THE LISTENER'S GUIDE TO MUSIC

Books by
Percy A. Scholes

The Listener's Guide to Music
The First Book of the Great Musicians
The Second Book of the Great Musicians
The Third Book of the Great Musicians
The Complete Book of the Great Musicians

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TO THE CONCERT-GOER

(ACTUAL AND POTENTIAL)

ON BOTH SIDES OF THE ATLANTIC

INTRODUCTION

When Mr. H. E. Wooldridge was Slade Professor at Oxford he devised what to many of us was a new method of lecturing. In place of the customary set discourses on Schools and Principles of Art he collected us into a dark room with a sheet and a magic lantern, and proceeded to show us how to look at pictures. I can still remember those hot summer afternoons, the shuttered windows, the Professor in cap and gown reading his manuscript by the light of two small candles, while we sat in serried rows following with literally breathless interest his accounts of the different ways of drawing hands or drapery, of the influence of one artist on another, of the rise and fall of conventions and schemes of composition. He never, so far as I recollect, endeavoured to direct our taste; he did not scold us for admiring Rembrandt or failing to understand the Primitives; he told us what there was to see in a picture, and left us to form our judgements for ourselves. And to many of us a picture gallery has become, since those days, an entirely new place.

This is what Mr. Scholes is doing in the present volume. He has addressed it not to students and connoisseurs, but to plain simple people who like music

but are a little bewildered by its complexity and by the pace at which it passes across their attention. He opens the door of the Masters' workshop and shows, not the secret of their mastery, for none can show that, but the way in which they used their tools and dealt with their materials. And any reader who follows him carefully, and makes use of his illustrations, will confess at the end of the volume that he has gained something in power of appreciation; he will have learned more fully what there is to appreciate.

For there are, as a philosopher said, more false facts than false theories in the world. The power of enjoying and loving the best music is not a rare and special privilege, but the natural inheritance of every one who has ear enough to distinguish one tune from another, and wit enough to prefer order to incoherence. The cause of almost all misjudgement in music (apart from wilful pedantry and wilful fractiousness) lies in want of observation—in a failure to hear what the composer is saying, and to interpret it in reference to our own needs and emotions. That is why so much of the best music gains by frequent recurrence; we cannot, as the phrase goes, 'take it in' at a first presentation, and must grow more familiar with its words before we can understand their significance. With the greatest music of all we can never be too closely acquainted; its meaning is as infinite and unfathomable as that of Sophocles or Shakespeare; but at each repetition we may understand more of it if we will, and the first step in understanding is to learn the actual elements of

which it is composed. There is no need to traverse or complicate this by discussing the different degrees of musical susceptibility and their bearing on the artistic judgement. Such degrees undoubtedly exist, and the more sensitive ear starts with a great advantage. But if the man of little sensibility errs on the one side, the man of little knowledge errs on the other. Berlioz divided bad critics into 'ceux qui ne sentent pas' and 'ceux qui ne savent pas,' and any one who will take the trouble may at least keep out of the latter class. If he does he will find to his reward that admiration grows as knowledge grows, and that the keener his perception and the more sympathetic his judgement, the fuller and more enduring will his pleasure become.

W. H. HADOW

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CHAPTER I

THE NEED FOR A GUIDE

The orchestra gather, with tentative piping and bowing and blaring they prepare to play, the conductor appears, the audience applauds, the baton is raised, silence falls, the pipes are in the mouths, the bows are on the strings, all is ready—Crash! The symphony has begun.

At once a thrill. It lasts thirty seconds, then interest flags. A tender tune comes from the strings playing softly, and attention is regained. Then the mind wanders again.

Enjoyment, yes! but intermittent. Understanding, yes! but mixed with perplexity. Something wonderful is happening, but only half the audience understands what. There are passages of poetry, but they seem to be mingled with passages of philosophical disquisition on some subject above our heads. What is it all about? Why on earth cannot the composer make his meaning clear?

The symphony goes on for forty minutes, fifty minutes, one hour—and bewilderment lasts the same time. There is a sensuous pleasure in the blare of the brass, the sweetness of the muted strings, the piquancy

of a momentary dialogue between two wood-wind instruments whose names one does not know. Our time is not altogether wasted, but on the whole was it worth while coming to the concert? A book, a lecture, a play, one can understand; these are made up of plain words. A music-hall performance needs no understanding at all. But these symphonies, sonatas, piano concertos, and string quartets seem vague and wandering. There may be a principle of order in this sort of composition, but if so, where is it? There *must* be such a principle, for a part of the audience seems to grasp the purpose of the piece, and is able to applaud with obvious sincerity. Is there some knowledge they have and we have not? If so, what is it?

It is to supply that very knowledge that this book exists—and to supply nothing beyond that knowledge. There is an art of composing, an art of performing, and an art of listening, and the third is the one least taught, least studied, and least understood. There are few books on the art of listening, and what books there are are sometimes too long and generally too difficult for the use of the ordinary concert-goer; moreover, their text is made to depend on music-type illustrations, and this places their argument beyond the grasp of many a reader. The object of the present book is to supply the means of an initiation into the art of listening, and to do it in the briefest and simplest way possible. Nothing not strictly pertinent to the listener's problem will be admitted into its pages, and such music-type illustrations as are given are an inessential part of the book.

The book, then, is one for the private reading of the ordinary listener. It is intended also as a text-book for classes in what is sometimes called 'The Appreciation of Music'—and such classes are becoming increasingly common on both sides of the Atlantic. And the young piano pupil or the violin pupil studying for the profession may here find a simple opening-up of a subject which may in his case be pursued in deeper treatises.

But it is the need of the ordinary listener—the *quite ordinary, humble-minded, so-called 'unmusical'* person—that has prompted the writing of the book, and it is his approval which will decide its success. This book is, frankly, for the man, woman, or (elder) child to whom music is to be one of life's 'hobbies'; put it right down on that level and the author is satisfied.

CHAPTER II

SOME SIMPLE NECESSARY TERMS EXPLAINED

BEFORE Music can be discussed in any detail certain ground must be cleared. If this book is to serve its full purpose the assumption must throughout be made that some of its readers 'do not know a thing about' music. The very names of the notes may be strange to them, the conception of 'key' may be novel, the rhythmic combinations implied in 'time-signatures' may have no meaning. And it is impossible to explain musical form without the use of the names of notes, the names of keys, and the names of 'times'. A chapter in which this and similar apparatus may be put at the reader's disposition must therefore follow. It may be dry, but it is necessary—and it is as short as possible.

NOTES

The sounds of nature range from 'low' to 'high' (to use purely conventional terms), proceeding by a mere smooth incline (to follow out the idea of those conventional terms). When a dog howls, a cat mews, or a cow moos, it is merely using a section of that incline,

beginning at the lowest point of which its vocal chords are capable and proceeding to the highest, or vice versa. Birds do not glide like cats, they hop: their song, too, as it happens, proceeds not by a smooth movement but from point to point in the 'incline' of sounds. In other words, birds use notes—and so do humans, birds and humans being the only two truly musical families of the world's creatures.

SCALES AND KEYS

A bird inherits a little combination of notes from its ancestors and contents itself with repeating this over and over again as long as it lives. Man invents new combinations in infinite variety, consequently man needs a working system. He fixes on a certain series of notes with a definite relation to each other and makes his tunes out of these. Such a series is called a Scale. A Scale is simply the regiment of the notes used in a human tune, drawn up on parade, and made to number off.

It is found, as an acoustical fact, that any given note recurs at higher and lower pitches, so that the whole long staircase of notes is divided into a number of short flights of stairs, and these become the scale-units of music.

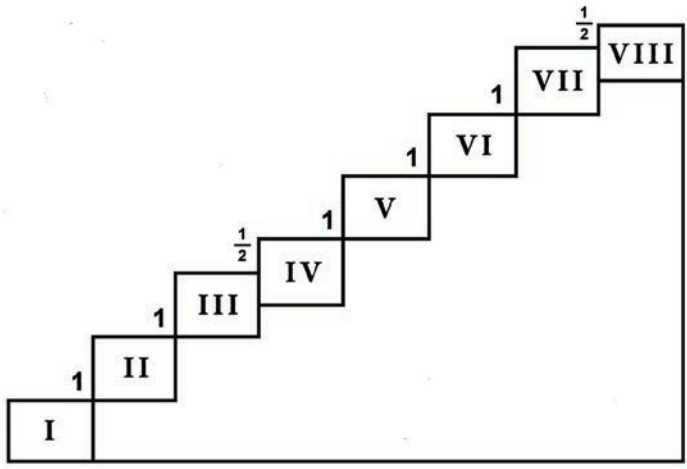
In normal European and American music each of these scale-units is divided into twelve equal parts,[1] of

[1]Many of the statements in this book are practical rather than scientifically exact.

which seven[2] are chosen for chief service, the others being called on as auxiliaries. These seven may be chosen out of the twelve according to two systems. The one system produces what we call the Major Scale, the other the Minor Scale.

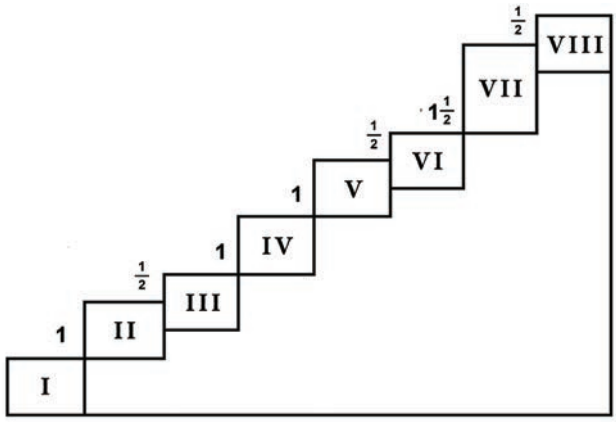
The twelve notes are divided from each other by intervals called 'semitones': two semitones make a tone. On the piano keyboard any two adjacent notes are a semitone apart; any two notes next-but-one to each other are a tone apart (whether white or black has nothing to do with it; there is no social distinction of colour—all enjoy equal rights of citizenship).

The Major Scale can be begun from any of the twelve notes by proceeding upwards as follows (1 = tone; ½ = semitone):



[2]Eight, instead of seven, if the main note be included both at top and bottom, in which case we have what is called an Octave.

The Minor Scale can be begun by proceeding upwards as follows:



[The arrangement of the notes VI and VII is sometimes varied slightly.]

The essential difference between the Major and Minor Scales is that in the lower part of the Major Scale the semitone occurs between III and IV, and in the lower part of the minor scale between II and III. Play a few scales Major and Minor, beginning on any note of the pianoforte and proceeding according to the diagrams just given, and the great difference of effect will be realized.

For convenience letter-names are given to the white notes of the piano as follows: A, B, C, D, E, F, G. The note next above any of these white notes is called its sharp, the one next below, its flat. A glance at the piano will show that on the keyboard sharps and flats generally fall on black notes, but that in two or three cases they fall on white notes, which white notes have thus not only their own proper names but also an additional name acquired from another note. (This is simple enough:

you may speak of a man as Tom Brown, or you may speak of him as Bill Jones's neighbour.)

The object of our explanation so far has been to enable a reader who did not know a fact about our tonal system when he began this chapter to understand in future what is meant by such terms as 'C major' or 'D minor', 'G sharp minor' or 'B flat major'. A piece 'in' the key of C major is one of which the main prevailing choice of notes is made by the use of those found in the major scale beginning on the note C, and so forth. (Where the note C is found on the piano does not matter to the reader, but if he does not know the names of the notes on the piano and wants to do so he can get a friend to show him in two minutes.)

MODULATION

Hardly any piece, however tiny, stays in one key. Even an Anglican chant to which the psalms are sung in church, with its mere ten notes, generally moves to another key about half-way through—that is to say, some flat or sharp is introduced in place of one of the original notes, and thus the key is altered. Such an alteration we call a Modulation.

A modulation, or a series of modulations is, however extended, merely an incident; the piece returns before its end to the key in which it started—which is felt to be *the* key of the piece.

A piece may modulate from any key to any key, but

there are certain close relationships of key within which it is easier and apparently more natural to modulate. Thus we speak of 'Related Keys', and in a quite short piece it is likely that all modulations which occur will be to keys closely related to the main key of the piece.

RHYTHM AND TIME

The whole universe moves in rhythm, suns revolve and seasons change, tides rise and fall, flowers appear and die, hearts beat and horses trot according to a periodic system which we call by that name. Poems are written and declaimed (or ought to be declaimed) in rhythms. Regular beats or pulses and recurring accents can be felt in a line of poetry, and these occur also in music. These accents divide the line of poetry or phrase of music into rhythmic units. In both poetry and music there are felt to be either two beats or three beats, as the case may be, to each unit. If a phrase of music seems to have four beats to a unit these will be found to be really two units of two beats each, making together the larger group of four. Similarly, six beats fall into two sets of three, and twelve beats into four sets of three.

The reader is now in a position to understand the 'Time-signatures' he sometimes sees quoted in concert programmes. The indication of $\frac{3}{4}$ means that there are three beats to a unit, or bar (neglect always the lower figure, which has no real significance except for the performer), $\frac{2}{2}$ has two beats, $\frac{6}{8}$ has two sets of three beats, and so forth.

Within each unit (or bar[3]) there may be, and generally are, smaller combinations—groups of half-beat notes or quarter-beat notes, two-beat notes, three-beat notes, one-and-a-half-beat notes, etc. There is thus possible an infinite variety of long and short notes and combinations of such, but underlying these shifting note-rhythms the regular rhythmic pulsation of the beats and bars can be felt.

Another part of the rhythmic system of Music is the use of 'Phrases' or 'Sentences'. In addition to its shifting rhythms of short notes and long ones, and its regular rhythms of beats and bars, any tune you may hear will be found to fall into lengths of (say) two or four bars apiece. Thus *God save the King*[4] has the time-signature of $\frac{3}{2}$, i.e. its bar-rhythm consists of groups of three beats each. But its bars also fall into groups as follows:

Three Phrases making one Sentence.

God save our gracious King,
(2 bars)
Long live our noble King,
(2 bars)
God save the King:
(2 bars)

Four Phrases making another Sentence.

Send him victorious,
(2 bars)
Happy and glorious,
(2 bars)
Long to reign over us;
(2 bars)
God save the King.
(2 bars)

[3]English *Bar* = American *Measure*
[4]American readers know this tune as *My Country, 'tis of Thee*.

The reader is now in a position to understand the words 'Beat', 'Bar', 'Phrase', and 'Sentence' when he meets them in annotated concert programmes.

MELODY, HARMONY, AND COUNTERPOINT

The poet and the plain man often use the words 'Melody' and 'Harmony' interchangeably. By either they mean merely pleasant sound.

Technically used, as in a concert programme, the words have distinct meanings, Melody being a simple string of notes such as you could whistle or sing by yourself, and Harmony a combination of notes such as you could play with your hands on the piano. A handful of notes, whether sung by a choir or played by instruments, is called a 'Chord'. When you sing *God save the King* you are uttering Melody; if you sit down and accompany yourself by 'Chords' on the piano you are also producing 'Harmony'. Despite the poets, neither 'Melody' nor 'Harmony' necessarily connotes anything pleasant, in fact poor Melody and bad Harmony are very common. Moreover, new styles of Melody and Harmony are constantly being introduced to which many people object very much until they get used to them.

'Counterpoint' is simply a combination of melodies. A composer might take *God save the King*, leaving the existing tune for you to sing as before, but fit with it two or three other tuneful parts for two or three other voices to sing at the same time. You would then be

singing your old 'Melody' and each of the other voices would have its Melody, the whole would be a piece of 'Counterpoint', and, further, since the voices sounding together would produce a series of 'Chords', there would be 'Harmony'.

It may be well to call attention to the adjective from 'Counterpoint', frequently used in later pages. It is 'Contrapuntal'. *God save the King* as sung by one person is 'Melodic'; as usually sung by a choir, or accompanied at the piano, it is also 'Harmonic'; as just arranged in imagination in the last paragraph it is, *further*, 'Contrapuntal'.

FORM

The relation of portions of a musical composition to each other and to the whole—fully explained in later chapters.

OPUS

This word will be found occasionally in the following pages, and frequently in concert programmes (often reduced to 'Op.'). Modern composers of the serious sort generally number their works as they produce them 'Op. 1', 'Op. 2', etc. Frequently several pieces are brought into one opus, and they are then numbered Op. 1, No. 1; Op. 1, No. 2, etc. It is always worth while to notice an opus number, as it gives an idea as to whether a work represents its composer's early tentative stages

or his maturity. In hearing an Op. 5, for instance, you must generally be a little indulgent. On the other hand, an Op. 50 or Op. 100 has no claim on your charity, and must be content to bear your fiercest criticism.

The use of opus numbers is associated by the general public with the performance of what it calls 'classical' music, since the more commonplace compositions are rarely numbered by their makers. On the day this chapter was written the author overheard in the train a conversation illustrating this fact. Two men were arranging together the holding of a suburban concert, and the guiding principle of the construction of the programme was laid down in these words—'No classical music, all good popular stuff—*none of them ops!*'

CHAPTER III

WHAT THE LISTENER REALLY NEEDS TO KNOW

When one comes to think of it, what a lot of musical knowledge there is that does not help the listener—or at least helps him only very indirectly.

One can imagine a keen but ignorant music-lover looking round for something to study. He finds a book called *The Elements of Music*, he masters it, and finds he has got a grasp not of the elements of music at all, but merely of the details of musical notation.

Something more is needed: he inquires and finds that after the *Elements of Music* people often go on to the study of *Harmony*. He buys a text-book, engages a teacher, and finds himself able to string chords together and to write a hymn-tune. But his listening is little more intelligent than before: put the piano score of a symphony before him, and he can spell out the chords and analyse the harmonies, but when the symphony is played he profits little by his new ability. He hears of *Counterpoint*, and takes up that subject: after months of work he can write a tiny exercise, using the technique

of the sixteenth-century choral composer. But his listening ability is little increased. The fact is that all this time our poor friend is laboriously acquiring the mere beginnings of the stock-in-trade of a composer (which he will never be), and neglecting to acquire the necessary stock-in-trade of an intelligent listener (which he wishes to be).

What subjects, then, should a listener study? Mainly three—*The Form of Music*, its *History*, and a trifle of *Instrumentation*. And these he should have set out not in the usual text-book manner, for the ordinary text-book of Form goes into details of which he need know nothing, the text-book of History supplies far more dates and names than he will ever require, and the text-book of Instrumentation assumes that its reader wishes to *write* for the orchestra.

To know something of how a piece of music is built will help the listener. To know something of the period in which it was composed, the stage of musical development it represents and the personality of the composer will also help him, and, in the case of an orchestral piece, knowledge of the instruments concerned will give a new interest to his listening.

Knowledge of Form will help him, because it will enable him to detect the musical subject-matter of the piece. As soon as he grasps the fact that a piece of music has definite musical 'Subjects', and is able to identify these and note their treatment, his perception is transformed. What was formerly a puzzling web of sound becomes a clear arrangement of definite

'tunes'—and any one can appreciate a tune. He can now recognize the relation of parts to one another and to the whole. The *drawing* of the piece is clear to him.

Ability to recognize tone qualities of the various instruments, singly and in combination, makes it possible to observe tonal contrasts he formerly missed. He notes a little theme taken up in turn by the clear-voiced flute, the rich-toned clarinet, and the thin-sounding, piquant oboe. He marvels at the variety of effects of the great body of fiddles, little and big, playing softly or loudly, bowing or plucking their strings, muted or unmuted, he admires the warm tone of the horns playing slow chords. The *colouring* of the piece is now clear to him.

The fact that the composer is not to him a mere name is of importance. He knows something of the joys and sorrows that made up the composer's life, and the piece is no longer a *tour de force* of technical achievement, but a human document, a medium of human expression. The fact that it was written in such-and-such a country enables him to regard it as the expression of a nation, and a period. The knowledge of the position the composer and his national 'school' occupy in the story of musical development enables him to avoid looking for what could not possibly be there—a type of feeling that belongs to a century later, or a manner of composition that belongs to another 'school'.

These three things then are useful: a knowledge of Form, a knowledge of History and Biography, and

a simple knowledge of Instrumentation. As for other knowledge, why of course *all* knowledge is of some value, but for the ordinary listener, engaged day after day in weaving or building, in buying or selling, in preaching or teaching, banking or law, a knowledge of these three is all that life will generally allow. And the beauty of it is that, of these three, one, at all events, History and Biography, can become a mere subject of general reading, to be gradually and pleasantly pursued as the days go by, and to be kept up-to-date without effort as new composers appear and articles and books upon them and their works come into one's ken.

CHAPTER IV

HOW THE COMPOSER WORKS

Light can be thrown upon the problems of intelligent listening by a little consideration of the problems of composition. It is a truism to say that a piece of music is written to be listened to. It is a piece of self-expression on the part of the composer, but he is expressing himself to some one—to an audience, or to many audiences that will hear his work in many places and at many times, possibly through many centuries. The composer has, then, not merely to express himself, he must do so intelligibly: he must *make himself clear*—and not only this, he must s*trike at the feelings* of his hearers. A good sermon is, presumably, a piece of self-expression also, but it is a piece of self-expression aimed at the minds and hearts of a congregation. Neither the piece of music nor the sermon serves its purpose if it simply acts as a safety-valve to the overcharged brain of its writer. It must not be a mere outpouring of thought or emotion; it must be designed for the production of a certain effect.

That very word 'designed' applied to music may

startle some simple-minded reader. For, strange as it may seem, there are in the world a number of people who misunderstand the word 'inspiration', and look on the composer as a mere channel—a lightning conductor which collects the electric fluid from the heavens and conveys it to the hearts of men. If these people were to put on paper their picture of a composer at work it would be something like this: A wild-eyed creature, with ruffled hair, seated at an untidy table with music-paper before him, and writing, writing, writing, feverishly and excitedly the thoughts that Heaven sends. 'Inspiration' is percolating from the ether into his brain, in burning streams it flows down his arm, into his hand, out at his finger-tips and along his pen, from which it drips over the paper in black-headed crotchets and quavers. The creature rises with a shout of joy—a masterpiece is born!

Or, alternatively, they think of the creature at the piano frenziedly fingering the keys, producing in immediate tone the thoughts that Nature sends him, and then turning to his desk beside him that he may record for after ages the currents and eddies of the afflatus.

Now symphonies do *not* come into the world in this way, any more than do plays, pictures, poems, novels, or cathedrals. Something called inspiration there must be, but something called design also. Of the attempted works of art that fail, some do so from lack of inspiration, and others from imperfection of design or ineffectiveness in its execution. The arts are on an equal footing here, and we can learn something

of the methods of work of the composer by considering, for instance, those of the poet. We shall find that 'the poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling' is an insufficient equipment, and that, in addition, there must be the habits of reflection and calculation, and a readiness to adapt means to ends.

How much of 'inspiration' there may be in the planning of a racing yacht one does not know, but there is certainly something that may go by that name, plus a large amount of calculation. How much of calculation there is in the composition of a poem or symphony is difficult to decide, but there is something that comes under that description, plus a good deal of 'inspiration'.

Amongst those who have lifted the curtain and let the public peep into the room of the poet, Edgar Allan Poe comes first to mind. In his essay on *The Philosophy of Composition* he says:

> 'I have often thought how interesting a magazine paper might be written by any author who would—that is to say, who could—detail, step by step, the processes by which any one of his compositions attained its ultimate point of completion. Why such a paper has never been given to the world I am much at a loss to say—but perhaps the authorial vanity has had more to do with the omission than any one other cause. Most writers—poets in especial—prefer having it understood that they compose by a species of fine frenzy—an ecstatic intuition—and would positively shudder at letting the public take a peep behind the scenes, at the elaborate and vacillating crudities of thought—at the purposes seized only at the last moment—at the innumerable glimpses of idea that arrived not at the maturity of

> full view—at the fully matured fancies discarded in despair as unmanageable—at the cautious selections and rejections—at the painful erasures and interpolations—in a word, at the wheels and pinions—the tackle for scene shifting—the step-ladders and demon traps—the cock's feathers, the red paint and the black patches, which, in ninety-nine cases out of the hundred, constitute the properties of the literary *histrio*.'

Having let us into so much of the secret of literary composition, Poe then goes on to analyse the processes by which was brought into existence his poem *The Raven,* prefacing his analysis by these words: 'It is my design to render it manifest that no one point in its composition[5] is referable either to accident or intuition—that the work proceeded step by step to its completion with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem.' Now Poe had a peculiarly logical and analytical mind. He thought out his processes, and could afterwards account for all he had done, as, probably, few poets can. Some processes of composition which with him were conscious may be with others unconscious; he had reasons where some others have intuitions. But in the case of every successful poet there must be a working to law, more or less conscious, and the principle of design is to be found everywhere throughout the completed work.

It is not difficult in our records of the great composers to find the equivalent of Poe's description of the processes of the poet. Those 'painful erasures', for

[5] i.e. the work done after the original 'inspiration' had come to him.

instance—how well known they were to Beethoven! To him inspiration came, as it came to Poe, as the gift from above of a mere tiny fragment—with Poe the germ of an idea, with Beethoven just a little handful of notes. And this fragment itself was imperfect, so much so that he turned it over in his mind for months or years, fashioning and refashioning it, polishing and perfecting, and sometimes, after long efforts at improvement, returning finally to an earlier form. He kept beside his very bed a sketch-book in which he could record the musical thoughts which had occurred to him. When he was walking he would stop, and take such a book from his pocket and jot down a new idea that had struck him, or the recasting, of an old one. This practice he began as a boy and continued through life, and when he died fifty of his sketch-books which still remained were included in the catalogue of the sale of his effects. His criticism of his own ideas was severe: he discarded many more of his inspirations than he used, so that if he had carried to completion all the symphonies of which his note-books show the beginnings, instead of nine of them, we should have had at least fifty.[6]

> 'The moment he takes his pen in hand he becomes the most cautious and hesitating of men. . . . There is hardly a bar in his music of which it may not be said with confidence that it has been re-written a dozen times. . . . Mendelssohn used to show a correction of a passage by Beethoven in which the latter had pasted alteration after alteration up to 13 in number. Mendelssohn had separated them, and in the 13th Beethoven had returned to the original version.' [7]

[6] Nottebohm.

Compare the statement of Brahms as to his own processes of composition:

> 'There is no real creating without hard work. That which you would call invention, that is to say, a thought, an idea, is simply an inspiration from above, for which I am not responsible, which is no merit of mine. Yet it is a present, a gift, *which I ought even to despise until I have made it my own by right of hard work*.'

In advising a young composer Brahms said:

> 'It seems to me you are too easily satisfied. . . . Let it rest, let it rest, and keep going back to it and working at it again and again, until it is completed as a finished work of art, until there is not a note too much or too little, not a bar you could improve upon. . . . I am rather lazy, but I never cool down over a work once begun, until it is perfected, unassailable.' [8]

In the case of Beethoven and Brahms the successive stages of composition, the clipping and trimming, the lengthening and shortening of passages, the reshaping of melodies, the recasting of harmonies, and the re-balancing of parts were largely recorded on paper. In the case of some other composers this work has proceeded as a purely mental process, no record being kept. But it has had to be done nevertheless.

> 'Mozart when he washed his hands in the morning could never remain quiet, but traversed his chamber, knocking one heel against the other immersed in

[7] Sir George Grove, in his masterly sketch in the *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*.

[8] Recorded by Sir George Henschel in *Musings and Memories of a Musician*.

> thought. At table he would fasten the corners of his napkin, and while drawing it backwards and forwards on his mouth, make grimaces, apparently lost in meditation.' [9]

Much of Mozart's composition was very rapid, that is to say the actual penning of his work was often quickly achieved. But his mind had been hard at work, accepting and rejecting, and what he produced was the result of the mental labours of a period of this kind superimposed on a basis of long study of the principles of composition.

> 'It is a very great error to suppose that my art has become so exceedingly easy to me. I assure you that there is scarcely any one who has worked at the study of composition as I have. You could scarcely mention any famous composer whose writings I have not diligently and repeatedly studied throughout.'

This laborious attempt to grasp the principles of effective composition by the study of the great works of others has been made by every great composer. Bach copied out the works of Italian and French composers. Handel travelled much as a young man, hearing and studying the works of other nations. Elgar's awakening came when as a boy he first caught sight of a copy of Beethoven's first symphony, was struck by its effects, and began to study the means by which these were obtained. His present method of composition is essentially that of Mozart: the labour is done without pen and paper, but it *is* done. As he told the present writer: 'An idea comes to me, perhaps when walking. On return I write

[9]Holmes's standard *Life of Mozart*.

it down. Weeks or months after I may take it up and write out the piece of which it has become the germ. The actual labour of writing this, with the complete orchestral scoring, takes perhaps eight or ten hours. But the piece has gradually shaped itself in my mind in the meantime.'

It is interesting to find one composer of to-day who has analysed the processes which he states to be general amongst composers. This is the French composer, Vincent d'Indy: he bases his analysis presumably largely upon a consideration of his own personal experiences, but he bases it also upon a long and careful observation of his master and life's friend, the great César Franck. An authentic document of this sort is worth giving at length.

> 'Without going too deeply into technical details, it seems indispensable at this point to remind—or inform—my readers that the creation of any work of art, plastic or phonetic, demands, if the artist is really anxious to express his thoughts sincerely, three distinct periods of work: the conception, the planning out, and the execution.
>
> 'The first, which we have described as the period of conception, is subdivided into two operations: the synthetic and the analytic conception. That signifies for the symphonist the laying down of the broad lines, the general plan of the work, and the determination of its constituent elements—the themes, or musical ideas, which will become the essential points of this plan.
>
> 'These two undertakings generally succeed each other, but are nevertheless connected, and may modify each other in this sense, that the nature of

the idea (the personal element) may lead the creative artist to change the order of his preconceived plan; while, on the other hand, the nature of the plan (the element of generality) may invoke certain types of musical ideas to the exclusion of others. But whether it be synthetic or analytic the conception is always independent of time, place, or surroundings—I had almost added of the artist's will; he must, in fact, wait until the materials from which his work will be built—materials which will account for the form while they are also influenced by it—present themselves to his mind in a completely satisfactory way.

'This mysterious period of conception is sometimes of long duration, especially with the great composers (look at Beethoven's sketch-books), for their artistic consciences compel them to exercise extreme severity in the choice of their utterances, whereas it is the characteristic of second-rate musicians, or those who are infatuated with their own merits, to be satisfied with the first matter which comes to hand, although its inferior quality can only build up a fragile and transient edifice.

'The second period in the creation of a work, which we call the planning out or ordering, is that in which the artist, profiting by the elements previously conceived, definitely decides upon the disposition of his work, both as a whole, and in all its minutest details.

'This work, which still necessitates a certain amount of invention, is sometimes accompanied by long moments of hesitation and cruel uncertainties. It is the time at which a composer undoes one day what it has cost him so much trouble to build up the day before, but it also brings the full delight of feeling himself to be in intimate communion with the Beautiful.

> 'Finally, when the heart and the imagination have conceived, when the intelligence has ordered the work, comes the last stage, that of execution, which is mere play to a musician who knows his business thoroughly; this includes the actual writing, the instrumentation, if it is required, and the plastic presentation on paper of the finished work.
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> 'If, as regards the general conception and execution of the work, the procedure is more or less identical with all composers, it is far from being uniform in all that concerns the thematic conception and the disposition of the various elements. One musician has to await patiently the blossoming of his ideas; another, on the contrary, will endeavour to force their coming with violence and excitation; a third—like Beethoven—will write in feverish haste an incredible number of different sketches of a single musical thought; a fourth—Bach, for instance—will not give his theme plastic shape until it is absolutely established in his own mind.'[10]

One purpose of this chapter is to destroy wherever it exists the idea that a composer's work is easy—the mere recording of a flow of notes that comes to him from a kindly muse. So far from this work being easy, it is often excessively laborious; the muse gives the man a shilling, with the ability (if he will diligently use it) to turn it into a hundred pounds.

And, that accepted, the way is clear for the next chapter, which gives some idea of the nature of the 'planning' or 'designing' of a piece of music, so far as its general lines are concerned.

[10]Vincent d'Indy's *César Franck* (Mrs. Newmarch's translation, published by John Lane).

Since this chapter was in type I have noticed (what I had long forgotten) that one eminent teacher of musical composition has advised his students to study Poe's essay on literary composition alluded to above. Mr. Frederick Corder, Professor of Composition at the Royal Academy of Music, in the introduction to his most helpful and original *Modern Musical Composition: a Manual for Students* (Curwen), says:

> 'Composition is as much a constructive art as joinery or architecture, and must therefore be practised consciously until long use and experience enable us to exercise our painfully acquired powers subconsciously. Yet nearly every one begins with a vague idea that he has only to turn his eyes to heaven, like a prophet in a picture, to be delivered of a musical work complete in all its parts. I would advise a perusal of Edgar Allan Poe's fine essay on *The Philosophy of Composition* as the most effectual antidote to this pernicious delusion. It is only possible for the long and highly trained expert to dispense with the searchlight of ratiocination, and it is very doubtful whether even he gains anything by so doing. But it is in the nature of the person of feeling to want to do everything by unbridled impulse, as it is in the nature of the intellectual person to love to fill up a form. The real artist—a combination of the two—reasons out his work first; then, having fashioned it in the rough, he re-writes and re-writes until the bare bones are quite hidden. I am aware that cold intelligence and hot enthusiasm are two oddly matched steeds for the chariot of Phœbus Apollo, but they must be taught to go in double harness, neither leading, but side by side and mutually helpful.'

A happy adaptation of Mr. Corder's opening sentence to the special purpose of this book, by the way, might be made as follows: '*Listening* is as much an analytical act as the appreciation of architecture; it must, therefore, be practised consciously until long use and experience enable us to exercise our painfully acquired powers subconsciously.' The succeeding chapters teach *conscious* analysis in listening—in the hope that with many readers this process of analysis will eventually become largely subconscious.