

with which this globe is filled, no more prayer to shield us from injuries or to turn circumstances to our favour, in a miraculous manner,—since no mischief, no enemy, no outside power can ever take away this paradise in us, this rich inner life of heart and soul and mind, whose loss would be the only *real* “evil,”—but our prayer has become a medium to bring us into conformity and harmony with the Spirit that moves and lives within us and within this whole creation, a prayer of gratitude for being thought worthy to form such a transitory part, however infinitesimal, of the Divine Essence, and an *acceptance* of this life and this world as it is, as the unceasing emanation of an ever present Godhead. Now we can no longer pray in the *optative* mood, for uncertain blessings and doubtful earthly benefits, but we must pray in the *indicative* mood, since now our faith and its aspirations are fulfilled. And therefore, if we still wish to continue to call that mysterious Force of life and energy by the name by which the Jewish seer called it in Palestine, and pray the prayer he taught us, we would say :

“Our father in heaven, hallowed is thy name, thy Kingdom has arrived and is here, realized within ourselves, realized within the progressing universe ; thy will and nothing but thy will is done on earth and in heaven. The daily bread—health for the body, knowledge for the mind, justice and goodness for the soul—is placed within the reach of everyone, if we but succeed in reforming, gradually and persistently, all that is unfair in our social institutions. Our trespasses are forgiven in the same measure as we are capable to forgive our offenders and thus, by blotting out hatred and resentment, restore the harmony with our fellow-men and with the world. And thou canst *never* lead us into temptation, with our heart and our mind abandoned to thy dictates ; for, by thy presence felt and realized within us, thou hast already delivered us from all evil.”

The Hero as Musician—Beethoven

An address delivered at the
First Unitarian Church of Toronto
at the Evening Service of Sunday
March 2nd, 1913

by

Luigi von Kunits

of the Canadian Academy of Music

JEDE echte Erzeugung der Kunst ist unabhängig, mächtiger als der Künstler selbst, und kehrt durch ihre Erscheinung zum Göttlichen zurück und hängt nur darin mit dem Menschen zusammen, dass sie Zeugnis gibt von der Vermittlung des Göttlichen zu ihm. *Brahmsen.*

MUSIC occupies a peculiar place among the arts. While all other arts represent or refer to some outside reality of material experience, tangible forms and shapes, actual scenes and events from life, however modified and spiritualized, music alone, at least in its purest presentation, where it is not connected with an oral text and where it is not intended to be merely descriptive, represents nothing but itself, expresses purely musical ideas through purely musical means. Although we may apply terms used in rhetoric to designate the constructive elements of a musical composition (speaking of motives, thoughts, ideas, phrases, sentences, development sections, questions, answers, preparations, climaxes, etc.), we are fully aware that only a remote analogy, not a true identity is to be admitted in the vicarious application of those names. Musical thoughts appeal directly to the musical mind,—in their intellectual construction, in their imaginative association and in their emotional tenor,—and are thus understood, intuitively perceived, and felt, without the intercourse of *abstract* reasoning, of *projective* imagination and of *psychically definable* sentiment.

The logic which governs the construction of the movement of a symphony, the interlacing of its phrases, the blending of its melodies, the development of its motives, the upbuilding of its climaxes, the symmetry of its parts,—is a logic inherent in the very nature of the musical atom, so to say, not a logic of abstract syllogisms and methods. Musical imagination, although practically limitless, is confined to the purely *musical* possibilities of

the tonal problems, to their various alterations and different treatments, their modulations, their colourings and rhythmical modifications. And the emotions which the musical mind receives by listening to a composition, although they may be of the most intense nature,—now melting our hearts in musing tenderness during a soft and plaintive cantilena, now arousing and stirring our expectation, while the webs of a gradual climax are woven closer and closer, now kindling in us an overflowing and boundless enthusiasm, when the great principal theme mightily asserts itself in the final close,—those emotions are not necessarily connected with anything definitely human, anything which in actual life causes joy or mourning, exaltation or despair, but they are in a sense, like allegories, mystic and mysterious, they possess the most definite and powerful reality for the musician, and they may not exist at all for a *non-musical* person.

Consequently, there is no way of understanding music but *through* music, and all attempts of explaining to the layman what music "means," are of no avail, and are even worse than useless, when they suggest to him to think of something else besides the music he hears, in order to understand it. Nor has aesthetic criticism much positive value for the musician: Whether a composition is considered "good" or "bad," is almost wholly a matter of the individual taste or of the prevailing fashion—factors that are subject to all sorts of changes, both with the individual and with the public; all a critic can say is whether a composition is conform to the accepted rules of artistry, and whether an audience seems to enter into its spirit, to realize the composer's intentions and to appreciate the form in which they are presented. That is even true about the style of *performing* artists, which also changes with the fashion. While, twenty years ago, a sound and well-balanced, poised interpretation won the highest praise from the connoisseurs, we, at present, witness a tendency toward morbid sentimentality and excessive exaggeration; and performances which, twenty years ago, would have impressed an audience almost like caricatures, are now hailed as true and inspired representations of convincing "temperament," because we

have lost the sense for the moderate and well-balanced, and our irritable nerves only respond to the excessive.

But whatever fashion there is in music, and whatever different hold music takes of people at different times, it is always true that the realm of ideas expressed in pure music, is something apart from every other realm of mental concern, something that seems to have no link with the material world except the medium of sound waves, something that in its subtlety and, so to say, rarefaction of the crude matter, comes closest to the *spiritual*, if we accept the term "spirit" in the old-fashioned signification as opposite to "matter." "Spirit" originally means the moving of the air, and this is what sound waves actually consist of: longitudinal vibrations of the air, of different speed and different duration.

* * * * *

As to the *man*, who occupies his life in this peculiar sphere of ideas, we should *a priori* expect him to be different from other people. We shall not enter into the question whether it is advisable to be merged body and soul in this particular art sphere, whether it is not more normal for man to develop *all* his faculties—intellectual, moral, physical—in a harmonious way, instead of just throwing himself on one single branch of activity and making this the exclusive means of expressing his individuality. Nor shall we, for the present, raise the question whether an artist creates the highest in his art by excluding himself from all other interests or by, on the contrary, drawing into his sphere of observation and artistic moulding the widest possible area of human experience. We only state that a musician who is all absorbed in his art, is liable to be somewhat detached from the current life of his time, having his mind mostly filled with ideas which, to the ordinary man, are partly unintelligible, partly useless. The mental energy spent in this fashion, often leaves not enough mental energy for the ordinary business of life, and the interest occupied in the realm of music, somewhat diminishes the interest in human affairs in general. People who cannot understand this psychological condition,

are apt to ridicule the musician as a man with his head in the clouds, and his feet stumbling over pebbles. They may not only ridicule him, but they may also point out the practical, economic uselessness of his pursuit, by showing that mostly those musicians who cater to the prevailing taste, by writing cheap popular music and light operas, or by letting themselves be managed and advertised in circus fashion as the "greatest in the world"—are coming money, while the real "genius" is starving in the garret; and since the ability of "coming money" seems, in our present stage of society, an economic and social duty, they are perfectly right, from their standpoint. And they may further point out how *selfish*, as a rule, a musical artist is, as he generally postpones everything to the pursuit of his ideas which, when he is truly inspired and wholly in their grasp, rank to him higher than family, friends, country, social duties and what not. In a man of science, those shortcomings might easier be condoned, because each new scientific discovery benefits humanity in a positive manner; but what economic value has the completion of a new symphony? The very fact that society has little economic use for musicians, causes their uncertain income, and this again causes their unreliableness as debtors and their frequent financial failures, which cannot be denied. Their lack of experience in worldly affairs renders them even incapable to *bear* prosperity if it comes to them; they risk their income in foolish expenses, in ill-advised undertakings, even in reckless gambling, as many instances past and present, easily prove. Nor does their *moral* sense seem normally developed, if we notice the extraordinary ease with which some great masters severed and connected their family relations, broke business agreements and showed themselves disloyal to friends.

So the verdict of many people about the musician would be: "Not very keen in intellect, not well informed about things in general, incapable of dealing in a right manner with worldly affairs, of doubtful moral calibre, economically inefficient, of a pronounced selfish disposition and devoid of practical usefulness." If anyone suspects that I am exaggerating, let him simply put the question to any business man of this great city of

Toronto, whether he would like his son to become a musician, and hear the answer.

* * * * *

From this anything but flattering portrait of the profession, as it is commonly conceived, it would seem at the first glance, immensely difficult, to give a *hero* in its ranks any plausibility whatever. The characteristics of a hero are, above all, his moral prowess, his pluck and persistency in overcoming obstacles and achieving success against tremendous odds, his unshaken courage and his readiness to sacrifice everything, life included, for the sake of the cause to which he devotes himself. If he lacks that steadfastness of purpose, if he is simply wrapped up in the fancies of his imagination, without translating his ideas into deeds, he is only a *dreamer*, not a hero. If he meekly surrenders his life, without deliberately making his very death instrumental for the promotion of his cause, he is a *martyr*, not a hero. And if the cause to which he obstinately clings, is of no benefit to the human race in general or his nation in particular, in the way of improving their condition, uplifting them morally, enlightening them intellectually, raising their well-being economically, then his wasted life is that of a crank, not a hero's.

Now, if I would undertake to show that this popular conception of a musician, as it undoubtedly exists, is an erroneous one, or that, while similar types are frequently met with, at all ages and at all places, they do by no means constitute the essential character of a musical artist, it would be a mistaken attempt, if I endeavoured to do so by way of deductive argument. Convictions are neither made nor unmade by logical reasoning, as the modern psychologist full well knows (and as it was admirably and exhaustively demonstrated from this pulpit, two Sundays ago, by the Rev. R. J. Hutcheon, our esteemed pastor.) Convictions (or "prejudices," which is but another name for convictions, according to the standpoint of the examiner) are merely plausible opinions, views that have taken hold of the individuals'

mind or of the people's mind, and which nobody takes the trouble to sift down to the bottom. By inductive inquiry you might prove their weak and unstable foundation, as Socrates did of old, and arouse doubt in their ultimate reliability, without, however, giving us anything more certain, unless it be the unavoidable suspicion that all so-called "truth" is of a subjective nature and of mere relative validity, that—outside of the exact sciences—the human mind is not capable of establishing any firm truth whatever, and that, therefore, scepticism that suspends judgment, and agnosticism that abandons transcendental research, are, after all, the safest roads to travel. Practical life would indeed come to a standstill, if everyone was required to have the principles of his conduct based on a deep conception of life and of the Universe, a conception that should be the outcome of his own profound deductive reasoning. And the fallacy of the belief that false opinions might be changed by argument, is exemplified every day, in political life as well as in religion. No one *e. g.* believes in the existence of God, because it is *proven* to him; and no one disbelieves it because he has, with Kant, recognized the futility of all such proofs. One may believe in Him as the source of energy, as the supreme cause of the universe, without, at the same time, believing in Him as a providential agency influenced by our prayers and ever ready to interfere in our favour or at least mindful to lead all our happenings to a satisfactory ending. All this will depend on one's own interpretation of individual experience and, as such will be subject to changes even with the same person. Any philosopher who intended to build a system on deductive reasoning only, and to exclude from his theory all mere assertions, would soon find himself hopelessly embarrassed, because everything, included his own identity, becomes questionable.

We can, therefore, do no better than oppose views to views, and their convincingness will depend on the practical illustrations we are able to give them. If we succeed in finding for the type of a musician a man who combines the highest achievement in his art with a loftiness of ideas, with a noble grandeur of the soul, with an ineffati-

gale perseverance in his chosen path and in his mission through overwhelming odds and obstacles, with an unselfish friendship and charitable conduct of life,—then we have found *the hero as musician*, and a glance at this type will be sufficient to turn us away from the popular, disparaging conception which is prevalent. It will at least show that a musician *need* not conform to that conception, although there may be a number of specimens to corroborate it.

Now, did such a man ever exist? Musical history tells us of many prominent masters who possessed *some* of those traits which we would admire in our hero; it shows us the conscientious toil and the domestic virtue of a Bach, the loving simplicity of a Mozart, the kindness and naive piety of a Haydn, the ever ready generosity of a Liszt, the childlike singleheartedness of a Schubert, the rugged manly faith of a Brahms, the high intellectual culture of a Mendelssohn, the tender heart and high-strung sentiment of a Chopin, the emotional depth of a Schumann. But there is only one master who seems to combine *all* the accomplishments and thus becomes the prototype of our *musical hero*, one about whom there is not a single dissenting voice concerning his all-surpassing greatness in art as well as in life: that man is *Ludwig van Beethoven*.

* * * * *

The data of Beethoven's life are more or less familiar to everyone who ever took some interest in musical matters, and we shall therefore touch them only slightly, just enough to recall them to our minds. The significance of this life, the vital lessons we may draw from it, have not so much to do with haphazard incidents and outward circumstances, but rather with the man's real work and his character.

He was born 1770 in Bonn. His childhood was an unhappy one: his father was a drunkard who treated his son with relentless severity and exploited his precocious talent to earn the bread for the family: at the age of

twelve, the boy had to keep not only himself, but provide for his two younger brothers as well. Luckily he soon came in contact with some of the greatest musicians and musical teachers of his time, and also in more or less close and familiar touch with the intellectual currents of that epoch,—the epoch of Goethe, Schiller, Kant, Lessing and Herder. Some well-to-do friends eventually took an interest in him and enabled him to go to Vienna, the musical center of Europe, as a student. The only moderate assistance he was given, obliged him, however, to earn his living by giving piano lessons and playing odd engagements which were not always of the dignified kind. Haydn and his other teachers recognized his talent, but took no great personal interest in his career ; his reserved manner and shyness, combined with a determined show of self-centered independence and with a sort of grim obstinacy in his artistic conceptions which seemed to be radically opposed to the style and fashion of the day, kept many away from him and prevented the growth of any personal affection with most people with whom he came in contact. By and by, a small circle of friends was formed, who began to appreciate his genius, but even to the end of his life, the critics did not cease to find fault with his work, and the public at large continued more or less in apathy and indifference. Nevertheless, he worked on and on, as the years passed by, and his compositions, in their consecutive order, gained in importance and became full of depth and meaning.—a meaning such as music had never before been thought susceptible of, as he enriched the means of expression, of rhythmical contrasts, of thematic development and of orchestral colouring. The sonata, the quartette, the symphony, from a playful, pleasing suite of four movements as it had been under Haydn and Mozart, became a vast temple of imposing architecture that sheltered in its interior the noblest and loftiest ideas of the human soul, its most exuberant exaltations of joy as well as its deepest sorrows, the fervid prayer of the religious mind, the majestic progress of the victor in battle, the idyllic nature of the country, the humour of passing moods, the frolicsome merriment of a happy gathering, the deep meditations

of solitude, the passion of ardent love as well as the passion of hopeless despair,—in short, all that life contains and offers and inflicts in its various aspects and vicissitudes, typifying, transfiguring, and reconciling all in this higher unity of a tonal edifice. Music became imbued with a significance undreamed of before, it became a powerful means of expression where words failed to be a medium, it acquired a subtle suggestiveness by the way in which the musical ideas were arranged, associated, subordinated to each other, differently accentuated and rhythmically modified.

That was his conscious and avowed mission, to make instrumental music a vehicle of the greatest aspirations of which the human soul is capable, to transform it, from the mere pastime it had been, into an allegoric embodiment of all the most earnest and momentous thoughts and emotions of man, thus raising him far above the petty and annoying details of his daily drudgery, and lifting him, at least for the time being, up into a sublime atmosphere where he finds all his joys and sorrows transfigured in beautiful and consoling melody and harmony, and where the soul forgets and is delivered from the miseries of its earthly career. This was his aim and purpose in life ; and how he gradually achieved it, in his successive works, no student of them need be told. His compositions are still our greatest musical treasure, and their adequate interpretation is still the highest test for the performing artist. To those who listen to them with an understanding mind, they offer far more than a purely musical pleasure ; they lift them into regions unknown not only to the ordinary man, but also to the scientist, to the philosopher, to the theologian, to the painter, to the poet even, regions so sublime that man ceases as it were to be mere man, and that the word of Paul seems to be fulfilled : "Ye are gods." Beethoven himself says in a letter to the archduke Rudolph, one of his pupils : "There is nothing higher but to approach the Deity closer than other men, and then spread its rays among the human race." In those words he manifestly declares how he conceives his own mission and the aim and purpose of his art : music, to him, preaches, consoles, counsels, inspires, prophesies.

And look at the long series of master works he has created : an opera, nine symphonies, numerous sonatas for all instruments, quartettes, masses, songs, concertos, chamber music of various kinds, and choral works! And then consider the difficulties under which the master created them : the uncertainty of a sufficient income, the fickleness of his friends, the life-long want of a fixed position, the sneering comments of the critics, the insolence of cheating publishers, the failures of so many performances, the indifference of the public at large, the hopelessness of poverty, the fatal disappointments in love, disappointments that kept him, all his life, from founding a home of his own and from the domestic happiness for which he so ardently longed ; then that terrible calamity, his increasing deafness, that put a melancholy barrier between him and mankind and robbed him of the perception of his own works ; and finally the trials with his worthless nephew for whom he cared like the most tender father, and who rewarded all his sacrifices with the most shameful ingratitude, that broke his heart and undermined his health and threw him on a sickbed of long and painful suffering, from which only death released him,—death at fifty-seven years of age ! Consider all that, and then tell me where you could find a greater and worthier example of a hero, a more stirring call for us to follow in his footsteps, a more vital illustration of all that is noble, manly, strong, pure, high and unselfish in human life.

Is it not as if he talked to us like this :

Look how little all these adverse outward circumstances I was placed in, hindered me from following my path, from shaping my own career, from thinking high thoughts, and doing great deeds. Therefore, in your own life, whatever your lot may be,—be strong and be patient ! Take things as they come, and keep hard at the game, just the same ! Be economical, learn how to do without things, repress your desires, lead a simple life, work cheerfully and with enthusiasm and enjoyment, and stick to method and discipline. Whenever your work don't please, remember that no one *can* please everybody : even the greatest masters are and always have been

shamefully criticized, belittled, ridiculed, maligned and misunderstood ; and especially the small boys will delight in throwing stones and in parading their disrespect : whoever rises above mediocrity, cannot help becoming their target ; to see you get angry about it, only increases their desire for mischief, and they'll molest you all the more. But, after all,—are you *yourself* pleased with your own work ? You are finding new faults every day with your individuality as well as with your efforts, in spite of all your endeavours ; you behold other men of more original aptitude, of greater physical strength, of a readier presence of mind, of more powerful concentration, of a happier temperamental constitution and more favourable antecedents to their several callings, and, consequently, of far higher achievements,—and that discourages and disheartens you so that you often feel like abandoning things altogether. But patience and "holy doggedness," so to say, might yet carry you far, even if the summits of the hills should be inaccessible. Life is not the secure possession of acquisitions—this is a nonsensical chimera—but a continuous *striving* after them ; even what you—seemingly—already possess, you must reconquer every day, or your skill fails, your capacity lacks, your memory flees, your knowledge is forgotten ; just as your body must be fed and taken care of and exercised every day, to keep in proper health and to remain an apt tool. So don't be moved off the track, in spite of disappointments and discouragements, and in spite of the ever growing realization of your own shortcomings. You are bound to make *mistakes*, just as you are bound to always and everywhere find *trouble* of some sort—that is life : a progressive motion under difficulties, the steering of a ship amidst various obstacles,—but don't alter its course ; in spite of everything—move onward !

And all these admonitions might be brought under one common head : Don't blindly follow your natural inclinations and propensities, your animal instincts and cravings ! To resent an injury, to fly up in a temper, to abuse your enemies, to show your disappointments, to freely announce your troubles, to put your Ego into foremost discussion and special consideration, with the ex-

clusion of any other topic, to readily believe the flatterer and to prepare revenge for the offender, to insist upon carrying your point in an argument, to get tired with an uncongential daily routine of duties, to take up or leave go your work according to the inclination of the moment, to get "cross" if you are "crossed" by men or by fate, to feel dejected if you are abused, ridiculed or criticized, to utterly collapse when your mind seems beyond control, your skill paralyzed, and every attempt a failure, when you once again palpably realize your limitations—physical, mental, economical,—when your whole life seems to have been but an endless chain of mistakes and an unintermitted series of troubles and humiliations, from your very childhood,—all that is the natural attitude of the *weak*—and we all are weak mortals ; all that has to be counteracted day by day, hour by hour ; and this self-discipline, self-control, self-training is *wisdom*,—not good, sound judgment in general, or a mere knowledge or conception of some such rules, but the habit or the routine of their constant application in matters both little and big, in the circle of the family as well as in the dealings with the world. The practice makes the master, and the watching of every detail is the consummation of the artist.

* * * * *

But I cannot close these few and merely suggestive remarks about Beethoven and his life work without touching on something that brings him particularly near to us Unitarians, and that is his *spiritual* convictions. The material from which we may draw conclusions as to his religious beliefs, is found in many stray remarks (some of them of considerable length) in his letters. We easily discover a gradual evolution from the anthropomorphic conception of the Deity, which was but the natural result of his Roman Catholic training, to an all-embracing *pantheistic* comprehension of the Eternal Principle, such as it was proclaimed in Goethe's "Faust," the work he admired more than anything else in literature. It is highly interesting to observe the several psychological phases of this evolution. They are familiar to most of

us from our own individual experience ; but in Beethoven's high-strung nature each crisis appears with an elementary outbreak, with an emotional force, with an undisguised ruthlessness as it is seldom witnessed in others. When he repeatedly *curses* his Creator for afflicting him with deafness, when he remonstrates and rebels against the Almighty for visiting him with so much and so undeserved unhappiness, when he at last realizes that no supernatural Mercy or Justice or protecting Providence in heaven governs his life or rectifies human doings and events, what a depth of despair, what an outburst of despondency !

And then, gradually, with the growing years, the conviction rises in his mind, that all this Goodness and Mercy and Justice and Charity for which he was vainly seeking above and outside of this world, was forever present and manifesting its power in *himself* and in all men that are noble and good and just,—an immediate offspring of the source of Energy and the principle of Order that permeates the whole universe, and that regulates the motion of the stars and the growth of life on the planets, as well as the eternal progress of the human race and the unfolding of every single being. All the calamities and evils that befall the individual, are unavoidable results of collisions among the multitudinous components into which the primitive, generating force continuously propagates and divides itself. But the final *resultant* of these numerous parallelograms of forces and of motions is bound to be identical with the line of direction along which this whole Universe is forever moving towards greater destinies. In this sense, then, God is forever with us, not like a mystic angel guarding a helpless child from accidents, but as the source of all our high thoughts and noble deeds and heroic actions, of all that makes us take a co-operative part in creation and evolution, of all that quickens, strengthens and accelerates the normal progressive *motion* of world and mankind, as that motion was planned by the all-superseding wisdom of the Supreme Mind, at the beginning of time.

And now, there is no more rebellion against fate, no more fault-finding with God for the evils and imperfection