

THE POWER OF MUSIC by Dmitri Shostakovich

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No description-however brilliant-can give a true idea of the power of music. Words cannot rival it in appeal and impact. This is only natural: if music expressed just as much as speech, it would be unnecessary.

Music is a means capable of expressing dark dramatism and pure rapture, suffering and ecstasy, fiery and cold fury, melancholy and wild merriment-and the subtlest nuances and interplay of these feelings which words are powerless to express and which are unattainable in painting and sculpture.

Leo Tolstoi, who on several occasions tried to give a definition of music, finally decided to call it "the stenography of emotions" Indeed, music reigns over the emotions, whose interplay it is capable of conveying with far greater force and vividness than all other arts. A musical composition worthy of the name is always inspired by emotions. Attempts at artistic creation based solely on craftsmanship are doomed to failure.

Good music always reflects reality as mirrored by the human soul-a wealth of emotions, moods and ideas. That is why the greatest and finest works of music are created when human perception is at its keenest-periods which inspire fiery passions and lofty ambitions: great social upheavals, revolutions, and tempestuous, triumphant advance.

The same reason accounts for the fact that music is equally accessible to connoisseurs and ordinary audiences. The criterion for enjoying music is the depth and intensity of an individual's emotionality.

The question often arises, "What is the message of the so-called serious music?" How to define the pleasure it gives the listeners? In all probability, the young men and women who do not care for symphonic music feel that it fails to amuse them, because it is unfit for either singing or dancing. But the purpose of music, as all other arts, is far from merely amusing people. Leo Tolstoi's *War and Peace* or Mikhail Sholokhov's *Quiet Flows the Don* are not a means of pleasantly whiling away the time. The same is true of the works of great painters.

The purpose of art is to help man cognize himself and the world around him, to educate man, to inspire efforts for a better, more rational pattern of life. As one of the arts, music serves these goals in its own sphere of emotions and ideas. Music perpetuates the image of man and his time, it stimulates emotional perception and uplifts the spirit.

Mikhail Glinka, the founder of Russian national opera, said that it is the people who create music, with the composers merely arranging it. This means, in effect, that the creative process in music, as in other arts, starts with establishing links with life. The composer strives to perceive the spirit of the time, the feelings of his people, to gain an insight into their sorrows, joys and aspirations. All this is reflected in his music.

Apart from giving an understanding of the people's spirit, great music also stimulates self-awareness. It truly exists, like all arts, only insofar as it makes man be aware his own innermost feelings, which are thus crystallized and brought to the surface. The enjoyment given by music largely stems from the fact that its impact arouses hitherto dormant emotions.

Real music is always revolutionary, for it cements the ranks of the people; it arouses them and leads them onward. The lyrical, gentle melodies of Chopin possess tremendous liberative force. It is not for nothing that Schumann referred to them as flower-covered guns.

Great music always expresses truly human feelings, truly progressive, human ideas. Colorless, empty music conveys nothing- but if it is truly profound and meaningful it impels mankind onward, because music itself is a poeticized sum of human emotions and aspirations on a universal scale. I specially stress the word "human," in contrast to "inhuman." Whenever mankind takes a stride forward musicians march in the van arm-in-arm with the standard-bearers. They inspire the strong and courageous, and urge the weak and hesitant.

Medieval feudal society went to pieces to the bracing rhythm of the Marseillaise; emancipation from the fetters of capitalist slavery was accompanied by the compelling strains of the Internationale. The epoch of the French Revolution gave rise to the great music of Beethoven and Chopin. The struggle to build a classless society, a new social system with free, strong and rational people, is producing its own outstanding works, which reflect the depth and scope of the raging combat between good and ill, the triumph of goodness and beauty.

People often ask which of the composers writing serious music are the greatest, and which are the finest works in their heritage. I am always at a loss to answer such questions! A French journalist once asked me: if you had to stay on a desert island, and could only have six records for your record-player, which would you choose?" I had to leave his question unanswered. Music is widely diverse, expressing as it does a wealth of thoughts and emotions. Mussorgsky and Chopin are miles apart, and so are Rimsky-Korsakov and Beethoven, but we treasure alike the heroic stoicism of Beethoven, the power of Mussorgsky and the uplifting, rippling ballades and polonaises of Chopin.

The spiritual world of an individual is enriched by the range of composers and musical compositions with which he is familiar. The treasure-store of music is inexhaustible, and it has inexhaustible possibilities. Music will grow and develop always, similar to man's spirit.

The Soviet composers have a vast audience. Yet this audience can and should be increased still further. The greater the number of people capable of understanding and appreciating music, the finer the compositions created.

Musical and aesthetic education is an important component in the large-scale work carried on to develop a harmonious individual. Whatever his mentality and vocation, man of tomorrow will not be able to live without art, without music.