

# ENGLISH TEXTS

## What is Music

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I would like to answer the question: what is music?  
It's a very interesting and important question. Without an idea of music it's not possible to make music. Given that we must make music.

That we are obliged to make something is unfortunately true. For the simple reason that if we don't, it will be done by others who will do it badly. So our intervention seems necessary to us in order to put things right. This is the reason why we do it.

It cannot be denied, however, that the choice of what we do always depends on what we are able to do, and the technique we have at our disposal, which we have for a certain period of time or which we have had to learn. If we have a really lovely voice we will say that the true music is vocal. The song comes before everything else. If we have learnt to play the violin we will say that the true music is instrumental. If we have managed to learn by heart the conventional chord sequences which make up the so-called harmonic theory, we will be reluctant to agree that the harmonic theory does not form the basis of music. If we possess an ease of movement and an inborn sense of time and rhythmic patterns and are excellent performers on the percussion instruments, we will consider that the theory of rhythm forms the basis of music. Let's say it again then: our opinion on what's to be done (and our opinion on the fact) depends also on our capacity to do it. And our capacity to do it is a result of our education: but our education doesn't depend on us. Or rather it hasn't depended on us (and this is a point on which our reasoning focuses, or rather will focus). Because generally when someone decides to do something he has already received an education. Well now, there are various types of education and various places where it can be received:  
one - a school  
two - a teacher at home  
three - books (our teachers become the authors of books)  
four - musicians in action (seeing them play, seeing them sing).  
And there are two ways generally speaking of receiving an education.  
Accepting it or rejecting it.  
Being diligent or negligent.  
There is the possibility of doing the opposite of the thing we are advised to do or of doing what we advised to do.  
There are two possibilities.

The school is just about the easiest way of getting educated. If we go to school we are obliged to accept the school's rules. We hand ourselves over to the school. The school will see to everything. You don't have to do anything else. Everything is known and will be passed on to you. In exchange not only do you have to pay the school fees but also you must accept and apply a number of rules. I, the student, agree to sit and listen and you, the teacher, in exchange tell me «what is music». And this is not all. Not only will the teacher tell me «what is music» but he will give me a piece of paper which will maintain that I too now know «what is music».

The teacher at home is, however, an education method which is much less straightforward because it costs more or perhaps because it's not so remunerative.

Allow me to explain. A teacher at home will tell you what music is in his opinion. His authority over you is much less. He's your servant and he tries to give you satisfaction. He offers you all the knowledge he possesses. And you can judge whether this knowledge interests you. But if the teacher is preparing you for a school course then the school ritual comes right into your house and your quest must be interrupted.

But you may forgo the symbolic piece of paper where beside your name you will find the title musician with the minimum sacrifice of a bit of cash and a long period of concentration. If you give up this scrap of paper you will be able to turn your teacher into an invaluable research partner who will give you a lot of assistance because he already knows a lot of things, even if he doesn't know everything.

Books give you the opportunity of an apparently total freedom of research, which is in any case pretty extensive. You ought to have a good library in your city — if not studying through books will be rather difficult. Otherwise a lot of money and a good book-seller with a pile of catalogues. And a lot of free time. Because if you go to school or are preparing for a school examination at home you are a student and not a vagabond and you have the right to do that thing only. If you study on your own from books bought or borrowed from the library you are a vagabond, or at any rate a rich vagabond. Thus books involve you in secrecy. But it's an adventure that I assure you is worth trying. Especially if you have a good library like the Central National Library in Florence. Anyhow in the world there are a lot of libraries, at any rate I hope that there are.

As soon as you enter a library and ask yourselves the question «what is music?» you will immediately get from the books six different answers, all of them very beautiful. You will come out of the library set on finding a seventh truth. A seventh answer. And from that moment life will start moving again. Now that you have the knowledge you will want to transform it into action. Into examples. It will be hard but you will be the only person capable of making music.

Seeing musicians in action is, on the other hand, an unconscious way of learning, but it is no less effective. Because although he does it unconsciously, the individual decides and chooses whether he wants to listen or not. He may or may not be fascinated by what he sees and hears. And without realising it he will repeat what he has seen and heard using the same technique. From a social point of view this is very important because there are a lot of people who have had a musical education and don't realise it. And they don't have any official declaration that they are capable of making music. Saying that they are musicians. They are first-rate musicians but they can't join the Musicians' Union because they haven't been making music. And they can't make music because they aren't in the Musicians' Union.

In the present-day society in order to play music it's not necessary to play music, but you have to get someone to write on a scrap of paper that you can play music. Then even if you don't make music it doesn't matter.

Today we are in cemetery.  
It's a sad image, but that's the way it is.  
Our graves are records. It's as if on the records were written: «Here lies Chopin». It's obvious that near a tomb we mustn't make a noise. Silence therefore. Which only goes to show...

But the record follows you everywhere.  
You sit at the piano. You are sad or happy. You are

in a particular frame of mind. You want to express this moment on the piano. A few notes will issue forth. But just look there's the record of Chopin! You can listen to Chopin because you have the record right by you. It's something you've already heard. He certainly knew how to express himself! In comparison. It's a comparison. Understand. Always. But Chopin didn't have records. There in Majorca he had a piano. But he didn't have records of Palestrina. If so, he too, while trying to get modulation effects, an inflected note, an enharmonical passage or an improptu rhythmic stress, would have said: «What are these preciosities, these fragments, this try, try and try again, compared to the vast scope of the great and perfect polyphony which I have been listening to just now», he would have drunk a glass of wine and put on Palestrina again. And Palestrina would have spun round. And Chopin would be sitting there in his armchair drugged by the soud. And I'm not joking. It's really like this. We are at this point. Everyone quite still on his seat, in a row, the seats fixed to the floor, otherwise the members of the audience would go crashing into each other. Dead silence. Otherwise a note of Chopin would be lost. A hundred and fifty years old note. Silence. Hardly anybody dares to do something of his own. Some may say: «If Chopin heard this music he would turn in his grave». And who gives a damn! Let him turn. We've got to think of the living. Not of the others. Of ourselves. Everyone's got to think of himself. And play how and when he likes. Just as when Chopin was alive. This is the point.

We are in a cemetery. The comparison is perfect. In a cemetery we don't do anything so as not to offend the dead. But it's a pause. A proper one. But it's also fitting that there should be a pause. But records are not considered as a pause. From the moment that the cemetery of records is commercial it's not interested in being considered as a pause, that is a short interval, but tends more and more to be considered as a long period. For this reason, the fact that some people who suggest we leave the cemetery and start to play with the children again is very dangerous for the music industry. Because playing with the children in music means that we don't buy records. But we buy instruments. Once only. An instrument lasts a whole lifetime. If you think about it, the greater part of musical instruments are sold with the idea that the instrument is a toy which we can jokingly imitate, or try to imitate, the record. Because on the record there is always a great soloist. (The comparison). The great soloist captured and reproduced a hundred thousand times. So the soloist who isn't absolutely first-class doesn't make sense. Instead the soloist (good or not) will always make sense. Because making music will always make sense. And if one day no one makes music any more because the record has taken over, it will still make sense to play. To act.

Life cannot be wrong. But many people ruin their whole lives trying to show that life is wrong. And they almost succeed. And I think that this is tragic.

So I'll give you some advice. When you go home ring up a piano shop and ask to buy a piano. You can buy a second-hand one for three hundred thousand lira. Otherwise you can hire one for a few

thousand lira a month. And as soon as the piano arrives put your hands on it.

In the nineteenth century thousands of pianists, male and female, played a Nocturne by Chopin in their drawing-rooms. One pianist would play before an audience of ten or twenty listeners. In the early twentieth century hundreds of pianists, male and female, played a Nocturne by Chopin. One pianist played for a hundred, two hundred, three hundred people. In a hall or in a theatre. In the second half of the twentieth century tens of pianists, male and female, would play a Nocturne by Chopin. Tens of millions of people listened to them in their drawing-rooms. Alone.

It's easy to see where this tendency leads.  
one - fall in the number of performers  
two - rise in the number of copies of the *pill*  
(we shall call any object which contains the possibility of reproducing a performance a *pill*).  
three - reduction of the volume — the encumbrance — of the pill.

The limit to aim at is:  
Only one pianist plays Chopin  
(maybe just one time)  
(that is once and for all)  
The number of copies of this performance is infinite.  
The volume of the object which contains the possibility of reproduction is infinitely small.  
The number of listeners to Chopin's Nocturne is infinitely large.  
The reproduction tends to eliminate the bad performance.  
Then it tends to eliminate the repetition of the good performance.  
Then it tends to eliminate the performance.  
It tends to eliminate the *action of playing*.

This is not a joke.

It's a joke to say that we've already reached this point.  
It's a joke to say that we could avoid getting to this point.  
But it's not a joke to say that there is the organized tendency towards this limit.

Certainly we could avoid getting to this limit.  
But it's necessary to reverse our intentions.  
Without reversing our intentions it's not possible *not* to reach this limit.

There are areas where the organization — and the proposal — of such a tendency has been obstructed at once. And the tendency has been reversed.

Technology found the way to make love with a syringe. This possibility has been rejected.  
Technology found the way to eat using only pills. This possibility has been rejected.  
Technology has found the way to make music with pills. This possibility has not been rejected.

Pop music is something that allows us to hope we may avoid this danger.  
The enemy number one of the pill (record, tape, etc...) is the GUITAR.

This is because pop music, although it uses the record in a commercial way, doesn't exclude but rather includes violently

the chance to play  
the chance to play  
the ease of playing.

When we say that reproduction tends to eliminate the performance it sounds like a contradiction. What does the apparatus reproduce if it isn't a performance? Without a performance there's no reproduction. How can reproduction eliminate the origin of its action? If reproduction means reproduction of a performance, if there's no performance what is reproduced? So the theory that reproduction tends to eliminate the performance doesn't make sense?  
No.

A phenomenon must be described according to its general tendency.

In other words:

First stage.

Reproduction tends to eliminate the bad performances. It doesn't reproduce bad performances.

Second stage.

Reproduction tends to eliminate good but not excellent performances. It doesn't reproduce good performance.

Third stage.

Reproduction accepts only excellent performances (this is the stage we have reached at the present time).

So the tendency to reduce the number of performances is directly proportional to the increase in the number of copies of a reproduction.

That is to say the number of performances is inversely proportional to the number of copies of a reproduction.

Now we should ask ourselves: does the number of copies of a reproduction at the present time show a tendency to rise or fall? It's impossible not to answer that the output will be increasingly higher. The reproduction systems will get technically better.

The increase in the output means, however, that there is less need for repeated originals.

So we'll come to the point when there's only one performance reproduced an infinitely large number of times.

One performance.

One time only.

Once and for all.

In this way reproduction results from performance but tends to replace the performance.

So it tends to eliminate it.

Is there a philosophy which takes the side of this tendency?  
Yes.

The philosopher — conscious or unconscious accomplices of the technicians — will tell you that:

it's not true that

music is beautiful

it's true that

a music is beautiful.

We are up to our necks in this propaganda at the present time.

The myth of the music of the past. The myth of some great musicians of the past. The myth of some works by these great musicians. The myth of the great soloists of the present time.

They tell us that music is beautiful at certain moments which have produced perfect works.

Chopin. And not all Chopin. The Nocturnes. And here too there is the distinction between some and not others.

And the soloists. Cortot. Benedetti Michelangeli. Rubinstein.

When all is said and done, gentlemen, in today's society there are only three people who can play Chopin.

And maybe in this society there is only one man who can play Chopin: Cortot.

However we must confess that the last Cortot — he was by then an old man — was not up to Cortot at the height of his powers.

So, there was a moment of Cortot.

Searching for perfection. In our search for music's substance the way gets ever narrower.

Searching for the perfect moment.

But we have to admit that we've already covered a good distance and we're a lot nearer than we think at the present time.

We've already spread the news that it's difficult to play an instrument and that only a few men can play one.

We've already spread the news that it's terribly difficult

to make music. Anybody who makes music today

is looked on with pity as one who gives himself too many airs. He is asked to show more humility and stop it.

We are searching for the most beautiful music of the past.

For the best musician of the present.

We're pretty close to finding them.

Maybe Chopin-Cortot.

Then that will be that.

From the moment we've found them

From the moment we've spread the news

From the moment nobody has the courage to laugh

at the spreading of the news.

From that moment music will be finished.

From that moment the pill will be ready to repeat a perfect music an infinite number of times. A single

unrepeatable music.

We're a lot nearer than we think to finding a single unrepeatable music that we can call Music.

We're a lot nearer than we think to rejecting life by playing, that is to say rejecting music.

We oughtn't to ask industry for such a high level of comfort as that we are offered today.

We need comfort but we also need difficulties.

Industry must supply us — sell us — difficulties as well.

Today the market only offers ways of getting rid of difficulties.

We've reached the point of demand for and supply of ridiculous comforts.

Comforts like the possibility of inserting the record, but — finally — not having to place the needle on the record.

We don't have to change the record.

We can decide what to listen to not for a mere 15 minutes but for 60 minutes, without having to move.

We don't have to — at long last — get up at the end

of the record and take it off. The apparatus stops on its own.

It expels it on its own.

We have the chance to stay quite still.

But do we want to stay still?

If we carry on like this — if we don't reverse the trend — we won't even have to insert the record or tape.

Before long we'll have boxes with all the music in our homes.

We'll just have to press a button.

Then it'll be enough just to look at a particular coloured point instead of another. We won't even have to lift an arm or finger.

Then it'll be enough just to think of a particular music.

Until we'll be asking for music without choice.

We'll be free of choice as well.

We must ask for difficulties.

Difficult and complicated machines to tackle and control.

We have to ask industry for the opposite of comfort.

Anyhow, now we can say what music is.

Now we know.

Music is playing.

Music is playing.

Music is playing.

Music is playing.

Music is playing.

Music is playing.

Music is playing. ■