Regaining Classical Music's Relevance

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Saving the Muse in a Troubled World

By

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Cambridge Scholars Publishing

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This book first published 2024

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-5275-5314-0
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-5314-9

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PREFACE

There are many signs telling us that Western classical music is in decline, more so than in former periods. To the eroding influences of the last century's idea of modernity has been added the politization of classical music: attempts to see the genre as a tool for social engineering, regular accusations of "white suprematism" and "eurocentrism", and a reinforcement of the label "elitism" which had already been launched half a century ago but which, with the rise of populism, appears to have acquired a more acid tone. With the assault on music life by the corona pandemic and its aftermath, plus increasing economic and climate problems and geopolitical tensions, classical music is in a more precarious state than ever before.

An overview of the range of criticism shows that one thing is clear: people who criticize classical music in this way don't know what the genre actually is and what it means in the wider context of Western culture. The critique mostly comes from outside the world of concert-going, and its tone of resentment points towards the perceived status of the music within society, its costs, and its "consumption" by the "well-to-do". This is seen as a "proof" that there is somehow a serious factor of exploitation going on, that the "pleasure" which seems to be had by attending concerts is being gained over the backs of the down-trodden. Cultural institutions like opera houses and symphony orchestras have become vulnerable to this kind of critique, since they cost a lot of money, which is not seen as an investment for the common good but a waste of funds for the entertainment of the settled bourgeoisie.

For many critics of classical music, this genre is "from another world"; literally so, namely from a past when Western societies were very different from today. It can be argued that this idea is mainly the result of a certain interpretation of the concept of modernity, which was born in the 20th century but has long roots in the 19th century. With the term "modern", a collection of assumptions comes into play which suggests some authoritarian force of history which prescribes modes of interpretation, and in the arts: defines value and meaning; however, this is not supported by any evidence, and is easily seen to be a nonsensical fallacy and cheap propaganda. History is what we make of it, nothing more, and nothing less.

But also, within the central performance culture, there is much misunderstanding about the nature of the art form. Because of the complex

administrative bureaucracies of the modern world, classical music life is mainly run by management, and due to the continuous funding problems, treated as a fragile business where marketing and accountancy appear to take priority. The qualities needed for organizing concerts and opera performances and everything around them, are not musical or artistic in themselves; although an interest in and a love for classical music is a bonus, these are not fundamental to the administrative needs of a musical institution. The skills needed for management are so different from the talent required for musical performance, that it very rarely happens that a brilliant performer is equally well-versed in administration, and hence there is a dependency of even the famous top musicians on their administrative support structure. Pursuing one's quite particular musical tastes (as a performer) in programming runs the risk of coming into conflict with administrative interests; this means that important decisions in music life are often taken not on the basis of artistic considerations or merit, but for reasons which often go counter to the meaning of the art form itself. In the end, this damages the art form, the performer and the administrative staff of musical institutions.

So, not only do outsider critics of the art form need some elucidation, but also the people who dedicate their lives to making musical performances possible within the intricacies of the modern world are in need of a better understanding of the reason for all their efforts. And what about the music lovers, the audiences, who have nothing to do with what happens backstage? They may also be enlightened as to the nature of what they love, so that they not only emotionally and subliminally, but also consciously understand why it is important to support the art form and help to protect it from falling victim to misunderstanding and erosion through inane fallacies. Will audiences continue to attend live concerts if programs are bland and repetitive, performers routine or embarrassing imitations of pop stars, or if they don't hear classical music but movie sound tracks and computer game confections? We are reminded of the immortal saying by the American impresario Sol Hurok: "If people don't want to come, nothing will stop them".

A possible solution to the problems which classical music has to overcome, must be sought in terms of understanding, information and education, and not in adaptation to the "requirements" of the world in which we find ourselves, if we want to preserve the real nature of the art form. This argument is the subject of this booklet, which wants to show how classical music is not locked up in history but, through its universal qualities, has very much to contribute to the modern world.

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PROLOGUE:
BIRTH FROM TROUBLE

Culture–in the sense of a collection of artistic, literary, and architectural achievements of a civilization–mostly develops according to two different dynamics: the one cultivating a repertoire of more or less central ideas and values which are not exclusively related to a particular period and/or place and maintain their centrality through time (the "spirit" of a culture); and the other one which is the way in which such central ideas and values are realized in the reality of a period and environment (its concrete form in historical context). This duality can be seen as two layers which are interrelated: they influence each other and together they form the character of a culture; we could also speak–metaphorically–about "content" (the central values and ideas of a culture) and "form" (the way content is realized). While the first has the more or less static character of generalized themes, with core values which offer orientation points and continuity, the second is in constant movement and change according to changes in society and dependent upon the individuality of the artists and of people otherwise engaged in the culture of a place and period.

Although boundaries of cultures can be blurred in terms of period and area, seen from a historical distance a general character becomes discernible, leading to insights and understanding. There are themes which remain relevant throughout history and to which humanity returns time and again, because they form an inherent component of the human condition: why are we here? what is the meaning of life? how should we deal with other people? how should a society be formed in a fair way? what is the meaning of consciousness and how does it relate to man's animal part? what is spirituality and what is its place in life? what is the place of man within the context of the universe, and of Nature? Every period and every culture tries to find their answers, in an ever-complex exchange between universal questions and temporal and local answers. The dynamics of the interplay between these two different layers define the way in which cultural traditions change over time and at the same time, preserve their core values, which can be re-interpreted in the light of experience and circumstances.

It may come as a surprise to the reader that this booklet, which explores the nature of Western classical music and defends its character in the way it

has come down to us, at the same time advocates a renewal of its practices, in the sense of the Renaissance idea: an older culture being reborn through a process of reconsideration and hence, opening up a new and viable way of practice, through finding new meaning in material that came down to us from history. In recent years, there has emerged a general discomfort about classical music together with the idea that it has to be modernized; this booklet wants to contribute to a possible modernization of the art form, but in quite another way as may be suggested by the general use of the term. It proposes that classical music as a genre has to be liberated from the widespread misconceived idea that it is only a historic thing and thus only related, in terms of meaning and relevance, to its time of birth, and that it can only exist, within the context of the modern world, as an object in a museum: interesting, nice, and valuable, but not related to modern humans in the way that it was related to its contemporaries in forms of society which were different from modern ones on a fundamental level. Such liberation would have a strong impact on the way classical music is presented, understood, organized, funded, and taught, and would affect the relationship with audiences, and the interaction between the organizational layer of management and staff on the one hand, and the musical practice as such by the performers on the other, together with its reflective field of academia.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic, or the less scientific description "corona crisis", brought concert life to a halt, since effective distancing–necessary to stop the spread of a virus–is not possible in concert halls. When it became known that the main danger was airborne transmission in closed spaces, live concerts seemed out of the question. Suddenly and unexpectedly, a veil came down over the performing arts, as over all public life. This was a different veil from the one which, for instance, descended in Europe with World War II; it was less politically burdened and less lethal in number, but for music life its results were even worse: concerts could still take place in the war years. Classical music, as a genre and as a practice, survived the onslaught of the war, and as a practice survived the increasing commercialism and bureaucratization of concert life and the attack by musical modernism, all of these reducing the genre to a "niche interest for the happy few", a "museum culture" considered without real relevance to the modern world, and to the reality of contemporary Western society. As such it was drawn into the corona crisis. And as if the pandemic was not enough trouble, as soon as it began to subside, a powerful state led by an entirely irresponsible regime began to threaten Europe and the world, by invading a neighbouring country and disrupting the fragile balance of the international world order, as far as such an order existed. All the anxieties and primitive manoeuvres which had defined the Cold War of the last century, and were considered

finally overcome, were back in a full-blown form and that while the world has to deal not only with epidemic threats and economic problems, but with an unprecedented climate crisis, for which the cooperation of every nation is an absolute necessity. One does not need much imagination to understand the disruptive and undermining effect all of this will have on culture, and especially the world of classical music which does not deal with objects, as in the visual arts, but with immaterial events in terms of performance and is heavily dependent upon extensive organization, funding and mobility.

After the attacks by the virus and by Russia, and for a considerable time thereafter, the concert world is expected to slowly recover but with considerable holes in the field. Yet, such a sudden backlash is, together with its aftermath, also an invitation to rethink the genre and its practices, and especially the relevance it may have in the modern world; when live music is difficult for all sorts of reasons, its practitioners are forced to reconsider the reasons why they invest their time and efforts in classical music at all. The distance created by lockdowns, by the elimination of opportunities and the temporary disappearance of live music, followed by a period of disruptions caused by war and further political and economic instability, and the inevitable much longer period of re-evaluation and mental preparation for similar disasters to come, requires a thorough re-examination of the "raisons d'être" of classical music, and of the need for live music in a world which has to deal with problems that touch its very existence.

Central to this re-examination should be the need to stop the erosion which has taken place in the last century, the slow but continuous undermining of the art form as something relevant to contemporary society. Classical music has long since been burdened by problems of relevance and its relation to the surrounding world, because it is a cultural tradition born and developed in the past, in contexts quite different from the modern world. Hence the question, which has already been lingering for decennia and has suddenly become more urgent today: how can we preserve a culture from the past in such a way that it can function constructively and successfully in the modern world? What is its place and relevance in a world which so often seems so far removed from the world where this impressive repertoire was born? Looking back to the last hundred years shows the problems of limiting conventions, materialist and commercial thinking, and the destructive influence of misunderstanding the concepts of progress and modernity, many of them limiting orthodoxies hardly ever seriously questioned in music life. Classical music as an art form and as a practice needs a drastic re-evaluation and reassessment to prepare it for the rest of the 21st century, and to liberate it from the misconceptions of a negative and restricting age.

Disaster does not necessarily always mean elimination and often creates new opportunities and new ways of thinking. There is something important to learn from difficult periods in history, for the simple reason that the human condition is not only defined by temporal circumstances but also embedded within the collective human mind and heart, or–as C.G. Jung would say–in the collective subconscious. This means that cultural inspiration and renewal can be reborn after a difficult period, as it has happened before. So, let us have a look at history, and why not at the most spectacular rejuvenation of culture that Europe has ever seen, a renewal through looking back to an imaginary, mythical Golden Age and recreating its spirit for the present and the future: the Italian Renaissance. Why this example? Don't we need the opposite: rejection of the past and beginning with a clean slate, armed with our experience of the present?

But classical music: its entire repertoire, is a fruit from the past, which has proven to be meaningful today because its artistic, psychological, and spiritual values have survived the passing of time, including some profound changes of society, and have shown to be related to universal human life experience, to the human condition which cannot be replaced by utopias and the gadgets of the modern world. Below the surface of appearances, humans generally remain the same in terms of character, as a serious examination of history shows time and again, and which we can easily notice in our own present time when archaic, pre-Enlightenment sentiments inflict entirely pointless destruction on innocents and fuel entirely unnecessary political tensions. So, if we want classical music as an art form to continue to exist, we have to try to think of it as an atemporal phenomenon that can take its place within any context of society; although born in temporal conditions, Western classical music has spread all over the planet and taken root in cultures with very different conditions and histories (the way in which music is related in a universal way to the human psyche is further explored in Chapter IV: Music and Nature). This means that we should regard this impressive repertoire not as something from a museum, as merely a historic artefact, but as a *living* art form, which still has the capacity to inspire and to stimulate interest, entirely independent of any historic context.

That is why the mindset of the Italian Renaissance is a good example because at the time, the idea of a "rebirth" of a culture from the past–as a universal example–was a stimulus for new invention, new developments, and new inspiration; ideas and values from antiquity were explored and transformed, and the development of the human being and his place in the real world became the centre of attention, in contrast with medieval thinking which focused upon metaphysics and man subordinated to divine forces as translated and regulated by the Church. What is needed today is not an

imitation of the Italian Renaissance, but a picking-up of its spirit, and understanding what made it such a stimulating and, for its time, contemporary and progressive movement. The Italian artists who were inspired by antiquity did not imitate, they learned from the past to create the present and the future. They took a number of core values from antiquity and interpreted them anew, giving them new life, emulating them and surpassing them.

In this paradox, artists liberated themselves from restrictions that a more collectivist culture of earlier, medieval times had imposed on their fantasy and invention; for them, antiquity was not so far away that they could not imagine their own version of it: for them, history was not cut into separate blocks on a line but looked more like a continuum within which it was easy to travel. They felt strongly that there were standards of excellence which remained valid through time, unaffected by temporary circumstance; their rediscovery of antiquity was a liberation from a limited world view, and this could be compared with the current need to liberate thinking about classical music from a similarly restricted world view, which can unlock new energies and a fruitful perspective.

The first obstacle to overcome is the way that history is generally and conventionally considered, because it is the idea of classical music as a historic phenomenon which hinders its understanding as entirely relevant for our own time. So, to understand the Renaissance mindset we will have to look into the concepts of past, present and future as parts of a mental continuum, rather than as a straight line like an arrow from left to right, from the past into the future, and thus limit history which gives the impression that works further down the line into the past must, because of their position on the time line, have less relevance than works closer to our time.

The Italian Renaissance was born from pestilence and war, and carried by a number of creative minds who wanted to explore the treasures of the past to put them to use in the present, and to offer hope and confidence in an atmosphere of decline and trouble. It is no coincidence that this new paradigm, which has since been understood as the birth of the modern world, emerged in Italy and not in the rich north of Europe: Flanders, the Low Countries, Ile de France, England, and the German lands. Trade and culture were flourishing there, so not much need was felt to drastically change ways of thinking about the world; the North continued and developed medieval culture in its own splendid way. But the Italian peninsula was, in comparison, rather backward and stagnated: at least, this was a general feeling among the artists and intelligentsia.

This difference can be shown by the great architectural projects: while the north of France and the Low Countries, and the western German lands, saw impressive cathedrals of the greatest sophistication and richness of

invention, the Milanese had to get architects from France to build their own gothic cathedral which nonetheless falls short of the typical character of northern gothic. Italian architects kept to the routines of old-fashioned construction methods as used in the previous centuries, and architectural solutions and technical innovations of the gothic architecture of France were hardly used. Soaring height was less important than in Northern Europe, and the spirit of true gothic never caught on in Italy, which can be seen in even the best churches of the period which are quite simple and often primitive in comparison with those of the north. Even the beautiful cathedral in Siena has nothing of the gothic spirit, in spite of the use of a number of stylistic components in the detail.

Because of the fall of Constantinople, the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantium) which was conquered by the Muslims in 1453, a great number of Byzantine scholars fled to Italy, carrying with them the surviving literature and scientific and philosophic writings of Greek and Roman Antiquity, which quickly spread among the Italian intelligentsia. This wealth of cultural material brought forth the intellectual and literary movement of "humanism" which was at the heart of the Renaissance and its culture and which–for the arts–created a new "wave length" of aesthetic feeling and imagination. Not a feeble imitation of the north, but a revival of the glory of Italy's own past, seemed to be a fertile perspective.

The faint reflection of a Golden Age in the past, together with the numerous ruins from the Roman Empire scattered all over Italian lands, created the symbolic means with which artists could overcome the stagnation they felt, and create something new on the basis of a half-understood culture where they filled the gaps in their knowledge with their own personal inventions. This means that they did not copy examples of what was left of the past, but let themselves be inspired by them. The Italian "revival idea" sparked so much enthusiasm that it soon spread all over Europe, where it found different variations and interpretations according to personal taste and local traditions.

But the longing for something better than the declining and troubling present had been shimmering long before Byzantium fell. Already in 1341, just before the great black death epidemic of 1347-48, the Italian poet Petrarca wrote:

> Someone then might say: 'What is all this, my friend? Have you determined to revive a custom that is beset with inherent difficulty and has long since fallen into desuetude? And this in the face of a hostile and recalcitrant fortune? Whence do you draw such confidence that you would decorate the Roman Capitol with new and unaccustomed laurels? Do you not see what a task you have undertaken in attempting to attain the lonely steeps of

> Parnassus and the inaccessible grove of the Muses?' Yes, I do see, oh my dear sirs; I do indeed see this, oh Roman citizens. 'Sed me Parnasi deserta per ardua dulcis raptat amor,' as I said at the outset. For the intensity of my longing is so great that it seems to me sufficient to enable me to overcome all the difficulties that are involved in my present task.[1]

And (from the same source):

> This age of ours consequently has let fall, bit by bit, some of the richest and sweetest fruits that the tree of knowledge has yielded; has thrown away the results of the vigils and labours of the most illustrious men of genius, things of more value, I am almost tempted to say, than anything else in the whole world….

Such language may strike us as a bit naive and as a rather quaint, nostalgic conservatism. But that was not at all the case, as history shows: such thinking set in motion one of the greatest and most fruitful cultural developments the West has ever seen, only to gradually erode from the 19th century onwards. Revivals can be fruitful, modern, and forward-looking, dependent upon circumstance and human need.

In the early 14th century Florence suffered a number of devastating disasters: trade collapsed, the banking system imploded, government sank under the weight of corruption scandals and internal quarrelling, crops were failing, and all of this was topped in 1347-48 by the plague which killed almost half of the population. It is not difficult to imagine the anxiety, nihilism and pessimism that reigned at the time. But after this dark period, the longing of the surviving population for a more positive way of looking at the world created a need for a rebirth of the things that make life worth living again: civilized values, education, science, beauty, the arts, something which would stimulate the faculties which had been numbed for so long. And exactly in the city which suffered so much, the spirit of a rebirth was born and was to become the inspiration of a whole continent.

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[1] Taken from an article by Andrew Balio, first trumpeter in the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra and founder of the Foundation for the Future of Classical Music, on the website of the Future Symphony Institute, the forerunner of the Foundation. "To Orchestrate a Renaissance", Future Symphony Institute, n.d., https://www.futuresymphony.org/to-orchestrate-a-renaissance/.
"But a sweet longing urges me upward over the lonely slopes of Parnassus" (*Georgics* III, 291-292). Mount Parnassus, rising above Delphi in Greece, was the home of the Muses of Greek mythology, and in literary references it symbolizes the source of art, literature, and learning. It derives from the same root as the ancient Trojan word for house. See also: https://ffclassicalmusic.org/

It is clear that what classical music as an art form, as a practice, can learn from those times, is something psychological: how to re-invent oneself, how to create a better world view, and how to find ways of creating energies which will contribute to life and unlock the creative faculties, which will be the most important requirement in the near future. In due course, most of the practices of concert life will continue to function as before, but that is by far not enough: past disruption should also be the stimulus to reform. These times offer a golden opportunity to change a so-called "museum culture" into a culture that is acutely relevant for the modern world.

The problems of the classical music world have already been debated for half a century, and although the situation in the USA is different from that of Europe, the questions being asked about the art form in the USA are equally relevant for Europe, especially concerning the predicament of the symphony orchestras:

> This is how the problems of the symphony orchestra have been framed by the leading opinion-makers and ideologues of our age. And orchestras have been struggling to answer them. At the meetings and conferences of the League of American Orchestras and the major granting foundations, in the hallways and boardrooms of our symphony orchestras, and in the print of our nation's respected newspapers you will hear the scramble to answer these questions:
>
> - How can orchestras become more relevant to their communities? How can orchestras affect social change?
> - How do we make classical music more fun and engaging for today's audiences?
> - How do we lower ticket prices far enough so that everyone comes to concerts?
> - How should orchestras embrace technology and innovation?
> - What should the new business model look like?
> - And the ever popular and desperate: How do we get more young people to attend the symphony?[2]

However understandable these questions are, they deal with the outside of the art form and not with its relevance in the context of the modern world: they leave the meaning of the art form untouched and want answers for direct, practical needs. Also, the questions show that the idea in the background is that the presentation and performance of classical music should be adapted to "the requirements of modernity", and to the needs of

[2] "Saving Classical Music: a Return to Tradition", Andrew Balio, Voegelin View, accessed July 17, 2021,
https://voegelinview.com/saving-classical-music-a-return-to-tradition/.

potential audiences. But any beginning of an answer to these questions has to first deal with questions about the nature and the relevance of the art form itself and about why we do need it at all. It is this central question about relevance, that this booklet attempts to answer, and which will be treated in the context of human nature and the pressing concerns of our own time.

In the coming years–and probably also long after–the question of relevance and meaning will have an unprecedented urgency. But which relevance and meaning? And who is going to decide? The management layer everywhere? The audiences–who have a CD collection at home and can extend their experiences through the internet–have long ceased to have any influence upon how the "business" is run: they can stay away but that is hardly a constructive input. Which professional, educated group is dealing in a direct way with the content of the art form? It seems that it is the performers who, in the first place, will have the responsibility to lead a recovery of meaning and relevance in performance practice, because they are–as no other party–in direct contact with the heart and spirit of the music. They can follow their professional insights, and instincts of love instead of careerism and financial reward: they can also see their career in the light of their responsibility which, in the end, offers a reward which cannot be expressed in terms of money. If they exercise enough pressure upon the management layer of music life, programmers and promotors will follow: despite lacking the musical talents which help the performers to better understand what is at stake, management staff can learn from the people who work, so to speak, on the "inside" of the profession. Only in this way, can some of the damage be undone and problems be turned into a positive challenge and a chance of reform.

This booklet combines two approaches: first, the psychology of music because all the problems of the classical music world can be understood as psychological problems; and second, relating these problems to the big themes of our time. The subject requires both an understanding of the past of the art form, and the preparedness to "think out of the box", to explore possibilities beyond convention, which may lead to speculative trajectories, but are the result of the pressures of the historical situation in which the art form finds itself today.

Classical music can be considered a form of stylized psychology, since its impact is psychological, and its values can be described in psychological terms. But because it is an art form, its essence cannot be entirely covered by language but only *approached*, like visitors to a garden who are only allowed to have a look over the fence. But from such a position, it is still possible to understand the relationship with the important themes of our time, because these themes require a profound change as to how we relate

to Nature, and hence: human nature and human culture. We are part of Nature and at the same time–because of the nature of our consciousness–we can distance ourselves from it. This distancing capacity has served mankind to build civilizations, but has also created dangerous, self-inflicted problems for these very civilizations. Today, a new relationship with Nature presents itself as the only option if we want to preserve both Nature and human civilization. Classical music as a genre of serious art offers both a trajectory towards a better understanding of human nature and an inspiration to find a better connection with the creative forces active in the natural world, which support our own being on a fundamental level.

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I

MUSIC AS PSYCHOLOGY

Why do music lovers after attending a concert of classical music feel better than before? Why do they go to concerts: to feel bad, or to feel better? Why do they want to hear some of the pieces of the classical repertoire again and again, and again? Is that because they are dumb, and want to revisit what they already know, thorough conservatives as they are? Or is there something else going on? If someone, entirely ignorant of the art form, looks at the central performance culture with the endless repetitions of a core repertoire, only occasionally including something unusual, it must strike her/him as a mysteriously conventional field where thousands of people want to hear the same kinds of sounds over and over again, a sort of apotheosis of an empty, obtuse hearing routine, inducing trancelike states only interrupted by a ritualistic clapping of hands on waking up from comatose slumbers.

But music lovers know this is not true; what is happening, is happening inside the listener. They have the experience, the very real experience, as if something inside is touched and (often) being put in order, the music waking up a process of emotional organization, along a sound structure that moves in time, that changes, appears to "say" something and to create a "narrative" that can be "emotionally followed" without ever having spelled out a subject or meaning. It is like a language but where the words have been deleted and only the emotional component of the words' meaning has remained. The emotional part of the psyche resonates with what is happening "in" the music, and is influenced by that resonance, as if emotions have been recognized by another consciousness, and are being ordered and given a meaning. This ordering does not mean that initially vague and chaotic emotions are being restrained or suppressed, but they are given profile and shape which have a logic of their own. Every serious music lover will–when reflecting on the listening experience–recognize this process. The interaction between the music heard, and the emotional territory in the psyche, can be described as a process of resonance: the emotional field aligns itself according to the dynamics of the music. This resonance influences the character of the emotional field, changing some aspects of its nature during

the experience, as if it is undergoing a "learning process". (Recent neuroscientific research has shown how human emotional reception systems respond to aesthetic stimuli, demonstrating our deep connections with Nature; this subject is treated more closely in Chapter IV.)

If classical music–and this means: Western classical music as it is practised in the central performance culture–has this kind of "educational" quality, it is to be sought in something like the education of the imagination, and helping to humanize and refine the emotions and, as is often hoped, in stimulating ethical and moral awareness. This last expectation is a fruit of the Enlightenment, when speculations that art had a moral/ethical component were welcomed as a new accolade for the artists, who were in a process of being liberated from functional servitude to court, Church or nobility. Since Beethoven, the idea that classical, serious art music (and especially the "abstract"/"absolute" variety as ideally represented by symphonic writing) has an ennobling spiritual influence, has accompanied many writings about musical aesthetics. (Of course, there is music that serves more mundane purposes like entertainment, but that is not our subject here.) With this high-minded idea about art music, classical "serious music" liberated itself from direct "practical" use and became a value, an aim, in itself. So, the "high art variety" of music may be irrelevant to practical, worldly concerns, but it may be very relevant to the formation of the personality and thus, can be expected to function as an important stimulant in developmental processes. In the course of time, its function became something like an aesthetic and a psychological one.

But what do we consider as "classical music"? Does traditional art music in other than Western cultures count? For our argument, only Western classical art music will be considered, since the music of other cultures operates in a very different historical and social context, and the subject of this booklet is the concert world of Western classical music which has found a home all over the world, irrespective of local cultural traditions.

Western classical music consists of two historic components: a) all serious music from Gregorian chant onwards up until and including the late Baroque in the first half of the 18th century, and b) the music from the second half of the 18th century onwards up until and including 20th century classical music. This distinction is based upon the performance practice and its instruments; the regular, classical performance world has developed on the classical repertoire as created in the second half of the 18th century and as it was seen from a 19th century perspective: the works of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven (the more narrowly-defined "classical" type of music) formed the basis of a performance culture that set standards in both performance and composition quality. For the first time in Western history, music from

the past began to take the form of a canon of venerated works, to which new works began to relate, both in terms of performance practice and composition, however oblique or rebellious at times. In the 20th century, the music of "pre-classical" times (the times before Haydn) was explored and a new performance practice was created next to the central performance culture: the *Historically Informed Performance* practice (or HIP), where a study of lost ways of performance led to both the attempt to create an "authentic" rendering of scores (the notation of which was often rather poor in information density) and the reconstruction of "pre-classical" instruments, together with the recreation of the art of playing them. All this is the Western classical tradition, which was continued next to the development of 20th century atonal modernism, which again created another territory: the field of sonic art, or, as the Germans have given it the appropriate term: *Klangkunst*. (This purely acoustical art form will not be part of these deliberations for the reasons that will become clear in the course of this chapter, and it will be dealt with later on.)

All Western classical music, as described above, was not mere acoustical decoration but has been intended to communicate something, but what? Not clear information like in language. But it was meant to create an effect in its listeners that embraced more than the perception of its sounds alone, it was meant to have an effect deeper than words, deeper than rational thought, and touching the emotions and that mysterious thing which the poets of former times had no problem in calling "the soul" (today we would, hesitatingly, rather describe this entity as a continuous non-rational self-identification process). Music was considered, by its composers as well as its performers and its audiences, as an *expressive* art, an art that had to "say" something that could not, or only inadequately, be put into words. By "expressive" we must not only think of 19th century romantic music, but also of these quasi-abstract works like Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, which express something very different from a Schumann song cycle or a Mahler symphony: these beautiful and introvert variations could be considered to express meditative reflections on the nature of being, or on the order of the world or of the universe, or the workings of the human mind, or about how a religious vision would perceive the world and the human soul. All this points towards the obvious conclusion that classical music has been meant to create an effect on the emotional part of the inner life of the listener, bypassing language and the intellect, and touching those layers of inner awareness we would relate to intuition, dream, instinct, and soul. Where words were used as in church music, it was assumed that the music would also render the deeper meaning of the texts *emotionally* powerful and therefore more convincing than if they were simply recited; the setting of

religious texts was therefore carefully monitored by the religious authorities and where necessary, restricted by rules which kept the clarity of the words intact (as in the Council of Trent, 1562-63). In the Lied tradition of the 19th century, it was accepted that the music was rendering the emotional dimension of the text as something directly expressive, thereby greatly increasing the effect of the words; the same with opera which attempted to engage the audience with a combined spectacle of words, stage action, and music: all as a creation of some sort of stylized but emotionally accessible reality.

In spite of the many successive changes in style, form, purposes and social and political circumstances, serious art music in the West has always been relevant to society, i.e., it was a fully integrated part of the best that the culture of a time and place could offer. The upper layers of society (the "elite") were aware of its existence, and also of its importance if not personally involved. The ambitions which drove composers, performers and commissioning patrons were always focused upon "the Best", in whatever sense. Relevance has never been an issue: it was taken for granted and never discussed because it was not something that needed explanation; it would have been very difficult for a composer or performer in those periods to articulate the relevance of his art, as it would have been hard for a fish to explain the relevance of water. Until in our own time: with the democratization and emancipation of the masses, and because of social mobility, technological progress, the development of an extensive media culture and the abundance of information channels and distribution networks, authority of tradition no longer goes unquestioned and also classical music as an art form which costs a lot of money (in Europe mostly from the tax payer's purse), is–for the first time–coming under pressure to justify its existence and hence, its funding. This is not, by any means, an altogether bad development, since it forces the professionals in the musical world to rethink what they are doing and to which purpose. In a time when all parameters of our civilization are shifting, and especially considering the current rise of populism everywhere in the Western world, a populism that is hostile to the idea of cultural excellence which gives the impression of "elitism", and on top of it all a disruptive pandemic with its aftermath plus rising geopolitical tensions, it is of the greatest importance that the nature and purpose of classical music be articulated and argued, to be able to protect it from erosion and attacks resulting from ignorance and misunderstanding.

There are already many efforts going on to make classical music more accessible and to counter the impression that this is a museum culture for the happy few, like the numerous educational and community projects that

orchestras all over the world have initiated. Thereby one is sometimes surprised to discover that classical music is being presented as something that it obviously is not: hip, easily understood, and entirely in touch with the outward appearances of modern times. In 2010, Holger Noltze, music journalist and lecturer at the Technical University in Dortmund, published his book "Die Leichtigkeitslüge" (The Lie about Easiness), in which he criticizes the way in which classical music is increasingly presented to potential new audiences as something "easy"[3]. He explains complexity as an inherent quality of the art form, and claims that culture should be allowed to be not easy at all, that it can be painful at times for the audience, that it may hurt, and that this demonstrates its power and meaning. He has nothing against the entertainment element that can often be found in classical music, but claims that something important is lost when all of it is approached as nothing more than another form of aural fun. Here, we see two extremes put against each other: art music as torture (Xenakis, Neuwirth, Haas) against art music as primitive fun (pop, hip hop, rap); both extremes ignore what classical music as a genre really does. However, the book stirred some public opinion in Germany, and the fact that it was written in the Holy Land of Classical Music at all, is a phenomenon which invites serious reflection…. If even in Germany, the European country that sees itself as a "Kulturnation", there are rising doubts about one of the greatest cultural assets of Western civilization, we all have to worry. So, there is indeed a problem with classical music as a genre, that goes to the heart of its nature and meaning and which can best be described as a problem of identity, of relevance in the context of the modern world, in relation to modern life experience which is so different from the art form's idioms and the times and places of its birth.

The problem which Noltze describes–making classical music "easy"–stems from the idea, that this art form is old, that it comes from premodern times (at least, very much: the heart of its repertoire), and that the only way to make it relevant for modern times is to make it in some way compatible: not only making it appear "easy", but also combining it with elements which typify the modern world: visuals, media cultural artefacts, a promotion cult around it as an imitation of pop music marketing, performers taking on the image of fashion models or pop idols complete with glittering dresses, and new concert halls which outdo each other in their efforts to look like futuristic space ships from sci-fi TV series and computer games. Central to this approach is the suggestion that classical music should be as quickly

[3] Holger Noltze, Die Leichtigkeitslüge: über Musik, Medien und Komplexität (Hamburg: Körber Stiftung, 2010).

digested and understood as all the offerings of modernity's entertainment industries.

All these attempts want to rescue the art form from its "historic shelter" and to bring it into the bright daylight of our own time, with its intense but evanescent life experiences. But here, we touch upon the real problem which is ignored in these attempts: the real nature of the art form is its *interiority*. The art form is (and always was) not at all "about" the outside world, but "about" the interior world of emotional experience. A piece by Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, or Schumann, and even later works by Mahler, Strauss or Stravinsky, never refer to the outside world as it really is, but to the inner experience of the human being living in it. In that sense music is "about" the human condition, about what it means to be alive. Even where music seems to refer to the outside world, for instance works with titles like "Pastorale", or "Till Eulenspiegel's Lustige Streiche" or "La Mer", it expresses the inner experience of the "subjects" which are transferred to a level where they lose all concrete substance and only the emotional essence remains. The titles invite entry to the central experience where they are no longer relevant; this is the kind of difference between the word "triad" and singing the tones which make up the triad.

We could thus consider classical music, next to being a superb art form, as a psychological instrument to enhance self-awareness, as a repository of means to increase emotional understanding: a stimulus to become aware of layers of perception and of value, awakening more sophisticated insights about being human; or simply as an emotionally uplifting experience which–by the way–may include all these things as well. Also, as an art form it can function as a signifier of cultural identity, to strengthen the feeling of belonging to a community which may reinforce positive social awareness and reduce feelings of alienation. (It can also become a tool of ethnocentric jubilation, which is something different and stands in sharp contrast to its humanist nature: classical music is for everybody with enough perceptive capacities to understand and enjoy it.) But since all these things have different meanings for every individual, it is much better to describe the art form in a way which includes all of these things: as offering an *alternative* to the outside modern world, contrary to the idea that classical music should be *part* of the modern world, because all of the above-mentioned effects are individual psychological effects of interiority, not collective processes of visible deeds carried out in full sight of a worldly public space.

Almost all of the signifiers of modernity as they are generally understood and shared, draw man towards the outside of life, towards the world, towards social contexts, technology, efficiency, the practical side of human life, and all things material. The world of multiplying media, the social

media with their one-minute evanescence, and the realm of internet fantasies, are all outside the world of inner awareness and individual reflection; they invite engagement outside the realm where the Self is at the centre, they are about the "movement out there". The meaning of life however and the experience of the human condition do not reside in all those outside forms of engagement, but in our inner world of emotion, reflection, and experience of Self and–to use an old-fashioned description–something deeper, the experience of "the movements of the Soul". Since the noise of the outside world has greatly increased over the last hundred years, it will be clear that a differentiated, balanced, and strong inner awareness of Self is more needed than in earlier times to cope with the pressures of modernity. It is on this point, that classical music has much to offer.

Where much of modernity draws modern man out of his own inner realm, classical music offers a place of restoration where anchoring into one's own Self creates a point of orientation and awareness from which the outward, modern world can be seen and dealt with in a way that protects the Self from being disrupted by randomly bombarding stimuli which are more often than not, superficial and without order. A well-centred Self, at some distance from the outward world, has a better grip of any stimuli, can be more effectively selective and better at assessment, because it has created quality standards against which stimuli can be measured and evaluated. The nature of classical music, which addresses the interior realm of the psyche, is very effective at creating such a distance from stimuli of the outside world which, if left on their own, cannot be properly digested if there is no coherent filter to manage them. The regular experience of classical music gradually builds up such a filter, with which stimuli can be better ordered and understood. This build-up is a process that happens for a greater part unconsciously, as a result of the inner resonance with the ordering forces which function within the music. So, in this sense music is not a form of escapism from the world but a balancing act, to keep the inner world sane and to be better equipped to deal with stimuli from outside.

But how is this at all possible? The repertoire of classical music was created in a time and place where the rattling of passing carriages was the worst sonic distraction, where none of the raging noises of modernity could even be imagined. In those times, people had enough time on their hands to reflect upon life, upon their experiences, to be aware of their own reactions to them, and to quietly contemplate the perspectives of past, present, and future. Ideas got the time and the attention to sink in, to mature, and to take on an individual and collective form. In the realm of culture, the "slowness of time" had a great impact: a craft was allowed a long trajectory of development, accompanied by constant reflection; the results of such

trajectories we can admire in the "old" collections of the great museums and in the "old" repertoire as presented in the concert halls and opera houses. The advantage of such a life was that the experiences of interiority were close to the surface and artists were strongly aware of them. The "interior world of individual experience" was the normal wave-length on which the artists operated, and since music is an abstract art, i.e., non-conceptual, composers could embed the imprints of their experiences into the structures of their music, where experience sheds its temporality and specifics, so that music (no longer dependent upon time and place) becomes universally accessible.

This means that the "old repertoire" which forms the mainstay of Western classical music, together with its aesthetic values, has never become old at all but remains as fresh as ever, reflecting interior experience which is accessible to every new generation. In our modern world this interiority has become rare and something to be wrestled from the world; the noisier the world becomes, the more valuable is the realm where people can restore their inner balance and awareness of individuality and Self.

The implications of the true nature of classical music as the art form of universal interiority are drastic: not its *adaptation* to modern life, but on the contrary, offering a *contrasting experience* makes classical music an indispensable part, an acute necessity, of the modern world. Interiority is the very thing the inhabitants of the modern world desperately need if they want to preserve the common sense and equilibrium to be able to function properly. It is in this contrasting experience, and not in some kind of practical or economic value, that the intrinsic value of classical music can be found, as a part of the common good. And this leads to the great irony in relation to the point of classical music's relevance in the context of modernity: because of its interiority, classical music has obtained a level of relevance for the world that it never had in the periods when it was born, because in the past, the art form was an organic part of the world, in spite of the occasional irritants emerging from composers' originality which occasionally clashed with their direct environment (composers like Beethoven, Chopin, Liszt and Wagner were quickly recognized for their contribution during their lifetime in spite of their utter and often "irritating" individuality). So, instead of a decreasing relevance, classical music has now *much more* relevance than it ever had, due to the psychic misery that inevitably comes in the wake of modernity.

If classical music is the art of therapeutic interiority, thinking about presentation, marketing, funding, etc., obviously needs to be developed from this insight. "Selling" music in wrapping paper which belies its nature will inevitably lead to disappointment: regular listeners will feel their

experience is being unacknowledged and dumbed-down, and may stay away in the future; and potential new audiences–especially the younger generations without much exposure to classical music–will feel cheated when they find out that a Mahler symphony does not sound at all like heavy metal or hip hop. One could revisit the many rubbing points that characterize the problems of classical music with this perspective in mind and try to find new and better ways to connect the art form to the *needs* of modern society, instead of trying to make it *compatible* with modernity. Especially the symphony orchestras, which are vulnerable because of their complex bureaucracy and great expense, could find explorative trajectories to anchor the institution within society in a way that secures its existence in the present and in the future, and at the heart of such considerations lies the way in which the orchestra as an institution is perceived from the outside, from the modern world to which it offers a much-needed alternative space.

A brief word about the sonic art performance culture is here in place. Since the Second World War, this entirely new art form has developed aesthetic and especially, psychological and receptive frameworks which differ fundamentally from those of music. This has meant an entirely different approach to composition, performance, education, and marketing. Sonic art does not intend to address the listener's interior life but instead wants her/him to become aware of the aesthetics of pure sound, which is more like an observation process of patterns which are not the means of any communication of interior, emotional experience, but are objective, independent entities to be enjoyed for themselves, as natural phenomena. Sonic art is not an art of interiority but an objective art that belongs to the world of objective entities.

This does not mean that there can be no “inner resonance” in the listening experience of sonic art, but this experience differs fundamentally from all forms of music from Gregorian chant onwards. The inner resonance that accompanies listening to sonic art is of the same order as any other inner resonance that accompanies the confrontation with any outward, objective pattern not meant as a form of communication; the patterns of sonic art can be as interesting, or beautiful, or engaging, or numbing or irritating as any pattern that outward reality may present. But it does not engage in the same way with the movements of inner emotional experience, because it does not “play” with the tonal relations and their capacity to create narratives which can be experienced as structures that carry psychological, emotional meaning unfolding in ordered time. Therefore, it is a grave misunderstanding to simply condemn the resistance of classical music audiences to sonic art as “conservatism” and the “refusal to engage with the modern world”. (Readers interested in the difference between music and sonic art, may find

some enlightenment in "The Classical Revolution"–as published by Dover NY in 2017; see the literature list at the end.) The spirit of sonic art is fundamentally different from music and confusing the two art forms is doing a disservice to both.

Given the ideological nature of much sonic art and the character of its promotion, which insistently relates it to the specific character of modernity, it can never offer the contrast to modernity as explained above. It firmly belongs to the modern world to which classical music: the art of interiority, in contrast, offers an *alternative* experience. In other words: audiences who want to immerse themselves again in the modern experience in an aural way, will seek sonic art; and listeners who long for an experience that confirms their inner life and universal humanity, will try to find this in classical music. In terms of psychological enrichment, it is clear that sonic art has not much of value to contribute in a world struggling with existential problems.

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II

THE SPIRITUAL ROOTS OF CLASSICAL MUSIC

The subject of this chapter is the relationship between classical music and its "parent": Christianity, a tricky subject, since many people in the cultural field believe that it is difficult to find a cultural product that is more "outdated", "narrow-minded", and "supremacist" than Christianity as an organized religion. Also, there is a consensus that the farther away religion is from the concert hall, the better, in spite of the rituals in both concert halls and churches which are so alike. With church music–Bach cantatas, passions, Mozart masses and the like–the connection is clear and does not warrant any exploration, but secular music (according to general opinion) should be pure and unencumbered by associations with the context from which art music liberated itself long ago.

Why is the connection important for the theme of this booklet? It is important because this historical connection is often forgotten, and the supposed numinosity, the psychic aura that hangs like an invisible fluidum around classical music, is a remnant of its heritage and subliminally picked up by players and audiences alike. Understanding the historical connection clarifies an important part of the art form and its practices.

The venerated status of classical music since its liberation from the Church and nobility around 1800, including the "genius cult", would be unthinkable without its religious inheritance. The "great artist", with the aura of a priest, representing the highest aspirations of man, and the idea of an "art religion" as developed in the course of the 19th century, can be seen as a belated emancipation of composers in the way that artists in the visual arts and architects in the Italian Renaissance became iconic figures even during their life time, with artists like Michelangelo receiving the accolade of "divine", and being spiritually-inspired. However, an increasingly secularized Western world with its scientific, "objective" world view has become more and more alienated from the sources that gave birth to the Western classical tradition, and understanding this split offers an insight into the tradition's relationship with the modern world.

In its best period, the Christian religion was much more than a religious nomination, organization, or collection of circumscribed axioms and

orthodoxies, offering hope, consolation, and emotional stability; it was a visionary and revolutionary world view, that played a prominent role in shaping Western civilization; it was to a great extent the cradle of modern society, its values, and its art. The Christian idea touched various archetypes that were deeply embedded in the human subconscious, mobilizing energies which had been lying dormant, and creating a dynamism which drove the West for ages–in spite of its flaws and the misuses that always accompany human endeavour.

It is not that religions create religious people, but the other way around. From time immemorial people have been religious by nature, that is: they feel connected to a wavelength of existence beyond the visible material world. Therefore, they create religions, in an attempt to find the most appropriate expression of their religious intuitions and experiences. Recent excavations in Turkey showed that complex ritual and social organization even came before settlement and agriculture (the archaeological site of Gobekli Tepe where stone constructions were built more than 11,000 years ago, right on the cusp between a world of hunter-gatherers and a world of farmers). In every serious religion, the imprint of some metaphysical reality is felt and embedded in rituals and works of art, which try to explain the meaning of life and the world: a spiritual reality recognized by people whose religious instinct is still intact and not yet crushed by too negative experiences, or suppressed by a one-sided rational intellect.

For an entirely rational mind, this suggested "metaphysical, spiritual reality" is pure nonsense and a superstitious projection, since the scientific world view which has developed over the last 200 years has proven to render understandable the world in which we live in purely material terms. But meanwhile, scientific research of matter itself has revealed its properties to be not so material after all, and while science covers the territory of physical reality in terms of objective presence, it does not deal with meaning, since meaning is a psychological category and not a material one. (Meaning within the context of science refers to scientific meaning, which is something different from meaning in a wider psychological sense, referring to how to live your life.) Here is the link with music, which is also not material, but consists of more or less referential patterns of vibrations in the air, which produce meaning and the experience of presence in the listening process. As there are different musical cultures in the world, but all based upon a natural, material property of sound waves and their proportional relationships as demonstrated in the harmonic series, there are different religious world views which are all based, under the surface of appearances, upon the natural intimations of the human being. The differences in the forms of religion are accents, which lift some particular value from the