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Music for the people against the music of the people

By

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9 Relativity in culture means that superiority and inferiority, progress and regress cannot be defined from an absolute point of view. Historians and ethnologists tend to be relativists today: Historians speak of changes rather than progress from one epoch to the next, and ethnologists speak of differences between cultures rather than that one culture is superior to another.¹ From a radically relativist standpoint one would argue that *the total amount of good things and bad things in the world is the same at every time and every place*. Every progress that we detect, would radical relativists say, is due to the fact that we do not see the other side where at the same time a regress occurs.

18 This ideology, as a guiding principle for researchers, is useful to prevent from rash conclusions and undue generalisations. If we took it as a guideline for our life, it would be disastrous. Why should we exert ourselves, if no progress is possible? Would it be morally acceptable to strive for a better life if it can only happen at the cost of others? Who would struggle for political reforms if all progress were necessarily connected with the same amount of change for the worse?

It seems to me that the definition of education as a means of *inculturation*² is an attempt of considering education from a relativist standpoint. The word "inculturation" suggests that culture is something like a house people can go in and out. That means, culture is something independent of its individual members. New members compensate for the loss of other people through death, while the culture itself remains unchanged.

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¹ See for example the recent fundamental statement of a group of German ethnomusicologists: Kerstin Klenke, Lars-Christian Koch, Julio Mendivil, Rüdiger Schumacher, Oliver Seibt and Raimund Vogels: "'Totgesagte leben länger' — Überlegungen zur Relevanz der Musikethnologie", *Die Musikforschung* vol. 56 no. 3 (2003), pp. 261-71, here 262-3, esp. note 6.

² For example TOKUMARU Yoshihiko: Article "ongaku kyōiku" (music education), in: *Nihon ongaku daijiten* (great encyclopaedia of Japanese music), ed. by HIRANO Kenji, KAMISANGŌ Yūkō and GAMŌ Satoaki, Tōkyō: Heibonsha 1989, p. 202-3.

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As a bird's-eye view on a relatively stable culture at a certain moment this may be a satisfying description; but from a systematic view it is unsatisfactory because there is no causal relationship between the loss of people through death, on the one side, and the benefit that a society has from education on the other. These two processes, one of which causes a steady decay of culture and the other a steady enlargement, occur independent of each other. When a child learns to be a part of the society, the culture extends itself, it becomes greater. The individual progress of a child is a direct contribution to cultural progress. And this progress is not necessarily a compensation for what is lost through the death of old people. (This is especially evident in epochs of cultural change.) Education causes change, not preservation. Not the children are integrated into the culture, but the culture becomes extended upon the children. Education is not inculturation, but cultivation of social property.

If education is insufficient, all things will worsen gradually, nothing becomes better. If we agree on this trivial sentence, we agree that a radically relativist thought must be false because it does not allow that something worsens while no other thing becomes better at the same time. Thus real regress and real progress do exist, and it is not only possible but also likely that some cultures are superior to others. At the very least, we have to know that our own culture can and must be steadily improved by means of education³, and if we fail to do so it will be inferior to other cultures within a short time.

Concerning music culture as a part of the whole culture, the same considerations are true. If nobody works for a renewal and improvement of music culture, the level of music culture will go down gradually, and if there are many who fight for a better music, there will be a real progress in music culture. Music cannot be preserved, but cultivated.

Music education is a means that prevents music culture from growing old and dying out, in the figurative as well as in the literal sense. There are other means as well, as for example composing new pieces, organising performances, writing about music and so on. Compared to these other means, typically music education is conservative: While composers and organisers create and propagate new styles and genres, music education often works against the tendency that old styles are edged out by new ones. Richard Wagner, for example, demanded the

³ This sentence, however, is true only if the concept of education is not confined to *formal* education in schools and *conscious* behaviour of "educating children".

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establishment of a music *conservatory* in Munich, and he explained its function as an institute for *conservation* of the performance style of classical works.⁴ Although his etymological derivation of the word "conservatory" was wrong — originally the word had denoted a home for "conservation" of poor children — his description fits well to the things musical conservatories did in the 19th century.

But even in Wagner's view of a "conservative conservatory", the function of music education was not to preserve an already existing culture. On the contrary, he believed that for the true cultivation of classical music a kind of revolution had to take place. His idea of conserving classical tradition was not against change and progress, but against sticking to the superficial and, as Wagner believed, irresponsible treatment of classical compositions. In essence, Wagner was not very far from the ideas expressed in a dialog between the philosopher Ernst Bloch and the composer Hanns Eisler in 1938: "Die Kunst zu erben" (the art of inheriting).⁵ Musical heritage like the works of Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven, they said, was the very basis of all further production, but the key question was *how* to inherit this heritage. In their Marxist view, Bach and Beethoven belonged to and reflected previous stages of social development, that had been outgrown by the following centuries. If someone would take them over uncritically, he would fall back to these previous stages. Nevertheless, the classical composers were the unshakeable foundation that needed a steady confrontation in the present as well as in the future.

Conservatism of this kind, which is in essence building a new tradition, is to be found in writings on music education of different epochs and different cultures. One of the most rigid views is to be found in Plato's writings. Plato believed not only, that music reflected the character of the people, but also, that the steady influence of the right music from the early childhood would form the character of the people accordingly. Thus, the ideal state would be penetrated by an eternal music that ensured its stability forever. Consequently, the influence

⁴ "In der Benennung einer Schule als 'Konservatorium' liegt der Charakter der von ihr geforderten Wirksamkeit bezeichnet; sie soll den klassischen Styl einer reifen Entwicklung der Kunst erhalten, 'konservieren', und zwar durch Pflege und treu erhaltene Überlieferung namentlich der Vortragsweise für diejenigen Musterwerke, durch welche sich eine Blütheperiode der Kunst zur klassischen gebildet und abgeschlossen hat." Richard Wagner: "Bericht an Seine Majestät den König Ludwig II. von Bayern über eine in München zu errichtende deutsche Musikschule", in R.W.: *Gesammelte Schriften und Dichtungen*, 3rd ed., vol. 8, Leipzig: C.F.W. Siegel's Musikalienhandlung, s.a., pp. 125-76, here 125-6.

⁵ In: Hanns Eisler: *Musik und Politik. Schriften 1924-1948*, ed. Günter Mayer (Hanns Eisler · Gesammelte Werke, ser. III vol. 1), Leipzig: VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1973, p. 406-14.

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of certain foreign or new music would be of serious danger for the continued existence of an established state.⁶ Plato goes so far to demand severe punishments for people who compose or introduce new music.

- 90 One should not forget, however, that Plato speaks of the ideal state and ideal music that is not yet existent and perhaps will never exist. Even if Plato's ideal of an eternal music was mainly derived from the traditional performing style of ritual music, a practical music policy based on his ideas would have meant firstly a revolution of the present conditions and secondly – given the fact that an ideal can never be fully achieved – a steady process of improvement.

- Plato's ideas concerning the ideal state were so fascinating because they were only a theoretical model. In this model, the power of music seems not only to be unlimited, but it is totally controlled and therefore exerts exactly the effects that are wanted by the rulers. In fact,
99 at that point there is the main problem with music education. While it is clear that music has a strong effect on people, even to a degree that they do unbelievable things, the music that is proposed to do these effects by educators often fails, and, more significantly, measures of oppression against harmful music tend to have the opposite effect. Music that is forbidden is all the more attractive. Oppression is the best promotion for music pieces.

- The treatment of rock music in former East Germany is a striking example, as Peter Wicke has pointed out. When in the 1960's East-German groups began to play the so-called "Beatmusik", the government feared that the American life-style would be imported through
108 the music.⁷ First attempts to suppress the whole thing failed, and so, in the 70's, the government tried to canalise the movement by institutionalisation and strict censorship. While at the surface the censorship was mostly successful, the sensibility of the audience for small deviations from the prescribed norm increased in the same degree as the possibility for such deviations was curtailed, and thus the political power of the music remained unbroken.⁸ In the last years of the German Democratic Republic the East German Rock music went almost out of control. Finally the music of the West seemed to be the lesser evil: To distract from the

⁶ See for example Plato: *Politeia*, 424B.

⁷ Peter Wicke: "'Wenn die Musik sich ändert, zittern die Mauern der Stadt.' Rockmusik als Medium des politischen Diskurses im DDR-Kulturbetrieb", in: Bernhard Frevel (ed.): *Musik und Politik. Dimensionen einer undefinierten Beziehung*, Regensburg: ConBrio, 1997, pp. 33-43, here p. 36.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 40-1.

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disturbing power of the East German rock groups, the scarce currencies were used to invite stars from the West, and in the last years of the G.D.R. the youth channel CT64 played almost
117 exclusively Western music.⁹

If we want to change the musical minds of the people, it is much more effective to create *compensations* that are really attractive and that will *supersede* the other genres. Only after such compensation is successfully installed, measures of prohibition may be undertaken, but perhaps they are not even necessary at that time.

In the German reformation in the 16th century, for example, songs played a leading role. The introduction of sacred songs that were based in part on the popular songs of that time was one
126 of the most effective measures of music politics that ever took place in history. In many parts of Germany, the reformation took the form of a singing revolution. Only after the Catholic Church had introduced similar songs — mostly the Protestant songbooks were used as direct models —, the power of the singing revolution was broken.

When the sacred songs had established themselves as a music for homes and daily life, and music education by the churches had developed to a certain degree, the Protestant church began fighting actively against profane singing and folk music traditions. This strategy was so effective that Doris Stockmann called it the "Volksmusik-'Kahlschlag'" ("folk music
135 eradication") that caused the most fundamental division of the central European folk music culture: Only in Catholic regions regional folk music traditions could survive and develop.¹⁰

The example shows how compensation worked for both churches. Originally, neither of the churches had planned to introduce congregational singing into the divine services. Firstly, the Protestants detected it as a compensation for profane singing, because the latter was believed to be against Christian life. Thereafter the great success of the protestant songs forced the Catholics to look for a compensation for the advantage of attractiveness the Protestants had.
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⁹ Ibid., p. 41-2.

¹⁰ Doris Stockmann (ed.): *Volks- und Populärmusik in Europa* (Neues Handbuch der Musikwissenschaft, vol. 12), Laaber: Laaber-Verlag, 1992, pp. 147-152.

In Meiji era Japan (1868-1912), some leading music educators developed their own theory of compensation in music. The reason for inventing this new thought was that Japan had begun to reform her society by a new educational system (enacted in 1872). Modern education had to form the citizen of a modern centralised Empire, as opposed to the regionally and socially restricted member of the feudal era. In the eyes of the contemporary elite, traditional music represented these feudal structures and thus had to be replaced by a new national music that represented the modern age and the modern state.

- 153 Because the traditional music was popular — and, even worse, the most popular music was connected with the red-light districts of Edo and thus more than any other music a symbol for the hardly controllable habits of the old society —, a mere censorship seemed not to be promising. So the idea of compensation came about. A rather funny comparison made by UEHARA Rokushiro explains the functioning of this policy:

- 162 I ... I turn into a vulgarism, but I call my method "piddle-ism". What I mean when I say "piddle-ism", is that some years ago there was a police order which prohibited to piddle on the street, and at the same time urinals were erected at several places; and a fine was imposed on those who piddled on the street. All people, of course, knew that it was not a good behaviour, and so, after no more than two or three years, the piddling people began to feel ashamed of their own conscience and stopped to do so. [...] Today most of these urinals disappeared from the streets of Tokyo, but there is almost nobody who violates the police order. It is the same with music. The government should publish an order what kind of music is prohibited, and if the police will enforce the order for two or three years, the vulgar music will disappear just as the piddling on the street.¹¹

- 171 The point is, of course, the urinals. Which kind of urinals did Uehara propose for singing people?

The music policy of Meiji era Japan followed a double strategy. One side was to establish a national music, a medium for identification for all Japanese people. Because traditional music was regional and because modern Japan followed Western models, the national music also followed Western models. The Japanese national anthem, for example, although based on a

¹¹ UEHARA Rokushirô: "Shakai ongaku no kairyô ni tsuite" [On the reform of social music], in: *Ongaku kanken*, Dainippon Ongakukai (ed.), Tôkyô: Shuppan Kyôkai, 1904, p. 89-90.

traditional scale, was played by military bands with Western harmonisation.¹² In the schools European and American folk songs were sung with Japanese words. Thus, just as the piddlers
180 on the street, every Japanese could know what kind of musical behaviour the rulers wanted from them.

The other side was the method of making the people give up their old habits. This method, so-to-speak the musical urinals, was called *zokkyoku kairyô* ("reform of profane pieces"). The idea was to create a music that was similar to the vulgar pieces, but without vulgar contents. It is not quite clear whether the educators who propagated *zokkyoku kairyô* only wanted to have a harmless profane music, or to exterminate the whole thing. Even if Uehara's story with the urinals suggests the latter (at the last stage the urinals are not yet necessary), he was very
189 serious with the creation of a renewed traditional music. Himself a shakuhachi player, he contributed substantially to the improvement of shakuhachi notation¹³, and he wrote the first scientifically founded theory of the tonality of traditional Japanese music.¹⁴

Looking back at the musical piddle-ism era, its main achievement was the gradual acceptance of the opinion that Japanese popular music was not necessarily wrong. Some music genres that were believed socially unacceptable, vulgar and mean before 1900 are nowadays acknowledged as a part of the classical heritage.

198 Today most music teachers are relativists, at least at the surface. They refrain from confessing that certain genres of music are not worth to be taught, and few educators would intend to replace one music genre in the society by another. Nevertheless, they cannot teach without giving preference to certain genres and neglecting others. The present situation in Japan is an instructive example.

After almost 100 years of Westernised school music, in the last two or three decades teaching of Japanese folk and traditional musics as well as world musics has gradually become a part

¹² On the early history of that song see Hermann Gottschewski: "Hoiku shôka and the melody of the Japanese national anthem *Kimi ga yo*", *Journal of the Society for Research in Asiatic Music* [of Japan], no. 68, 2003, pp. (1)-(17) and (23)-(24).

¹³ His improved notation is used today in the Kinko-school of shakuhachi playing.

¹⁴ UEHARA Rokushirô: *Zokugaku senritsu kô* [Thoughts about the melody of profane music], first edition Tôkyô 1895.

of the curriculum. Last year this tendency was once more intensified, and playing traditional
207 Japanese instruments became compulsory for the middle schools.

Nobody will deny that this is a great improvement, especially when in a few years at least the
younger teachers will be able to teach it adequately. However, the time for music education
has not been extended, but reduced.¹⁵ It is obvious that the very high level of Western music
teaching cannot be maintained under these circumstances. The decision to teach more
traditional musics is a decision against the culture of Western music, a culture that is also a
more than 100 years old tradition in Japan, even older than some of the so-called traditional
music genres that will now be introduced instead of it. Even if traditional music culture is yet
216 alive at several cultural niches, a greater number of Japanese people identifies themselves
with Western classical or popular music¹⁶ and looks at traditional musics like an exotic relic
of the past.

The sacrifice of a reasonable amount of Western music for the sake of teaching traditional
instruments is not a measure of preservation, but the conscious decision for cultivation of a
certain area of the Japanese music culture on the cost of another. We cannot teach without
making such decisions. The question of what we do with our heritage, or, to say it with Bloch
and Eisler, to find the adequate method of inheriting our heritage — this difficult question is
225 more than ever a problem in our globalised world. Perhaps it is one of the most important
questions in music education today.

¹⁵ Last year the Saturdays became school holidays and thus the total number of school hours was reduced. Music lessons belonged to the main sufferers of this development.

¹⁶ Including Japanese music that is directly related to Western music genres, as for example Japanese rock groups.