

MUSIC AS RESONANCE AND REMEMBRANCE

JAMES D'ANGELO

In his book *A New Model of the Universe* the philosopher P D Ouspensky suggested that there are four essential pathways for the seeking of Truth and hence the spiritual unfoldment of humanity - philosophy, science, religion and the arts. He believed that each of these, in their pure form, are a definite way of knowledge and based upon revelation described by him as 'something proceeding immediately from the higher consciousness or higher powers.' He divided these four disciplines into two categories - philosophy and science being the domain of the intellect and religion and the arts, the domain of the emotions. In reference to artistic endeavour Ouspensky had this view:

Art is based on emotional understanding, on the feeling of the Unknown which lies behind the visible and the tangible, and on creative power, the power, that is, to reconstruct in visible or audible forms the artist's sensations, feelings, visions and moods, and especially a certain fugitive sensation, which is in fact the feeling of the harmonious interconnection and oneness of 'everything' and the feeling of the 'soul' of things and phenomena. ... an art which does not reveal mysteries, which does not lead to the sphere of the Unknown, does not yield new knowledge, is a parody of art, and still more often it is not even a parody, but simply a commerce or an industry.

(P D Ouspensky: *A New Model of the Universe*, Alfred A Knopf, 1931, p 33)

The interpretation of emotional experiences and 'emotional understanding' is the aim of 'art'. In the combination of words, in their meaning, in rhythm, in music, in the combination of meaning, rhythm and music; in sounds, in colours, in lines, in forms - men create a new world and try to express in it that which they feel but cannot express and convey simply in words, i.e. in concepts... The combination of feeling and thought of high intensity leads to a higher form of inner life, define to define in ordinary language. Thus, in art we already find the first experiments in a 'language of the future'. Art marches in the vanguard of inner evolution, anticipating the forms it is to assume tomorrow.

(P D Ouspensky: *Tertium Organum*, Alfred A Knopf, 2nd edition, 1981, p 65)

Ouspensky does not elaborate on how each of the arts specifically instils emotional understanding, that is, puts the individual in touch with those experiences that awaken him to his greater, one true self. He writes just one line about music:

'The emotional tones of life, i.e., the "feelings" are best expressed in music.'

(P D Ouspensky: *Tertium Organum*, Alfred A Knopf, 2nd edition, 1981, p 65)

A fundamental question arises out of Ouspensky's propositions as they relate to music: what are the processes through which the experience of harmonious, pure feelings and their contribution to a state of higher consciousness and unity are invoked by the phenomenon we call 'music'? Music is an art that, at its greatest, encompasses all the pathways Ouspensky mentions. As a

physical phenomenon it is a science. Every tone has a measurable frequency. The combination of tones, as chords and polyphony, are based on definite acoustical phenomena. The timbre of instruments and voices can be determined by a precise proportioning of the overtone series. The relationships of the rhythm to the pulse of music are mathematical in nature. There exists within music a perfect balance between the qualitative and the quantitative. Ultimately the listeners' experiences are qualitative, the depth of which are largely dependent on the emotional understanding of the performers. Even as the most abstract of arts music also has the potential to be philosophical by inspiring us to act with a greater moral and ethical sense and religious by inclining us to be devotional to our divine nature.

When receiving and perceiving music, the listener lives in two worlds - the physical world of resonance, where its sounds have a tangible existence as they impinge on our particular physical and mental nature and the metaphysical world of remembrance where its unheard vibrations activate an eternal memory of archetypes. The creation of music can be linked to the creation of all worlds. In the beginning, as is stated in St John's Gospel, was the Word or Logos. Through an all-powerful fundamental tone of tones the Supreme Creator set a seemingly unlimited creation in motion. That is, he became 'emotional' its literal meaning being 'a moving out from'. The first emotion 'the Word' is a pulse or throb which expanded into a wave form generating more and more wave forms, like a vast overtone series, which can be called 'vibrations or frequencies' that then coalesced into forms both invisible and visible and inaudible and audible. The process can be observed in reverse when a seed syllable or 'mantra' is employed in the act of meditation. The seed syllable is the form which transforms itself into a wave pattern that then dissolves into a pulse. From this view the nature of a human being is that of a unique multitude of vibrations riding on the crest of the Word. The poet and author William Anderson, in his monumental work *The Face of Glory*, sets forth a similar and magnificent vision:

That sound (the Word) resonates in eternity and its resonances create voids and spaces and a diversity of experiences in time, the time experience of a galaxy, a tree, a man, a mayfly. It still holds within itself all lights and all darkneses and all possible variety of colours. It also holds the natural laws and the principles of life and intelligent life. It creates beings capable of consciousness themselves who are the spectators and audiences of its creation. It is universal consciousness letting itself be known as glory.

We, the human race, are the creation of that sound and as we are made conscious by its light and will, so we share in its creative possibilities. Where we think we invent, we discover; where we suppose we originate, we are supplied from the true origins. In our ultimate existence, our true individuality, we are that sound and through our existence we are ears to hear that sound and mouths to utter that sound.

(William Anderson: *The Face of Glory*, Bloomsbury Publishing Co, 1996, pp 337-38)

In this respect an individual can be likened to a musical instrument held together by the properties of the vibratory phenomenon such that if the Word were discontinued, all of creation would lose its existence. From our cellular level to our organs and nervous system and even beyond to the electromagnetic field that surrounds our bodies, we are networks of heard and unheard sounds - sounds that like ordinary sound fades away and goes out of tune unless it is

continually re-initiated and re-tuned. It is music that can serve these purposes through the principle of resonance whose literal meaning is 'to return to sound or to vibrate in sympathy with sound.' In another words, 'sympathetic vibrations' wherein a vibratory phenomenon of a system, object or being sets in motion, i.e., emotion, another such system, object or being whose frequency or frequencies are the same or nearly the same as the stimulus. The very word 'sympathetic' as it links to compassion indicates that this condition is the equivalent of the pure emotional states of love and ecstasy. The derivation of the word 'ecstasy' is from the ancient Greek *'ekstasis'* meaning 'displacement' or 'trance', that is, to be transported out of one's body/mind complex through the apprehension of the divine. Ouspensky believed that the state of ecstasy was the supreme condition through which to reach the truth of our existence:

Ecstasy is so far superior to all other experiences possible to man that we have neither words nor means for the description of it. Men who have experienced ecstasy have often attempted to communicate to others what they have experienced, and these descriptions, often coming from different centuries, from people who have never heard of one another, are wonderfully alike and above all contain similar cognitional aspects of the Unknown.

All true art is in fact nothing but an attempt to transmit the sensation of ecstasy and only the man who finds in it this taste of ecstasy will understand and feel art. If we define 'ecstasy' as the highest degree of emotional experience ..., it will become clear to us that the development of man towards superman cannot consist in the growth of the intellect alone. Emotional life must evolve, in certain not easily comprehensible forms. And the chief change in man must come precisely from the evolution of emotional life.

(P D Ouspensky: *A New Model of the Universe*, Alfred A Knopf, 1931, pp118-119)

When music is set in motion as wave forms pulsated by whatever means, e.g. the tensing of the vocal cords, the bow across a string, a hammer striking strings, etc., those wave forms, like living beings not only penetrate our ears, i.e., hearing but also impinge upon our entire electromagnetic field as well as the physical body itself. We are bombarded with sound and, without screening the music mentally, are essentially helpless in its wake. Through resonance value judgements can be made about whether or not the music is compatible with our nature. That is, to the degree that there is a correlation between the pattern of frequencies emerging from the music and our own frequency patterns. If the sounds are stimulating, strengthening and even re-tuning our vibrations through the resonance factor, then we are drawn into it, feel in sympathy with it and even at this level become emotional about it. This is the very basis of the idea that music and sound can heal, i.e., to change positively both the physical and mental states and ultimately cause a condition of total well-being, a state of 'sound' health or wholeness. Here the word 'person' can be linked to the Latin *'per sonare'* – living through sound. If we are to begin to have an emotional understanding of music, then first we have to be in resonance/sympathy with its sound patterns physically and mentally.

Our physical and psychological nature are the filters through which the sound phenomenon we call music passes. It would be quite difficult to reach the level of remembrance if our material body felt in disharmony with the sound. The more frequencies unique to the individual that are set in motion by the sounds the better. Simultaneously music resonates what lives in our ordinary mental plane and will set off the imagination and the dream state based on what is

stored there. Our choices of composers are partially based on this resonance phenomena. Why do some people prefer Beethoven to Mozart, Brahms to Wagner, Bruckner to Mahler or Schubert to Schumann? Where does the difference lie between them for us inasmuch as all these composers have had a lasting value for thousands of people? Or why does so-called New Age music, with its floating, quasi-ethereal and synthesized timbres, soothe and relax some listeners and irritate others? On a greater scale, why do many Western listeners find the music of different non-Western cultures so difficult to come to terms with? People are often baffled by which sound worlds they like to inhabit and come up with all sorts of rationales for their choices. Paul Hindemith, the twentieth-century German composer, in his essay on perceiving music emotionally, gives this view:

I like to mention the second movement of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony which I have found leads some people into a pseudo feeling of profound melancholy, while another group takes it for a kind of scurrilous scherzo, and a third for a subdued pastorale. Each group is justified in judging as it does. The difference in interpretation stems from the difference in memory-images the listeners provide, and the unconscious selection is made on the basis of the sentimental value or the degree of importance each image has: the listener chooses the one which is dearest and closest to his mental disposition, or which represents a most common, most easily accessible feeling.

(Paul Hindemith: *A Composer's World*, Anchor Books (New York), 1961, p 47)

The principle of resonance in music is a valid and significant catalytic force in possibly reaching the deeper level of remembrance. We need not go always beyond this phase. There are all sorts of music that simply provide us with feelings of exhilaration or reverie. At these times we are content to bathe in a stimulating sonic environment of simple emotionalism and/or sentimentality. These sound patterns might or might not faintly convey something of what we remember as the various musics of the invisible/inaudible worlds we once knew. However, even when the music contains clear imprints of these worlds, listeners can be satisfied with perceiving only the outer layers of the music because they become attached to the sensuality of the experience and/or the performers fail to draw out the music's finer qualities due to their own attachment to the sound phenomenon. Nonetheless, the principle of resonance is the gateway to penetrate the deeper mysteries of music's enchantment, leading to music as remembrance and hence to what Ouspensky describes as emotional understanding and ecstasy.

Ouspensky does not refer to this principle of resonance in any tangible way except as it might apply to his use of the word 'phenomenon' but he does seem to address what can be described as 'the arts as remembrance' when using the term 'noumenon' in the following passage:

For the artist the phenomenal world is merely material - just as colours for the painter and sounds for the musician; it is only a means for the understanding, and the expression of his understanding, of the noumenal world. At our present stage of development we possess no other means for the perception of the world of causes, which is as powerful as the one contained in art. The mystery of life consists in the fact that the 'noumenon', i.e. the hidden meaning and the hidden function of a thing, is reflected in its 'phenomenon.' The phenomenon is the reflection of the noumenon in our sphere. THE PHENOMENON IS AN IMAGE OF THE NOUMENON ... The reflection of the noumenon in the phenomenon

can be sensed and understood only by that subtle apparatus which is called the 'soul of the artist'.

(P D Ouspensky: *Tertium Organum*, Alfred A Knopf, 2nd edition, 1981, p 133)

The basis of music as remembrance lies in the continuity of life, i.e., that the spiritual inner organ known as the soul contains the memory of all experiences while both in a physical and non-physical existence. The more important of these relate to our sojourns in non-physical form where we are allowed to move through higher vibrational dimensions of existence, however long or briefly, absorbing into our consciousness worlds of unimaginable sounds, colours, and forms and glimpsing the world of archetypes. Is it any wonder that the music of the spheres remains an eternal archetypal concept? Here are our future spiritual homes that the soul recognizes as paradise and holds in its memory. However, once re-born the pull of earthly life takes over and such memories become covered over. This is what William Anderson calls the third level of the Great Memory:

'the realm of archetypal images and ideas, of the essences of colours, of the original intentions of language and of what music is before it is turned into notes.'

(William Anderson: *The Face of Glory*, Bloomsbury Publishing Co, 1996, p 330)

Nonetheless, grace is given to humanity in the form of musicians (and other artists) capable of recovering those memories through transcribing those archetypal pre-sound worlds - the noumenon of music before it is converted into audible, orderly vibrational patterns. The physical tones sculpted into forms contain the seeds of the 'unstruck sound' or '*anahata*' as the philosophers of India call it - the causal world written into our souls. The great twentieth century British painter Cecil Collins had this vision:

For the artist and the poet there exists a great zone of consciousness into which this cosmic drama is transmitted and reflected and enacted. This is the archetypal world to which the human psyche has access. This eternal archetypal world of original essence is again reflected into the world of time and space in works of art and culture and in moments of transformation of consciousness in the spontaneous experience of living, or during the canonic and ritual participation of religion.

The world of time and space is the world of contraction of consciousness; space-time is embryonic consciousness. In our present state we are embryos of consciousness and one of the major problems of the artist and the poet is how to transmit the nuance of the archetypal world into the field of contraction and orientate consciousness towards the centre of life; for art is remembrance of the source of life. Because of our endless forgetfulness we need this beautiful gift - the voice of remembrance.

(Cecil Collins: *The Vision of the Fool*, Golgonooza Press (UK), 1994, p 90)

Ouspensky believed that:

'an artist must be a *clairvoyant*, that he must see that which others do not see; and he must be a *magician*, must possess the gift of making others see what they

do not see themselves, but what he sees.'

(P D Ouspensky: *Tertium Organum*, Alfred A Knopf, 2nd edition, 1981, p 133)

It seems no coincidence that the words 'magician' and musician' ring sympathetically together. Such an artist/musician of our own time is the French composer Jean Catoire, the nephew of one of Ouspensky's close Russian disciples. His music, which consists of nearly 600 opuses and in which style is stripped down to a minimum, has only recently been recognized and performed. Catoire has precisely described the process of transcribing music. i.e., not the act of constructing it but rather channelling it as a clairvoyant. He disdains the title of 'composer', someone who puts together sounds. In his essay *The Phenomenon of Sound* he writes:

Every sound work is first presented in its absolute aspect, in its non-sound archetype which contains all the primary relations from which the subsequent sound values will emerge. Then the work is perceived in its total space-time presence, that is, what will be a chronological phenomenon of unfolding sound is envisaged in an absolute present. The entire work, down to the smallest details of its subsequent development as sound, is then seen as a whole. This is akin to psychic perceptions where forms are not experienced in a sensory way. Rather it is a process where the vision consists only of value-relations and concentrations of energy. This is what I call 'auditive vision' which is not a sense, in the ordinary meaning of the word, but a faculty through which it is possible to bypass the mental plane and tap into the psychic states. The essential work of composers is to place themselves in the state of a conscious medium in order to transcribe for others what is shown to them on the archetypal level.

(Jean Catoire: *The Phenomenon of Sound*, unpublished manuscript, 1972, pp 3-4)

During the history of Western music, beginning with the simplicity and stillness of Gregorian chant, there has been an evolution of a musical language and up until the early years of this century composers, born into a particular era, largely adopted the conventions of the prevailing style. These styles, which are part of the resonance factor, act as filters for the noumenon of music. It means that the greater the music is, the more transparent it is because it is neither encumbered by an overweighting of style nor a style whose complexities are impenetrable. For example, stylistically Mozart's music is not original. Nonetheless, possessed with the clairvoyance to envision a work all at once, we recognize his musical fingerprints. Catoire has this explanation for the uniqueness of great composers:

Each transcriber (composer) possesses his own universe of archetypes. Each works within well defined zones, sometimes quite limited, but within these zones the archetypes, which he discovers and transcribes, are different. Each work, ... even if it resembles another to the point of identity as far as the style of writing, nonetheless keeps its particular archetype easily identifiable and clearly different from that of other works. Every style is a limitation of means of expression. That is why the more the composer approaches the archetype, the more he limits his zones of investigation and the more simplified the style becomes.

(Jean Catoire: *The Phenomenon of Sound*, unpublished manuscript, 1972, p 9)

This is the ideal state of the musician as magician who serves as a messenger in the listeners' act

of remembrance. In this act we can have the experience of ecstasy, that pure emotional condition, which Ouspensky placed such high value upon, where heart and mind are interchangeable. One is reminded of the religious ritual of the Sufis called the '*dhikr*', literally 'remembrance of God'. Through the repetitive chants and pulsating rhythm of the '*dhikr*,' ecstasy is induced and the veils of forgetting are lifted. In effect all of our greatest experiences of listening to music would be a '*dhikr*'. Once we are sufficiently resonated and therefore in sympathy with the sounds, then we can use those sounds, as they are shaped into forms, like a magic carpet to lead us on a tour of our spiritual, paradisaical homes. How can we not be emotional as we 'move away from' the earthbound state and are given tastes of those worlds from which our soul and spirit came and desires to return. Remembrance is resonance operating at the finest and highest levels of vibration. Such experiences lead the way to the state of meditation in which we know that we and the Word, the fundamental tone of tones that spawned it all, are One. This is the ultimate emotional understanding which Ouspensky must have glimpsed and which he exhorts us to continue to seek and experience.

James D'Angelo, 1997