

## The Art of Creating Music

If one can accept the premise that education is the essential condition at the base of all of the arts, it follows that the work of art itself would necessarily have an educational value; it would necessarily contribute to the progress of humanity. That being said, music, as we accept it in Western Civilization, is the youngest of the art forms being regularly performed and accepted from about 1500 to the present. Ancient music before about 1500, although enjoying mini-revivals throughout the world on some occasions, remains to most of the public, a curiosity at best and ugly at worst!

The art of music has its rules, precepts and laws. They are not arbitrary and are necessary to the understanding of the form itself. These rules, developed by the common practice of composers of the past 500 years, and studied exhaustively by enthusiastic (and sometimes not so enthusiastic) students and composers are ever evolving and complex in nature; some relating to the disciplines in science and others being derived by esthetics. Analysis of and reverence for those composers who have preceded us is not only right, but is a necessary condition for the advancement of the art form itself and its contribution to humanity.

Music (as it has evolved in Western Civilization) fulfills three basic functions for most of its audiences: It must be entertaining, it should be educational and to most of us, it is a spiritual experience. It shares the characteristics of the other art forms and includes elements of the sciences as well. If one examines the rudiments of music, it is obvious that the art form has for its basis (sonorous) vibration, rhythm, melody and harmony. To these, the composer adds the nuances of dynamics, articulation, orchestration etc., but the main elements are the organization of rhythm (which is based on mathematics; specifically arithmetic), melody (which in its origin probably evolved from linguistics), and harmony (which in obeying the laws of vibrations-the laws of physics), depends on the sciences. Music therefore is primarily derived from mathematical science, natural science and the science of physics in its rhythm, melody and harmony. None of these three elements however can or should stand alone without the science of esthetics, or artistic effect-in other words, expression.

If, as one hopes is the case, a composer has the need to write, he is bound by his need to communicate through his creation. Expression, then, becomes the goal of the art form itself. At this point, one comes to the realization that music should have some type of form. It can readily be compared to the more ancient art form of architecture. To compose music is to put into order uneven elements. Initially, the composer begins to determine which will be the principal element.

One begins almost immediately (as in architecture) to deal with the concept of "proportion". A common approach might be "have a big, grand motive together with some other smaller secondary ones, and join them well together." In other words, "something should dominate all the rest, either by its grandeur, or by its function, (or by

its interest).” This concept certainly applies to architecture and it also applies to the musical composition. Saint Saens even went so far as to describe the art form in this way: “Music is an architecture of sounds”.

Following this model, in architecture, sculpture, painting etc. the work generally progresses from the general to the particular; that is the “ensemble” appears before the “details.” In literature, music etc., the “detail” leads to the appreciation of the “ensemble”; it proceeds from the “particular” to the “general”. If you look at a cathedral of the Baroque period, the magnificence of the whole strikes before the minute florid details are seen, but in Bach’s “Art of the Fugue” the motive is presented and extended to the point of complete development and eventual musical climax. It is important to note that the motive or musical idea must be very clear and precise so that it is easily grasped and remembered.

In the study of music theory, important consideration should be given to the tools of composition. They are: harmony, counterpoint, fugue and orchestration. By beginning with the understanding of chord progression or succession, one understands the hierarchy of the tonal structures as it evolved in the music of Western Civilization. An often-misunderstood subject is that of “modulation” which should actually be an example of “expression” rather than an “aimless attempt for trivial effects or showmanship”. It is also possible to accept that modulations to higher tonalities can represent a move towards “the light” whereas a modulation to a lower key might be understood as a movement towards “darkness”. It is also possible to assume that key signatures with several flats might sound darker than keys with several sharps (except when performed by keyboards, mallets and other instruments with fixed tuning). As one develops a thorough knowledge of harmony, “counterpoint” becomes an important compositional tool. It is assumed to be a “stricter style”. Harmony deals with the chords; a vertical sonority, but the “mechanism of notes”, counterpoint, suggests harmony through the horizontal statement of the imitation of melody. By the use of contrary motion, a symmetry of melody against melody is found and by manipulations such as “inversion”, “retrograde”, “retrograde inversion”, “augmentation” and “diminution”, the composer’s craft can become very interesting indeed, bringing the art form to a rather complex but beautiful climax. Other manipulations such as “canon” (“rule” of music strictly followed), “stretto” (a succession of “canons”) and even the “perpetual canon” (which continues with no point of conclusion), are all examples of tools that may be employed by the crafty composer. Finally, perhaps the highest form of musical understanding lies in the successful design of a “fugue”, in which the main idea is developed after the rules of “perpetual imitation”.

The fugue makes use of all the types of imitation both simple and complex, combined and invertible, but at the same time developing and accompanying the principal theme or themes! It is, then “the perfection of counterpoint” all that a good composer should know and be able to demonstrate in his work.

Finally, there is an opinion that one is a “genius” or has considerable “talent”, but what do these terms actually suggest about composition? “Genius” is the pinnacle of creation, the “soul elevated to (its) highest expression”. A genius is the “prototype” of “all which he engenders”. “Genius” is inborn and no teacher can teach it. No human power can create it nor can it be found “where it is not”. “Genius” can only grow and manifest itself through “talent”.

“Talent”, however (although not powerful enough to create essentially original work), is acquired from good teaching and logical study. “Talent” is essentially the “care giver” of “genius”; it is through “talent” that musical “genius” can be demonstrated. “Genius” without “talent” is paralyzed and the gifted artist must, through diligent study, acquire as much “talent” as possible.

A third trait, often ignored, but just as important as the other two is “musical taste”. With this acquired attribute, one can begin to recognize the faults and strengths in the works of others as well as in one’s own works and to appreciate them and discriminate “with a sane judgment”. So, then, the “genius” creates, the “talent” imitates and the “taste” appreciates.

Through artistic education, regardless of how extensive or excellent, “genius” cannot be achieved, but through that same education, the origination of “talent” and the development of “musical taste” will occur and will serve “genius” well.