CHAPTER - I

WHAT IS A WORK OF MUSIC?
In this chapter I shall concern myself with the general philosophical problem of the identity of a work of music. The problem is general to all works of art, although the answer given to the identity seeking question, "what is a work of art?" may be different from one kind of art to another.

1. In what I have to say in the following pages I am guided primarily by an argument of Richard Wollheim's in his rather difficult and terse essay entitled *Art and its Objects*. One may distinguish between two kinds of questions concerning the identity of a work of art. They are very roughly: (i) a metaphysical, and (ii) a logical question. The metaphysical or ontological question might have the form "Is a work of art a physical or a non-physical object?" — The logical question might be thought to arise after we have settled the metaphysical question and it is this, "what, in actual fact, are the criteria of identity of a particular work of art?" However, both these types of questions are inextricably linked up and an answer to the one would, in most cases, imply an answer to the other.

In the case of music, as generally in the case of all performing arts, the answer to the first question is easy
enough. It may be thought that a musical work is identi-
cal with a particular performance of it, just as it may be thought that, for instance, a novel is identical with the particular copy of the novel that I have with me (although one must, of course, note here that a novel does not belong to the class "performing arts"). The mistake here is quite apparent and can be shown in several ways. One of these ways would be to point out that one may find fault with a particular performance of a musical composition without thereby implying that the musical composition is itself faulty in a similar way. Correspondingly, to have, for instance, lost my copy of the novel Anna Karenina is not to have lost the novel itself. The important point to realize is that there are two distinct ways of talking about works of art, at least in the context of the performing arts such as music; in one way of talking about it we speak of the work of art itself, and in the other way of talking about it, we speak of a particular performance of it. Although in practice these two ways are occasionally mixed up, they are nonetheless logically distinct.

So, if a musical work is not to be identical with a particular performance of the work, one can perhaps
quite safely say that it is not a physical object in the sense in which the particular performance might be thought to be a physical object i.e. in the sense that it, the performance, must have a spatio-temporal location. Nor is a musical work to be identified with the notations made by the composer, in case he does so decide to make them, for the very simple reason that these are simply marks on a piece of paper and as such are not heard. Perhaps there is no need to labour this point because of its obviousness, the point, namely, that a musical work is not a physical entity.

2. A more important question, however, for my purpose, is what I call the logical question about the identity of a musical work. I think a careful answer to this question will bring out some powerful peculiarities of music as a form of art. In attempting to answer this question I follow once again the lead of Richard Wollheim.

We might begin by making a distinction between a general entity, or more correctly a generic entity and elements that come under this generic entity. And a general answer to the logical question "what is a work of music, say, a khayal?" might be as follows - the khayal is a generic entity, and a particular performance of it is
an element that comes under the generic entity. But it is important to distinguish between three different kinds of generic entities. A generic entity may be a type, a class or a universal. Types have tokens as their elements, classes have members and universals have instances. An example of a type would be the ambassador car and a particular ambassador car is its token, an example of a class would be the class of sweet smelling things with any sweet smelling thing as its member — and an example of a universal would be redness with its instances being particular cases of the colour red.

3. The distinction between these three generic kinds of entity may be more illuminatingly made in terms of the kind of relationship that there is between their elements and them. One might say that the relationship varies in the degree of what Wollheim calls "intimacy", or "intrinsicality", that an element might have with its corresponding generic entity. Thus the relationship between the members of a class and the class may be said to be the least intimate or intrinsic. The relationship between a type and its tokens is perhaps the most intimate; with the relationship of a universal and its instances coming somewhere in between. A universal must be present in all.
its instances, thus redness must be there in all red things. A type also must be present in all its tokens, but a type is itself frequently thought of as some kind of token which is not the case with the universal and its instances. Thus the ambassador car is itself frequently thought of as a particular ambassador car.

To carry on this rather dreary discussion a little further. The different kinds of relationship that we have been considering between an element and its corresponding generic entity are also reflected in the different ways in which properties may be shared between an element and a generic entity. A generic entity and its elements may just happen to share certain properties or it may be that an element has a property because the generic entity has it and vice versa. In the latter case we might say that properties are transmitted between an element and the generic entity. Thus between a class and its members there are no transmitted properties, although they may happen to share properties. For instance, the class of large objects may itself be large but this is a property which is not transmitted from the member to the class or the other way round. The class of large things is not large because its members are large. The fact that they
share this property is purely fortuitous. Between a type and a token and between a universal and its instance there are usually a large number of shared properties and most of these shared properties are also transmitted. In the former case the number of transmitted properties is greater than the latter. For instance, what we might call necessary properties of an instance or a token (necessary because the token or the instance has these properties simply by virtue of the fact that they are tokens or universals) are not transmitted between an instance and its universal whereas they are transmitted between a token and its type. Thus an instance of red is itself red by virtue of the fact that it is an instance of the universal redness, but of course it cannot follow that the universal redness is itself red. On the other hand, if a particular ambassador car is, for instance, rugged because it is a token of the type ambassador car it follows that the type itself must also be rugged.

The point of all this rather abstract discussion has simply been to say that a musical work is a generic entity, which is closest to the generic entity we have called type and particular performances of the work are the tokens of this type. This is perhaps not absolutely accurate in view of somethings that I shall say a little
later on, but for the purposes of the question with which we began this discussion it is perhaps accurate enough.

4. Having made this point, the important question now to ask is, "How do types come into being?" There may be a great variety of ways in which types may come into being, but one can perhaps say this as generally correct: we feel the need of a type under circumstances in which we can correlate a group of particulars with a piece of human invention. And this covers a wide range of cases, a range which may have at one end of it the creation of a particular, say, a song, which then is performed, each performance then being a token. At the other end of the range we may just have a set of instructions which can then generate indefinite number of tokens e.g. the khayal or the thumri or the symphony.

We have already seen that a type and its token may share properties. Moreover there are properties which are transmitted between tokens and their types and vice versa. It is important to make, for an understanding of the general nature of music, the following points about properties that may be predicated of a type. These are (1) there are no properties which cannot, in principle, pass from the token to its type, i.e. everything that can be
predicated of a performance of a musical work can also be in principle predicated of the work itself. If the performance is, say moving or rousing, the work itself may be moving or rousing. (Here of course we are leaving out a consideration of properties which a performance has by virtue of its being located in space and in time). (ii) although all properties (leaving aside the spatio-temporal properties, of a performance mentioned in the parentheses at point (i) above), of a token may be transmitted to the type, it is not necessary that they will all do so. This, taken along with the next point, brings out something of great importance about performing arts particularly of music and drama. (iii) It is necessary that not all properties should pass from token to type, although any single property might do so. Among the properties of which it is necessary that they should not pass from token to type, are the properties generated by the act of interpretation or rendering of, say, a particular piece of music. Such properties of a token might be said to belong to the token in excess, as it were, of the properties that it has by virtue of being a token of the type in question.

5. It will, I think, be true to say that every performance of a piece of music involves interpretation. A purist in
music criticism might say that there is at least one performance of a piece of music which cannot involve any interpretation and this is the very first performance of the piece of music in question. Thus it may be said that every recital of the Raga Darbari involves interpretation except its very first recital by Tansen. A little reflection will however show that this is not correct, for even Tansen's rendering of the raga is but an interpretation of it.

A question that might be raised at this point is, "Does this fact about the necessity of interpretation make the performing arts, and music in particular, radically different from other kinds of art?" The question is complicated by the fact that performance itself is an art apart from the work of art which is being performed. However, into the complications raised by this point, I do not wish to enter at this stage. Here I would like to consider an interesting remark relating to the point about interpretation made by Susanne Langer.²

6. Langer thinks that a musical composition is essentially incomplete; it needs completion through its tokens. The implication of this is that a work of music is necessarily defective, unlike the case of other forms of art.
This way of looking at the matter distorts, to my mind, the very nature of music as a creative art. Also it exaggerates the differences in this respect, which undoubtedly do exist between the performing arts and the other forms of art. To take the latter point first, the point about "the essential incompleteness of a musical composition", may be restated in the following way. In music the composer cannot enjoy the kind of freedom over his work that, for example, the poet does over his poem. The composer must, of necessity, concede some freedom to the performer, but is this really so? Is it not the case, even in the case of poems, that a poem can be interpreted or taken in different ways? In fact one might even say that this is an inalienable mark of all great poetry. It might perhaps be said that the fact that a poem can be taken in different ways is not a limitation of poetry itself as a form of art but is a function of the inadequacy of any particular reading of it. It is possible to think of the definitive interpretation of a poem, which, when available, becomes its correct meaning. This claim however cannot be sustained, if not for any other reason, for the simple reason that interpretative openness of a poem can, in practice, never be ruled out.
Even if however the point that the control of the composer on his work is less than the control of a poet over his poem is granted, a serious acceptance of the Langerian claim about the essential incompleteness of a musical composition leads to consequences involving a radical revision of the very idea of music as a form of art. And this brings me to the first point made above. To suppose that something is incomplete necessarily implies that it is, in principle, capable of being completed. Now suppose one were to undertake the task of completing, in the Langerian sense, a musical composition. This would involve the composer indicating every single detail of how it is to be performed. Perhaps in the case of Western Classical Music this is imaginable because here the modern practice is for the composer to write down at least every note that is to be sung or played on an instrument with some indication of how it is to be done. One can think of the same process being continued until we have a work over which the performer has no freedom other than to follow to the minutest detail the instructions of the composer. But this will have the intolerable consequence of introducing a degree of mechanicality to a musical performance which is, in the ordinary view of things, alien to it. To envisage this kind of completeness of a musical composition
is also to imply the ultimate replacibility of the performer by, say, the computer. Such a thing might indeed come to pass but what we shall then have will no longer be music in the normal meaning of this word.

7. However when we turn to the Indian Classical Tradition, any attempt to introduce "completeness" to a musical work will reflect a total misunderstanding of the very tradition. Here in a composition in the classical mode the practice never is to indicate even all the notes that are to be sung or played on an instrument. The freedom of the performer here is an essential part not only of his art as a performer but is also a part of the idea of the work itself. Take for instance, the guru-shishya tradition or the gharana system of Indian Classical Music. The discipline imposed by the guru on the shishya always leaves, must leave, an area of freedom to the shishya in his performance. For the first five or six years the shishya relies completely on the guidance of his guru who teaches the shishya everything individually and directly but gradually the shishya learns to improvise, and then in the rendering of a raga he adds to his methodical musical training that which he draws from within himself. Similarly the discipline of the gharana system must equally
leave room for the freedom of a particular member of the gharana. Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan's renderings of Raga Rageshwari or Lankeshwari, Goonkali, and Kaushi Dhani could serve as revealing examples of this, where, while retaining the broad characteristics of Patiala gayaki, the artist transcends the limitations of his own school showing that his individuality is greater than the tradition he imbibed. Pandit Bhimsen Joshi is another consummate artist, who stands out as having added new dimensions not only to Kirana gayaki but to the entire tradition of Indian Music. In his rendering of Raga Shudh Kalyan, while maintaining the systematic note by note elaboration of a raga, so characteristic of the Kirana gharana, he adds intricate taan patterns characteristic of the Gwalior gharana, and presents the raga with subtle innovation and rare artistry. The idea of the freedom of the performer then, is not peripheral but central to Indian Music.

8. The difference between music or the performing arts generally and other forms of art implying the necessity of interpretative properties of a token could however be exaggerated. I have already indicated that the poet for instance, must "suffer", if that is the correct word, from a similar lack of control over his work. But this is
also largely true of paintings and sculptures. A painting may be taken in a great variety of ways just as a piece of sculpture may. And it is impossible to put a limit on the possibility of new interpretations. It only needs a genius, such as, say, Freud, to open up the possibility of generating a whole range of new interpretations in respect of any particular work of art or any particular kind of art and one can neither predict the birth of a genius nor of course predict the new possibilities of looking at things that he might introduce into our awareness. However, there is one difference between the performing arts and others which it is impossible to deny and this is that these arts necessarily involve human beings, as opposed to say pigments or stone or wood. And man's control over other human beings can never achieve the degree of completeness that it might over pigments or stones or wood.

What I have said so far is quite obviously far from being an adequate answer to the logical question about the identity of a work of music that I posed at the beginning. However I do not wish to pursue this question any further and would instead like to consider what I take to be more substantial issues about the understanding of music as
a form of art, and these are: the expression of emotions and their significance in a piece of music, the importance of the theory of Rasa, the idea of musical appreciation and the essence of a musical experience.
REFERENCES

1. Art and its Objects (Cambridge, 1980).