

2020 AND THE PERFORMING ARTS

Is it strange? Can it be a coincidence? A twist of nature sprung upon a totally self-centered, self-destructive humanity?... that the corona pandemic should fall in 2020, the year of Beethoven's 250th anniversary ?

Beethoven! A giant. A face eaten up by scrofula scars. A genius deaf to his own music. A mighty figure who lived almost in complete isolation a good portion of his life ? A composer who seemed to shun the theatre: he wrote only one opera: Fidelio, and only one ballet: The Creatures of Prometheus.

Strange coincidence this 2020 ? Is it ? Life reserves for us those weird unfathomable circumstances or phenomena – mysterious moments beyond our humble power to comprehend, beyond our self-centered often detrimental outlook on life. It could be a form of history beyond “history”, not the kind we describe as “repeating itself”, but a unique solitary obelisk, sprouting out of nowhere to galvanize all forms of feelings and fears, negative wonder, collective behavior – in short, a huge strait-jacket forcing us into long and meaningful introspection.

On this particular 200th anniversary, everywhere in the world theatres are black and silent. But ALL radio stations, ALL television stations, media of ALL kinds, are booming with Beethoven's music in such a way as to give it a unique all-encompassing presence in our lives of confinement.

Because of the corona, then, family life is being rediscovered, reading is re-entering our imposed leisure. We find our kitchens at last to enjoy home-cooking instead of “delivery food”. Even baking, like Clara in the Nutcracker, has waved its magic wand, and transported us to the Kingdom of Sweets. We are writing, or painting or composing --- in short, we make our choices among the important and primary actions of life. But crowning all, and providing a warm enveloping protective shield, is the presence of music, whether we sit and listen to it, whether it is a

meaningful background as we stagger through life in search of who we really are, or as it clothes our theatrical creations.

I have always believed that great music comes directly from the cosmos. Isn't it a fact that prophets in the old days would hear voices from outer space? And wouldn't they transmit what they heard to people around them? Likewise, great composers receive their music from the universe. The breath of the spheres glides through their beings, and they become the mouthpiece of the universe, its messengers.

If music is the message of the universe, theatre is the reflection of society. Society cannot exist without people, people cannot live without theatre. It does not run away from our lives or from its monstrosities. It faces them and pieces them together in such a way as to project them to us sometimes in harmony and beauty, sometimes like in those distorting mirrors found in circuses, painful to accept, but essentially reflecting the truth in all its crude reality. I once wrote:

“Theatre is a big lie, which we clothe and decorate the way we wish. But that big lie is the root of important truths without which our societies cannot live. A society without theatre and more particularly FREE theatre is like a totally handicapped person: no sight, no hearing, and the impossibility to express the word.”

By “theatre” I mean of course the performing arts, those special moments that breathe life onto a wooden floor, a floor that becomes our world, separated from us only by that invisible wall we can almost touch.

Dance is also a statement of truth. But instead of words, it is expressed in movement, (the visual) as well as in music (the audio), both embracing the same idea, both clothing it in that form of expression called ballet, called dance.

In our own dance world, music comprises a long and bewitching list of names, a batch of which I pick at random: Stravinsky, Debussy, Bartok, Copland, the mystical rhythms of the whirling dervishes...just a tiny sample of all the wonders that enrich both the dance and through it the music world. All who composed for ballet in particular,

and dance in general, penetrated the world of movement with great respect and deep insight.

A rare exception, Beethoven's *Creatures of Prometheus* was staged during his lifetime in 1801 (he was 31 at the time) by Salvatore Vigano, one of the most prominent choreographers of his time. But it remained a rather solitary attempt. Trials were made by new choreographers in both England and France in the early XXth century, but they remained stalemates.

Theatre will light up again and buzz with all its rich and dazzling sounds. Actors will act, dancers will dance, singers and musicians will fill our hearts with the magic of music. The question remains, however: WILL IT ALL JUST BE A CONTINUATION FROM WHERE WE BROKE OFF? WHO ARE WE GOING TO BE, WHAT ARE WE GOING TO EXPRESS? THINGS ARE CERTAINLY CHANGING EVERY DAY, SOMETIMES EVERY HOUR, SO CAN WE REMAIN THE SAME? IT IS QUITE POSSIBLE THAT A PANDEMIC OF NEW ART WILL SEIZE OUR WORLD OF CULTURE, A NEW BREATH THAT WILL SWEEP AWAY WHAT MADE US TICK SO FAR. MAY WE LIVE TO SEE IT AT ITS BEST.

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