CHAPTER - XIV
According to Huxley, all that is fundamental and most profoundly significant to the human spirit can only be experienced, not expressed: "the rest is always and everywhere silence." But, after silence, music comes nearest to expressing the inexpressible. And, significantly enough, silence is an integral part of all good music. Compared with Beethoven's or Mozart's, Wagner's music 'says' less because it is always speaking.3

By mysterious analogy, music evokes, sometimes only the phantom of man's most significant experiences, but sometimes the experiences themselves in their full living force. Another peculiarity of music is its capacity to evoke experiences as perfect wholes, however

1. Ludwig Van Beethoven (1770-1827), German composer.
2. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791), Austrian composer.
3. Compare, in this connection, what Sushila (a character in Island) says about the music of John Sebastian Bach: 'The music that's closest to silence, closest, in spite of its being so highly organized, to pure, one-hundred-degree proof Spirit.'

Island: Chatto & Windus, 1962; p.265.
partial, however
obscurely confused, may have been the original experiences thus recalled. Listening to expressive music, we have, not the artist's original experience, but the best experience in its kind we are capable of; indeed, a better and completer experience than we have ever had before we got it from the music.

Music in the Theatre:

Music's ability to express the inexpressible was recognized by the greatest of all verbal artists; whenever Shakespeare wishes to communicate something in the nature of a mystical emotion or intuition, he regularly calls upon music to help him.

In the last act of the play which was drawn from Huxley's novel, Point Counter Point, selections from the slow movement of the Beethoven A minor quartet take their place as an integral part of the drama. The play as a whole was curiously hard and brutal. Bursting suddenly into this world of almost unmitigated harshness, the Heilige Dankgesang seemed like the manifestation of something supernatural. It would have been absolutely impossible to express by means of words or dramatic action what those three or four minutes of violin playing made somehow so luminously manifest to any sensitive listener.¹

Musical Harmony: a Recent Product:

Musical faculties have long existed potentially; but musical harmony is the product of the last five hundred years. The actualization of hitherto potential faculties is probably more or less similar in all cases. Extraordinarily gifted individuals make the first step; their action can be imitated, can be easily repeated. Little by little a technique is elaborated. With the aid of this technique, other men of genius are able to explore those aspects of the universe of which they have now been made aware. There may have been composers as remarkable as Beethoven among the ancient Greeks; but their technique was rudimentary. The whole history of art shows that, once the technique of exploiting the faculties has reached a certain pitch, men of genius can rise to supreme achievement.¹

Music and Time:

The most intractable of our experiences is the experience of Time. Music, says Huxley, is a device for working directly upon the experience of Time. "The composer takes a piece of raw, undifferentiated duration and extracts from it, as the sculptor extracts the statue from his marble, a complex pattern of tones and silences, of harmonic sequences and contrapuntal inter-

weavings." Duration is, temporarily, transformed into something intrinsically significant, with an internal logic of its own, expressing itself within and beyond some given technical convention.¹

Art, Huxley has said elsewhere, provides methods for spatializing time. Music, poetry and dance, for example, provide methods for spatializing time on the highest plane of awareness. As long as it takes the music to be played or the poem to be read, the transmutation of time into space is as complete as it possibly can be. A mind impregnated with music will always tend to impose a pattern on the temporal flux.²

Conventions in Art:

Emotions are everywhere the same; but the artistic expression of them varies from age to age and from one country to another. We are brought up to accept certain current conventions. But conventions vary with great rapidity, even in the same country. It is only with the aid of a historically trained imagination that we can see or hear as our ancestors heard or saw. Remoteness in space divides no less than remoteness in time, and so the

¹ 'Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow': Collected Essays; Chatto & Windus, 1960; p.244.
² Beyond the Mexique Bay; Chatto & Windus, 1949; pp.218-20.
artistic conventions of strangers are to most of us, as little comprehensible as those of our own fathers.

Music and the Visual Arts:

The variations in conventions are, in Huxley's opinion, due to two causes — physiological or intellectual. While form and colour have very little direct physiological effect upon the perceiving organism, sounds, on the other hand, act directly on the nerves. Certain types of rhythmical sounds produce certain almost specific effects upon the nervous system; and the musician must take into account these specific physiological effects of sound. Thus it comes about that there is a certain family likeness among the conventions of musical expression, which does not exist in pictorial art. But even in music the differences between the conventions of expression are very great. For instance, what we regard as the fundamental difference between major and minor keys is not fundamental at all. Before the seventeenth century it was not known even in European music; while in Oriental music, the most cheerful and martial music is pitched in the minor key.

There are also the purely intellectual reasons. While the visual arts lend themselves to story-telling and
and the symbolization of philosophy and religion, music does not. ¹

Music and Literature:

Should music have a connection with literature? Huxley asks. In the past the answer would have been unanimously, yes. Today, while the intrusion of literature into the plastic arts is abhorred, in the field of music the objection has been less savage. Programme music is deplored; yet, for all the talk about 'pure music', good composers still write songs, masses, operas and cantatas.

In this respect, the composer is more fortunate than the painter. It is psychologically possible to write 'pure music' and expect it to be as harmoniously complex, as rich in unified diversities, as music inspired by a literary text. But the intrusion of literature in music has often been beneficent. Where music is a matter of structural pattern, it is easy to write 'pure music'. But where there is no structural pattern, where the style is polyphonic and the movement is not circular, the musical imagination requires a text. Huxley suggests that contemporary musicians, who aspire to write 'pure music' in

¹. Jesting Pilate; Chatto & Windus, 1948; pp.50-52.
forms as rich, subtle and compact as those devised by Gesualdo and his contemporaries, would do well to turn once more to the poets.

**Rhythmic Movement:**

In primitive religions prolonged rhythmic movement is very commonly resorted to for the purpose of inducing a state of infra-personal and subhuman ecstasy. The same technique for achieving the same end has been used by many civilized peoples — by the Greeks, for example, by the Hindus, by many of the orders of Dervishes in the Islamic world, by such Christian sects as the Shakers and the Holy Rollers. In all these cases rhythmic movement, long-drawn and repetitive, is a form of ritual deliberately practised for the sake of downward self-transcendence.

**Rhythmic Sound:**

Intimately associated with this ecstasy-producing rite of rhythmic movement is the ecstasy-producing rite of rhythmic sound. Music has always something to say to men and women on every level of their being, from the sentimental to the intellectual, from the visceral to the spiritual. No man, however highly civilized, can listen for very long to African drumming, or Indian chanting, or

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Welsh hymn-singing, and retain his critical and self-conscious personality intact. Exposed long enough to the tom-toms and the singing, everyone of our philosophers would end by capering and howling with the savages.¹

Like rhythmic movement and rhythmic sound, repetition of verbal formulas or phrases of music lulls to rest the superficial part of the consciousness and leaves the deeper mind free to concentrate on ultimate reality.²

Renaissance Music:

While Renaissance poetry, painting and sculpture have been studied in minutest detail, Huxley writes, Renaissance music has relatively received little attention. How few people have heard, or even heard of, the music of Dufay³ and Josquin⁴, of Okeghem⁵ and Obrecht⁶, of

1. The Devils of Loudun; Chatto & Windus, 1952; pp.368-69.
2. Ends and Means; Chatto & Windus, 1948; p.232.
3. Guillaume Dufay (c.1400-1474), Flemish composer of church music.
4. Des Prés; Josquin (c.1445-1521), French musical composer.
5. Joannes Okeghem (early 15th century - c.1495), Founder of the second Netherlands school of contrapuntists.
6. Jacob Obrecht (c.1430-c.1500), Dutch composer.
Dunstable, and Byrd, of Marenzio and Victoria: Even so great a historian as Burckhardt knew next to nothing about the music of his chosen period.

Seventeenth-Century Music:

Huxley remarks on the recent description of seventeenth-century music as 'baroque'. If some plastic artists are Baroque, there is no justification, except that they lived at the same time, for applying the same epithet to composers, whose fundamental tendencies in regard to form were radically different.

About the only seventeenth-century composer to whom the term 'baroque' can be rightly applied is Claudio Monteverdi. And he is baroque only in his desire for a

1. John Dunstable (1370-1453), English mathematician and the earliest of old English composers.
2. William Byrd (1542 or 1543-1623), one of the greatest of English musical composers.
3. Luca Marenzio (1553-1593), Italian composer.
4. Tomas Luis de Victoria (c. 1548-1611), Spanish composer.
5. Jacob Burckhardt (1818-1897), Swiss historian of art and letters.
6. 'Gesualdo: Variations on a Musical Theme': Collected Essays; Chatto & Windus, 1960, p.181.
7. Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643), Italian violinist, conductor and composer.
more direct and dramatic expression of feeling. Actually between 1598 and 1620, baroque painting and sculpture and so-called baroque music moved in almost opposite directions. The only conclusion to be drawn is that the internal logic and the recent history of the art exorcise a more powerful influence upon the artist than the social, religious and political events of his time. For example, fifteenth-century sculptors and painters inherited a tradition of symmetry and closedness, while composers of the same century inherited a tradition of openness and asymmetry; and till the end of the sixteenth century the painters and sculptors on the one hand and the composers on the other pursued their several paths uninfluenced by each other or by the events of contemporary history.1

The Waltz:

The progress of popular music, Huxley suggests, has been a sort of Rake's Progress. The first waltz2 was almost completely empty of emotional content; the subsequent waltzes are densely saturated with amorous sentiment, languor and voluptuousness. The original waltz, 'Ach, du lieber Augustin', induces no emotions

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1. 'Faith, Taste and History': adonis and the Alphabet; Chatto & Windus, 1956; pp.235-36.
2. Waltz, ballroom dance in slow 3/4 time; first appeared in the eighteenth century; form utilized by Chopin as medium for instrumental music.
beyond a general sense of high spirits and cheerfulness; the modern waltz makes one palpitate by its luscious strains. From the jolly little thing it was at its birth, the waltz has grown into a voluptuous, heart-stirring affair.

**Popular Music:**

And what has happened to the waltz has happened to all popular music. From the innocent thing it was once it has become provocative. Compare the music of *The Beggars' Opera*, says Huxley, with the music of a contemporary revue. "They differ as life in the garden of Eden differed from life in the artistic quarter of Gomorrha."  

The evolution of popular music has run parallel on a lower plane, with the evolution of serious music; all that the writers of popular tunes do is to adapt the discoveries of original geniuses to the vulgar taste. Ultimately and indirectly, Beethoven is responsible "for all the languishing waltz tunes, all the savage jazzings, for all that is maudlin and violent in our popular music."

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2. Gomorrha, a city in the neighbourhood of the Dead Sea; destroyed, with Sodom, owing to the homosexual practices of the inhabitants (Genesis xix).
because he first devised effective means for the direct expression of emotion in music. Only, his emotions happened to be noble.

Sexual Quality in Popular Music:

However, it is the nineteenth century Italians who were directly responsible for the introduction of a certain vibrant sexual quality into music. That is one reason why Mozart's operas are far less popular than those of Verdi\(^1\), Leoncavallo\(^2\) and Puccini\(^3\). The arias of Mozart have a beautiful clear purity which renders them utterly insipid compared with the sobbing melodies of the nineteenth-century Italians.

Rossini\(^4\) was the first to show what charms may be in vulgar melody. It is by often repeating in different parts of the scale a very short and easily memorable phrase that Rossini achieved his melodic vulgarity. Vulgar people before him had to be content with Mozart's delicate airs; Rossini revealed to them a more congenial music. It

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1. Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901), Italian Opera composer.  
2. Ruggiero Leoncavallo (1858-1919), Italian composer.  
3. Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924), Italian opera composer.  
4. Gioachino Rossini (1792-1868), Italian opera composer.
was only a step from it to the great triumphs in the field of popular music in our time.

Barbarism in Music:

Barbarism, Huxley points out, has entered popular music from two sources, either from the music of barbarous people, like the negroes, or from serious music inspired by barbarism. As we grow inured to the violent and purely physiological stimuli of the clashing and drumming, the rhythmic throbbing and wailing glissandos of modern jazz music, there seems little hope of our reverting to less crudely direct music. Even serious musicians seem to find it hard to dispense with barbarism, and persist in banging in the old Russian manner. Though as a boy, Huxley was carried off his feet by the wild melodies, the persistent, relentlessly throbbing rhythms of Russian music, the only music in which he, a civilized man, can take unflagging pleasure is civilized music. Today, unfortunately, composers overwhelm us "not merely with Russian and negroid noises, but with Celtic caterwaulings on the black notes, with dismal Spanish wailings, punctuated by the rattle of


2. However much we may admire the Chromatic Fantasia of Bach, Huxley says elsewhere, we all of us have a soft spot somewhere in our minds that is sensitive to "Roses in Picardy". ('Democratic Art', On the Margin; Chatto & Windus, 1948; p.67).
the castanets and the clashing harmonies of the guitar.  

Why Great Music?

The democratically minded will insist that there is no hierarchy in music. It is not altogether easy to answer them. The arguments on both sides — the champions of great and light music — are ultimately based on conviction and faith. The best one can do to convince the democrat of the real superiority of, say, the Mass in D over The Will of Song is to point out that, in a sense, one contains the other; that The Will of Song is a part, and a very small part, of a great whole of human experience, of which the Mass in D is a much more nearly approximate expression.  

Modern Attitude to Great Music:

Modern young men regard all pictures which bear a close resemblance to their subjects, or reproduce natural beauty, or move at first sight as highly suspicious, if

1. 'Popular Music': Along the Road; Chatto & Windus, 1948; pp.246-52. Compare the following remark of Huxley in an essay in Do What You Will:  

"If good music has charms to soothe the savage breast bad music has no less powerful spells for filling the mildest breast with rage, the happiest with horror and disgust."

2. 'Silence in Golden': Do What You Will; Chatto & Windus; 1949; p.56.  

2. 'Democratic Art': On the Margin; Chatto & Windus; 1948; pp.73-74.
not damnable. This doctrine applied to music has led to
the exaltation of Bach at the expense of Beethoven; to the
dry 'classical' way of playing Mozart, supposed to be un-
emotional because he is not vulgarly emotional, like
Wagner¹; to steam organ-like performances of Handel² and
senseless bellowings of Palestrina.³

**Indian Music:**

Indian Music, Huxley had an opportunity to observe,
is innocent of any harmony more subtle than the bagpipe's
— the drone on the dominant; and it knows no better
organized form than that of the air with variations. It
is played on but few instruments, and these few, he thought,
were rapidly being ousted by "a form of miniature American
harmonium, pumped with one hand and played with one finger
of the other." Nevertheless, Indian music, he found, is
surprisingly rich and various, though the richness and the
variety depends entirely upon the individual player. Where
music has never been committed to writing, but is "an

1. Richard Wagner (1813-1883), German composer and writer.
2. George Frederick Handel (1685-1759), German composer
   and conductor.
3. Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (1525-1594), Italian
   composer.
4. "Convolus": *Along the Road*, Chatto & Windus, 1948;
   pp. 171.
affair of tradition tempered by personal inspiration", the interpreters role is more important than in the West. He is not only the interpreter, but also the repository and publisher of music; not only the guardian of ancient tradition, but also the inspired improvisatore.

At Lahore, Huxley heard a most accomplished performer on the sitar, or Indian lute; he found him exceedingly humble compared with the lordly artists of Europe. Music in India, he found, had strangely come down in the world, had become the monopoly of prostitutes. This view is, however, more than a little out of date. Music in India is rising, slowly but steadily, to respectability.

The Sitar:

It would be interesting to note Huxley's attempt to describe the sitar in terms of the West. The sitar, he says, "is a long-necked guitar, bellied with the half of a bisected pumpkin, wire-strung, and played with a plectrum. From this lute a skilled musician can draw an extraordinary variety of sounds — from sharp staccato to notes long-drawn, as though produced by a bow; from clear, full, ringing sounds to a whining slither through fractions of a tone; from loudly martial to sweet and tender. The melody is played only on the first string, the remaining
At Lucknow, Huxley happened to attend the All-India Musical Conference. There were accomplished singers and celebrated players of every Indian instrument — including even the harmonium which, "to my great astonishment and greater disgust, was permitted to snore and whine in what I was assured was the very sanctuary of Indian music."

The vina and the sitar must be heard at close quarters; at a distance nothing can be heard beyond a jangle of plucked strings. That is why at the concert at Lahore, he had been amazed by the richness and variety of the sitar; at Lucknow, where the concerts were held in a large tent, there was only tinkling monotony.

The Quarter-Tones in Music:

At the Conference, Huxley listened attentively in the hope of hearing some new and extraordinary kind of melody based on the celebrated quarter-tones; but he listened in vain. The scales in which Indian music is written are of quite familiar types. The pentatonic or blacknote scale, for example, seems to be a favourite; and any one who knows ancient European music would find little difficulty in labelling the various melodies of India with

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their modal names. The quarter-tone makes its appearance only in slurred transition from one note of the fundamental scale to another. The sentimental tsigane violinist and the jazz-band player make just as free a use of quarter-tones as do the Indians, and in precisely the same way. ¹

**Gesualdo:**

The music of Gesualdo is so strange and, in its strangeness, so beautiful that it haunts the memory and fires the imagination. Like most of the great composers of his time, Gesualdo wrote exclusively for the human voice — for groups of five or six soloists singing contrapuntally. All his compositions belong to one or other of two closely related musical forms, the madrigal and the motet. The motet consists of a setting of a short passage, in Latin, from some sacred text. A madrigal is a non-religious motet, with a vernacular text.

**Madrigals:**

Gesualdo wrote madrigals, a form of music which, though sung, is not a song; that is to say, it does not consist of a tune, repeated stanza after stanza. Also,

2. Carlo Gesualdo (c.1560-1613), Italian musician.
in the madrigal there is no solo singing; all the voices are of equal importance.¹

Order in Disintegration:

Elsewhere, Huxley points out that in Gesualdo psychological disintegration had pushed to the extreme limit a tendency inherent in modal as opposed to fully tonal music. And yet it does not matter that the whole is disorganized for each individual fragment is in order. The Higher Order prevails even in disintegration; more clearly present, perhaps, than in a completely coherent work. You are not lulled into a sense of false security by some merely human, fabricated order; you have to rely on your immediate perception of the ultimate order.²

Beethoven:

There is, at least there sometimes seems to be, says Huxley, a certain blessedness lying at the heart of things, a mysterious blessedness, of whose existence we accidentally or providentially become aware. In the

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² The Doors of Perception; Chatto & Windus, 1957; pp.39-40.
Benedictus Beethoven gives expression to his awareness of blessedness.  

The Serenity of Beethoven's Music:

Every artist has his views about the universe at large and he expresses them through his works, at least by implication. Music 'says' things about the world, but in specifically musical terms. But we cannot isolate the truth contained in a piece of music. Thus, the introduction to the Benedictus in the Missa Solemnis is a statement about the blessedness that is at the heart of things. But this is about as far as 'own words' will take us. 'Only music, and only Beethoven's music, and only this particular music of Beethoven, can tell us with any precision what Beethoven's conception of the blessedness at the heart of things actually was.'

The ineffable serenity of the slow movement of Beethoven's A-Minor Quartet, the peace passing all under-

1. Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827), German composer, famous for his nine Symphonies.

2. Compare Spandrell's remark on Beethoven in Point Counter Point: "You can't understand anything until you have heard it (i.e. Beethoven's music). It proves all kinds of things - God, the soul, goodness - unescapably. It's the only real proof that exists; the only one, because Beethoven was the only man who could get his knowledge over into expression..." (Point Counter Point; Avon Publications, V-2031, p.436).

standing of the orchestral prelude to the Benedictus do
not represent the old man's only mood; when he turns from
contemplation of eternal reality to consideration of the
human world, we have, as Huxley puts it, the positively
terrifying merriment of the last movement of his B-Flat
Major Quartet.

Beethoven and Verdi:

Of the same nature, says Huxley, but if possible
even more disquieting, is the mirth which reverberates
through the last act of Verdi's Falstaff, culminating in
that extraordinary final chorus in which the aged genius
makes his maturest comment on the world — not with bitterness or sarcasm or satire, but in a huge contrapuntal
paroxysm of detached and already posthumous laughter.¹

The Lydian Harmonies:

This is how Huxley describes in Point Counter
Point, the effect of Beethoven's music. "Slowly, slowly,
the melody unfolded itself. The archaic Lydian harmonies
hung on the air. It was an unimpassioned music, trans­
parent, pure, and crystalline, like a tropical sea, an
Alpine lake. Water on water, calm sliding over calm; the
according of level horizons and waveless expanses, a

¹. 'Variations on Goya': Collected Essays; Chatto & Windus, 1960; p.158.
of serenities. And everything
counterpoint/clear and bright; no mists, no vague twi-
lights. It was the calm of still and rapturous contempla-
tion, not of drowsiness or sleep. It was the serenity of
the convalescent who wakes from fever and finds himself
born again into a realm of beauty. But the fever was 'the
fever called living', and the rebirth was not into this
world; the beauty was unearthly, the convalescent serenity
was the peace of God. The interweaving of Lydian harmonics
was heaven."

Heilige Dankgesang:

Spandrell\(^1\) who is keen on convincing Rampion\(^2\),
the apostle of earthly reality against the claims of the
spirit, of the greatness of Beethoven's music, plays the
Heilige Dankgesang. Rampion, at last, was overpowered and
convinced. "It was as though heaven had suddenly and
impossibly become more heavenly, had passed from achieved
perfection into perfection yet deeper and more absolute.
The ineffable peace persisted; but it was no longer the
peace of convalescence and passivity. It quivered, it was
alive, it seemed to grow and intensify itself, it became an
active calm, an almost passionate serenity. The miraculous

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1. A character in *Point Counter Point*.
2. Another character in the same novel.
paradox of external life and eternal repose was musically realized ... The music played on, leading from heaven to heaven, from bliss to deeper bliss.\(^1\)

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1. Point Counter Point; Avon Publications; V-2031, pp.439-41.