

GIVING AND TAKING

Chamber Music as Training in Musical Teamwork

Lecture given at the 1981 ESTA-conference in Edinburgh

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Music as a social force

I would like to take as the starting-point of my lecture something which the conductor Bruno Walter spoke about in 1935 under the title "The moral power of music":

"While I was in San Francisco I received a visit one day from a middle-aged man . a musician with a long-standing interest in the lives of convicts. He told me that in course of thinking about these convicts' fates, their welfare and future prospects, it had occurred to him to work with them through music. With this idea, he had managed to persuade a prison-director to let him begin teaching the inmates polyphonic choral music, and the outcome of his efforts over several years was apparently astonishing; the behaviour of all the convicts whom he taught changed fundamentally. Not only was their enthusiasm obvious during the music lessons; there was also a significant moderation in the conduct of even the most difficult of them, both in their behaviour towards the wardens and towards one another."

Bruno Walter told this story in order to reflect on the nature of the criminal mind and on the ineffectiveness of words to get past such people's self-defensive wall of introversion. He concluded,

"Where words had failed, music had succeeded. Through the harmonies of polyphonic choral music they could hear how teamwork can result in progress. While each person sang his own note they produced chords in which the lonely individuals became a community, achieving something beneficial through helping one another, and sensing - on an elementary level - the beauty of that support."

I would summarise Bruno Walter's thoughts in a phrase which expresses the fundamental thesis of my lecture: music can make us into a community.

As individuals we have a certain responsibility towards the music which we play, but, above and beyond this, we can and must develop the ability to carry the musical work as a team; we need a certain 'chamber-music-mindedness'.

We are not alone in the world; without one another we are spiritually lost. By 'chamber-music-mindedness' I mean a readiness for cooperation in the field of music, an aptitude for mutual responsibility, a predisposition towards shared experiences, common interpretations, common ambitions, towards mutual giving and taking. A chamber-music oriented attitude requires the mutual resonance of individuals; chamber music is the place to practise musical 'Zusammenarbeit', or teamwork.

The soloist, the chamber musician, and the orchestral musician

The term 'chamber music' is basically an expression for a musical type. The term *musica da camera* arose in 17th-century Italy in order to distinguish the new 'Hausmusik' of the courts from sacred and dramatic music. It began as the music of the privileged few and, together with other musical types, grew to form the repertoire of musical 'Meisterwerke' which are now some of our greatest spiritual assets.

This differentiation between musical types still exists, however, and as teachers we all know that soloists, chamber musicians and orchestral musicians represent different hierarchies in the musical cosmos. In particular, we string-players know that there are three roles, which I shall characterize as follows:

The soloist, when playing not literally alone but rather together with so-called accompanists, is the *spiritus rector* of the group of musicians and the main representative of the musical composition. All the other musicians must respond to his pulse, which in turn must be rooted in musical principles. It is however by no means the case that the soloist has all the rights and the accompanists all the duties!

The chamber musician is a conversation-partner with equal rights. He carries the music, but is also simultaneously carried himself. He acts as an individual within a group, in which everyone has equal responsibility.

Orchestral musicians, in particular rank-and-file string-players, are in effect choral chamber musicians. As a famous conductor once said, "Orchestral playing is just chamber music on a grand scale". The rank-and-file string-player is a member of a group which must homogenize, and in which the shared responsibility is therefore doubled. All this is true of the general process of musical collaboration, and therefore requires the conductor's help - on the condition that he too has found his own right and proper place as a chamber musician within the community - but is it always the case in practice: in teaching situations and in concert-life?

We have all come across the breed of soloist who behaves as master of all worlds, exploiting the efforts of his colleagues to bolster his own career.

We often find chamber musicians participating in musical warfare, all players pitted against one another, each one, according to temperament, either attempting selfishly to market his own product, or retreating like a snail, in indignation or resignation, into his shell. The musicians' ears are as closed to one another as locked doors.

Similarly, we can recognize the orchestral musician who slaves away anonymously, bullied and humiliated by the conductor, his enthusiasm long since wiped out in an epidemic of tutti-frustration. I am sure that we all experience - not only occasionally but maybe even the majority of the time - that the actual state of affairs is very different from the way it should be.

Chamber music - the stabilizer of musical roles

I believe the reason for the biases in practice which I have mentioned is that we are not familiar enough with the social element in music. We practise this social element to a certain extent, of course, but on those rare occasions on which we are aware of it, it is usually a secondary matter, hardly ever the main issue.

It is of course clear that our primary concern is and must always be the music itself, the triad of *musica mundana*, *musica humana* and *musica instrumentalis*, which lives both inside and outside us, and is our life-long ideal.

However, as most music requires several people for its performance, it is important to permeate, consciously, our thoughts about the self and the music with those about the group and the music. This is an enormous task. From my sketch of the basic functions of the soloist, the chamber musician, and the orchestral musician, it is evident that in none of these functions - above all, naturally, in the role of soloist - should a 'self-and-the-music' mentality dominate, to the exclusion of all else. Similarly, a mentality which subordinates the self to the group absolutely is counter-productive and extinguishes the individual element; in such cases, the music risks becoming depersonalized, and can even transform itself from music into a purely mechanical progression of sound-events. This is a particular danger for the orchestral musician.

So we become more and more aware of the focal point for working on bringing out the individual in the orchestral musician and, conversely, awakening the social conscience of the soloist. This all takes place during a chamber-music education, where each musician must learn the arts of leading and following to an equal degree. This should be at the centre of every musical education. In such an environment both the individual and social elements - in other words, the solistic and the chambermusical poles - can be developed with equal intensity, in constant balance, like an artistic breathing process of in- and exhalation. In the chamber-music studio all our individual habits of role become levelled out in pursuit of musical coherency.

The devastating consequences of chamber-music deficiency

How does chamber-music actually work in teaching situations? In fact, does it work at all? Unfortunately I have to say that both in the structure of musical education and in everyday practice, chamber music leads a subordinate, almost backstage existence; many young musicians never come to experience the benefits of this spiritual source, and so enter their musical careers as soloists, orchestral musicians or teachers chronically lacking in experience of chamber music.

The results of this deficiency are what I have just described. In such cases, music is no longer able to bring us together, and all our musical efforts crumble under a tendency towards, at best, indifferent camaraderie, or, at worst, outright competition. It cannot be ignored that a sport-sensational element has found its way into the musical domain. Frequently, the positive aspects of competition, those which could contribute to artistic development, are overshadowed by negative factors. The entire music business is largely 'antikammermusikalisch'. This scenario produces, of course, many losers; for example, the faded orchestral player whose knowledge of the love of music is a thing of the past and for whom daily rehearsals are monotonous as an office-job.

Human cooperation and chamber-music-mindedness

What can we teachers do, to have a positive influence on the malaise of our musical life, in particular during the learning phase? The real dilemma is in fact much larger than the area embraced by the questions which I have chosen to address in this lecture; it hangs together with the present spiritual condition of modern society. Chamber music's dilemma, however, is basically a reflection of that under which we all suffer; nowhere in the whole world can people manage to live peacefully together.

Segregation and fragmentation pervade our world. "Wir sind so grundverschieden voneinander": we are all so fundamentally different from one another. But precisely in recognition of the fact that we are addressed, in every person, by an individual, we should try to find ways and means of bringing to fruition

the difficult skill of working together, which requires all the strength of our hearts. Surely music-teachers have a distinct privilege in such efforts, in that we have the opportunity to communicate with the whole person through art? Not only the whole person, but also the pupil both as an individual and as a member of a community. Here it is perhaps evident more than anywhere else that the music-teacher's job is not only a pedagogical but also an artistic one. It is a profession which I am sure is not without importance for the future of humanity.

The necessary permeation of the individual by the social

What steps can be taken, to ensure that the study of chamber music provides a truly thorough training in musical team-work? As I have just mentioned, it is clear that the basis of musical-pedagogical efforts consists in bringing music closer to the individual. That means training the ear, developing the instrumental technique, and deepening the musical experience - all this with the goal of helping the 'self and the music' mentality to grow - in other words, cultivating the individualistic or solistic element in music. The young musician needs precisely such a focus for his musical development, for the same reasons as his attention is directed towards himself in the early stages of his personal development. This is the necessary starting-point - one which, however, must be followed by a second act. And this second act, which is of the greatest importance, must be prepared like a seed right from the beginning. That is to say, during one-to-one teaching, something must be brought in which is chamber-music orientated.

It has become almost a matter of course that children now are taught not only alone but also in groups, where the ground is prepared for shared musical experiences. However, this kind of preparation can and must also be undertaken during individual teaching, in order that the negative habits associated with the roles already discussed do not gain the upper hand later.

Such an approach is possible right from the very first lesson. For example, when a pupil bows an open string for the first time in his life, I as teacher can accompany him at the piano, the open string forming a pedal-point to a harmonic progression. Of course, I have to make sure that the beginner bows his open string properly, but at the same time I am already giving him a kind of chamber-musical experience, in so far as the chordal progression at the piano brings the pupil's pedal-point into different harmonic contexts, making his single tone into a melody. It is of the greatest importance that this second, non-solistic element is also present, in however modest a proportion, from the very start. By the way - string teachers must not forget their keyboard skills! They have a prominent role in the formation of a general musical image for the pupil in the stages before the actual accompanist turns up. And that must not happen too late, either!

It is all too often the case that a pupil practises for hours completely alone, instead of concerning himself with the musical environment, which is important even at an early stage, however sketchy it may be. Precisely this state of affairs, the proportion of time a pupil spends practising alone, shows where the imbalance lies. The application of the self to the social element of music must be intensified and must become an ever more conscious part of the training. The consequences of stressing this social element too little, or even not at all, are unfortunately visible everywhere.

Three points of failure in teaching situations

We now have excellent centres of musical training throughout the world, and as far as the promotion of talent is concerned, all the necessary connections are in place. That is not to say, however, that ideal conditions prevail. On the contrary, there are many trouble-zones in our musical lives; in reality, however, all such problems belong to the chamber-music dilemma. I am thinking in particular of the problems in

the teaching of theory, where the indispensable inner musical ingredients, which are supposed to be enriched through maximal technical understanding, often turn into stone instead of bread, because the capacity for experiencing music is insufficiently developed - sometimes it is even directly obstructed. More specifically, I am thinking about the difficulties of permeating instrumental technique with expression, of transforming technical impulses into musical ones, of generating musical life. In any case, the original solistic demand is, luckily, present, even if in need of dilution. If this were not the case, all this talk about chamber-music training would be as illusory as the emperor's new clothes in Hans Christian Andersen's profound tale.

Seen from the outside, then, we have an excellent basis from which to develop the social side of music. How could we change things so that chamber music could be not only a side-subject in music-teaching, but could actually become the alpha and omega of a musical education; for instrumentalists, singers, conductors, teachers at all levels, church-musicians, musicologists and composers?

Methods of chamber music training

Such a change is not to be brought about with a mere increase in the hours spent working on chamber music, nor in an improvement alone in the organization of chamber music. As Goethe wrote, "Das *Was* bedenke, mehr bedenke *Wie*" ("The *What* consider, more the *How* and *Why!*"). Should we not try to define not only the term chamber music but also the activities subsumed under the term? Can we not, for example, practise a chamber-music technique, by singling out concrete elements of the genre and working on them concentratedly? As an example I would cite the string-quartet studies of Mogens Heimann, a pupil of Carl Flesch who spent his entire life scrutinizing and promoting his teacher's work. With these studies in the genre's technique, Heimann contributed to a conscious upgrading of chamber music in general.

When we begin to delve into this area, we find a myriad possibilities and perspectives. Not only the means for developing a foundation for chamber music becomes clear, but also the connecting paths to a broadening of the field of vision for soloists, orchestral musicians and also conductors. It becomes clear how a qualified chamber-music coach can have a decisive influence on the development of an individual's vital musical imagination. Even technical know-how can be improved through experience. with chamber music, in so far as that which I call the technical moral support of one's musical neighbour acts as additional confirmation of one's own technical capabilities.

Chamber music's three basic principles

In chamber music, several, often many, musical elements act simultaneously. Rhythmic interlocking is one example; those playing the fastest notes carry the main responsibility for tempo stability and rhythmic coordination, while the rest have the job of supporting this process, so that their rhythms are in time with the shortest durations. Thus all players have a feeling of greater security. This is where the moral support of musical neighbours comes into play; the principle of active contrast is at play.

How easily it happens that those responsible for tempo come off the saddle, as it were, through ignoring the above simple ground-rule, causing the whole structure to collapse. We can hear the resulting imbalance when even just one musician opts out. It is like the physical act of carrying something in a group: if one person lets go, the rest notice the extra weight immediately. Chamber music should be just like a correctly-built house approved by the authorities: we have these standards in order to prevent the

premature collapse of the building.

Another rule is that of motivic transfer, where the principle of giving and taking is the rule. I will illustrate the extent to which this should be natural and organic with an example from everyday life. If you and I were having lunch together I might ask you to pass me the potatoes. You hand me the bowl and I take it. When do you let go of the bowl? Hopefully not until I have taken it! And when I have taken the bowl, you surely wouldn't continue to hold it - you would let go. It would be rather strange - and annoying - if you were to let go either too early or too late. Giving and taking are elementary social processes, which should work just as organically in musical situations when both giver and taker are subordinate to rhythmic principles. It is of course more difficult in music than at the lunch table, and many mishaps occur through insufficient listening and lack of communication between players.

The third rule is that of active accompaniment, of supporting with the entire soul. In chamber music we often think that one part seems boring. In my view there are no boring parts, but only musicians with underdeveloped imaginations! There are of course terribly boring things in this world, but the stamp of boringness is not always applied after considerable engagement with the matter in hand, but unfortunately more often out of comfort, ease, or for reasons of lack of inspiration. Beautiful themes, for example, often have extremely simple accompaniments - few notes, many short silences, maybe a high degree of repetition, or even just one single held tone. Precisely this is the test of the true chamber musician, who ideally will avoid polluting the musical environment, instead helping to adorn the theme with his active participation. He will play his held tone, his repeated patterns or pizzicato in such a way that the soloist can engage with the accompaniment and thus play even better. It is even possible to experience the accompanists' pauses as an integral part of the musical process. Meanwhile, the musician with the theme is constantly reminded that he cannot play so well without his musical partner.

Inner Hearing as the way to the realization of music

The obligation of every musician in an ensemble to have a clear understanding of the harmonic environment is one aspect of intonation in the ensemble which is often overlooked. Before we begin to work on intonation purely technically, we must know who is providing the harmony. Different perspectives may be equally valid, but it is a prerequisite that an ensemble at least once grasps, for instance, a seventh-chord with the inner ear and that every player asks himself as a consequence: which am I? the fundamental, third, fifth or seventh of the chord? Through his musical experience of the root, third, fifth and seventh, each player comes to support the "Gesamtharmonie" with the correct timbre, and so can begin to solve the intonation problem through purely musical means.

This route to correct intonation is often the shorter one, as it is more concrete, secure and organic. A musician who knows that he is forming the dissonant element of a chord will produce his tone in a manner which corresponds to the tension of the dissonance. Someone representing the third will recognize his responsibility for heightening the major third or flattening the minor third. In that moment he becomes the chief representative for a particular musical mood. In intonation we also discover how intimately such moods are related to sonic homogeneity and timbre.

In this example of the necessary grasp of harmony in connection with intonation in an ensemble, something very important becomes clear. Our image of the music must always be far more comprehensive than the notes which we play on our instruments. In chamber music, we are each playing just one part of that which is heard as an entire organism; this organism must however live inside us, if we are to fill out our roles properly. Of course this is not only true of harmonic contexts, but also holds for the general picture of the melodic element in the music: it is not just a matter of *my* theme, *my* motif, but

also of *our* simultaneous melodic events. The situation is similar with rhythmic events: my own part can only be meaningful when I have an image of the rhythmic interaction of the whole group. This general image opens our minds and ears for the shared dynamics not *my* forte or *your* forte, but . . . *our* shared forte! Equally for shared articulation - not *my* staccato or *your* staccato, but rather a mutual and honest embrace of an interpretation which is true to the work. In all imaginable musical and instrumental fields we must work towards unity. The same bowing, the same amount and part of the bow, the same sense of tempo, the same phrasing, and the same awareness of transfer of material, etc. In this way we can train ourselves consciously in the principles of chamber music.

The beneficial effects of the social on the individual

I have already discussed how chamber music can have a positive effect on the individual. Our technique is doubly secured through the help of others; our musical imagination is widened far more than we could have hoped, and with that our individual practice is enriched and even perhaps gains in its purpose. Something of chamber music can even rub off on those who often play alone - pianists, for example: namely, a capacity for more sensitive hearing. Those practising an orchestral or choral part do so better when they have at least a sketchy idea of the whole. (This is also why it is necessary to be able to read scores and piano reductions: it doesn't have to be the Rite of Spring!)

Even for the conductor, soloist and orchestral musician, chamber music has serious (and enjoyable!) consequences. The role of conductor is just as "kammermusikalisch" as that of the orchestral musician. Every movement of the conductor must be the expression of a constant dialogue between himself and the orchestra. And the soloist forms a team or duo with the conductor, for the mutual support and inspiration of the other participants. The strings and winds learn not only to create their timbre according to the composer and the score, but also will have learnt what a solo, chamber, or orchestral timbre (for example, a tutti in the strings) actually means. This timbre-formation is further varied by the possible instrumental combinations within the orchestra: cello and horn; violin and bassoon; double bass and tuba; piccolo and timpani, etc.

Chamber music - a way of personal development

In chamber music at its best, all these beneficial effects come into play. In teaching situations it can even happen that the process comes full circle and musical education itself is experienced as part of the social development of the individual, like a chamber-musical process. The extraordinary inner activity of musical vision and the external act of musical communication are the fundamentals of chamber music. A hypothetical, abstract musical theory and an egotistical concentration on instrumental technique have little to contribute here. Imagination and communication belong together - hence my earlier comment that other problems belong to the chamber-music dilemma.

At the same time we can also see more clearly now that the all-embracing impetus which chamber music can give us has validity for many situations which we encounter in our extra-musical lives. This stimulus can help to balance the individual and social sides of our selves, permeating our lives as a principle as basic as the body's heart- and breathing-pulses. Musicians have the privilege of being able to be in contact with those things all their lives; we can achieve, in the artistic domain, that which is the leitmotif of all humanity. The Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner once formulated this theme thus:

“The healthy social life is found
When in the mirror of each human soul
The whole community finds its reflection,
And when in the community
The virtue of each one is living.”

He called this his motto for social ethics, but it could also be taken as a maxim for chamber music. Bruno Walter ended his 1935 lecture, thinking about the convicts' singing:

“The strength of music to form communities out of singing people, and create peace among them, is proof of the presence and intensity of music's moral forces, and this community is not only limited to those who perform the art, but also draws the listeners into its magic circle: whether they are five, or two thousand - all are caught in the same surge and raised to the same heights of feeling. Music makes a community of us all, and often allows us to experience, through the magic of its transcendental power, a kind of mystic release, and unity with one another. The chains of individualism are cut away in the tide of love in which music embraces us, and the lonely soul condemned to life-long imprisonment, carried up into music's eternal sphere, becomes partly joined with the cosmos, and catches a glimpse of holiness. In great moments of musical transcendence one is reminded of the words of the dying Faust:

“In proud fore-feeling of such lofty bliss,
I now enjoy the highest moment, - this!”

Translated from the German by Juliana Hodkinson.

(Goethe and Rudolf Steiner quotes taken from authorized translated editions.)