

## AN INNER MUSIC

by

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In Edward Steichen's great photographic exhibit, "The Family of Man," the theme picture shows a young mother and her child, the one making music with a lute, the other with a smile. Throughout the volume, amid scenes of love and labor, growth and conflict, birth and death, the mother and child reappear with their eternal song. So it is that music restores us to ourselves, binds us together, and draws us to the Delectable Mountains of peace and joy.

Sidney Lanier has written that "Music is love in search of a word." The Zohar, a thirteenth century classic of Jewish devotion, observed that "There are halls in the heavens above that open but to the voice of song." And Walt Whitman caught the spirit of the new world when he testified, "I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear." Whitman heard mechanics and carpenters, masons and boatmen, shoemakers, woodcutters, mothers, maidens, young men "each singing what belongs to him or her, and to none else."

It is of music that I speak today--the outer music of voices and instruments and the sounds of nature, and the inner music--Shakespeare's "food of love"--that sustains us through life's heights and depths and consecrates existence.

### II.

It has been said by Longfellow and others that "Music is the universal language of mankind"--which is to say that those who cannot speak commune through love and song. Jews and Moslems, Catholics and Protestants unite as one people when the psalms are sung. At Christmas Eve in 1914 German and French troops streamed from their trenches to exchange rations and sing carols in remembrance of the Christ child. A mother in Japan or Finland or Philadelphia who sings her child to sleep, a child who lulls her doll to rest, all sing a common song, and are made one in their music.

Music unites a people, too. The glory of France is not exhausted by Louis XIV or Napoleon or DeGaulle; it rises heavenward in the Song of Roland, the tone poems of Debussy, and the great Marseilles, a national anthem which makes everyone who hears it in that moment a Frenchman. The genius of England is symbolized not only by a Wellington or a Churchill, but finds expression in the sacred melody of a William Byrd, a Henry Purcell, a Benjamin Britten--not to mention the Beatles of Liverpool. And Germany--her creative power reached its pinnacle not in Charlemagne and Bismarck but in the mighty harmonies of the Nibelungenlied, of Luther's "Ein Feste Burg," of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms, of Richard Wagner and Richard Strauss--Germans all, titans all. The haunting lute songs of China and India, the drum music of central Africa, now sounding new life in Christ, now sounding death to the ministers of Christ, the ecstatic fire music of the American Indians--all tell of the remembered life of a people, dramatized in song.

But music is more than a universal or a national language, Music fundamentally is an inner discourse of a man with himself, with his God. Unless a composer hears this inner music, he has nothing to write, a fact attested by Beethoven, who, though deaf, produced from the echoes in his soul the Choral Symphony. When we contemplate great persons, and ponder what it is that sustains them through suffering, despair, and the advent of death, we find the answer in the inner music, the deeper soundings, in the rhythm of "a different drummer," in Thoreau's phrase. The late Winston Churchill, surely the world's first citizen, until his death last January, was sustained through his years of leadership by a transcendent confidence in triumph of human freedom over the forces of darkness. The particular strains of Churchill's inner music cannot be known to mortals, but we can be certain that it was not "For he's a jolly good fellow." Rather, Churchill heard King Henry the Fifth at Agincourt: "When the blast of war blows in our ears, Then imitate the action of a tiger!" Or James Thompson:

"When Britain first, at Heaven's command,  
Arose from out the azure main,  
This was the charter of the land,  
And guardian angels sung this strain:  
Rule, Britannia! Britannia, rule the waves!  
Britons never will be slaves!"

By the end of the year 1940, according to Churchill's own account,

". . .this small and ancient island. . .had proved itself capable of bearing the whole impact and weight of world destiny. We had not flinched or wavered. We had not failed. The soul of the British people. . .had proved invincible. The citadel of . . .Commonwealth and Empire could not be stormed. Alone, but upborne by every generous heartbeat of mankind, we had defied the tyrant in the height of his triumph. (And) all our latent strength was now alive."

"Upborne by every generous heartbeat of mankind. . ."--perhaps it is for us to know after all the inner music of this wondrous man.

How can we explain the late Eleanor Roosevelt? Homely, unwanted, a servant in her own home, the butt of public ridicule, her family sundered by divorce, her last years spent in widowhood--how did this reluctant woman endure the cruelty of the years? Clearly, an inner music sustained her, an inward impulse led her to embrace the family of man as the circumference of her love. Perhaps she identified herself--an ordinary person called to extraordinary tasks--with the "ranks of unknown men(whose) genius renews the youth and energy of the people." It was clear that she was borne by the love of little people in those days when the public voices were so hostile. Who can deny that beneath the emotions of advancing age there rose a gallant spirit and a buoyant song?

Likewise the late President Kennedy. Something there was that gave him courage through his days of danger, illness, and calumny. Was it, as with Churchill, "the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger?" Was it, as with Eleanor Roosevelt, solicitude for the "interests of the great mass of people. . .who (lack) the resources to have representatives in Washington to protect their interests. . .?" Or was Kennedy's inner music the song of the sea he loved, given voice in the Navy Hymn.

"Eternal Father, strong to save,  
Whose arm hath bound the restless wave,  
Who biddest the mighty ocean deep  
Its own appointed limits keep:  
O, hear us when we cry to Thee  
For those in peril on the sea!"

Kennedy, whom tragically we can honor but in memory, was sustained, I am persuaded, by a sense of destiny infused with grace, his massive self-assurance tempered by an Irish sense of the incongruity of all things. He stood in the vanguard of the free, cognizant alike of the voices of the human past, the cries of the dispossessed in every land, and "the mystic chords of memory. . . (which) will yet swell the chorus of the Union when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature."

Certain persons' lives suggest a distinctive music form. Winston Churchill, the architect of the Grand Alliance, lived out a symphony--a Beethoven, a Sibelius, a Bruckner. Eleanor Roosevelt, the traces of a tragic pilgrimage ever present on her visage, recalls the German lied, of a Schulz, a Schubert. The life of John Kennedy, his gift the promise of tomorrow, sounds a voluntary, a vivid prelude to a larger work--as by Purcell, William Boyce, or Vaughan Williams. And in the background, always within earshot, the lutesong of the mother, and the laughter of her child.

## II.

Some of you will say, "Enough of the praise of famous men. We know that a massive impulse buoys them onward toward great goals. But what of us--what of us whose hearts are empty, whose souls are void, what of us in whom there is no inner music?" I answer that every person in the world has his own song. Some catch it, some create it, some wait for seeming endless years, trying one tune after another, setting one melodic line against another until one day, in the sunlight of surprise, discord yields to resolution--and the song breaks forth at last. Some, to be sure, find a song too late, or not at all. How strange, how tragic, that many who inspire song in others fail to find their own. How base, how cruel, that those who have no inner music--Lee Harvey Oswald--violate the lives of those who do in mid-crescendo. How touching, how irresistible, to enter into a life which has no central joy, which sobs or shrieks its lack of meaning to an uncomprehending world. The miracle is not that so much is being done for our mentally ill, but that, having once felt pity for the lost, the people of God have not given up everything to minister to their needs.

The inner music begins with the first sounds of life, in the cry with which a newborn child announces himself to himself and to his world. My two-year old son Edward Lincoln Parke did not cry when he was born. His breath came hard, and only the expert labors of the finest doctors in Boston brought him through the first ten days of life. Now, as you can imagine, his cry at midnight, his illtimed interruptions of adult events, fall on our ears as an angel voice--at least most of the time--as he tells us now what he could not articulate at his beginning, namely that he is alive and needs our love.

In contrast, my newest son, William Stevenson Parke, born last Tuesday (30 November 1965), cried out before he was fully born--his thighs were not yet visible when the breath of life first sounded from his lips. At birth he weighed nine pounds, six ounces, and I am happy to report to you that mother and son are both doing beautifully.

There is a music, too, that young children make at play. Their humming, their unconscious flights of song, their experiments with instruments--all testify of a primordial harmony working itself out in the recreation of the world. Children do not learn music and then reproduce it; it is in them, they give voice to what they cannot repress. If music had to be learned, how should we explain the

Lark, the thrush, the nightingale who, in Robert Bridges' words,

"on slender pipe calleth the nesting tribes  
to awake and fill and thrill their myriad-warbling throats  
praising life's God, untill the blisful revel grow  
in wild profusion unfeign'd to such a hymn as man  
hath never in temple or grove pour'd to the Lord of heav'n"

It is of the nature of birds and men to sing: deny them song, and you deny them life itself.

Music testifies of the grace of creation, it proclaims God's uncovenanted love. In a child, music is unselfconscious--it streams like water from a spring, like sunshine from a star. In adults, however, music takes on a new dimension, the dimension of deliberation, discipline, structure. Adults also sing freely, but they order their music--whether in creation or appreciation--by established rules of sequence, rhythm, and combination. And so from the selfless tune of the child the impulse channels to the lutesong of its mother and thence to a concerto, or a string quartet. "See then," wrote Robert Bridges, "how deeply seated is the urgency whereto Bach and Mozart obeyed. . . ." At every stage, an inner music motivates, at every stage the orders of creation govern, at every stage the nuances of life as lived transform and modulate the given. In this sense the distinction between sacred music and secular, between that composed for the concert hall and that for the cathedral, falls away. In the realm of music--that of a child, or that of a virtuoso--all is celebration.

### III.

There are, it seems several varieties of inner music, several types of impulses which move men to song. The first is faith, the convincement of the presence of God in the human soul. Faith is the great testimony of the inescapability of God and the reality of the church, "Faith," in the Revised Standard version of the epistle to the Hebrews, "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Faith is the inner music of religion, the persuasion of a Power that purposes perfection in all things. It is experienced as a gift, and determines action, rather than being determined by action, as Luther clearly saw. "Faith makes us, and not we it," wrote Emerson, an insight echoed by Dr. Sullivan when he wrote, "Religion is not to be accomodated to us, but ourselves to it."

Faith may express itself in prayer--the inner music of devotion, it may express itself in praise--the inner music of adoration. Or faith may express itself in the martyr's confidence, the inner music of assurance (or resignation) whereby an Ignatius of Antioch in the second century or a Dr. Paul Carlson in the twentieth welcomed the prospect of death as a surety of eternal life. Faith is the ground of worship, of mysticism, and of sacrifice, and the magnitude of a man's faith is the measure of that man's religion. Faith overleaps the petty dreams and selfish words of men to posit in Wordsworth's phrase, "a Presence whose dwelling is the light of setting suns and the round ocean, and the living air, and the blue sky, and in the mind of man." It is the bond and covenant of God with his people whatever their religion. Faith it was that created the psalms and the gospels and the epistles, the plainsong, and the St. Matthew Passion. Faith it was that called forth the greatest music of the Western world, and how harsh would be our poverty if the heritage of Christ did not include the hymns and oratorios of the singing church.

Boris Pasternak understood this. In Dr. Zhivago he wrote of the story's

heroine, "Lara was not religious. She did not believe in ritual. But sometimes, to be able to bear life, she needed the accompaniment of an inner music. She could not always compose such a music for herself. That music was God's word of life, and it was to weep over it that she went to church."

A second type of inner music is that of protest. As faith sounds a mighty "Yes" to the values of existence, protest sounds a mighty "No" to circumstances which violate those values. Suffering and emancipation from suffering--both create great music--the music of forbearance, indignation, liberty. The slaves sang, "Swing low, sweet chariot, comin' for to carry me home. . . ." The German sectaries sang "Freiheit"--freedom! The generations of workingmen--miners, millhands, railroad gangs--sang "John Henry," the song of the legendary "steel driving man" who surpassed the steam hammer in competition but burst his heart in the process. The civil rights advocates, Negro and white together, sing "We shall overcome. . . deep in my heart, I do believe, we shall overcome some day," and overcome they shall. Injustice is something a man feels deep in the marrow of his bones, and a man sings in order that the world may know both of his hurt and of his hope.

A third type of inner music is that of celebration. It is the music of self-affirmation, of love, of the poetic vision of the world. Walt Whitman sang a song of himself--"I celebrate myself, and sing myself," he wrote--and his countrymen agreed that in his song America had found an authentic voice. Lovers since the time of Song of Songs have sung to each other in intertwining harmony that bespeaks a single theme: "We shall be one person." Poets for ten thousand years have sung in verse the glory of life, the wonder of nature, the miracle of man. The music of Bach, according to Schweitzer's fine insight, sang  
 "of drifting mists, of boistrous winds, of roaring rivers, of waves that ebb and flow, of leaves falling from the tree, of bells that ring for the dying, of the confident faith which walks with firm steps, or the weak faith that falters insecure, of the proud who will be abased, and the humble who will be exalted, of Satan rising in rebellion, of angels poised on the clouds of heaven. . . one sees and hears all this in his music."

Milton at the beginning of Paradise Lost described the inner music of "Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme," and Shelley spoke autobiographically in calling poets "the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present." Blessed be those--pilgrims, lovers, poets, yes, and preachers too--who "determine to utter nothing which they have not experienced inwardly, and made their own, knowing it by heart."

#### IV.

Faith, protest, celebration--these are the resonances of every significant life. In superintended tension, theme against theme, dissonance in alternation to repose, these elements of inner music become a fugue, a soul in flight--now rising, now descending, now public, now withheld, now overtopping, now subsumed. So regarded, our inner music need not be a single line of melody, patterned and predictable, but can expand by a throbbing impulse of its own to innovate and thrill. Is it not the case that the most interesting people we meet are those whose inner life is manifold, whose inner music is rich and passionate and free?

I conclude with the thought that, in the realm of personal religion, it is fruitful to listen before one speaks. By listening--to self, the children,

to each other--we catch the voices of silence, we experience eternity. By listening, we make contact with the genius of man, of America, of liberal religion, of ourselves, and to that extent can more truly give it voice. By listening we rediscover the Soul, that deep-centered dwelling place of consciousness, conscience, and affection, of which the terms "self" and "psyche"--in spite of all the advances of psychologic science--are pale synonyms indeed; the soul, that nucleus of sacred energy, ever-changing yet always the same, whose origin and destiny we cannot know, yet whose existence within ourselves, and in those we love, we can not doubt. By listening, we hear the word and enter the Kingdom of God when it appears--now in weeping, now in laughter, now alone, now in embrace, now dying, now being born.

By listening we heed the inner music, apprehending which, said Emerson,  
 "Thou shalt have the whole land for thy park and manor,  
 the sea for thy bath and navigation, without tax and  
 without envy; the woods and rivers thou shalt own, and  
 thou shalt possess that wherein others are only tenants and  
 boarders. Thou true land-lord! sea-lord! air-lord!  
 Wherever snow falls or water flows or birds fly, wherever  
 day and night meet in twilight, wherever the blue heaven  
 is hung by clouds or sown with stars, wherever are forms  
 with transparent boundaries, wherever are outlets into  
 celestial space, wherever is danger, and awe, and love,---  
 there is Beauty, plenteous as rain, shed for thee, and  
 though thou shouldst walk the world over, thou shalt  
 not be able to find a condition inopportune or ignoble."