

# MODERN MUSIC

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## MUSICAL TRANSMIGRATIONS

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THE common conception of "influence" in the art of a master or of a period is that important or characteristic traits of an immediate predecessor are noticeable in the work of the younger artists. In this sense, one speaks of the influence of Wagner, Brahms and Debussy on music between 1900 and 1910. It is not my purpose to deal with this natural, this usual influence of a master on his pupil but rather to discuss a phenomenon which has but recently been disclosed through the progress of modern historical research.

The Hindu religion affirms a belief in the migration of souls. A similar transmigration of ideas after a lapse of centuries can be traced in the history of art. Certain apparently new conceptions of modern inventors prove on close inspection to be a renaissance of old ones, alive centuries ago and carried out for a while before being abandoned and forgotten. There appear to be times when innovations spring up which cannot take root because they are too far in advance of their period. A later age may be more hospitable to the growth of these incomplete ideas, reappearing now in a new light, a purer form, a more comprehensive aspect. It is a strange fact that revolutionary artists have always attributed their innovations to inventiveness, when as a matter of fact they obey some secret law which bids them take up a thread that had fallen to the ground and lain invisible through many generations. All the problems of contemporary art are rooted in the past, reaching down sometimes deep into the ages.

This idea is less startling if one recognizes the fundamental aesthetic and spiritual law that the vital problems of art are nearly constant in all the ages, that they have hardly altered from antiquity to the twentieth century. What changes is the emphasis given to one or the other of these problems, their relative importance. It is scarcely possible to discover any new general theories of art; we can only attach more weight to one which has been somewhat neglected for a time. The same changes of mental attitude recur constantly in long cycles of a thousand or more years; the realistic and the idealistic, classic and romantic follow each other fairly regularly. Each century, however, attempts to solve these eternal, never fully realized problems with different technical means, from a different point of view.



Almost all the innovations of radical modern art may be traced back to some former period. Thus the primitive, medieval *organum*, with parallels of fifths and fourths which were strictly forbidden by the rules of classical, academic art, has been revived after nearly a thousand years. We find the fifths and fourths deliberately exploited by Schoenberg and by the modern French and Russian composers. Those who attended the last international music congress in Paris in 1914 and, at the concert in the Sainte Chapelle, heard motets of the French masters of the thirteenth century, will recall how strikingly reminiscent were these barbaric sounds of the Schoenbergian practice. Fourths, fifths, seconds and sevenths were the intervals used for chords. Sixths and thirds seemed purposely avoided. There was, moreover, a fantastic, polyphonic superposition of several parts differing entirely from each other in tempo, time, measure and key, quite similar to passages in *Pierrot Lunaire*.

How many musicians are aware that the chromatic harmony of 1900 and later was known before, about the year 1600? Schubert, Chopin, Liszt and Wagner are commonly credited with the discovery of this harmony which had been foreign even to Beethoven. Historical research, however, has shown that the

great Italian madrigalists of about 1600, Marenzio, the Prince of Venosa and Monteverdi anticipated Wagner by about two hundred and fifty years in the most surprising manner. A comparison, for instance, of Marenzio's madrigal, *Solo e pensoso*, with Wagner's chromatic *Erda* harmonies in *Rheingold* and *Siegfried* will prove their similarity. The Prince of Venosa and Monteverdi went beyond Wagner; they are in fact the direct predecessors of Richard Strauss and the French impressionists. The astounding modulations of the Prince of Venosa's madrigal, *Resta di darmi noia*, and the boldness of harmony in Monteverdi's madrigal, *Piagn'e sospira*, were not equalled in the nineteenth century and can be understood and appreciated only today. The harmonic progressions of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* are closely related to Monteverdi's practice in *Orfeo*, written three centuries ago. A certain school of recently discovered Italian monodists, like Claudio Saraceni, Benedetti, Belli and others, abound in "false" cross-relations such as F-sharp in the bass sounding together with F-natural in the soprano, which are the delight of our youngest generation of composers. These peculiar cross-relations are, however, even older; they are to be found in Armenian church music, and very ancient Arabian *magams* are similarly built on a scale which has B-natural and E-natural in the first half and B-flat and E-flat in the second half.



Quarter tone music is a typical ultra-modern specialty. In 1550, however, a Roman priest, Don Nicola Vicentino, spent the greater part of his life in speculations on and experiments with "enharmonic" music. These have come down to our time and have revealed a quarter tone music. He even constructed an arcicembalo, an exact counterpart of Alois Haba's quarter-tone piano of 1925.

Italian monody, the declamatory, recitative style, as found in Caccini's *Nuove musiche* of 1602 and in Monteverdi's *Orfeo* and *Incoronazione di Poppea*, is closely related to Wagner's arioso style. It is directly imitated in the modern Italian com-

positions of Pizzetti, Malipiero, and Casella and has also been employed by Debussy and Ravel.

The so-called "linear counterpoint" of Schoenberg and his school has its striking parallel in the polyphony of the old Netherland masters like Ockeghem, Josquin de Près, and Obrecht. This fifteenth century music has a rhythmical and metrical freedom and independence of the single parts which was impossible in later music, restrained by bar-lines. The tendency of 1925 is to free music once more from the restraint of the bar, of the regular measure, and to regain those peculiar and fascinating, "free rhythms" which had been practised with such superior mastery by the old Flemish artists. Hearing a motet by Josquin, it is impossible to tell whether the piece is written in 4/4, 3/4 or 6/8 time, as the measure changes continually and "good," or "strong" parts of the measure, accented in one voice, frequently coincide with unaccented parts of the measure in another voice. In my edition of thirty-eight songs of old German masters and of Monteverdi's madrigals, I have for the first time made evident to the eye these peculiar rhythmical combinations, combinations which were unknown to later music and are now being rediscovered by the most advanced composers. Busoni's second piano sonatina is one of the first modern attempts to utilize the strange "free rhythms." They are also found in the music of primitives and exotics like the African negroes, the American Indians, the Arabs and others.

Another problem of the day is tonality, and its counterpart, atonality. It has become urgent through the exhaustion of the common major and minor scales. The medieval church-modes of Gregorian chant; the exotic, Asiatic, whole tone scale of Debussy; the pentatonic scale of Chinese, Scotch and Indian music, and the irregular quarter and three-quarter tones of Turkish, Persian and Arabian music (impossible on European instruments) are gaining considerable ground and have begun to change and fructify our European musical system.

The peculiar progressions of parallel major thirds, so striking in Debussy's harmony, have been found in compositions of the great German master, Heinrich Schutz, a hundred years before Bach, and an organ-toccata of the Roman organist, Michel-

angelo Rossi, shows a free and systematic use of the same augmented triads.

Many other characteristics of modern art may be found in music of past centuries, but these examples will suffice to show that music is a living organism, not developing according to the fancies of individuals but following an inherent law. While it is considered axiomatic that every art must offer us new products, it is not always recognized that new elements must be an actual growth, organic, necessary, not artificial, whimsical or eccentric. The revolutionary tendencies, the zeal for innovations so characteristic of our day, will prove creative only if the results are a natural consequence of the past. I do not intend to determine here how necessary and organic our present-day innovations are. John Ruskin wrote pregnant words which balance the relative merits of tradition and convention on the one hand, and revolution and innovation on the other: "Frankness is in itself no excuse for repetition, nor audacity for innovation, when the one is indolent and the other unwise."