent and important that we should attempt some such approach. The attitude of superiority to academic institutions can anyway only do harm to however well-intentioned a cause, because it gives those within the pale a legitimate right to insinuate that the outsider who sneers is either an ignorant amateur, or a crank, or both. A little good-will on both sides is essential if the closed barriers which at present shut off the ‘academic’ musician from contact with the

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rest of the civilized world are either to be broken down or voluntarily relinquished.

That it is important that the barriers should be removed can hardly be disputed, for the main difficulty in deciding what one means by musical education lies in that quality of abstraction in the nature of the art which tends to encourage a divorce between music and the other great branches of knowledge (or thought or feeling). Probably this difficulty could be effectively counteracted only during the early stages of education, in which case some conception of the rudiments of musical grammar and of musical history should be taught in schools not as a specialized activity but as one of the great departments of human knowledge, as central as literature or science or mathematics. The idea of music as an art to which only the technically initiated have access should be rigorously guarded against, and I know of no way of ensuring this except to stress continually the relation between the musical manifestations of the human spirit and the verbal, plastic, pictorial, mathematical and even historical ones. Certainly under the present system the potentially musical child may often languish for lack of impetus to his imagination, whereas a relatively unmusical child will be pushed through a course which it finds acutely boring merely because it has betrayed a certain aptitude for—or manual dexterity on—a particular instrument, usually the piano. Such instrumental prowess would seem to bear sometimes an almost fortuitous, and always a very complex, ratio to essential ‘musicality’; in any case one cannot work out that ratio merely by dumping a pupil down at a keyboard.

This is a difficulty that extends to a more advanced stage of musical education than that tentatively offered by the day-school, for the main function of musical academies as at present constituted is undoubtedly the manufacture of performers. They have other functions; but by far the majority of the students attend academies in order to gain official recognition of their efficiency on a particular instrument. No one would want to suggest that a desire to perform is to be deplored: but probably about one-twentieth of these students—at a liberal estimate—have talent sufficient to justify a professional career; the rest would be better employed in educating themselves to form a responsible and discriminating audience for the talented. Theoretically, the economic objection might be urged

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that it's no use talking airily about discriminating audiences when the aim of most of these young men and women is eventually to eke what precarious livelihood they can from their professional studies. But this objection is no more than theoretical because only a very small percentage of the students make much use of their technical dexterity in their subsequent careers as teachers, accompanists, church- or even cinema-organists: all they require from their studentship is the 'certificate,' and this might as well be awarded for a humane education as otherwise. Neither the ability to play an instrument, nor a knowledge of the grammar of music, is, by itself, a contribution towards musical education: the simplest, and yet apparently the most difficult, lesson for a musician to learn is that one cannot be 'musically' educated without being emotionally educated as well. Indeed it is difficult to understand how, without some general, humane, musical education it is possible to train a satisfactory interpreter at all. At this point, the circle completed, we are in a position to ask what the basis of this general musical education might be. In a phrase I would summarize it as the inculcation of the Historical Perspective.

## II.

I think it may be because music is a relatively abstract art—its medium remote from the material of everyday life—that our judgments about it are prone to be more humanly fallible than they are, perhaps, with any other art. We imagine ourselves as standing at this particular minute point in time, looking back almost with complacency at the ever-rolling stream, able to assess from our lofty eminence the size and contour of each particular wave or ripple. We forget how we fail in consistency—how to-day's daemonic Mozart was the childlike cherub of yesterday. We lack humility; brazenly proclaiming the subjectivity of our responses we assert its almightiness, make no effort to temper it with knowledge and understanding of the kind of significance men of ages and creeds different from our own may have seen in their art. Egoistically we fall, therefore, into three connected kinds of error, the first of which may be described as errors arising from insensitive response to emotional climates; the second, as errors related to problems of social necessity; and the third, as purely technical errors consequent upon the two previous failings.

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Of these errors the first, that relating to emotional climates, is by far the most serious: I will give one main example of it—the reputation, in this country, of Jean-Baptiste Lully. Amateurs and academic musicians alike all know—they can read it in any of the history books—that although Lully is a composer of ‘some historical importance’ with reference to the Beginnings of Opera and the Development of the Orchestra, his music is of antiquarian interest only, being artificial, superficial, frigid and altogether devoid of aesthetic import, as indeed one can only expect from the product of a decadent state of society. No one, least of all academy students, is ever given an opportunity to put these generalisations to the test since the artificiality, superficiality and frigidity of Lully’s music are the reasons offered for never performing it. Instead, Lully is offhandedly compared to his great contemporary Purcell, whose human, passionate and dramatic music (itself almost completely unknown less than twenty years ago) is presumably supposed to sum up the entire achievement of the seventeenth century, and is left to bury his head in the sands of oblivion as best he may.

Even without an intimate knowledge of Lully one cannot help feeling uneasy about these glib assumptions, cannot help suspecting that it may be idiotic to look to Lully for the same kind of satisfaction that one finds in Purcell, cannot help remembering that if he lived in a decadent and superficial society, that society was great enough to produce Racine. When one considers the treatment that Racine himself used to be subjected to at the hands of English critics—considers how all the opprobrious adjectives now heaped on the composer were one time the property of the writer—one is bound to tread more cautiously still. French critics, one recalls, have always placed Lully among the great composers of history—as profound beneath his calm impersonal stylization as the Purcell whom they consider ‘*toujours anglais, toujours sentimental, toujours en mode mineur.*’ Bonnet, in his *History de la Musique* published in 1715, said of Lully ‘Did he wish to depict Love, what heart is not melted? And what melody, what naturalness! Did he wish to express Grief, do not the rocks groan with him?’ Would hearts have melted and rocks have groaned for a maker of courtly trifles? May it not be that we find Lully’s music dull because we listen to it arrogantly, without regard to its conventions and its own

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emotional climate, if indeed we listen to it at all?

I have dealt at some length with the case of Lully not for its inherent importance but because it is representative. I might have chosen countless other examples. For instance, if the church music of Couperin le Grand—music as profound as anything written in the eighteenth century, not excepting Bach—were even as well known as his clavecin pieces which are always dismissed as ‘charming’ but ‘artificial’ drawing-room confections, perhaps we might begin to understand why Couperin himself certainly did not regard his little pieces as being deficient in seriousness or even emotional intensity merely because their duration in time was brief and their sonority not excessive. Even Bach himself, as Schweitzer has shown, might be better performed if he were better understood; and the further one goes back in musical history the greater the possibilities of misapprehension must necessarily be. The poignantly dramatic Monteverde or Vittoria offer a more immediate satisfaction to our ears than the relatively impersonal Palestrina, but that does not mean that they are more ‘profound.’ Nor does it mean that they are more profound than (say) Guillaume de Machaut. Indeed the ignorance of and indifference to all pre-sixteenth century music displayed in academic institutions is perhaps the most damaging of all evils consequent upon a deficiency of historical perspective. Can one seriously maintain that for several centuries European composers—including men of the most phenomenal versatility of intellect such as Machaut and Jacopo da Bologna—tottered helplessly around on the hollow crutches of their fourths and fifths because they failed to ‘discover’ the diatonic third? Isn’t it more reasonable to conclude that they used fourths and fifths because they liked them? No one thinks of referring to the ‘progress’ of the English language from Chaucer to Shakespeare; it is accepted that they incarnate distinct civilizations and people making any pretensions to literary cultivation are willing to make the small effort necessary to overcome the slight unfamiliarity of Chaucer’s language. Similarly, the conventions of thirteenth and fourteenth century polyphony may be very different from those of nineteenth century homophony, but it is the smuggest obtuseness to claim that the latter are more mature. If one *listened* to Perotin or Jacopo or Perusio—as one can do a little with the help of the gramophone—one might begin to realize that such a contention is no less absurd



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than that of the history book which claimed to trace the evolution of European music from the 'infancy' of Monteverde to the 'maturity' of Richard Strauss!

Inevitably, therefore, the second class of errors—those connected with social necessity—is bound up with the first, since almost all errors of emotional climate arise from a misguided attempt to listen to music *in vacuo*, or in an environment inappropriate to it. One cannot hope to respond 'appropriately' to a musical composition if one is oblivious of the kind of social significance the composer intended it to have. One cannot sensitively listen to almost all so-called primitive musics and the better part of European music up to the sixteenth century if one doesn't realize that the connection between music and society, even between music and behaviour, was here an extraordinarily direct and immediate one, designed as ritual to induce a certain physiological state in the listener's nervous system. (This is to some extent true even of Palestrina, which is why he, rather than Vittoria or Lasso, is, in the suave hypnotism of his mellifluous linear writing, the supreme musical expression of the Catholic ritual). For Bach music was still 'an harmonious euphony to the glory of God' and if we fail to realize this our notions of him will be partial and distorted: but he is also a professional craftsman making music for a secular and social need, so that he inaugurates the Professional period which culminates in Haydn and Mozart. Nor can one understand the music of the nineteenth century aright if one doesn't realize why the 'professional' relation between music and society gave way to the idea of the composer as tragic hero and why in the twentieth century there have been a number of attempts to provide artificially a relationship that should be organic—attempts of which the most innocent is Gebrauchsmusik and the most insidious (as well as the most futile) the allying of music with propaganda.

The technical errors dependent on these first two classes of error concerning emotional climate and social necessity are too numerous to describe here in any detail; the most I can do is to indicate their range. They include misapprehensions about the phrasing of Bach, particularly his basses; misapprehensions about the nature of eighteenth century ornamentation which is attributed to a desire to compensate for the inferior mechanism of the 'old instruments,' notwithstanding the fact that it appears equally in vocal music and

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that Couperin himself said ' that it is not a matter of choice to introduce such ornaments as one wishes. I declare that my compositions should be executed as I have marked them and that they will never produce a certain impression on persons of real taste so long as everything I have indicated is not observed to the letter <sup>1</sup>; misconceptions about the balance of wood-wind and strings, and the importance of the harpsichord, in the eighteenth-century orchestra ; failure to appreciate the distinction in kind between viol and violin,<sup>2</sup> harpsichord and cembalo, baroque organ and modern ; and all manner of fallacies of tempo and interpretation arising from a romantic upbringing.

I hope I have established that an Historical Perspective is an indispensable basis for a true musical culture. But what kind of practical training, it will be asked, is likely to conduce to such an attitude? Assuming that a student proceeds to his musical academy with a working knowledge of the grammar of music and that he is at least willing to acquire immediately that ability at score-reading without which he can have first-hand experience of only a microscopic proportion of the music of European history, I believe that such an outlook would emerge naturally from his technical studies providing that these studies were given intelligent direction. In the next section I will attempt to indicate what this direction might be.

### III

In trying to gain, from first-hand experience, a coherent idea of the unfolding tradition of European music one has continually to bear in mind the interaction of four allied aspects of it. These are (i) the composer's creative faculty ; (ii) the society of which he is a unit ; (iii) the resources available to him—which will be conditioned by (ii) ; and (iv) the idioms he uses—which will be conditioned by all the three previous points in varying degrees, according to the vitality of his personality and the relatively traditional or anarchic nature of the society he lives in. Of course it is impossible to study all these aspects simultaneously ; but we shall understand none of them thoroughly if we aren't at least aware of the influence upon

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<sup>1</sup>François Couperin : *L'Art de toucher le clavecin*.

<sup>2</sup>*cf.* Hubert le Blanc : *Défense de la Basse de Viole contre les Entreprises du Violon et les Prétentions du Violoncelle*. 1740.