Music of the Common Tongue

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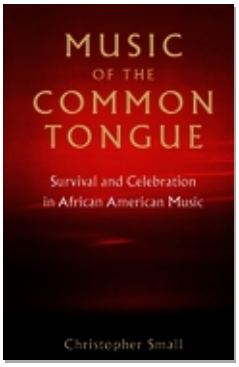

Chapter 6

ON VALUE AND VALUES

The social status enjoyed by a musical culture is inseparably linked to the status of the social group whose world view it incarnates and whose values it celebrates. The account I have given so far of the encounter that occurred in North America between the two great musical traditions will have made it clear that it occurred principally, and in its most fruitful developments, on the lowest levels of American society, among people who, black or white, were united in one respect — their dispossession and their alienation from those who, through their access to power and control of property, were shaping the official, formal values of the emerging American society and nation. We have seen how those who did have a stake in those values found ways to protect themselves from what they saw as pollution by the inferior, intruder culture; from their own point of view they were probably right to do so, since the values that were articulated by the music of that encounter were deeply subversive not only of those of the official United States but also of the entire industrial world. That this situation still holds today is reflected not only in the splitting of the western musical tradition into two opposing streams, but, even more obviously, in the difference in social status that is accorded to them. In this chapter I propose to investigate some of the relationships which exist between musical values and social status as they affect the practice of music in the west today.

It need hardly be said that classical music enjoys a high social status in our society, and that participation in a classical-music performance is an activity that carries the stamp of social approval. It is in fact the official music of the western world; one might say of the industrialized world, since, as we have seen, the development of a western-style classical-music culture and submission to the values of industrialism are

processes that go hand in hand. It boasts a long and well-documented history which is traced back to antiquity and it is accorded an intellectual rigour and even a moral value denied to other traditions. It is the music of this tradition that is taught, performed, analysed and researched, in schools, conservatoires and the music faculties of western universities, and it is this which is regarded as the highest achievement of the human race in the art of sound, of which all others are at best approximations, at worst corruptions. Its social pre-eminence is underlined by the frequent and visible presence at classical concerts not only of heads of state and their distinguished guests but also of the leaders of our social and intellectual life. The convergence of values is well illustrated by the story of the famous scientist who, when asked what message should be transmitted by radio into outer space to signal the presence of intelligent life on earth, replied, 'We could transmit Bach, but that would be boasting'. This assumption of superiority is underlined also by the scale and opulence of concert halls, opera houses and other buildings which are given over to the performance of this music, as well as by the frequent appearance of the names of the music's practitioners in lists of those who are honoured by governments for service to their grateful countries.

Given the high status of this music, and the moral and intellectual value that has been attributed to it, it is scarcely surprising, and for the most part taken for granted, that professional composition and performance of classical music (the dominance of professionals is virtually total) is underwritten, even kept alive, by an extensive network of subsidy, not all of it visible to the casual eye. Concerts and concert-giving organizations as well as opera houses and opera companies receive sponsorship from the state and from wealthy organizations, businesses and individuals on a considerable scale; for example, in 1980–81, every time the curtain rose on a performance by the British Royal Opera it was subsidized by the British taxpayer with an average sum of thirty-one thousand pounds.[1] But, further, the life of the professional musician in classical music, tough, demanding and ruthlessly competitive as it unquestionably is, is subsidized at every turn. The aspiring performer or composer is aided by grants,

scholarships and competition prizes, at state- or privately-funded schools which pay his teachers' salaries; concert halls and opera houses where he or she will perform are built and maintained by municipalities, radio networks and wealthy organizations, as are the orchestras in which he or she will play or with which he or she will appear as soloist, or which will commission his or her compositions. A composer can be freed from the pressures of having to please an audience in order to earn a living — unlike his seventeenth- and eighteenth-century predecessors — with secure employment in university or conservatoire, often with minimal demands made on his time or energy for teaching, while the young aspirant knows that if he or she should fail to make it as a professional artist there is always a fallback position in teaching, administration, criticism and other ancillary occupations which provide a decent living and an acceptable social position.

The matter of subsidy is interesting in other ways. From the beginnings of civilization, of course, musicians have played for money, and, not surprisingly, their musicking has tended to celebrate the values and the status of those who pay them; indeed, that has been a principal function of professional musicians, West African *griots* and European church and court musicians alike. The musician may well share the values of his patrons without having to give the matter much thought, as did nineteenth-century British music-hall artists, who were generally a part of the working-class society that paid to see and hear them, as did the early stars of blues, and many of the great country-and-western singers, whose identification with their audiences' values and lifestyle was a major element in their appeal. How sincerely Handel admired King George II when he wrote *Zadok the Priest* for his coronation, or Beethoven the Emperor Joseph II when he wrote music for the latter's funeral, is a matter for conjecture (both were ambitious professional musicians who knew on which side their bread was buttered), but we do know that Edward Elgar, whose Coronation Marches, Coronation Odes and other ceremonial music were an important factor in the twentieth-century reinvention of the British concept of monarchy and the broadening of its appeal to the mass of people in an industrial society, was perfectly sincere in his admiration for the

monarchy, and for Edward VII in particular, and in what David Cannadine calls his 'genuine love for colour, pageantry, precision and splendour.'[2]

Modern classical musicians, like their illustrious predecessors, receive their financial support from sources close to the centres of power in today's industrial society. In many cases this means the state, either directly, as in the Soviet Union, or indirectly, as in Great Britain through its Arts Council; the latter organization, since its foundation in 1946, has always been presumed to be independent of the government of the day which allots to it a sum of money annually for its operations, even though its senior officials have always been members of that informal and diffuse British power structure which has been dubbed the Establishment. The 1979 and 1983 Thatcher administrations, however, with their unashamed centralizing tendencies, have demonstrated through the nature of their appointments to the Arts Council the spuriousness of the so-called 'arm's-length' policy when the chips are down. In many other countries the sponsorship of classical musicking is in the hands of wealthy organizations, families and individuals; for example, over $100 million of the $250-odd million that the building of New York's Lincoln Center cost was contributed by some two dozen families, probably about half of that sum by the Rockefeller family. Likewise, firms such as Texaco, Eastern Airlines and Ford have sponsored individual productions at the Metropolitan Opera (the New York State and Federal Governments also contribute, but less spectacularly, especially under the Reagan Administration).[3] The classical musician, in fact, remains as much a client of the rich and the powerful as ever he was in the history of the tradition. As I said in a talk in 1984 to the Composers' Guild of Great Britain:

> 'We are often told these days that there is no such thing as a free lunch, and this is no less true of state subsidy than of any other handout; no subsidy, from the state or elsewhere, comes without its price. As I see it, the price that the state exacts for what is after all still quite generous subsidy of classical music is to tie it firmly to its official values; the musician, whether school, college or university teacher, eminent composer, famous conductor or soloist, rank-and-

> file orchestral player, even critic and musicologist, is incorporated into a system by means of which young people are socialized into those values while older people are reassured of their continuing validity even in a world that seems to be coming apart around them. Either that, or he is reduced to playing a kind of Glass Bead Game, an intricate, fascinating and intellectually demanding but quite meaningless activity which, as Hesse suggests, serves no purpose other than to keep some of the best minds of the society in a privileged position and too occupied to question what it is they are doing'.[4]

The classical musician lives in a world which, no matter how fiercely competitive, is fundamentally orderly and tidy, inhabited by people who share the same assumptions about life, in which concerts generally start and end on time, in which hitches are rare and major breakdowns almost unknown. His or her professional life will probably follow an orderly pattern, from selection in school (the way in which certain children are singled out as 'musically talented' is interesting in itself and deserves investigation), through college, conservatoire or university, with examination and certification to mark the completion of each stage, to study with one or more masters and finally to a debut before the public, with the possibility that honours — a decoration, an order, a knighthood, even a peerage, or the title of Honoured Artist (since the Socialist countries are no different in this respect) — will crown a career that has proved especially distinguished. He will find that wherever he goes his calling will be received with respect; he will not be hassled by customs and immigration officers looking for subversive literature or illegal substances, nor will he be required to pay exorbitant insurance premiums on his car. He will find that in dealing with record companies, publishers, managements and the like he will have at least the partial protection of a law of contract and copyright that was drawn up with the neat division of labour characteristic of the classical-music culture in mind. He will find, too, that no matter where he plays he can count on a disciplined audience that knows it must arrive on time, sit still and quiet as he plays, and applaud at the end.

Even the history of the tradition has been tidied up into an orderly sequence of master musicians, the 'great composers' of the past who gave over their lives to the production of musical works for our delectation and spiritual refreshment. That history is regarded as unproblematic, showing a steady development in style from one generation to the next in unbroken succession, as masters of composition passed on their knowledge and skills to their juniors. True, the conventional version of history tells us that there have been revolutions in style every few generations, but hindsight generally reveals these to have taken place within an essential continuity of tradition, and, true, different parts of the European continent and latterly its colonial offspring have developed local accents, but these have always been no more than dialects within the *lingua franca* that is assumed to be generally understood. True, too, some musicians of genius have in each generation developed the common musical language in ways that were not always comprehended by their contemporaries, but these developments have usually found gradual acceptance as they became familiar to later generations. We are invited to admire the integrity, even heroism of those musicians as they maintained the power of their vision in the face of incomprehension without a thought for worldly success; the extraordinarily long time-lag that seems to have been needed for acceptance of the work of twentieth-century masters is taken as evidence of unusual tenacity and integrity on the part of those masters, but it is only a hiccup in an essentially smooth continuity. The classical-music culture of today, in fact, is presented to us as legitimized by a long and consistent history, during the course of which its social and intellectual basis has remained unchanged.

This tidying-up process has also reduced the variety of social meanings which the performance of this music has generated at various times and in various places over its history to a single meaning: that of the concert-hall performance. That manner of performance, as we have seen, affirms and celebrates the values of the industrial state in all its singleness of vision. We are led, then, to ask whether the superior and privileged position of classical music and musicians today is not a matter more of a congruence of values

than of any real superiority in the actual process of musicking. Certainly the congruence can be perceived in many ways once one is alert to it.

There is, for example, a curious ritual which takes place in London's Royal Albert Hall every year on the last night of the BBC's summer season of promenade concerts, in which the audience of young people don funny hats and an exuberant manner while the BBC Symphony Orchestra and soloists perform a hodgepodge of 'well-loved classics', many of them harking back to Britain's imperial, and especially naval, past (Elgar's *Sea Pictures*, Henry Wood's *Fantasia on Sea Shanties*, and Parry's *Songs of the Fleet*, all dating from that period of Anglo-German naval rivalry that climaxed in the first world war, are favourites), and patriotic songs, climaxing in *Land of Hope and Glory*, whose music is that of Elgar's first *Pomp and Circumstance March* and whose words disclose a mindless jingoism that one would have imagined to be well and truly buried by now along with the British Empire itself:

> Land of hope and glory, Mother of the free.
> How shall we extol thee, who are born of thee?
> Wider still and wider shall thy bounds be set,
> God, who made thee mighty, make thee mightier yet![5]

The whole proceeding takes place in an atmosphere of warm and indulgent social approval and is televised to huge viewing figures across the British nations; the young audience remain still and quiet in the approved manner during the various items, confining their shenanigans to the spaces between the 'serious' pieces and to those with which it is expected that they will sing along. Those who have protested about the singing of these bellicose patriotic songs have been told, with some impatience, that it was just harmless and healthy fun and didn't mean a thing; the kids were all right. But in the *Sunday Times* during September 1982 appeared a news item that suggested that the event had a deeper meaning. Under the headline THE PROMS' HOPE AND GLORY, it ran:

> 'The euphoria of victory in the Falklands turned what the BBC describe as the "world's most famous musical celebration" into the most patriotic and nostalgic "last night" for years. *Rule Britannia* and *Land of Hope and Glory* and

> *Jerusalem* were sung with tremendous fervour accompanied by the waving of hundreds of Union Jacks and a few Falkland Islands maps . . . And the fun ended with *Auld Lang Syne* and a rendering of *God Save the Queen* which left many weeping eyes both in the hall and in homes up and down the country'.[6]

The link between the performance of classical music and the objectives of the powerful could not have been more nakedly exposed, nor could the extent to which the young music lovers, doubtless in all innocence, have assimilated those objectives as their own.

There are other congruences also. I have suggested that a musical work of the western classical tradition is essentially a drama, in which the individual soul progresses from one spiritual state to another by means of a process of struggle and antithesis, which is finally resolved. In a concert piece, the protagonist remains unspecified; it is often assumed, generally quite without justification, that it is the composer himself (we do not, after all, identify Hamlet with Shakespeare). The very lack of specificity allows each individual listener to identify him or herself with the protagonist, whose relationships, struggles and eventual triumph or defeat we infer from the internal relationships of the musical work itself.

In opera, on the other hand, the drama is external; the characters are given names and a physical and social environment and their actions and relationships are shown to us on the stage as well as in the musical relationships. It is interesting that opera has from its beginnings in the early seventeenth century until the beginning of the present century been the source of most of the technical innovations in western classical music, innovations whose purpose has always been to render the stage situation more dramatic, more explicit; only after the significance of a musical-dramatic gesture was fully understood by audiences in the theatre could it be used to similar effect in the abstract drama of the concert piece. Indeed, our understanding of concert works owes more than we imagine to conventions first established on the stage: the swordplay of cymbals, the rousing call-to-arms of massed brass instruments, the thunderous rumble of the bass drum, the pastoral strains of the oboe. not to mention those abstract

dances, triumphal marches, funeral processions, dirges, riotous scenes of celebration and intimate scenes of confession and love — the symphonic repertory teems with such episodes, all of which appeared and were understood by audiences on the operatic stage before they could be comprehended on the abstract stage of the symphonic or concert work.

In the same way, the plots of operas make explicit those attitudes which are implicit in the abstract drama of concert music. Those nineteenth-century operas which form the staple repertory of the modern opera house (indeed, apart from the operas of Mozart, the whole repertory of regularly-performed opera stems from the nineteenth and the early twentieth century) are especially revealing in this respect, not surprisingly in that they were devised for the entertainment and the edification of the nineteenth-century middle class. Like the concert music of the same period, they have consistently presented to their audiences in mythologized form their fantasies, fears and most intimate concerns. Thus we find that the historical and mythological characters of much nineteenth-century opera, for example *Aida* or *Nabucco*, were invested with attitudes and emotions of contemporary nationalism, and the patriotism of the emerging nation-state. The experience of the industrial working class, not unnaturally, finds no voice in these large and glamorous stage works; the only factory I can think of is that tuneful cigarette factory from which Carmen and her gypsy friends emerge to begin the real drama of their lives. Merry peasants, on the other hand, who have just brought in the harvest, sing and dance without a care in the world, other perhaps than the pangs of unrequited love; they populate the stage in many operas — cousins, all unknown to themselves, of the 'plantation darkies' of the contemporary minstrel show — remarkably like those smiling peasants of genre paintings who, as John Berger remarks, 'assert two things: that the poor are happy and that the better-off are a source of hope for the world.'[7]

Notions of male honour and of female virtue — middle-class sex roles, in fact — are hammered home relentlessly in the operas of Verdi, Puccini, Weber, Wagner and dozens of lesser contemporaries; even Brünnhilde finally falls a prize to

an ambitious man (that the operas of Wagner, not excepting *The Ring*, are mighty vehicles of middle-class values is a matter which has been discussed fully by both Nietszche and Theodor Adorno). The rare independent and self-possessed women such as Violetta, Aida, Norma, Carmen, Lulu, all come to tragic ends, and even the attempt to achieve independence, made for example by Louise and Katya Kabanova, is doomed to failure and tragedy. Indeed, the only fully realized and successfully independent female character that I can discover in the whole of nineteenth and twentieth century opera is a vixen. And endless comedies of marital intrigue go to show that the most suitable use for female intelligence is in catching and holding a husband; it is not certain whether these moralities were intended to instruct women or to reassure men.

It could of course be said that there is nothing very remarkable about this, that such themes were also the staple of nineteenth-century spoken drama, but nineteenth-century spoken drama does not form the bulk of the repertory of the twentieth-century stage. Opera has always been a powerful vehicle for the transmission of the dominant class's social values, as can be seen from the way it functioned in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries to affirm the legitimacy and the nobility of character of absolute rulers (it was they, after all, who used to foot the quite considerable bill). What does deserve comment is that these attitudes should still stand today behind a repertory of stage works which, it is claimed, or just assumed, are some of the highest achievements of western, or indeed human, culture, and which are presented night after night throughout the industrialized world in a ritual that appears to satisfy the dreams and the quest for identity of contemporary middle- and upper-class people, attracting in addition not only the highest social approval but also a level of subsidy that dwarfs that given to other artistic activities. Only the purchase of paintings for national art galleries can match it in scale. One can only conclude that opera as an activity serves to reinforce, or at the very least presents no challenge to, the values which legitimate and maintain the present power structures of the modern state.

It is of course possible to point to a number of modern operas which do, through the stories they tell, offer some challenge to those reigning values; they play as a rule to half-empty houses, and, for the most part, no matter how eminent their composers, become only names in histories of twentieth-century art music. Only a handful of twentieth-century works has entered the repertory of operas that are regularly performed, of which only those of Strauss and Puccini, both essentially composers in the nineteenth-century spirit, have gained real popularity with audiences. Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* does, it is true, appear to challenge the values of the society, in that it enlists our sympathy for a poor devil of a proletarian soldier; the trouble is that the poor devil is so gormless and so obviously defenceless against his tormentors, many of whom are presented as caricatures, that we cannot feel anything but a vague pity, and not much genuine anger at the social forces lined up — one might even say, stacked up — against him. In any case, what finally destroys him is not the hardships of the proletarian soldier's life but our old operatic friend, sexual jealousy; he is Don José in proletarian guise. It is no wonder that *Wozzeck* is becoming something like a repertory piece, despite its relatively unconventional musical language, for it enables audiences to have their cake and eat it too. And its musical language is not that of 'modernism' but of heightened romanticism, and becomes each year more accessible to a general audience.

The heroine of the same composer's *Lulu*, set since the discovery of its final act also to attain a certain popularity, is an updated version of the operatic femme fatale, destined, like her sisters, to come to a bad end. It is probable that Berg did not intend his heroine to be seen in this way; indeed, it seems as if he wanted the opera to stand as a protest against bourgeois society's treatment of women. But the high probability that few of the work's audience will see her in anything but conventional operatic terms highlights an important factor which is shared by concert halls and opera houses today: they impose a set of values on everything that is presented, through the nature of the ritual which is the real content of the performance. The power of that ritual is such that not even the supreme dramatic genius of Mozart can go

against the values which a modern opera performance celebrates.

How many opera goers, for example, notice what is *really* going on in *The Marriage of Figaro*, or are even interested? For beneath the comedy, the story concerns the desperate struggle of a servant and his bride to save her from violation by an unprincipled aristocratic lecher, a struggle whose existence they dare not even acknowledge. They conduct their defence with wit and dignity, qualities which are notably lacking in the other characters in the drama; further, to complete the subversion of conventional social roles, it is Susanna the maid who displays the most intelligence and resource, running rings even around her shrewd bridegroom Figaro. The aristocrats are both stupid and frivolous; this is true of even the Countess, despite a certain sympathy won for her by her situation and by her two lovely arias. The bourgeois characters are unpleasant and venal to the point of caricature; only the servants show any real integrity, not to mention genuine love and fidelity. Likewise in *Don Giovanni*: the only emotion that one can take at all seriously, apart from the Don's lust and the other characters' ceaseless desire for revenge, is the love beteen the peasants Masetto and Zerlina, whose aria *Batti, batti* as the two are reconciled is one of the most heartrendingly beautiful moments in the whole of the lyric drama. And as for *Così fan Tutte*, it is perhaps the most ruthless send-up of nascent bourgeois notions of romantic love (to pour such heart-breaking music into farewells that we *know* are not for real is to subvert the entire operatic convention) in the whole history of the European theatre.

That even those three great comedies, *sui generis* in their subversion of both social and theatrical conventions and of the accepted values of today's, no less than Mozart's, audiences, could have become incorporated without apparent effort into the canon of operatic 'masterpieces' is a tribute to the power of the ritual of the modern opera house and to its ability to impose its own values and systems of relationships on whatever is presented there. Nor do recent attempts to dramatize values other than those of modern industrial society fare any better. Luigi Nono, for example, may show us, in *Intolleranza*, the hounding and final destruction of an

immigrant; Berthold Brecht and Kurt Weill may show us, in *The Seven Deadly Sins*, the gradual disintegration of a young woman through the pressures of 'getting on', and, in *The Threepenny Opera* and *Mahagonny*, the corruption of capitalist society; Sir Michael Tippett may present us, in *The Midsummer Marriage* with images of community and of mutual love (though his casting of the young mechanic and secretary in the 'Papageno' and 'Papagena' roles, destined to live forever outside the portals of the Temple of Wisdom, shows the continuing class-based limitation of his vision) — all these, and many other attempts to use the operatic stage as a medium for the promulgation of values other than the official values of industrial society, are destined to fail in one of two ways. Assuming they reach the stage in the first place, either they are rejected outright by the audience, as in the first instance, or, like the others, they are accorded a cautious acceptance while their message is quietly put to one side in favour of discussing the conductor's tempi, the producer's and designer's stage pictures and the vocal qualities of the leading soprano.

On the whole those works in what one might call a twentieth-century idiom which have achieved some success in the opera house have been those, such as the operas of Britten, Shostakovich, Stravinsky, Stockhausen, even Tippett (however much he may have struggled to break free of them — and his struggle is not without a certain bleak integrity), which share the values and the assumptions of their middle-class audiences. In fact, like symphony concerts, operatic performances today, whatever they may have been in the past (and we recall that not only does the nature and meaning of the ritual change over time even if the works performed do not, but also each historical period perceives the art works on which its imagination has to work in ways which suit its own mythopoeic needs) are rituals in which are dramatized the mythologies which underlie and legitimate the modern industrial state; therefore the middle and upper classes who are the beneficiaries of that state gain reassurance that their values are the supreme values, as they are believed to have been in the past (hence the importance of asserting the continuity of the tradition) and to remain in the future.

The role played by subsidy is thus ineluctably political; it is here that the most conclusive evidence lies for the coincidence of values between classical musicking and the activities of the state. For those who run the modern state, no matter what their party-political colouring, are concerned primarily with maintaining themselves in power, and only secondly with the welfare of their citizens. Two observations on this are in order. First, not all of those who run the modern state are actually involved in the visible structure of government; as Malatesta put it nearly a hundred years ago, in terms that remain true today: 'Today, government, consisting of property owners and people dependent on them, is entirely at the disposal of the owners, so much so that the richest among them disdain to take part in it.'[8] There is in fact no difference in principle between sponsorship of the arts by the British, American or Soviet governments and that by major corporations such as Texaco, Eastern Airlines and Ford, or by super-rich families like the Rockefellers. They all sponsor the same kind of musical activity. Clearly, neither governments nor big business regard classical music as any kind of challenge to them or to their values.

And, secondly, those who run the contemporary state not infrequently devolve their powers of arts sponsorship on to individuals who may be of impeccable liberal credentials but whose position in society places them near to the sources of power; thus, the first Chairman of the Arts Council of Great Britain, and the man who shaped in a crucial way its nature and its activities, was the economist John Maynard Keynes, whose economic ideas have been powerful for over thirty years in shoring up the institutions of capitalism, while a more recent (1986) incumbent, Sir William Rees-Mogg, was a previous editor of the London *Times*. The links with the power structure may be indirect, even tortuous, but they are real.

We can see the process at work in the music departments of colleges and universities. The majority of university music departments are still stuck in an exclusive concern with the past, but some have taken steps in the direction of 'the new music', while others have committed themselves wholeheartedly to it. This is especially true in the United States; Gilbert Chase in his 1966 history *America's Music* has this to say:

> 'It is a truism that the American university is a traditional haven of the artist; what is significant is the increasingly important role of the university as a creative and disseminating center for the *contemporary* arts providing not only material security for the artist but also a stimulating atmosphere based on awareness of really contemporary values, and an opportunity based on adequate performance resources and the ability to attract limited but receptive audiences. The composer himself — often doubling as performer — has been the most active agent in this development. With backing from the foundations, the universities have proved receptive to his initiatives and have welcomed their new role as patrons of the new as well as guardians of the past. The movement in this direction is nationwide and rapidly growing. Should the present decade accomplish no more than the expansion and consolidation of this trend, its contribution to our musical culture would be of incalculable value.'[9]

Whether or not one can endorse the author's enthusiasm depends, of course, on whether one perceives universities to be those citadels of independence, intellectual freedom, ideological tolerance and exploratory adventurousness which they claim to be. Like all large institutions, universities on the whole tend to be intolerant of genuine innovation, which takes place, if at all, on the fringes, and while no-one in authority is looking (should the innovation become conventional wisdom, credit is naturally claimed retrospectively); their acceptance of musical experimentation presupposes — indeed ensures — that, no matter how outrageous some of it may appear, it will remain socially and ideologically harmless. Tame artists, in fact, make good pets for university establishments as long as they do not attack their masters (not for real at any rate). Campus composers may growl and snarl often most convincingly, but they are careful to keep their claws in (or perhaps they do not notice that their claws have been painlessly extracted). Hesse's story of the Glass Bead Game may be taken as a parable for the activities of many modern university music departments.

It may seem almost improper to link universities, or other institutions of higher learning, with the power structure of the modern state; the legend of academic independence is a

powerful one, but universities are indeed an essential part of the education system, whose function is as much to produce the élites of the future as it is to guard the legitimizing past, and the world of vice-chancellors, principals, directors and boards of regents is a part of that loose group of people, whose links with governments may be informal but are nevertheless close, which is called the Establishment. Certainly those who hold power in institutions of higher learning share to a major extent the assumptions and values of those who hold power in government. We may thus not be surprised to find avowedly revolutionary musicians such as John Cage, Mauricio Kagel and Frederic Rzewski finding sponsorship in university music departments; the universities themselves do not consider them to be any challenge to their values, and treat them rather like licensed clowns. And indeed there is nothing in the work of any of these musicians which need cause any member of the Establishment to lose a single night's sleep.

We need not postulate any conspiracy in this. The process of self-identification is less deliberate than that; it is simply that those who hold power in our society tend to view the world in similar terms, and in so far as they feel impelled to give their support to the activities of musicians (and there can be no doubt that there is among many of them a sincere love of music), it is classical music and musicians to whom they look as natural vehicles for those values which they regard as important. They see no need to justify their attitudes; the superiority of classical music is self-evident. Such confidence makes it possible to be indulgent towards other forms of musicking; there is room for a certain amount of Afro-American musicking, as long as it is kept in its place, and even for the creation and performance of a certain number of works whose overt content does run counter to, or at least criticize, the values of modern society. The setting of the concert hall, not excluding college and university auditoria, can be relied upon to neutralize any dissent and assimilate it into the main stream of middle-class musicking. In any case, the naïvety of the political stance of most contemporary concert works is sufficient to render such dissent harmless if not outright laughable. As for any dissent that is too extreme, or too convincing, the separation of function between composer and

performer, and the elaboration of the apparatus needed for performance, makes it easy for access to performance outlets to be managed through control of orchestras, concert halls, opera companies and the like. The 'gatekeepers' who regulate the artist's contact with his audience will probably find such work genuinely unfit for performance in those places — as inded it probably will be. The truly dissident artist will be impelled by the nature of his or her vision to work in other styles, media and locations.

The circle of control is complete. The professionalization of music and the insistence on selection, examination and certification within the classical culture has effectively cut off most people from their ability to do anything more than sit and listen to what is presented to them; even their ability, and their right, to hold opinions without reference to the professionals is in doubt. Amateur performers scarcely dare to make an appearance in any public place, and certainly not in the company of professionals, while amateur composers, even if their existence is recognized at all, are usually figures of fun, at best eccentrics. And since the dissolution of the great tradition of improvisation which was a principal glory of the European classical tradition up to the end of the nineteenth century, no performer dares, or is even able to, play anything other than what has been passed to him by a composer. It is a closed situation; and closed situations mean death, if not immediately then in the long run; little professional musicking would survive in the classical tradition if the sources of subsidy were cut off.

It might almost be possible to argue for a definition of classical music, at least in western society, as 'music that gets subsidized'; certainly very little support of this kind is offered to the vernacular artist, who generally has to endure the full rigours of the economic climate. Nevertheless, neither the relatively low status of Afro-American musicking nor its general inability to attract subsidy from the powerful is necessarily all to its disadvantage. It is in fact the very absence of subsidy and of its concomitant ties to the power structure that make Afro-American musicking the best hope for future developments. This is, of course, not to suggest that the Afro-American tradition today is in a state of perfect health, either

musical or social, but despite, or even perhaps because of, the money values with which it is saturated, there is an openness about it which contrasts with the closedness of the classical-music culture.

All professional musicians need money, and those who pay them have their own reasons for doing so; states, and wealthy individuals and organizations, which support musicking without the expectation of getting their money back, expect that it will support their values and legitimize their position, while, on the other hand, those who do expect to get their money back — record companies, managers, impresarios and suchlike — are less interested in the content of the musicking, so long as it shows a profit. While this situation, too, has its dangers, it at least allows space for a variety of attitudes and sets of values, which is to my mind preferable to the monolithic content to which the classical-music culture today has been reduced. The values embodied in a vernacular-music performance may also correspond in many respects with those of the state, as one saw, for example, in the presence of Ronald and Nancy Reagan at the twenty-fifth anniversary concert of the American Country Music Association in Washington DC in 1984. Such patronage is of course not accidental but part of a very calculated exercise in image-building and value-assertion, apart from the fact that the Reagans and their entourage had in all probability a liking for country music at least as genuine as that of the British Establishment for classical music. For in the act of participating in a country-music performance, the President and his lady were affirming a community of values with those for whom country music is the natural celebration of identity; as Bill C. Malone says: 'Country music has simultaneously identified with Middle America, the working man, and progressive youth while also reaching out for that affluent middle-class audience which is presumably different from the other three categories.'[10] What better description could we have of the appeal which Ronald Reagan himself hoped to make? We should notice, however, that in this case it is the politicians who are trimming themselves to the values of the music, and not the other way around.

This suggests that country music, like other styles of

musicking which can be identified within the Afro-American tradition, is itself not monolithic, either musically or in terms of values. It is important, as I have observed before, to keep in mind that named categories are convenient subdivisions only, often imposed by people who are outside the practice of the art; in real life they constantly ebb and flow, influencing and penetrating one another. Like vernacular speech, the 'common tongue', vernacular musicking varies, within the use of a common grammar and syntax, almost from one individual to another; there is no selection, no formal training, no examination to be passed or certificate to be gained before the individual is permitted to put the language into practice. Like the spoken vernacular, too, it is open to many kinds of abuse, especially by those who would control our manner of talking or musicking for their own purposes, and it is under constant pressure towards standardization for the benefit of those who would gain money, or power, or both, from us.

We might say that there are two reasons why people pay musicians to play for them; the first is very old and the second is relatively new. The old reason is to celebrate the values which legitimize their position, while the newer reason is in order to make money. In each case the employer will exercise a measure of control over what the musicians play, in the first case to ensure that they will indeed celebrate him (he will probably select, if he can, musicians who share his values, so that there will be no problem in that respect), and in the second to ensure that what they play will appeal to enough people to make it pay. It is easier for the person who pays the piper to call the tune in the first case than in the second. In the first, in the subsidized, or classical, field, not only is what the musician does controlled by the granting or withholding of subsidy, but even more crucially, entry itself into the profession of musician is controlled by examination and certification, through colleges of music and university music departments, in such a way as to ensure that only those who submit to the values of the culture are admitted; the degree of control that is being exerted is thus hardly noticed by the musicians, who believe themselves not only to be doing what they want to do but indeed to be engaging in the only kind of musicking that is worth their time and effort. On the other hand, in the

vernacular, or 'commercial', field, anyone who can show that he or she can hold an audience can set up as a musician; the level of formal skill may be anything from elementary to virtuoso (the skills of holding an audience, of course, are themselves considerable and not to be slighted) and the social and political values celebrated anything from individualism to collectivism, statism to anarchism, 'left-wing' to 'right-wing' or any mix of these in coherent or incoherent form (no musical performance, of course, is or can be value-free). The entrepreneur does not mind so long as he makes a profit.

We should notice two other things also. The first is that, since the vernacular musician has to endure the full rigours of the economic climate, with his effort measured on a strictly profit-and-loss basis *which is not of his making*, it is arguable that the degree of commitment required of the vernacular musician is greater, rather than less, than that required of the classical musician. It is perfectly possible, and indeed not rare, for a classical musician to have been selected in school as talented, to have gone through the process of training and to have become a perfectly successful professional without once giving a moment's thought to what he or she is doing or why. The orderly structures and institutions of classical music will be quite enough to propel him or her through life in comfort and without too many disturbing glances outside the profession and its concerns. For the vernacular musician, on the other hand, survival in the chaotic and voracious world in which he or she is obliged to live and move is a matter of daily crises and manoeuvring. Further, while we read continually in the popular press of the exploits of rich rock and pop stars, the rich vernacular musician is in fact very much an exception; for each who makes it to fame and fortune there are hundreds, if not thousands, who think themselves lucky to make enough money from the musicking to pay for their instruments and the indispensable beat-up van.

A BBC radio feature in 1983 estimated that there were about a thousand rock bands (the term of course covers a multitude of persuasions) currently at work in the one British city of Liverpool, of whom at most a dozen or so would ever make a decent living in the pubs and clubs of the city and perhaps three or four would make it to national exposure and

the charts. Most musicians, of course, dream of becoming rich and famous but, equally, most know that this is unlikely. In commercial terms, the overwhelming majority are non-starters; the only explanation for their continuing to play (and without doubt most of them are no more than mediocre in terms of musical or performance skill, while some range from elementary to incompetent) lies in the fact that for young people in that devastated city, with unemployment approaching fifty per cent, making music is a way of affirming their identity, perhaps even their very existence, in the face of an uncaring society that would prefer on the whole that they did not exist. Unemployment, as the programme's presenter said, is a great maker of musicians.[11] Similar sentiments were expressed by the British impresario Richard Branson in a recent television programme: 'England leads the world in music because of one thing. The Dole. Instead of having to do work or waste their time playing covers of hits at the Holiday Inn like American bands, they can sit at home and develop their music in peace'.[12]

And, secondly (and this applies to superstars no less than to aspirants), it is virtually axiomatic that whenever a musician makes a great deal of money from his or her musicking, it is only after many more people have made even more money first. The acknowledged rampant commercialism of the rock and pop world stems not so much from the musicians as from those who stand to make money from them. Each musician who enters the field of commercial music (and we should notice that there is no choice for a professional musician in our society other than between commercial and subsidized music — it is a question of which is less distasteful — and at least the commercial field does not compound its commercialism with hypocrisy) has to decide to what extent he or she is going to accede to the demands of the market and plan a career accordingly. An honest musician is obliged to keep constantly on the move to evade the clutches of commercial stereotyping, to make a clearing, however small, in the jungle, where he or she can make something of his or her own; but we should note that even those who do allow themselves to be co-opted all the way by the market do not necessarily make bad music. Certainly the subsidized musician is in no position to stand in judgement.

There are certain points at which the conflict of values between the two musical streams in our society surfaces to reveal the very sharp divisions in it. Two examples must suffice. The first shows that such divisions are not confined to the capitalist sector of the industrial west, and comes from an article by Charles Taylor in the British left-wing weekly *New Statesman*, concerning life in Czechoslovakia today. He says:

> 'Some become dissidents mainly because they feel an irrepressible urge to express themselves more authentically. You find this particularly among young people, a powerful, almost physical need to discover the truth of what they feel. This they can only do through a kind of free experimentation which the official reality can't accommodate . . . The search for expression takes a number of forms: not only direct acts like signing the Charter [Charter 77] but also participation in unofficial classes in history and philosophy, which are barely tolerated and frequently harassed; and perhaps even more important in its impact, participation in clandestine pop music groups . . . Absurd as it may seem, unauthorized pop music really is a threat to Bolshevik regimes. This is because music is the medium through which successive generations of young people in modern urban society work out their own identity through a kind of expressive experimentation. With the dissolution of traditional forms in a society, this kind of experimentation becomes a vital need, because each group of young people, no longer stepping into a millenially-sanctioned identity, has no choice but to work out its own.'[13]

This, we note, is taking place in a country where performance standards in the symphonic, operatic and chamber repertory, and even the avant garde, all generously subsidized, are as high as anywhere in the world. The capitalist sector, of course, has its own ways of dealing with these problems.

The point at which the conflict of values in industrial societies surfaces most sharply is the school system. In schools, as we know, it is classical musicking that is recognized and encouraged, and it is in schools that the primary selection takes place which labels children, according to the criteria of classical music, as either musical or unmusical. Those pupils

who accept the values of the school will also be likely to accept the valuation placed upon themselves as well as that placed upon different kinds of musicking; thus we find quite frequently that young adults who are accustomed to listening to, criticizing and even performing in the Afro-American tradition will nonetheless consider themselves unmusical, even 'tone-deaf' (whatever that might be) as a consequence of their experiences in school music. It requires an act of conscious rejection of the school's verdict, and thus of the values of the school, before young people are able to affirm what is assumed in the Afro-American tradition: that everyone is born with the gift of music, no less than with the gift of speech. The very rampant commercialism of which the Afro-American culture is often accused would be less severe if everyone were to believe him or herself capable of active participation in musicking; the schools' dereliction of duty in abandoning the majority of their charges to the mercies of those very commercial arbiters of taste whose influence they so frequently deplore is all the more reprehensible for that reason.

The conflict of values can place a teacher who does want to bring the practice of Afro-American music into the school in a difficult position. Apart from frequent opposition from colleagues and superiors, the fact that examinations, those touchstones of practical worth and intellectual respectability, concern themselves exclusively with classical techniques and history compels the teacher eventually to put those who want to engage themselves seriously in the practice of music to the study of that tradition to the exclusion of the other. And since for the majority of young people it is Afro-American music which remains closest to their own concerns and feelings as they explore their relationships and their sense of identity, the result is a splitting off of all but a minority from the one opportunity they will have of exploring their own musicality and of developing their skills within the context of the school.

The teachers' dilemma is this. On the one hand, their pupils as they perform or listen to music of any kind are finding their way, as humans will if left to themselves, to forms of expression that will assist them in the formulation and

articulation of values, the ordering of experience and the definition of identity. On the other, those who opt for Afro-American music are affirming values which may be very different from, and even opposed to, the official values of our society as they are expressed through the schools. Afro-American musicking does not depend on literacy, that essential tool of school, and state, socialization, nor does it require the formal instruction of compliant groups of pupils; its performance involves not stillness, isolation and abstract contemplation but movement, communality and involvement, all of which are out of place, to say the least, in the conventional school classroom. Nor can one imagine any form of examination that would not do violence to the very nature of the music act (how *would* one have awarded comparative marks to, say, Jerry Lee Lewis and Count Basie or to Charlie Parker and Louis Jordan?), not least because of the standardization which examinations by their very nature impose upon the teaching methods themselves. And standardization is death to music.

The value conflict confronts us here head on: how is it that forms of musical expression which are natural and important elements in the formation of the sense of identity of so many young people can have come to represent a threat to the values of the institution that is ostensibly set up to serve them? The only answer to that question which makes any sense lies in the acknowledgement that our school system exists today, not to serve the interests of its pupils at all, but rather to serve the interests of the industrial state, and its masters, in which those pupils will become workers, soldiers, managers, bureaucrats, scientists and political leaders — and members of the seemingly permanent pool of workless. To say this, of course, is not to deny the efforts of many teachers who do genuinely attempt to serve the interests of their pupils as they see them; but the objectives of the state, expressed through examinations, have in the long run to take precedence. It is the classical-music culture which, as we have seen, fits best with those objectives.

We note a further striking coincidence of values; in accepting or rejecting the school's definition of musicality one accepts or rejects much else not only in the school's system of

values but also in industrial society as a whole. Such a statement is far too cut-and-dried to match the extraordinary variety of human feelings and actions, of accommodations and compromises with the prevailing values, and of those contradictions which we all carry within us, but it contains enough truth to make it useful. In his perceptive book *Profane Culture*, Paul Willis discusses the way in which bike boys use motor bikes and records of 1950s rock'n'roll to create from 'the plastic ersatz and the detritus of the bourgeoisie' a culture which gives meaning to their lives through values which are opposed to bourgeois notions of time, causality and hierarchy, and yet,

> 'Although they had mastered a technology for their leisure and pioneered embryonic forms — or developed and made explicit working-class themes — of living with technology, they made no attempt to apply these insights to their working situation. They did not make demands, or pioneer changes there for more humanized systems of work — or even see the connection between technology in their leisure and the most massive technology of all: machinery and work. Not only this, but they uncritically accepted the current organization of production and their lowly place within it as well as the legitimacy of a whole range of other institutions — though making, of course, their own local and creative adaptations — which maintain and reproduce society in its present form, and which ultimately outlawed or displaced their own culture.'[14]

Nevertheless, says Willis, 'their profane acid scaled off the pretences and illusions of the bourgeois order and allowed new production in their own cultural fields to penetrate through and show the possibility of the revolutionary in the small, detailed and everyday.'[15]

Afro-American musicking was, as we have seen, first developed by musicians who were in any formal sense unschooled and, in the overwhelming majority, non-literate, as well as of the lowest social status, whether black or white. We have seen that this lowly position was not without its advantages; even today, while there has been a considerable admixture of influences from schooled and literate music, those advantages, along with the social disadvantages, remain.

It is the very openness of Afro-American music today which still, even in its most skilled and elevated forms such as jazz, allows anyone, no matter what their level of skill or formal training (and many Afro-American musicians have, of course, received formal training, often to a high level), to begin playing and to do the best they can with what they have, untrammelled by notions of status or formal correctness. Of course, like speech, all musicking has its rules and conventions, without which no communication, and in all probability not even any thinking, can take place, and these rules must be learnt by the performer and the listener, but, like the rules of speech, they are learnt by doing, and absorbed without conscious thought.

To sum up, one might say that to take part in a classical-music performance is to affirm and celebrate, whether or not one is aware of it, the values and the relationships which underpin and validate the society of the modern industrial state, while a performance in the Afro-American tradition is always *to some degree* subversive, either explicitly or by implication, of those values and relationships. Both of those statements are full of contradictions and overlaps of values, and there is nothing to stop any performer or listener from taking part in performances of both kinds, but nonetheless the tendency is there.

Not all Afro-American musicking is clear-cut in its opposition to the values of classical music and of industrial society; we shall see later how jazz, in particular, has derived much of its creative energy from the fact that it is a field where these two sets of values are debated. But all Afro-American musicking, being the child of the encounter between the two great cultures, partakes of the nature of both while, like all offspring, not being the same as either of its parents. Let us now look at the further development of secular musicking by black Americans.

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