

*Right-Hemisphere*

*Conducting, Nr. 4*

When the hall is heard  
filled by the emotions  
created by the music,  
whose emotions are they?

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Published in Australia by Maxime's Music.

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November, 2014

## When the hall is heard filled by the emotions created by the music, whose emotions are they?

First of all, some important facts about the emotions as pertains to conducting:

1. The basic emotions and their expression are the same for all people on earth. There is no such thing as a Chinese smile, a German smile, etc.
2. The basic emotions are genetic, thus they are in place before birth. The smile can be seen in the face of the fetus, but it is not a learned expression for it has never seen a smile.
3. Considering the several million years which span the development of the human species, the so-called modern period, our period, includes the past 10,000 years. Therefore, since all the developmental processes are in place, it has been speculated that if one could go back to the age of the cave painters in Spain and France and adopt a new-born infant and bring him to a family living today, that child would grow up as a normal child.

The significance of this is that Bach, Mozart and Beethoven are to be considered identical to us in their emotional makeup and should not be thought of as men from some distant period. If the contemplative conductor in his study comes to identify a certain emotion in some passage in Mozart, it is very likely to be identical with what Mozart himself felt. Beethoven's *Rondo*, Op. 129, "Rage over a lost penny" expresses a frustration every listener today can identify with.

4. It is important to remember that the composer had the feeling first, before he wrote notes on paper. Thus the challenge for the conductor is to try to understand what the composer felt, not what he wrote.

After the composer puts his feelings on paper in the form of music notation, the burden is then on the performer to faithfully convey this to the listener. Let us say a pianist is going to perform a Beethoven Sonata. The notes are on paper but the duty falls to the pianist to create the emotion, for the composer is no longer here to represent himself in person. The pianist must become Beethoven, and for the reasons given above, assuming contemplative study, he will succeed if discovering feeling is his goal. The great pianist, Alfred Brendel addressed this very point.

Although I find it necessary and refreshing to *think* about music, I am always conscious of the fact that *feeling* must remain the Alpha and Omega of a musician; therefore my remarks proceed from feeling and return to it.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in *The New Yorker*, May 30, 1977.

Carlo Maria Giulini makes the very same point with regard to the conductor.

An interpreter, in the moment he is involved in a great expression of art, becomes himself the composer. A great actor, in the moment he is playing Iago, has to be Iago. A great interpreter must live with a deep 100 per cent conviction in what he is doing.

The reference Giulini makes to the theater is very accurate, for the dramatic arts like Music also have both a written form and a different form in performance. No critic, no member of the audience would expect the actors on stage to just walk around reading from their play-book. Everyone expects them to add the emotional qualities necessary to give the character verisimilitude. Curiously, in the field of Music there are some critics who say, "Just play the notes."

For an orchestra or a band this primary duty falls to the conductor who must cause the ensemble to join him in representing the composer's feelings. What happens next was discussed by Wagner in the analogy of a magnet. Wagner said that a kind of general, core form of the emotion, which he called the quintessence of the emotion, extends to the players and in turn is what leaves the stage toward the audience. In an audience of 2,000 it is assumed everyone will understand this quintessence form. If the music is sad, no one will find it happy. But this core form of the emotion then enters the ears of the individual and is sifted through that individual's personal experience with that emotion and it is then heard in a personal meaning in the right hemisphere of his brain.

This is one of the unique aspects of music, that it communicates in both a general and an individual language of feeling at the same time. Since music makes no sense without a listener, then the answer to the question asked in the title is you, the emotions you perceive are your own. It is your emotions as a listener that give meaning to music. Are we minimizing Beethoven? No, for communicating with you was his very purpose in composing.

This is the power of Music, that the experience goes directly from composer to listener. This is not true in Painting, for example, where a canvas stands between the artist and the viewer. Neither does the listener have to "know anything" about Music, for his understanding of Music as a language of feeling comes to him also through genetic transfer.

It is this direct experience in Music which often makes it possible for an individual to have the feeling of a personal relationship with a particular composer. It is also this direct experience with the composer that raises a question in programming. What if the composer is, or was, a bad person? Can we have true empathy with such a person. I think of Manuel de Falla who loved the music of Debussy and decided to write an opera on the life of that composer. He began composing, but as he became more familiar with the life of Debussy he found him to be a contemptible person and so closed his score. This strictly ethical composer found he could not empathize with such a person and therefore could not create music representing him.

This leads us to comment that while it is rare in orchestral circles, in the band field there often appears a composer who is not a genuine artist, but rather a shallow fellow writing only for money. Given the direct experience between composer and listener, here the player, should we not supply his music to our students, who live already in a society filled with shallow and commercial interests? Or, do we just play his music and make everyone happy? For a conductor who is charged with the development of young people, perhaps it is a question worthy of some thought.