

On the Watchtower

By JOSEPHUS

Listening to Bronislaw Huberman—not, this time, in the divine idiom of his violin, but in the less felicitous medium of the spoken word—I was impressed with the simple truth of his observation about the dualism of art. Yes, it requires two to produce art: the artist, and the public. In this partnership, alas, the artist seems to be the ever-faithful partner, who never flags or wavers, cultivating his art in peace and in war, in times of prosperity and in times of adversity, while the other partner is as fickle as the times, as unsteady in his allegiance as the artist with his artistic temperament would have a right to be.

But in the art of music there is more than this dual partnership: there is a triple alliance. For it requires three to cultivate this art, namely the composer, the performer, and the listener. The Jew seems to excel in the role of intermediary between the composer and the public: here again he is the middle man, and here again his productiveness has been challenged. It has been said that Jews excel in music not as creators but merely as interpreters. Yet in listening to a virtuoso like Huberman one realises the injustice of this taunt; one feels that if art is great because it lifts us to a higher plane of being, this surely is great art. The performer is more than an intermediary, more than a middle man: for the middle man can often be eliminated, not only without loss but with actual advantage, whereas without the performer there would be no music at all, even though there were the composer's score, and a public willing to listen to its performance.

The gibe that the Jews are the world's middle men and the world's fiddle men is true and yet not true. The truth is that the preponderance of Jewish interpretative musicians is proof of the Jew's inherent musicality, rather than of his aptitude for a particular branch of musical activity. That Jews do not nowadays produce as many composers as great interpreters of music is due to adventitious rather than to intrinsic causes. It is due to the lack of a land, a national home, which is the first pre-requisite for a national culture. The Jew has carried his song with him during his wanderings, but he could not carry with him that more stable national life which is required for a creative culture. And here the Jewish National Home opens up vistas of cultured creativity. The Palestine Orchestra not only employs and cultivates Jewish musicians: it will eventually prove a training ground for Jewish composers who, inspired by the peculiar character of the land and the age-long traditions with which this land is saturated, will create a truly Jewish music.

The Jews are essentially a musical people. Huberman spoke of the tremendous enthusiasm which inspires both the players and the public in the Holy Land, and here again he gave the true reason for the Jew's predilection for music in preference to other arts. It is the spiritual nature of this art, an art which reflects the inner life of man in its most general aspects without reference to any material semblance by way of illustration.

Huberman used the word "mysticism" which he applied both to the Holy Land and to the art of music, but I think by mysticism he really meant spirituality. The Jew loves music because it is the purest, the most spiritual, the most symbolic of the arts. It is an art which dispenses with the likeness of concrete things, working out its patterns in the texture of time—weaving round the intervals of time the whole wealth of human thought and emotion. If there is a likeness to be found in this magic carpet of sound, in this dream texture of aesthetically organised time-intervals, it is to be sought neither on earth nor in heaven, but in the soul of man the succession of whose moods also follows a time pattern with its alternation of joy and sorrow, tension and release, challenge and response.

The Jew was the first to turn his gaze inward and project the succession of his moods into his religious beliefs. Thus his God acquired spiritual qualities and resembled the soul of man rather than the forces of nature. But this inner faith could not be symbolised by a plastic divinity in the likeness of a concrete

object: it found expression in the prophetic cadence whose passionate utterance with its alternating rhythm of doom and salvation takes on the sweep of eternity.

Together with this verbal music there was also vocal and instrumental music which expressed the Jew's religious ardour and ministered to his spiritual needs. This predilection for music the Jews seem to have preserved to the present day. Being a wandering race, their art, too, was mobile: they did not build great monuments of stone but their song they always carried with them. Sometimes they even despaired of this burden—as when they hung their harps on the willows by the rivers of Babylon refusing to sing the song of the Lord in a strange land. But they have taken them up again and like wandering minstrels have woven the story of their life in the texture of time.

Music is the most universal of arts. All great music expresses universal tensions and fits any order of emotional experience; it may accompany any human content, setting the listener on a mental and emotional adventure which he may pursue at pleasure filling in his own particular mental or moral conflict. It is probably this universality of music that makes it so acceptable to the Jew: it is its general humanity rather than its Jewishness that appeals to him. The uninformed Jew who thrills to Huberman's interpretation of Beethoven or Brahms would swear that this is Jewish music, but in reality this music, expressing universal emotional moods, strikes the human rather than the Jewish fibre in his soul.

It is for the same reason that this Palestine Orchestra, which is really an international orchestra, has become a Jewish orchestra, and evokes such enthusiasm in Palestine and in the Diaspora. It is indeed doing fine work since it is bridging the gulf between the national and the universal. And it is no mere accident that Huberman who as an artist and a thinker has been feeling his way towards a cosmopolitan society, towards some Pan-European State, has showered so much love and energy on this orchestra. In his mystic soul this national, international orchestra has taken on the shape of a portent and a symbol.

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