

György Szabados: Improvisation and Composition

Improvisation and composition seemingly form an opposing pair in music; they are however inseparable from each other. Improvisation is looking for a form, a spiritual frame, and freedom makes it living. The composed music however remains a frame, if it doesn't give space to the soaring flight of the soul, of the emotions, of the moment, which fill up the often-successful frame. The composition's power consists in its capacity to provide opportunity for the manifestation of human stance in the music, but since it is determined also by the moment, the end result will never be the same, and the frame will not be identical with the creative impulse which has made the composition.

Thus, composition is an artificial work; a form, which wants to be a natural phenomenon. Improvisation however is true spontaneity. Improvisation is the joy of unlimited possibilities, the archaic gesture of creation. Composition is a fixed structure, a row of frozen and maximally polished moments, a monument of the time and of the composer, which begins to live whenever a new visitor arrives, whenever a new spiritual sacrifice makes it alive. The reason's power over passion, where the reason, the structure, the construction always remain dominant over the emotion's free impulse, able to enchant the form, whereas everything depends on this original serenity.

Finally, the extremities enrich each other mutually. It depends on the era, which one and when is more needed than the other. Improvisation always emerges from the oblivion in times, when the soul is impatient, when the closed forms restrain it (let me remind you how much Bartók was warned against it by his teachers): when composition doesn't offer any aesthetic experience, then it turns toward the seemingly free artistic manifestation.

This often ends up in the destruction of earlier forms and so it tests the newly created forms, trying the taste, and so an answer takes shape, which puts forward the succession of times. Everything is imaginable in the drama, except monotony because the senses have to catch up with life hurrying ahead. It is a question of the artist's nature and of the tension, which enables the creative consciousness to assimilate instinct. But those who claim exclusivity and decide in favour of one or the other, might not be aware of the paradox of both: the composition; this spiritual image turns the world evoked by him into his building stones, his object under the sign of eternity. The improvisation, by contrast - provided it is not imitating a style and it remains original - withers immediately in life's experienced magic (and this is a tragic event because this gives the work the necessary credit, the wide background). Actually, both composition and improvisation are „holy and barbaric cobblers“ of the want, therefore all who think they are able to understand and to sew up this want, are haughty and unsatisfied. Because the want is the only eternal in all, which moves, attracts and leads the whole system.

Man perceives this want normally as a surplus, as a wonderful gift. The whole history of the European rationalism – from Plato to this day – is convinced of that. The surplus can be caught only in the extent and character of how this want is perceived. Since the division of labour increased with the time, and as nature's man strived for the creation of a social existence, he became more and more artificially controlled, and in this process his relationship to the want and to the necessity has changed. Thus, we are thinking in a more practical way and the music art has become more rational.

So the great formations have disappeared from the European compositions and from the daily life of the latest time, although they were (and will be) the basic forms in time of every movement, because they comply with the human scale. Simple, but up-to-date movements, motifs, and melodies have faded away, which used to have their communal, artistic, and musical function for thousands of years. They were replaced by more and more complicated, artificial, and mostly extra-musical – thus sub-anthropomorphic - formulas, which are more mechanistic and more constructed. As if the sounding of the completeness would be possible only through the collection of details, as if the creation would be more high-ranking, the more the vessel is filled. The new era offers an endless row of rubbish.

Once, music used to be so important in Ancient China that – in spite of its improvisative character – a deviance from the officially fixed Chinese pentaton-system by one tone had decapitation as a consequence., because they believed that this change constituted a danger for the state's security. Not so long ago, in Europe too, the art of music was considered as the purest manifestation of the truth. It is unnecessary to prove the unique role of music. Today however, music is no more such a truth proclaiming art, and nobody will be beheaded for reasons of music.

Improvisation is linked just to disappeared, or not yet clarified, basic forms; it is looking for and following the human phenomenon's natural laws, which sustain a community. If necessary, it cuts the desire into a divine image or puts it into a demonic mouth; if not otherwise, with the help of protected sound documents.

Can it be more adaptable in a state of disorientation of space and time?

Translation by Marianne Tharan (March 2017)