



THE EUROPEAN MUSICAL SHIPWRECK

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A Brief Musical Review

Dance and song, which are at the origin of music, are known to all civilizations.

The ancient Greeks mastered sound, as can still be seen today in their theaters. Pythagoras (c. 580-495 BC) attempted to access the harmony of the spheres, while Plato (c. 428-348 BC) declared, "Music gives soul to our hearts and wings to our thoughts."

The early Chinese measured the morale of a kingdom by the quality of its music.

In Christianity, the primordial sound is postulated as the founder ("In the beginning was the Word"). Gregorian chant is part of the heritage of ancient Mediterranean liturgies, while drawing from a Nordic source. Subsequently, the architects of cathedrals and churches perpetuated the primordial role of the human voice.

In contrast, the Koran does not mention music, and some fundamentalists even advocate the destruction of instruments.

In medieval times, musical notation appeared, which made it possible to preserve the precise memory of compositions and to form orchestras in which musicians played together on different scores instead of improvising in turn on a common theme.

In the 12th century, polyphony was created in the construction of Notre-Dame de Paris. This combination of melodies or musical parts, sung or played at the same time, is the result of ancient practices, both liturgical and popular.

From the Renaissance onwards, the notion of pleasure predominated. According to the Irish scholar Robert Boyle (1627-1691), who distinguished it from acoustics, "music has for its object sound insofar as it is pleasing to the ear."

The invention of musical writing made possible the existence of symphony orchestras in which

musicians could play together to different scores.

In the 17th century, after Monteverdi, Italian opera conquered all of Europe, except France, where Louis XIV himself took the stage to dance to the music of Lully. With opera, for which real palaces were built, the combination of the orchestra, lyric and dance brought these three arts to an unprecedented level.

National anthems appeared for the first time in England in the 18th century, inspired by the religious hymns sung during battles. In France, the *Te Deum* and *Domine, salvum fac regem* served to "divinize" the king as the embodiment of the fatherland, and their subsequent replacement by *La Marseillaise* marked a transfer of the sacred.

In the middle of the 19th century, choirs and open-air music developed considerably. A little later, the Belle Époque saw the golden age of music stands, which marked a great movement towards the democratization of musical practice. In 1899, France had seven thousand civilian bands and four hundred military bands.

For three centuries, European "classical tonality" permeated countless unparalleled masterpieces.

At the beginning of the 20th century, however, artists undertook a movement of "deconstruction" of the musical rules, considered "reactionary," proposing atonal, dodecaphonic and serial music.

This new compositional technique was not successful among the mass of listeners. The human ear, even without notions of music theory, hears false notes, and all the massive subsidies granted to Pierre Boulez (1925-2016) and others since the Pompidou presidency were not be able to change this singular characteristic of music that distinguishes it from other arts. The success of film and video game music, often by well-known composers, illustrates the public's resistance to the spread of atonal music.

However, a divergent opinion was formulated by the writer and music lover Lucien Rebatet (1903-1972), author of the masterful book *Une histoire de la musique* (1969), who praised atonalism by considering Arnold Schönberg (1874-1951) as "the culmination of great German music."

After World War I, the arrival of jazz in the baggage of the U.S. Army reflected a real shift in the musical

center of gravity, which until then had remained European. In the 1930s, the Americans also developed "muzak," or elevator music, which colonized public places.

Also, from the other side of the Atlantic, the Scopitone, a combination of image and sound, spread to France in the 1960s, followed by the music video in the 1980s.

In 2017, the South Korean song Gangnam Style surpassed 3 billion views on YouTube.

In recent years, classical music has come under attack in the name of anti-racism. For example, Oxford University has recently published a report claiming that "white European music of the slave period great distress to students of color" . This is an "intersectional" discourse that clearly ignores the existence of singers Barbara Hendricks and Jessye Norman.

Music as a Cultural Practice

In so-called primitive societies, sorcerers and shamans used the psychic effects of rhythm or music in activities related to the sacred.

Today, the disc jockey is a mere sound technician without psychic or religious endowments, although he is capable of appreciating the sound effects experienced by the dancers. As in ancestral techniques, but without ritual supervision, psychotropic drugs are consumed to induce the participants to feel a collective social fusion and temporarily break with reality.

In addition, the mass production of works made possible by technology has brought about a real revolution in the relationship with sound, favoring the rupture of traditional social relationships and the emergence of artificial conflicts in families. Recordings and broadcasting have also gradually made music kiosks and street singers disappear.

Now the listener can remain alone and still feel a sense of freedom. However, this feeling must be relativized, as young people in particular are strongly influenced by large-scale commercial operations that promote lifestyles associated with pseudo-rebelliousness.

Politicians have also turned their attention to large music festivals, the model for which remains

Woodstock in 1969, as such events are likely to channel the subversive impulses of participants. On July 14, 2011, a "Concert for Equality," organized by SOS Racisme at the Parisian Champ de Mars, brought together a million people. Since 1998, the Paris Techno Parade has brought together some 300,000 "partygoers" each year, while its Berlin counterpart has exceeded one million.

In fact, computer tools now allow technicians, who know nothing about music theory or the principles of composition, to offer their creations to a large public.

Orchestrating the Reaction

Like food products, musical productions can contain toxic elements, which is all the more harmful since an individual's cultural frame of reference often corresponds to the music he or she plays or listens to.

Thus, even among activists conscious of their deep-rooted identity, it is not uncommon to find the predominance of musical tastes borrowed from the "cultural occupation troops."

The organizers of the Manif pour tous, who played techno music during the demonstrations, did not distinguish themselves from the soundtrack of Gay Pride, which anticipated their political failure.

[Thierry Decruzy urges](#) "dissidents" to draw inspiration, among others, from a "French identity rock" (RIF) group such as, In Memoriam, which performed in the middle of the NATO war in Belgrade in April 1999, or from the female group Les Brigandes, whose references are openly inspired by the [counter-revolutionaries of the Vendée](#).

He also recommends drawing on the repertoires of film music, epic video game music and classical compositions, while supporting singers committed to the defense of identities and drawing inspiration from a living musical practice as rich as that of the folk choirs of the Baltic countries.

Johan Hardoy writes from France. This article appears courtesy of [El Manifesto](#).

Featured: *Instruments de musique (Musical Instruments)*, by Anne Vallayer-Coster; painted in 1770.

