

# Creativity in Performance / *By Elizabeth A. H. Green*

■ Creation takes place in the mind of man—specifically, in the imagination. By use of this wonderful faculty even I can create strange and beautiful things. I shall build a bridge to the moon. The great arch glistens silver in the moonlight, spanning the dark heavens. It shines in blinding gold as the brilliant sun glides across the sky. And it glows softly pink in the quiet of the falling dusk. This I have created from nothing.

But not quite from nothing. Man can create only by taking the materials and the concepts of this world and juxtaposing them in new relationships. A moment ago I constructed a bridge, and I called it a bridge because bridges exist in my world. I colored it silver in the moonlight because these concepts are part of my existence. Only God can create from nothing.

In the arts we come as close to the definition of creation as it is possible to do in this world. The painter starts with a blank canvas, a sort of nothing. The musician starts with silence, another kind of nothing. The minute the musician produces a tone, he is creating—from nothing—a sound, a thing that has physical existence and practical meaning for the auditor.

The beginner in music struggles with producing a tone. As his skill grows, he tries to make a better sound. As he continues to mature musically, his imagination tells him what kind of a sound will be best at a certain moment in a certain com-

position. The imagination is the center of musical performance when we speak of creativity.

We have all heard renditions which we have felt were “only notes,” and then, in happier circumstances, heard the same notes played with life, with imagination, with color, by another performer. The violinistic skill, for example, to utilize varying emotional intensities in the vibrato, to change the basic string quality of tone into a flute quality, or even into a clarinet sound (all of which are possible on the violin), was applied, through a vivid aural imagination, to endow the dead notes with the vital breath of life.

Thus every musical sound is a creation of a sort, and this “creation” can only be called such if the imagination comes into play to produce a thing of beauty, of interest, and of true musical value.

As human beings, each of us is unique. None of us has identical traits, identical backgrounds, identical reactions to the stimuli that impinge upon us moment by moment. As such individuals, each of us has his own personal approach to music. This is as it should be. Individuality is the underlying reason why the music critics disagree upon salient points in the performances of the great artists. One critic will approve a thing which the next critic tears to pieces. As Ivan Galamian\* so gently put it to a group of critics in New York, “If you gentlemen will just agree

on how you want things performed, I am sure we will be most happy to oblige!”

Since each of us is unique, this implies that a great artist will be convincing in performance only when he himself states with conviction what seems right to him. A master performance is the melding of the personality of the composer with that of the performing artist. When each is great, and each is adequate technically, then we have the performance *par excellence*. And even though, as individuals, we may not agree with the performance, still we have to admit that it is a valid expression of truly great art, and as such we applaud it vigorously.

■ This brings us, then, to the subject of modern composition. Too many things are being foisted upon a passive public today, in the name of music, which are not musical and which have practically nothing to do with music’s best-known definition—“a concord of sweet sounds.”

All sound effects are not necessarily music. Music has to have some fine emotional appeal, or should I say some appeal to man’s finer emotions? When this is lacking the result is an idle “clacking of tongues.”

All sound effects are interesting as such, and the width and variety of the present day electronic sound

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is a fascinating thing. But not all of these "effects" can be rightly classified under the heading of music. It is high time that we stated clearly and precisely where the dividing line should be drawn. Where there is truly great music, there has been great imagination on the part of the live composer. Where there is machine music, there has been a substitution of the scientific-research approach for the valid imagination approach. Where there is great music, there is communication from the heart of one man to that of another—or to that of the human race as human beings. Where there is electronic music (which should rightly be labeled "electronic sound effects"), this communication from heart to heart is missing.

On the occasion of his eightieth birthday, Vaughan Williams lectured at Ann Arbor. Among other well-remembered statements of this great musician, we recall vividly his kindly caution to the young composer of today: "Remember that it is just as creative to take the same materials from which great music has been fashioned in the past and to combine them into new beauty as it is to write something completely 'different.'" He was gently reminding all of us that a composition does not have to be strange or ugly in order to be new. Since man is unique, no two people

will compose in exactly the same way. If the personality is great enough to create, it will create in a personal and individual pattern.

Music is a thing which must be listened to by human ears. When the process is painful, it ceases to be of musical value in the world.

On a string instrument, beats are forceably produced when a unison is thrown out of tune. Letting one note descend from the unison to a quarter-tone below and on to a minor half-step, the beats will still be physically painful to the ear. Music which relies on such a technique is not destined to prolong itself as have the Beethoven symphonies and the great music of the other master composers. Why? Because nothing that belies the laws of nature ever does last very long in this old world of ours. It is a basic tenet of our earthly existence that we must live in accord with the natural laws of our planet and the space in which it resides.

One of the most magnificent sentences ever written by man is Emanuel Kant's declaration: "Two things fill my soul with awe: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me."

Music can be no exception to the general code. Its purpose is to provide a certain pleasure and to lend a certain grandeur to man's existence. It has no place as music

when it comes into being as an ugly, deformed, and unlovely by-product.

We can create only what we can imagine. If we cannot hear our music in an inner ear before we write it, then the imaginative process is weak. If we cannot hear in the mind a pitch or a tone color before we perform it, then again the creative process has broken down. When the imagination does not function we are no longer creating. We are only reiterating.

In conclusion, let us say that creativity in performance means that the performer has a thing clearly in mind that he is trying to convey. He has imagined the contour of a phrase, the quality and depth of a dynamic, the emotional power and urge of a composition, and, given the necessary technical means, he can then create the audible image. Without adequate technique he cannot produce his effects. But with fine technique and no imagination, his music ceases to be a creation. Iteration alone cannot move an audience. But a truly creative performance can once again "bring the angels down" and, concomitantly, "raise men up to heaven."

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### *Sixth International Conference*

# International Society for Music Education

Franz Liszt Music Academy, Budapest, Hungary

June 26-July 3, 1964

**HOST** to the 1964 meeting of the International Society for Music Education will be the Hungarian Ministry of Education, the Association of Hungarian Musicians, and leading institutes. Zoltan Kodaly, vice-president of ISME, is the chairman of the Hungarian Preparatory Committee and the honorary president of the conference.

**Theme: Contemporary Music and Music Education.** The conference will consider the role and place of music in the education of youths and adults. Among the subjects are: the philosophy of modern music; evolution of contemporary music; stylistic criteria; developments in contemporary instrumental and electronic music; jazz; music especially written for children; methods of analysis; the creative approach to contemporary music; and the training of the professional musician. A complete list of subjects will be published in the January issue. Papers may be offered on any of the themes; the maximum time allotted to each

paper will be twenty to thirty minutes, and all papers must be submitted not later than February 1.

**A full schedule** of general and special sessions will be announced in an early issue.

**Registration.** Music educators who propose to attend the conference are requested to register as soon as possible. Registration should be directed to: Secretary General, ISME, Manderscheiderstrasse 35, Cologne, Germany, or ISME, 1201 Sixteenth St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

**Hotel accommodations** should be made early. Inquiries concerning accommodations in Budapest should be directed to the Association of Hungarian Musicians, Budapest V, Semmelweis U. 1., Hungary. Prices: de-luxe hotel, single or double with bath, including all meals—\$10-\$12 each person per day; first class hotel, single or double, including breakfast—\$4 each person per day.