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A QUARTET FOR OUR TIMES

An obituary for Olivier Messiaen, John Cage, Astor Piazzolla and Dizzy Gillespie

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I

In 1992, music suffered the loss of three of the most outstanding composers of our century, the Frenchman Olivier Messiaen, the American John Cage, and the Argentinean Astor Piazzolla. In these three figures, who all lived long and richly productive lives, can be found important clues about the passage of twentieth century music, for they represent between them three of the great quests which have dominated contemporary musical experience: the metaphysical, the anti-metaphysical, and the popular. In short, we have lost in their passing our greatest religious mystic, our most radical inventor, and the maestro of the tango. And then, with the turn of the year, we also lost one of the great jazz musicians, Dizzy Gillespie, and an era seemed to be over. Four contrasting acoustic worlds, four unique and original voices.

Messiaen (born in 1908) shared the metaphysical stance of composers as varied as Schoenberg, Stravinsky and Britten, figures of radically different aesthetic persuasions who through their religious attachment all expressed belief in a superior moral order (a tendency more marked among composers than other artists, notwithstanding Nietzsche's pronouncement of the death of God, because the unsolved mystery of music's provenance makes it more of a liability). Messiaen's religiosity was divided between Roman Catholicism and pantheism. His musical idiom is similarly dualistic: both tonal and atonal, made up of both vulgar melody and mathematical construction. Furthermore, Messiaen is a pivotal figure, who occupied the position of father-figure to the composers of the Darmstadt school - the postwar European avant-garde of Boulez, Nono, Pousseur, Berio, Stockhausen and the rest who met at the famous Summer School and constitute the most extreme and uncompromising of the late modernists. It was in Darmstadt in 1950 where Messiaen demonstrated the technique of integral serialism which was adopted by all these composers, and which ruled the roost until the 1970s.

Cage (born 1912) was also a mystic, but of a quietistic kind, who took his inspiration from Zen Buddhism, and saw no superior moral order beyond the chance operations of mother nature. This his music rigorously sought to imitate, and he meted out the same treatment to all the available sonic material of the twentieth century. His originality lay not in the use of non-musical sounds - the Italian Futurists had done this already - but paradoxically in the systematic manner of his treatment of this material. The result: Cage did not compose music, but noise. He made noise musical - but this of course is to beg a number of questions in an age when music itself all too easily ends up as noise. One of Schoenberg's pupils in California in the 30s, he belongs to a tribe of anti-metaphysicals which includes Bartók, Varèse, and the

aforementioned Darmstadt composers (except that Stockhausen inhabits a world of pseudo-Wagnerian mythology), who all treated noise in various ways as material for musical composition. Cage, as an American eccentric in the mould of Charles Ives, served the Europeans as Messiaen's foil. Fredric Jameson is correct when he calls him a postmodernist *avant la lettre*.

Piazzolla (born 1921) occupies a different cultural space. He is found in the company of names like Duke Ellington, Kurt Weill, George Gershwin and Heitor Villa-Lobos, whose art lies in a special synthesis of idioms: composers who conjoin the techniques of written composition and those of the vernacular, in various different combinations. Piazzolla, whose roots were urban popular music, did this with the tango. In the process he combined the susceptibilities of three great musical cultures, those of Latin America, North America, and Europe, and points towards the cultural conditions of the late twentieth century, the breakdown of the hierarchical separation of styles which comes, we are told, with full-blown postmodernism. And because of the quintessential nature of tango, his music also voices that other crucial ingredient of postmodern sensibility, nostalgia.

II

If this is not an altogether familiar way of looking at music, it is partly because the public discourse of music remains entrapped in old and outmoded pre-technological habits of listening, in which different musics were kept apart because they generally belonged to different kinds of space, both social and physical. This is not the way we hear music nowadays. Nowadays, we experience an acoustic world saturated with recorded sound, spaces suffused with disembodied song. Whether we like it or not, music now comes to us from any direction and in any environment in the form of discs, radio, tape, cinema, television, muzak. Our musical experience is now predominantly what Pierre Schaeffer, the pioneer of *musique concrète*, called acousmatic: sounds which one hears without seeing their source. The times we live in: the modern mother is invited to lull her baby to sleep with a cassette, instead of singing the lullabies herself.

Since the heterodox diet of musics we are constantly exposed to belong to every style, idiom, dialect, age and genre, the old definitions have become unworkable. When ubiquitous mechanical reproduction pushes music into the realms of noise pollution, it seems that musical values become relative. This of course is considered one of the defining characteristics of postmodernism, and sows the seeds of great confusion. But if the features ascribed to this cultural moment are such that any combination of them yields up contradictions, the crucial problem is not relativism, but that of heterophony. Not whether one thing can be judged better than another, but being able to hear them at all. Postmodernism is by all definitions neither a traditional kind of artistic movement, still less a singular style, but rather the force-field which has overtaken the former separation of cultural spaces; wherein different media, artistic forms and cultural styles all merge into an undifferentiated continuum,

and all such spaces are globally linked in a network of networks which renders their original source invisible.

The emergence of the acousmatic world was already the subject of comment in the 1920s and 30s by a number of observers in Germany including Kurt Weill, Paul Hindemith, Walter Benjamin, Schoenberg's pupil Stuckenschmidt, and above all, T.W. Adorno. Philosopher, sociologist and trained musician, Adorno (who also taught at Darmstadt in the 50s) contributed a subtle, intricate analysis of the musical condition of the time, and of how the industrialisation of culture over the preceding half century had markedly extended the social reach of the high musical tradition, transforming the conditions of listening and distorting the manner of enjoyment. Using the method he called negative dialectics, which led to controversial and even scandalous results, he uncovered the process by which the commercialisation of music leads to fetishisation. The process exaggerates various sensual features of music at the cost of other qualities, the essence gets lost, and popular taste is subjected to the dictatorship of the unmusical ear - an ear trained in the barking of the fairground.

In the late 1940s, when they were all German refugees in America, Schoenberg bitterly attacked Adorno in the press for helping the novelist Thomas Mann to insult him in *Doctor Faustus*. Schoenberg should not have complained: in the great rift which then divided the European avant garde, the

split between Schoenberg and Stravinsky, atonality and neoclassicism, Adorno was on Schoenberg's side. For Adorno things were defined not by what they aspire to but by what they deny, and Schoenberg's genius lay in his denying the appeal of beauty. He praises Schoenberg's stance because it acknowledges the force of history. Stravinsky, said Adorno, denies history, by consuming it through infantile regression. At the same time, said Adorno, the terror Schoenberg spread was not the result of his incomprehensibility but came from the fact that he was all too correctly understood: his music gave form to that anxiety and insight into the catastrophic situation of the time which others (Stravinsky was not the only offender), by regressing, evaded.

The point is not whether the more piquant parts of this description are true. What Adorno gives us is a handle on the ideological implications of different musics. For Adorno, 'ideological' music is music which has no sense of internal struggle - that is, within the musical material itself. Idealist philosophy taught that artistic creation belongs to an internal dimension which represents a realm of autonomy; creativity therefore answers only to its own prerogatives and susceptibilities, its own immanent structural laws. These notions are encouraged in the case of music by its lack of representational content (Umberto Eco calls music 'a semiotic system without a content plane'). There is generally thought to be an insurmountable gap between the musical material 'in itself' and whatever it may be taken - psychologically, ideologically, politically - to embody. (As Adrian Leverkühn, the composer-hero of *Doctor Faustus* muses, this 'in itself' is a very Germanic way of thinking.) Mahler countered this view in his famous dictum that 'the music is not in the notes'. Adorno goes further and makes the claim that the musical material is not indifferent to the material reality of society. Music, he finds, has a mimetic aspect, and the rationalisation of the latter is seen in the rationalisation of the former. The careful formulation is needed in order to avoid any hint of a mechanistic relationship, but it can be no surprise if

the scope and direction of the composer's historical intervention is, though not determined, nevertheless limited and conditioned thereby. There is a kind of analogical affinity, which the historicist sees as no mere coincidence. Think, for example, of the connections between the development of merchant capitalism, the growth of individualism, the invention of Florentine perspective, and the emergence of diatonic harmony. Music is really 'a force field of constructive and mimetic moments and no more exhausted in either kind than any other such field.' [1] In short, the ideological content of music corresponds to the form in which the available musical elements struggle between themselves and are reconciled with each other (or not).

Adorno thought the element of reconciliation was no longer possible, but it is. 'Just think', says the Italian composer Luciano Berio, in an interview dating from 1981, 'of the wave of interest in music that there's been over the past ten years or so among young people.' They find themselves, he says, in a complex and dramatic world which they lack the means, including the ideological means, to decipher. They are attracted to music because they sense, however dimly, that it can symbolise the possibility of consolation, even of a utopian interpretation of the world. It provides an alternative space, 'though not necessarily a reassuring and optimistic one'. This youthful audience, Berio continues, will listen to anything and everything. 'Clearly the mass media and a different way of organising musical life have made music more accessible. But it's too easy just to attribute the current phenomenon of a great, indiscriminate move towards music to industry's desire for a wider market.' It is a phenomenon which escapes precise analysis, 'including the marxist type, which, in musical matters, tends to be dogmatic and simplistic.' [2] It also escaped Adorno, whose trenchant analysis of the condition of contemporary music is flawed by the very acuity of his middle-European ears, which remained immune to the musical impulses of the untutored that feed the roots of popular forms.

III

Messiaen, facing this world where the artistry of the composer threatens to disappear into a black hole, chose the position of a church organist. This, in the grand scheme of musical ambition, is to stake out identification with Bach - apparently a backward-looking situation in which to locate oneself. But Bach - for Mann and Adorno - was not a simple reactionary, more like a creative force sitting astride the cusp between an old and a modern musical idiom.

Warning us that 'the controversy whether Bach belongs to the Middle Ages or already to the Modern Age is undialectical', Adorno considers the presence in Bach of a medieval tradition, which, like the absolutist state, did not bow unprotestingly to the demands of the rising bourgeoisie. The stronghold of this tradition was the style of sacred music which Johann Sebastian made his own, and his problem - according to Adrian Leverkühn in *Dr. Faustus* (Adorno speaking through Thomas Mann) - was not how to write harmonically in the form of polyphony, but how to write polyphonically

in a harmonic language. Not, in other words, how to write 'modern' music in an ancient style, but how to write the old music in the modern manner.

History does not repeat itself but Messiaen's situation was quite similar. He chooses the church because he will not bow unprotestingly before the godlessness he has witnessed in the most terrible of all wars. We know about this from his ominously entitled 'Quartet for the End of Time' (*Quatuor pour le fin du temps*), written in a prisoner-of-war camp. His problem became how to write religious music in a time when, like belief itself, neither harmony nor polyphony seem possible any more. Forced to reinvent a devotional idiom from scratch, he turned towards Eastern philosophy and Eastern music, and to nature: he engaged in the most detailed study of birdsong anyone has ever undertaken. Marrying up these sources with a scheme of simple affirmative non-developing harmony in the monumental *Turangalila* Symphony, he created a unique musical discourse around the idea of love, both religious and erotic. (This, according to his own testimony: metaphysical composers, distrusting words, often use them tokenistically.) Musically, defying equally the prescriptions of left and right, he became not a centrist but a bridge between different realms of alienated experience. Messiaen's music is hugely restorative, and for as long as it lasts, returns to the non-believer the capacity to feel the deep consolation of mystical faith.

Cage, who brought the example of American experimentalism to Darmstadt in 1956, and in the process helped to change the direction of the European avant garde, also turned to the Orient, but in a very different way. For one thing Cage was a child of California, a deceptive place where the frontier ends and the west points to the east, and native intellectuals cultivate naivety and dream of ancient oriental wisdom. As a student in Schoenberg's composition class at UCLA in the mid-30s, Cage learned from the master that he had no talent for harmony. [3] According to one story, Schoenberg declared that he was no composer, but an inventor of genius. The prediction was born out in the invention of the prepared piano and the composition between 1939 and 1952 of the series called *Imaginary Landscapes*, using novel combinations of percussion and electrics: turntables playing frequency test records, contact microphones made from electric guitar pickups, and so forth. The most notorious was No.4 for twelve radios, dating from 1951.

By this time Cage had enrolled in the Japanese philosopher Daisetz Suzuki's class in Zen Buddhism 'back east' at Columbia University, and begun to use chance techniques derived from the Chinese *I Ching* to determine the values of the notes and sounds of his music. His object was 'to free sound of all psychic intentionality... let sound be itself, rather than a vehicle of human theory and feeling'. [4] This evacuation of the subject position of the composer, which pre-echoes the French literary theorists' idea of the death of the author, is cousin to the impersonality which was sought by that quintessential Frenchman, Pierre Boulez, and explains the affinity which the two composers originally felt for each other.

Cage belonged to the tradition of the American eccentric, a fraternity which makes a special showing in music. His confrères include figures like Ives and Ruggles; Henry Cowell with his tone clusters; Harry Partch with his 43-note scales and home-made instruments; and Conlon Nancarrow, forced to live in Mexico after fighting in the International Brigade in Spain when the US Government refused to renew his passport, where he composed the most beguiling and rhythmically intricate pieces for player-piano. Ruth Crawford Seeger shared much of this sensibility, Varèse, as an adoptive American, was an honorary member, and Satie their mascot. The eccentric, however, is by no means the innocent he or she may try to seem. In Cage's case, to express the desire for spiritual liberation by rifling the conceptual apparatus of the great mystical philosophies of the East is a clear symptom of the loss of selfhood in the West. It is indeed a deeply ambivalent position, which combines (to follow Edward Said) certain habits of thought rooted in the mentality of the coloniser, typical of orientalism, with the desperate need to escape from them. Cage, it must be said, succeeds in escaping. (Unlike Stockhausen, who finally falls back in his recent opera cycle into crude orientalist stereotypes of 'exotic' peoples to illustrate his musical ramblings.)

When Boulez came to criticise Cage for the 'adoption of a philosophy tinged with orientalism serving to mask fundamental weaknesses of compositional technique', it was because the French composer had become worried that his own total serialism was only obverse of throwing dice: both were forms of number fetishism, the one relying on arbitrary and mechanistic automatisms, the other on extreme nonchalance. [5] Boulez, in attempting to distinguish serial music from chance music and distance himself from American experimentalism, advanced the term *aleatoric* (from the Latin *alea*, dice) to describe the use of controlled choice as an integral element of the musical structure - in contrast to the randomness cultivated by Cage. The term caught on for music which played with elements of chance and choice alike, ignoring the differences Boulez was trying to bring out. (The same thing, of course, had happened with the word 'atonal', which in defiance of Schoenberg was widely used without differentiating between heavy chromaticism, polytonality and twelve-note music.) Boulez found himself lumped together in general awareness with diverse composers of different tendencies - Cage and other American experimentalists, alongside Europeans like Nono, Berio, Stockhausen, Ligeti, Penderecki, and Xenakis - notwithstanding the often considerable contrasts in their compositional technique and the radically different sounding music that resulted (not to mention their varying ideologies). But not everyone denied the broad similarity between them. To Morton Feldman, 'The fact that men like Boulez and Cage represent opposite extremes of modern methodology is not what is interesting. What is interesting is their similarity. In the music of both...what is heard is indistinguishable from its process. In fact, process itself might be called the *Zeitgeist* of our age.' [6]

Piazzolla's music represents the *Zeitgeist* in quite another way, for tango criss-crosses the twentieth century like few other musical forms, with roots and branches in Africa, Argentina, Italy and Cuba, Berlin, Paris and New York. A highly paradoxical form of music - erotic and melancholic, dramatic, sentimental and religious, the soul of

nostalgia and what the French call *le mode r tro* - tango is first and foremost a vernacular music like jazz. Vernacular does not mean the same as popular in modern parlance, a category commercialism has largely drained of musical intelligence. Adorno was mistaken in lumping jazz and commercial popular music together but broadly correct in his analysis of the formulaic nature of the latter. The vernacular, however, is not formulaic in this sense at all. To follow Bakhtin, it is full of different voices, rich in genres but not constrained by them, the heteroglot expression of a heterogeneous community, which evolves along with the community's history. This is the ethos of tango. With Piazzolla it has come a long way from the time it was first danced in the whore-houses around the port of Buenos Aires at the turn of the century, when it was sung in *lunfardo*, the slang of the immigrants, and played on the bandoneon, a type of concertina which originated in Germany and probably first reached Argentina as a sailor's instrument.

Vernacular music is full of miscegenation, and tango is the disrespectful combination of various parentage. It is the Italian tarantella brought over by Italian immigrants, crossed with the *milonga* - the song of the *gaucho*, and the Afro-Cuban rhythm of the *habanera*. The word itself came into use around the 1820s, a derivation of *tambo*, a term of Arab-African origin for the singing and dancing of the slaves to the accompaniment of drums and other instruments. According to one authority the earliest published use of the word tango to refer to a new dance form is a newspaper sheet music advertisement in 1866. [7] Taking shape in popular dance halls, it was developed as a song form during the First World War by Carlos Gardel, and immediately commercialised by the record companies Columbia and Odeon, both of which already had branches in Buenos Aires. Then with the coming of the talkies, it was taken up in a big way by the American film major Paramount. In short, ever since it first stormed Paris, Berlin and New York in the 1920s, tango has been a world music. And Piazzolla was a world musician.

Born in Mar de Plata in 1921, Piazzolla grew up in New York, a child prodigy on the bandoneon. He was aged thirteen when his musical skills brought him to the attention of Gardel, who promptly cast him as a ragamuffin selling newspapers on the streets in his seventh film for Paramount, *El dia que me quieras*. Apparently Gardel didn't particularly like his style of playing, which he called too *yoyega* - Buenos Aires slang for Hispanic. [8] But this did not impede the young man's advance when he returned to Buenos Aires five years later, and immediately joined the band of Anibal Troilo, himself the most remarkable bandoneonist of his generation. Piazzolla now began to compose his own tangos and embarked on the study of classical composition with the composer Alberto Ginastera, before going to Paris as a pupil of Nadia Boulanger, the pupil of Ravel (Spanish connections again). The encounter was decisive. Returning to Argentina to re-immerses himself in tango, his music became intensely brooding, disquieting and provocative. The traditional tango players hated it. 'I was taking the old tango away from them. The old tango, the one they loved, was dying.' They were so incensed they even threatened his life, and Piazzolla has told how a singer of the old style once burst in on him in a radio station with gun in hand. 'My tango - new tango - it's danger music!' [9]

The new tango also had distinct political overtones. In 1960s Argentina, Piazzolla became a symbol of resistance to a Kafkaesque dictatorship which echoed with melancholy and defeatism. Meanwhile, despite his efforts to be recognised as a

symphonic composer, it was the jazz world where Piazzolla became celebrated. This is hardly surprising: tango is cousin to jazz, with the same kind of musical charge, even a similar rhythmic pulse. Nor is it an accident that tango took to the bandoneon the same way jazz took to the saxophone. The two instruments, invented within a few years of each other in

the middle of the nineteenth century, both employ the mechanical engineering of the industrial revolution to create new instruments which produce a unique timbre, rasping and sensual at the same time; they are instrumental counterparts of the instinctive but untutored popular singer - exactly the opposite of the favoured instruments of the nineteenth century bourgeois salon, the violin and the piano.

For tango, as for jazz, the primary motive is not leisurely diversion, but restoration through the sublimation of pain. According to the French-Canadian writer Pierre Monette, tango is intrinsically melancholy, a music of memories, a universe where everything is posthumous, and one only sings of love the day after its loss and destruction. It is the music of uprooted people who never cease to dream of an ideal past which they know to be irretrievably lost. [10] But people like this are not only found in Buenos Aires, and the result is an ironic paradox: across the world the contemporary public, geared up to the rapidly changing fashions of modern jazz and commercial music alike, were taken by a music which was pure kitsch, dépassée, loaded with the sentimentality of their grandparents.

Whichever way you come at it, Piazzolla's tango is replete with memories. For this writer, white male first-generation English of Eastern European extraction, it brings recollections of evenings spent with friends in different Latin American cities; it also carries traces of Satie, Stravinsky, Berg, Milhaud, and obviously Weill and Brecht; and some old 78s from childhood with titles like 'Habibi', sung in Hebrew and recorded in Tel-Aviv before the war. I admit this kind of mélange of associations is not unusual, or even limited to tango, but an example of what Edward Said has recently called the transgressive element in musical experience, its nomadic tendency, its ability to make connections with all the different domains in which it participates. [11] But perhaps tango, as a sticky sort of music, is especially prone to this kind of transgression. And in Piazzolla's hands, it pulls no punches.

Dizzy Gillespie, born in 1917, entered jazz in the age of swing, touring Europe with the Teddy Hill band by the age of nineteen. Back in the United States, he served a second apprenticeship in Cab Calloway's band entertaining white audiences at The Cotton Club, and soon began playing regularly as a sideman with Earl Hines, Billy Eckstein and Ella Fitzgerald. In short, he learnt his skills, like all the musicians who created be-bop, by moving between the big swing dance bands and informal after-hours 'blowing sessions', where a new style began to crystallise in the early 40s.

The jam session originated as a semi-private and informal site for the self-expression of the professional dance-band musician, where small audiences of cognoscenti appreciated the technical skill and creativity which the big dance bands

restricted and regimented. The clubs where be-bop took root were typically run by musicians - bandleader Teddy Hill was one of them - who hired a small rhythm section and invited celebrity players to 'sit in' (in return for food and drinks on the house). Here experiment was not only permitted but expected, and in practice provided the means of screening out those without the necessary technical competence: fast tempi, awkward key signatures and difficult chord sequences discouraged them from participating. Some of the musicians also spoke of a musical idiom which white musicians would be incapable of imitating.

Gillespie was a leading exponent of the new style, celebrated for his intricate syncopation and innovative harmonies, but without abandoning either the big band or the style of the entertainer. He is famed as both the intimate partner of Charlie Parker, and the big band leader for whom George Russell wrote *Cubana Be/Bop* in 1947. This kind of dexterity is not unusual. Jazz is full of contrasts and continuities of skills and talents in ever renewed combinations. Gillespie was also distinctive because the blues was less important to his personal style than Afro-Cuban rhythm. An all-round musician who composed, sang and played a mean piano, in his foremost role as a trumpeter he lined up behind Buddy Bolden, King Oliver, Louis Armstrong and Roy Eldridge. As a band leader, his work was at its best in the brief period when the Cuban drummer Chano Pozo played with him.

Pozo died in 1948 aged 33, Parker at the age of 35 seven years later, both in tragic circumstances (a car accident, drugs). Gillespie carried their inspiration forwards into the 60s, when a new generation of experimentalists appeared, and Miles Davis led jazz into a fusion with rock. Twenty years further on, the circle was renewed when jazz turned again to Latin American rhythm and in particular, the musical cultures of New York and Havana embraced each other. This circumstance says something else about music, ideology and the mimetic moment. Gillespie, as a musician, presents the paradigm of a continuing stylistic fusion and rejuvenation, and the sheer breathtaking thrill of the stream of notes. His public persona was that of the non-political good musician. But when the black North American jazz trumpeter defies the opprobrium of the U.S. Government and goes to Havana in the 1980s, and the cameras record the warmth of his embrace by the bearded *Comandante* who played the bugle as a schoolboy, the suggestion of certain political connotations enter the music and its ideological force becomes more concrete. Which goes to show that the transgressions which music commits are not at all limited to the realm of private subjective experience.

IV

The thrill of virtuoso music making is one of the most powerful of musical qualities: real and physical but ineffable and indescribable. It is like the singer's voice in the account by Roland Barthes: 'a site which escapes all science' for 'no matter how much you classify and comment on music historically, sociologically, aesthetically, technically, there will always be a remainder, a supplement, a lapse, something non-spoken...'. In short, an insurmountable gap between music and its explanation. This ever-present difference, says Barthes, is assigned by psychoanalysis to the category of objects of desire (or repulsion), and possess a distinctly erotic quality. [12]

What Barthes puts his finger on is also a crucial element in the construction of the mass appeal cultivated by the modern music industry, popular and 'classical' alike, namely, the fetishisation of the secret aspects of the musician's persona. Beneath this fetishism lies the magic which persists after all the hype - the magnetism of performers like Pavarotti or Michael Jackson, Madonna or Jessye Norman. When postmodernism takes up this argument, it seems to tell us that the experience of these artists, the irreducible thrill of their voices, each one different from the other, is nevertheless interchangeable. Perhaps this would be so if the negative definitions of Adorno were no longer relevant, and the musical world of today no longer the same as Adorno's. But the condition described by Adorno is in all essentials the immediate precursor of today's. What we experience now is their continuation and intensification, not their transcendence, sublimation or displacement, and certainly not their negation.

There is a certain difference. Today, when the heterophony of the acousmatic world has subverted traditional aesthetic schemata so thoroughly, we are far less hidebound by hierarchy; this may well constitute the utopian element in postmodernism. To put it another way, who is interested when they listen to the music of their choice in knowing whether Messiaen is really on a par with Piazzolla, or antiphonal African Pigmy choral singing with hip-hop? This change is in many respects a positive one. Adorno spoke of the attitude of the 'resentment listener', who despises what he or she doesn't understand,

which he associated with the jazz fan's rejection of classical music, or the ancient music lover's disapproval of the romantic symphony. (He forgot to include the category of music critic.) If these stereotypes are becoming dated, it is not because they have shifted but because they have lessened. In short, the culture of acousmatic reproduction has generated a traffic in music which symbolises among other things an ideal that political culture has utterly failed to achieve: the dialogue between different peoples and social classes.

The forms of this dialogue in music are multiple. In the past quarter century we have seen Indian classical musicians teaching their instruments to English working class pop stars, and lessons on the sitar in English schools; Japanese conductors have won international competitions and taken charge of Western orchestras; American composers have gone to study drumming in Africa; African traditional singers have joined forces with Western popular musicians in stadium concerts beamed by satellite around the world. These are mostly high-profile examples, the tip of an iceberg which floats in the daily association of practising musicians in any of the great capitals of the world. Behind the hype generated around these phenomena is the huge remainder which the music, in the moment of its performance, persistently and defiantly produces: the trace of another kind of speech, a musical language of which Adorno remarks that yes, it is universal, but without being Esperanto.

Am I committed by arguing this way to a refusal of musical judgement? Not when I'm listening to Dizzy Gillespie, Piazzolla, Messiaen or John Cage. From these different musics I know what matters: the authenticity of the dialogue - between the musicians, between musician and audience - which is found when the musical voice transcends ideology. The grain of the voice. Which means in turn that the question tabled by Adorno about ideology in music remains vigilant and inescapable.

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