Variation on a Theme: Edward Said on Music

MUSTAPHA MARROUCHI

Everything, yet nothing, is a variation.
THEODOR ADORNO, *The Philosophy of Modern Music.*

EDWARD SAID, LIKE other descendants of those displaced by the violence (of the letter) of the last century, came of age to find the world he expected to inherit rent apart, turned nearly unrecognizable. For some, to move forward has required allowing that ruptured, destroyed world to recede. For others like Said, it has been a matter of survival to re-enter the past, searching its remains for the means to create a redemptive history. What this means is that the life he was born to, was an inheritance rife with the contradictions of Middle-Eastern politics in the postcolonial era. Trained as an amateur pianist, Said has performed and written widely on classical music and opera. It is the virtue of his إجتهاد (perseverance) — comprising his 1991 Wellek Lectures, essays on opera productions, music festivals, recitals, together with a homage to a belly-dancer — that in them the reader is confronted bracingly with a genuinely innovative and adventurous style of investigating musical compositions. Said does not give the impression of having written them hurriedly. Each of his sentences is crafted with a sense of actual experience being articulated in a deliberately chosen language. Reading him requires considerable attention to nuance and tone.

To begin with, there is Said's resourceful reaction to a set of predicaments (or impasses) in modern critical thought. One is, for the listener, the perfecting of piano product which has resulted in boring interpretations on boring pianos. Not that the boredom of modern classical music performance is confined to piano music: it is just that piano-playing offers a particularly acute case of a disease which has blighted large areas of the classical music repertoire,

with the exceptions perhaps of contemporary and early music, where the stultifying effects of repetition have not as yet set in.[1] Criticism of this sort has come mainly from theorists of the Left — from such critics as Carl Dahlhaus, Alfred Brendel, Theodor Adorno, John Cage and others — or from composers (Brahms, Wagner), who have had good reason to be dissatisfied with a system that places so little emphasis on the performance of music that is alive, and so much on the importance of maintaining a vast musical museum. Meanwhile, except for the happy few (Alfred Brendel and Glenn Gould come to mind) the performers have tended to keep quiet. As employees of the museum, they have had most at stake and have understandably, if regrettably, felt themselves badly placed to undermine it.

Of course intelligence, taste, and originality do not amount to anything unless the pianist has the technical means to convey them. In this respect, how can we factor in Said's career as a Julliard-trained pianist while at the same time taking into account the fact (something Said himself never does) that his childhood was rather a privileged one, in terms of class and gender? Is it at all possible to read him without hearing, in the authorial voice, all those signs of high bourgeois cultural sensibility, of a sense of truth, individuality, freedom, humanity, suffering? What is it that Said finds appealing in Glenn Gould, a musician who had phenomenal technical gifts, a perfect memory, a very high intelligence, but self-consciousness and self-observation to an extent most other performers would scarcely be able to imagine? Said — always provocative, sometimes provoking — places the musical act under a scrutiny (his reading of Gould is a case in point) which is at once exhaustive and multidimensional. His critique remains unexampled in terms of the sheer multiplicity of vantage points from which it probes its subject. Solidly rooted in Adorno, his thought is often complex and complicated in expression. His *contrapuntal* strategies can never be pinned down because he derides any notion of mainstream, "definitive" performance. He is nothing if not an exploratory pianist who presents the established Western system with a challenge and that includes critical musical discourse.

My intention in this essay is to investigate the career of Said the music critic and/or performer as informed by his life, his intense musical education and his musical predispositions. These break down into *two* main themes: the manner in which music "transgresses" boundaries, *and* the role of "silence, meaning and restlessness" within Said's reframing of the questions governing the ways in which Western art music is received. It is an interesting paradox that the US, the home of hard-nosed capitalism, has produced Steve Reich, Philip Glass, Robert Wilson, Peter Sellars, Edward Said — all key players at the cutting edge of opera and classical music. Said, of course, stands out among these as a postcolonial critic and musician whose motivation does create a sense of necessity. The stakes are high. After all, he lives in the culture that is right now being imposed all over the world in the name of freedom (but of course it is its own form of enslavement); a critique of that culture becomes imperative. And an alternative becomes urgent, because we can see the deadening results of the influence of that culture played out around us. In proposing to explore some of these matters, I find myself inevitably led to think about performance: pianists (Glenn Gould) interpret every note with peculiar antics on stage, and so too do singers (Jessye Norman) as well as conductors (Daniel Barenboim). New opera productions such as those of Peter Sellars are radical enough interpretations — with new translations of surtitles, new settings, new contexts.[2]

Said owes his interest in music to his "mother's own wonderful musicality and love of the art. Over the years," he movingly writes, "she has always been interested in my playing, and together we have shared many musical experiences together" (*Musical* xi). The underlying motifs for Said have been the emergence of another side buried for a long time beneath a surface of often expertly acquired and wielded musical characteristics belonging to his other self, the one his mother tried to construct according to her design, the "*Edwaad*," as she would have it, and of which he speaks intermittently in *Out of Place*.

> I am still haunted by the sound, at exactly the same time and place, of her voice calling me *Edwaad*, the word wafting through the dusk air at the Fish Garden's closing time, and me, undecided whether to answer or to remain in hiding for just a while longer, enjoying the pleasure of

being called, being wanted, the non-Edward part of myself finding luxurious respite in not answering until the silence of my being became unendurable. ("Living" 8)[3]

In the same essay, he describes in affecting detail how late in her life, although stricken by an unforgiving illness — her cancer afflictions already pronounced,

. . . she arrived in London from Beirut on her way to the US to consult a specialist; I met her at the airport and brought her to Brown's Hotel for the one night she had to spend there. With barely two hours to get ready and have an early supper, she nevertheless gave an unhesitating "yes" to my suggestion that we see Vanessa Redgrave and Timothy Dalton as Anthony and Cleopatra at the Haymarket. It was an understated, unopulent production, and the long play transfixed her in a way that surprised me. After years of Lebanese war and Israeli invasion she had become distracted, often querulous, worried about her health and what she should do with herself. All of this, however, went into abeyance, as we watched and heard Shakespeare's lines ("Eternity was in our lips and eyes, / Bliss in our brows' bent") as if speaking to us in the accents of wartime Cairo, back in our little cocoon, the two of us very quiet and concentrated, savoring the language and communion with each other — despite the disparity in our ages and the fact that we were mother and son — for the very last time. ("Living" 9-10)

But Said sees the last and best result of the Cairo traffic in Ignace Tiegerman, his music teacher and friend:

. . . a tiny Polish-Jewish gnome of man who came to Cairo in 1933, attracted by the city's warmth and possibilities in contrast to what was coming in Europe. He was a great pianist and musician, a wunderkind student of Leschetizky and Ignaz Friedman, a lazy, wonderfully precious and bright-eyed bachelor with secret tastes and unknown pleasures, who ran a Conservatoire de Musique on the rue Champollion just behind the Cairo Museum.

No one played Chopin and Schumann with such grace and unparalleled rhetorical conviction as Tiegerman. He taught piano in Cairo, tying himself to the city's *haute societé* — teaching its daughters, playing for its salons, charming its gatherings — in order, I think, to free himself for the lazy indulgence of his own pursuits: conversation, good food, music, and unknown kinds (to me) of human relationships. I was his piano student at the outset and, many years later, his friend. ("Cairo Recalled" 32)

Ignace Tiegerman inspired inordinate devotion not just in those like Said who got near him, but also in those who knew him only from his teaching as was the case of one of his female students,

> a stunningly fluent and accomplished young married woman, a mother of four who played with her head completely enclosed in the pious veil of a devout Muslim.
>
> Neither Tiegerman nor I could understand this amphibious woman, who with a part of her body could dash through the *Appassionata* and with another venerated God by hiding her face. She never said a word in my presence, although I must have heard her play or met her at least a dozen times.

Said concludes:

> Like Tiegerman, she was an untransplantable emanation of Cairo's genius; unlike him, her particular branch of the city's history has endured and even triumphed. For a brief moment then, the conjunction of ultra-European and ultra-Islamic Arab cultures brought forth a highlighted image that typified the Cairo of my early years. ("Cairo Recalled" 32)

Tiegerman caught people's imagination and continued to do so long after Said left Cairo. This is partly explained by the existential romance of his life, by his appearing to have sacrificed himself to his art: a process of self-destruction painfully visible in the photographs taken at various stages in his career — the androgynously beautiful, ecstatic figure of the young Tiegerman transformed by the end of his life into a human wreck, hunched over the piano like an old vulture.

Tiegerman was not the first or last great pianist to have lived an intense life. There was Toscanini, Gould, Horowitz, Pollini, a polyglot family of musicians against whom Edward Said measures himself and to which he would be honoured to belong. Said, like Tiegerman, also seems to have lived with the same intensity and refusal to compromise by going to the most extreme point and beyond it — destroying himself in the process.

> For years I seemed to be going over the same kind of thing in the work I did, but always through the writings of other people. It wasn't until the early fall of 1991 when an ugly medical diagnosis suddenly revealed to me the mortality I should have known about before that I found myself trying to make sense of my own life as its end seemed alarmingly nearer. A few months later, still trying to assimilate my new

> condition, I found myself composing a long explanatory letter to my mother, who had already been dead for almost two years, a letter that inaugurated a belated attempt to impose a narrative on a life that I had left more or less to itself, disorganized, scattered, uncentered. I had had a decent enough career in the university, I had written a fair amount. . . . I was a compulsive worker, I disliked and hardly ever took vacations, and I did what I did without worrying too much (if at all) about such matters as writer's block, depression or running dry.
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> ("Between Worlds" 3)

It was this quality of compulsive worker that transformed the real Said from being simply a student of music into an accomplished pianist. Importance is an attribute which is almost never applicable to performing musicians. However great they may be, they have no importance. To understand why Said is an exception to the rule, we need to look at his indigenous Cairo.

Said's disorderly palimpsest Cairo with its endless stream of consciousness (the Egyptian cinema, souks, bazaars), cohabitation of Islamic, Mediterranean and Latin erotic forms; the latent promiscuity of this semi-underground Cairo also teemed with musicians, song writers, and performers: there was the exiled Farid Al-Atrach, the melancholic lute composer-interpreter; his sister, the romantic singer with a sparrow-like voice, Ismahan; Muhammed Abdel Wahab, the aesthete-composer with an attitude; Tahia Carioca, the enchanted belly-dancer *extraordinaire* and *femme fatale*, who died of a heart attack in a Cairo hospital on 20 September 1999, at the age of 79, spanning a career of 60 years as the most stunning and long-lived of the Arab world's Eastern belly-dancers, and whom Said describes in the following terms:

> Tahia Carioca, the greatest dancer of the day, performing with a seated male singer, Abdel Aziz Mahmoud, around whom she swirled, undulated, gyrated with perfect, controlled poise, her lips, legs, breasts more eloquent and sensually paradisiacal than anything I had dreamed of or imagined in my crude auto-erotic prose. I could see on Tahia's face a smile of such fundamentally irreducible pleasure, her mouth open slightly with a look of ecstatic bliss tempered by irony and an almost prudish restraint. . . . She danced for about forty-five minutes, a long unbroken composition of mostly slow turns and passes, the music rising and falling homophonically, and given meaning not by the singer's repetitious and banal lyrics but by her luminous , incredibly sensual performance. ("Homage" 8)

He adds:

> Eastern dancing, as Tahia practiced it, shows the dancer planting herself more and more solidly in the earth, digging into it almost, scarcely moving, certainly never expressing anything like the nimble semblance of weightlessness that a great ballet dancer conveys. Tahia's dancing suggested (vertically) a sequence of horizontal pleasures, but also paradoxically communicated an elusiveness and a kind of grace that cannot be pinned down on a flat surface. . . . One never felt her to be part of an ensemble–as in kathak dancing, say — but always as a solitary, somewhat perilous figure moving to attract and at the same time repel men and women. ("Homage" 9)

It is probably too much to say of Tahia that she was a subversive figure, but Said thinks that her meandering, careless way with her relationships with men, her profligacy as an actress whose scripts (if she had any left), contracts (if she had any to begin with), stills, costumes, and the rest, all suggest how far away she always was from anything that resembled domesticity, ordinary commercial or bourgeois life, or even comfort for the kind so many of her peers seem to have cared about. She performed within an Arab and Islamic setting but was constantly in tension with it. She belonged to the tradition of العالمه, the learned woman who is also a courtesan, an extremely literate woman who is lithe and libertine with her physical charms. The great thing about Tahia, Said seems to suggest, was that her sensuality, or rather the flicker of it was so unneurotic, so attuned to an audience's gaze in all its raw or, in the case of dance connoisseurs, refined lust, that it was as transient and unthreatening as she was ("In Memory" 25).

Within the concert hall was the Prima Donna of the East, the great Koranic reciter and austere singer Umm Kalthoum who was reputed to be a lesbian and whose Thursday-evening broadcasts from a Cairo theatre were transmitted everywhere between Morocco and Oman. Having been fed a diet of her music at far too young an age, I still find her songs insufferable. But for those who like and believe in such cultural stereotyping, her long, languorous, repetitive lines, slow tempi, strangely retarded rhythms, ponderous monophony and eerily lachrymose or devotional lyrics stood for something quintessentially Arab and Muslim. She, who sang with great authority in all the most exacting roles, excelling in the

intricate *classical* style of Arabic song, mattered in a way no other female singer had since her arch rival, Ismahan, and as none has yet mattered after her:

> The greatest and most famous singer of the 20th-century Arab world was Umm Kalthoum, whose records and cassettes, fifteen years after her death, are available everywhere. A fair number of non-Arabs know about her too, partly because of the hypnotic and melancholy effect of her singing, partly because in the world-wide rediscovery of authentic people's art Umm Kalthoum is a dominant figure. But she also played a significant role in the emerging Third World women's movement as a pious "Nightingale of the East" whose public exposure was a model not only of feminine consciousness but also of domestic propriety. During her lifetime, there was talk about whether or not she was a lesbian, but the sheer force of her performances of elevated music set to classical verse overrode such rumors. In Egypt she was a national symbol, respected both during the monarchy and after the revolution led by Gamal Abdel Nasser. ("In Memory" 25)

What Said admires in Umm Kalthoum is her majesty, presence, and power of delivery. In her performance, one finds great virtuosity, breadth, and clarity of voice. His devotion to the aesthetics of her two-hour performance which conveys a sense of the sublime still strikes a chord many years after her death as the following excerpt shows:

> The first musical performance I ever attended as a very small boy (in the mid-1940s) was a puzzling, interminably long, and yet haunting concert by Umm Kalthoum, already the premier exponent of classical Arabic song. I had no way of knowing that her peculiar rigour as performer derived from an aesthetic whose hallmark was exfoliating variation, in which repetition, a sort of meditative fixation on one or two small patterns, and an almost total absence of developmental (in the Beethovenian sense) tension were the key elements. The point of the performance, I later realized, was not to get to the end of a carefully constructed logical structure — working through it — but to luxuriate in all sorts of byways, to linger over details and changes in text, to digress and then digress from the digression. (*Musical* xi)

There is an intensity, Said seems to be saying, and a refusal to compromise or cave in to the demands of the concert hall or society at large; that constitutes a well-known attitude in Umm Kalthoum's lifelong time which suggests a powerful insubordinate anger. His portrait of her explores with compelling plausibility the

idea of an artist at her best. Robed in the black or white gown and head scarf of a devout Muslim woman, Umm Kalthoum radiated the verve and wit that informed her entire personality. Her extraordinary singing career and her power as an icon throughout the Arab world still resonate many years after her death. Egypt was the capital of that world when it came to such matters as pleasure, the arts of desire and sociability, and both Tahia and Umm Kalthoum were its representatives.

Said's own knowledge of music is encyclopaedic, his taste eclectic. Proud of his achievement as an adept pianist, not only does he give recitals for charity and other non-profit organizations but he also deconstructs sonatas and concertos before classes of trained music students as well. He is also comfortable with critiquing various opera, orchestral performances, and music festivals.

> While it is true that grand opera is essentially a nineteenth-century form, and that our great opera houses now resemble museums which preserve artifacts by Wagner and Verdi for twentieth-century spectators, it is also a fact that some of the nineteenth-century repertory was already reactionary in its own time, whereas some was musically and theatrically revolutionary. In either case, however, nineteenth-century performances maintained vital contact with the cultural and aesthetic practice of the time: composers like Verdi, Wagner and Puccini were often around to influence what was done to their work, audiences and performers usually understood the language in which the opera was sung, and in the main, a musical idiom was shared by all concerned.

Said ends with this remark:

> Very little of this obtains today. . . . The problem . . . comes from the Italian repertory which, aside from Rossini, who was a genius, is mostly made up of second-rate work. The very prominence of a grotesque like Pavarotti is itself an indictment of the repertory that suits him so well. Such singers have reduced opera performance to a minimum of intelligence and a maximum of overpriced noise, in which almost unbelievably low standards of musicality and direction. This is an environment inhospitable to ideas or aesthetic conceptions. ("*Die Walküre*" 648)

It is tempting to see in Said a frustrated concert pianist, a man who but for the grace of God would be travelling around the world from concert hall to concert hall and recording studio to recording studio. What is clear though is that it is *playing* music that gives

him the greatest pleasure. He makes it happen for himself and for others as in the following instance:

> So in the case of the Brahms variations I found myself playing them with (for me) an unusual commitment to Brahms's music, in part because as I played I found myself recollecting with poignant nostalgia the voice and even the pianistic gestures of an old teacher, Ignace Tiegerman. . . . I remember asking him then whether he "really" liked Brahms, my tone indicating the perhaps jejune doubts and vacillations about Brahms that I felt even as he played the piece so convincingly. Yes, he said, but only if you really *know* about him, nodding at his hands.
>
> This wasn't connoisseurship or blasé familiarity. It suggested a whole tradition of teaching and playing that entered into and formed my own relationship with Tiegerman, as it must have between him and his colleagues and friends in Europe. Out of that emerged a capacity for giving life to a piece *in* the performance, a capacity dependent on knowing a composer through a structure of feeling. (*Musical* 90-91)

In his discussion of Tiegerman's use of variation, Said points to some important differences with both traditional and modern uses. The Brahms variation is the technical means for the development of the novelistic or epic figures that appear in his music as the identical but ever changing.

Music permeates most of Said's work; it is a vital factor. Not surprisingly, Said fixes on that most fascinating and ambiguous of all contemporary pianists, Glenn Gould, who gradually came to shun public performance for the sake of the recording studio. As if compensating for not giving public performances, Gould developed from modern technology what amounts to another kind of performance space — as instanced by his musically illustrated radio lectures, writings, and films.[4] Indeed, many of Gould's eccentric gestures can be seen as a response to the tired routine and unthinking consensus that ordinarily support the concert performance. In its character as a kind of extended, eccentric performance, Gould's life at the same time refused to give up the reclusive values of music. Said returns now and again to his much-admired Gould, who for him attempted, both through the genius of his playing and his decision to give up the routinized existence of a touring artist, to integrate his music with the world — without giving up its "reinterpretive, reproductive" aspect. This is the

"Adornian measure of Gould's achievement," Said notes, "and also its limitations, which are those of a late capitalism that has condemned classical music to an impoverished marginality and anti-intellectualism sheltered underneath the umbrella of 'autonomy'" (*Musical* 95). It is communication that Said sees as central to the culture industry, to the mass-produced and popular construction of aesthetic media. No matter how subtle or sophisticated the intentions of a composer, his music becomes, in Said's analysis, part of the culture industry or, at the very least, one of its fellow travellers.

The most obvious expression of Gould's *Klavierradikalismus*, his piano radicalism, was his abandonment of the concert platform. Not that he was the first or last great pianist to stop giving concerts: Horowitz and Michelangeli retreated for long stretches, and Eileen Joyce gave up altogether. But Gould did not retire only to make a triumphant return at some later point, nor did he give up merely for personal reasons and disappear into private life. His refusal to play in public was an expression of principle, a rejection of what he felt to be a false and dead form of music-making in favour of a higher artistic mission, which he believed could better be pursued in the recording studio. In this respect, Gould fully understood the problems of his historical position. "He . . . was that almost impossible creature," Said observes, "both a pianist of staggering talent and a man of effortlessly articulate opinions, some so arguable as to seem merely quirky, others profoundly insightful and intelligent. His work invariably offers musical and intellectual satisfactions encountered in the performances of no other contemporary musician" ("Glenn Gould" 534). Like Gould, in his approach to the history of music as well as to musical interpretation, Edward Said is able, like no other musician and/or music critic of his age with the exception of Charles Rosen, a lesser critic (perhaps) but a greater pianist, to think radically and for himself. He confronts the pieces of music themselves, instead of through the preconceptions and musical clichés of his time. This led him to reject almost all nineteenth-century piano music after Beethoven, to view Wagner with distrust, and to admit to his personal canon only a fraction of the output of Mozart. Said argues for his aesthetic from a number of directions, but it is best understood

as the aesthetic of a dedicated and passionate polyphonist. This accounts for his "blind spot" for music between Bach and Wagner, his championing of pre-classical composers like Sweelinck, Gibbons, and Byrd, his love of the late Romantics (especially Strauss) and Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern.

Auden said of Rimbaud that verse was a special illness of his ear, and one could say of Said that polyphony is a special illness of his inner ear, an almost pathological specialization in his way of thinking, perhaps even a condition of his psyche. His passionate commitment to musical polyphony sets him at odds with the culture of the concert hall and classical music. The musical repertoire best suited to that culture is one in which polyphonic values are expressed in favour of drama and virtuoso display. Said finds this music uninteresting and aesthetically corrupted by the functions it is designed to fulfil. Nothing better embodies this corruption than the piano concerto. Here we touch on the political dimension of Said's musical aesthetic. For in the piano concerto he sees not only crudeness of form (he thinks the sonata allegro overrated) but a dramatization of the aspect of human behaviour he dislikes most — competitiveness: the piano competing with the orchestra, the pianist strutting the stage as artist hero, vanquisher of orchestras and audiences, master not of musical control but of crowd control. By contrast, the polyphonic music which Said so loves presents an image of equality in formal relations and democracy among participating voices, an image, if you like, of a human set-up in which the competitive stress of the piano business (symbolized by the virtuoso piano concerto) would have no part.

Said's love of polyphony is a love of musical thinking (the pianist, he once said, echoing Gould, plays the piano, not with his fingers, but his mind), and if he rejects music of slight polyphonic content, this is because such music requires of the player a lesser degree of mental attention. This brought him into direct conflict with the main tradition of piano-playing as it has developed since the end of the eighteenth century, a tradition in which digital virtuosity has been the chief technical goal. Said acknowledges this contradiction. Since the concert hall is no place to nurture the subtleties of polyphony, either acoustically or ideologically, the pianist should abandon it for playing in private. Since the piano

repertoire is mainly full of anti-polyphonic music, the pianist should abandon it for Bach and Schoenberg. And since the conventions of piano technique are musically mindless, he should abandon them for a technique based on thinking.

Said's distaste for traditional pianistic virtues — beautiful sound, sensuous texturing, subtle or not so subtle tone-colouring — led him to cultivate an austere, bright, "unpianistic" sound in his own playing. He seeks out instruments that would maximize the clarity of voicing within polyphonic structures, and insists on regulating these instruments in ways that turn the piano technique grey. His views on the role of polyphony in Western music would be less convincing had he not himself possessed such a high degree of skill in polyphonic playing, the skill, as Glenn Gould would have it, of playing the piano. But it is the presence of Said's personality in his playing, the note of total commitment that is to be heard in it, which gives it its special power. Said's aesthetic is uncompromisingly puritanical and austere, yet his playing is never cold or dispassionate: it is dynamized by an exultant energy and conveys to the listener the tactility of the music as it is produced by fingers that are thinking. For Said, without the ability to be radical, to call into question the established certainties of the classical music canon and its institutions, a performer of this music in the late twentieth century cannot properly interpret it. Unfamiliar music (Medieval and Renaissance music and contemporary works) does not demand this kind of radicalism, but the classics of the concert hall can easily become a gruesome bore without it. Put another way, a performer who does not, as Gould did, question the purpose of playing the classical music canon, who is not aware of how the pieces can lose their meaning in the process of constant repetition, who does not entertain the possibility that the commercial institutions of music-making create a context in which he can no longer effectively communicate — such a performer cannot develop an aesthetic through which the familiar can once again be heard as new.

As *locus classicus* Said uses Gould's deliberate refusal to make his legendary 1955 recording of Bach's *Goldberg Variations* the basis for his new interpretation (1981). Gould did not listen to it again until three or four days before the first session in the studio. He makes his point with unerring aptness:

> I found that it was a rather spooky experience. I listened to it with great pleasure in many respects. I found, for example, that it had a real sense of humor, [. . .] and I found that I recognized at all points really the fingerprints of the party responsible. I mean from a tactile standpoint, from a purely mechanical standpoint my approach to playing the piano you know really hasn't changed all that much over the years. It's remained quite stable, static some people might prefer to say. . . . But, and it is a very big "but," I could not recognize or identify with the spirit of the person who made that recording. It really seemed like some other spirit had been involved. ("In a Kind of Autumnal Repose" 11)

For Said, perhaps the most telling contrast between the two performances occurs in the final stretch from variations 25 through 30. In 1955, Gould subjects the grief-stricken 25th to a slower, more searching tempo, restores the emotional balance with the radiant *figurae* of the next four variations and drinks heartily through the combined peasant strains of the quodlibet. The aria reprise confirms his *bonheur de vivre*. The 1981-recording of variation 25 is poised, but more sad than despairing; hence, less emotional distance is covered through the next four variations. Curiously, the two bumptious tunes of variations 30 unfold tentatively. This approach makes little sense till the Goldberg aria returns ("Glenn Gould" 534).

Gould had a rare and astonishing talent for doing one thing brilliantly and suggesting that he was doing something else too. Hence his predilection for contrapuntal forms or, on a slightly different note, his eccentric habit of playing the piano, conducting and singing, or his way of being able to quote both musically more or less anything at any time. "In a sense," Said observes, "Gould was gradually moving toward a kind of untheatrical and anti-aesthetic *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or universal artwork, a description which sounds ludicrous and contradictory" ("Glenn Gould" 535). Where Gould could approach Mozart through his unique Gouldian perspective and find, according to his own lights, much that was wanting in much of Mozart and therefore a beauty in what pleased him, other pianists's trust in the composer's infallibility leaves them little room to manoeuvre between the familiar rites of Mozart worship: Mozart as fresh but urbane, unaffected but ironic, aloof but intimate, and so on. Where Gould could write jacket notes for his recording of the *Appassionata* dismissing the work as pompous and

overrated, or could sigh wistfully that he had "tried very, very hard to develop a convincing rationale for the *Emperor* Concerto," other pianists only intone of these works that they have "spacious grandeur." Where Gould could contemplate the possibility that the concert hall was destroying his capacity to be the musician he wanted to be, other pianists can only fuss about the etiquette of program-planning (few pianists playing the classical music canon today interpret it in the light of a coherent aesthetic, which is why most with the notable exception of survivors from an earlier generation, like Artur Balsam or Mieczyslaw Horszowski) sound as though they are simply repeating, rather than re-creating, the music they play. Gould's strength, Said writes, is that he

> always seemed to achieve a seamless unity between his fingers, the piano and the music he was playing, one extending into the other until the three became indistinguishable. It was as if Gould's virtuosity finally derived its influence from the piece and not from a residue of technical athleticism built up independently over the years. Pollini has something of this quality, but it is the wonderfully intelligent exercise of his fingers in polyphonic music that separates Gould from every other pianist. Only a great Bach organist communicates in the same way. ("Glenn Gould" 536)

Or, to put it differently, the particulars have a momentum in the direction of the ensemble. For the most part they become what they are because of their relation to the whole. In themselves they are relatively unspecific, like the basic proportions of tonality, and tend to be amorphous.

The question of whether there is a truly original musical style emerges when Said writes about music in works like *Musical Elaborations*, a remarkably rich and entertaining essay. Performance, which now extends from "authentic" plainchant to Berlioz and Wagner played on period instruments, is an interesting phenomenon which has become the single most characteristic aspect of our serious musical life. It is a development that has taken place with astonishing speed over the past quarter of a century, though as Said amply demonstrates, this success could not have been achieved without the work of scholars, instrument-builders, enthusiasts, and pioneers dating back more than a century. Now that it has gone beyond the innocent revival of music everyone had

forgotten, to strike at the roots of how we perform the music everyone knows or seems to know, the authenticity question rouses the strongest feelings among musicians — who justifiably feel that traditional performing styles are being implicitly challenged and even radicalized (Nigel Kennedy's bravura is a case in point) — and raises questions about the museum culture of our day, our lack of commitment to emergent composers and music and our escape into the distant past. With its claim that the past knows best, the classical music establishment appears to attack the very idea of cultural continuity and development.

According to Said, classical music enthusiasts have always been open to accusations of arrogance, of claiming that their way to perform was the only way and of being effete. Does a reliance on history somehow remove from the musician the need to perform with passion and involvement? In the days of Roger Norrington's Beethoven, John Eliot Gardiner's Handel and Nikolaus Harnoncourt's Mozart such an accusation may be true, but some of the variations which Said has demonstrated show that in the past the charge was certainly justified. When Erwin Bodky wrote in a program note for concerts of his Cambridge Society for Early Music in Boston, Massachusetts, in the 1950s, he declared:

> Classical . . . music was a highly aristocratic art and restraint governed even the display of emotion. . . . This deprives concerts of Classical music of the atmosphere of electricity which, when present, is one of the finest experiences of the modern concert hall. Who seeks but this may stay away from our concert series. We want to take this opportunity, however, to thank our artists for the voluntary restraint in the display of their artistic capabilities which they exercise when recreating with us the atmosphere of equanimity, tranquillity and noble entertainment which is the characteristic feature of Classical music.
>
> (*Conditions of Music* 123)

This statement goes against the grain of what Said presents us with in *Musical Elaborations*. The essay argues two principal points, and they remain somewhat at odds with one another. First is a dutiful act of loyalty to the fashionable notion that works of art must be removed from the sphere of aesthetics for subjection to cultural-historical analysis. The most illuminating writing about music, Said states, is "humanistic" rather than merely aesthetic or

technical — it (music) must have its various roles in society and in history, its relation to the discourses of political power, strenuously investigated, just as literature is nowadays primarily a matter for "cultural studies" and routinely submits to ideological or psychoanalytic analysis (*Musical* 29). Said argues at length with Adorno, who practised the same critique, though before it became the vogue, with magisterial strength and gloomy inclusiveness. Said, deferential but still his own man, characteristically points out that to treat modern music as a reflection or portent of the world's present or impending ruin is actually a Eurocentric view, taken with unconscious colonialist arrogance, to apply universally.

Said knows far too much about music to believe that the musical canon is, like the literary one, a white male bourgeois fraud. Any interpreter approaching the classical music canon in the twenty-first century is faced with an interpretative language distended with cliché: the result of the same works having been repeated over and over again. The concert platform is the scene of these repetitions, the place where the classical music canon is done to death night after night and year after year. Like Glenn Gould who stopped playing in public, Said plays in privacy in order to stamp his performance with individuality and intimacy. The subject-matter of his transgressive sonata (in chapter three) is, roughly the experience of music in solitude, of private performance and properly creative listening. This is far more interesting, and it establishes the right of Said's narrative to be taken more seriously than if it had offered nothing but a Foucauldian exercise in musical "archaeology" or a renegotiation between musical and other discourses.

Said's second principal subject, though still classifiable as cultural criticism, is his study of the conditions of modern performance — for instance, the alienating social arrangements of the concert hall. "Performances of classical music," he rightly observes, "are highly concentrated, rarefied and extreme occasions. . . . Performance is thus an inflected and highly determined point of convergence where the specific and the general come together" (*Musical* 17). Put differently, performance is a feat quite distinct from composing, which it has in large measure displaced from public interest. Nowadays sharply differentiated from

composers, performers are also clearly marked as separate from their audiences. Most members of the audience play no instrument, cannot get to know music by playing piano transcriptions as they once did, and in any case could not hope to play the way the pianist does: so they observe him in an alienated but reverential ignorance, much as they might a pole vaulter. This is true as the most effective deterrent to concert-going is the nonsense in which all, performers and audience alike, feel obliged to participate, perhaps to establish that elusive rapport — the absurd, ritually prolonged applause, the ceremonial entrances of leader and conductor, the marching off and on-stage, the standing up and sitting down, all reaching its farcical nadir in the yelling, stamping foolery of the Proms. Said along with Adorno, Gould, and others lament that social and technological developments have gone far toward ruining classical music by making it available in this way, or in recorded performance, invariant and therefore falsifying. He also deplores the musical pollution of our aural environment, the "demotion of music to commodity status" (*Musical* 72). On the other hand, he dislikes the way musicologists barricade themselves behind abstruse textual analysis, not risking the more "humanistic" approach which places music in social and psychological settings. It sometimes appears that he wants music to suffer all the pains literature is currently undergoing. This is conscientious, but it seems strikingly at odds with the preferred inwardness of his own experience of music; and it makes for a certain apparent confusedness of exposition.

It is not easy to grasp the structure of the Wellek Lectures right away; listening to them must have been strenuous, despite the relief of musical illustrations. Said talks about a great many things, digresses, honors his critical commitments, and returns with some relief to music proper. So there is a continuous struggle between an intense private love of music and a conviction that the modern way of treating the discourses of art as underprivileged in relation to other discourses ought to be applied to music as to everything else. Hence the stress on professional performance. Said pays handsome tribute to Toscanini and Gould among others. He has to weigh against their admired interpretative skills the fact that they in different ways conspire in the maintenance of a social order:

"Toscanini giving performances appropriate to the sponsorship of a giant industrial concern, Gould abjuring the concert hall but making that very gesture an index of apartness and a permanent part of his performance" (*Musical* 98). Said most approves works that transgress social norms, or musical norms socially imposed — for example, *Così fan tutte* and Bach's *Canonic Variations on von Himmel hoch*, the latter because it is so enormously and gratuitously in excess of the "pious technical sententiousness" of the chorale.

For Said, performance is a fundamental prerequisite of all true music. Examples abound but the one that most exemplifies his attachment to it is the final lecture, an account of what it was like to listen to Alfred Brendel playing the Brahms *Piano Variations, Opus* 18, a work he had not known, though he at once realized its connection with the *String Sextet* in *B flat*. He subtly distinguishes between that experience and the experience of listening in the same recital, to the Diabelli *Variations*, a work Said knew well, so that during its performance he was attending to Brendel's interpretation rather than to the music itself, as he had done with the Brahms variations. The other instance is that of Gould's performance of contrapuntal pieces. Said speaks of a one hour-program Gould devoted to the fugue that comprised selections from Bach's *Well Tempered Clavier*, the last movement of Beethoven's *Sonata* in *A flat major* (*Opus* 110) and a daemonic rendition of the last movement of Paul Hindemith's *Sonata No.* 3, "a fine piece hardly ever played in concert today because of the intellectual cowardice of most contemporary musicians" ("Glenn Gould" 533). The program of variations climaxed with performances of Webern's *Variations* and Beethoven's *Sonata* in *E major* (*Opus* 109).

> Gould linked the two by a brilliant highlighting of the structural finesse and expressive detail in both works — a considerable achievement, since the pieces are written out of diametrically opposed aesthetics, one exfoliative and elaborate, the other concentrated and crabbed. The program also included a severely restrained performance of a Sweelinck organ, which I first heard during a Gould recital in 1959 or 1960. I was struck then, and again watching the film, by the way Gould disappears as a performer into the work's long complications, providing an instance of what he called "ecstasy," the state of standing outside time and within an integral artistic structure.
>
> ("Glenn Gould" 534)

The greater the autonomy of an artwork from social or institutional imperatives, the more precisely will its formal constitution depict the structure and conflicts of the society in which the artist lives and works. Aesthetic form, the artwork's perceptual frame, is a product of consciousness shaped by the social objectivity that mediates all consciousness; thus the more the artwork relies on its own autonomous form rather than trying to depict, immediately, social reality, the more distinctly will this reality and its antagonisms appear in cipher in the work's perceptual arrangements and the tensions they engender. "It is as a dynamic totality, not as a series of images that great music becomes an intrinsic theater of the world" (*Aesthetic Theory* 76).

The death of interpretation, Michel Foucault argues in *Dits et écrits*, is the belief that there are signs of something, that is to say, some hidden essence waiting for us at the end of our interpretative journeys; the "life of interpretation, on the contrary, is to believe that there are only interpretations" (322). Modern, critical knowledge of classical music is certainly an hermeneutic of depth, but that should not be construed as a search for deep structures; rather, we must realize the full analytic impact of what Nietzsche saw: that "interpretation has . . . become an *infinite* task." Said's interpretative variations, as I read them, consist in holding every interpretandum *to be already an interpretation.* He reminds one of the Jazz pianist Keith Jarret, polyphonic, contrapuntal, variational. But Said brought this technique about largely by hybrid means, through the affirmation of a heterogeneous tradition that encompasses not only musicology but also opera, aesthetics, theory. It is because of this state of mingling between music and literature that Said has such a clear grasp of the nature of music that he can see the differences from, as well as the similarities with, text/performance. His musical critical career contains analyses of works by Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Verdi, Rossini, Richard Strauss, Stravinsky, Chopin and many others that are both completely comprehensible to the layman and musically acute. They are this because we sense he has himself spent long hours weighing and balancing temporal sequences against each other without theoretical preconceptions, but solely in order to achieve his own ends in private moments.

Said's admirable clarity about the "life of interpretation," in Foucault's phrase, stems at least in part from his awareness of the fact that the late twentieth-century interpretation of music, far from being a natural phenomenon, consists of man-made objects — objects, moreover, which are made according to a very limited set of possibilities. Said is aware that we cannot simply object to the results of a performance, but he asks why we should not make use of the fact that works of music are not life but compositions, in order so to compose them as to throw as much light as possible on life. At times, he raises questions that have no easy answers.

> How far can one go in transforming a work, and what is it about the work itself that appears to permit some changes but not others? Why are ideological notions about authenticity or fidelity to a text allowed to rule performance standards, and what is it about Mozart's operas [for example] in particular . . . that inspires the conservatism of some viewers and the enthusiasm of others when the works are staged with startlingly new, even shocking force? (*Musical* 16)

But this is not merely a critic's awareness of an artistic problem: the notion of a work as being filled with "life" has cultural and existential as well as aesthetic dimensions. Commenting on what he calls "an outsider's interpretation" of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, Said notes:

> Peter Sellars's choice of the drug scene, with a darkened stage and frequently indistinguishable figures, struck me as shatteringly, chillingly pertinent. Don Giovanni's love life is as romantic as a dingy subway platform inhabited by outcasts and misfits who lie in wait for the occasional trick; the attitude of the confirmed junkie shooting up every time he gets a chance is perfectly comparable to the driven rake in his view of women. And Sellars portrayed it. ("*The Barber of Seville, Don Giovanni*" 319)

At such moments it becomes the duty of the musically gifted critic to reveal the cultural roots of whole hearted performances — even though such performances may lack money and stars. "For its part," Said concludes,

> music criticism is now effectively the report of attendance at concerts that are really evanescent happenings, unrepeatable, usually unrecordable, nonrecuperable. And yet in the interesting recharting of intellectual undertakings attempted by what has been called cultural studies, certain aspects of the musical experience can be understood inclusively as taking place within the cultural setting of the contemporary West. ("*The Barber*" 320)

A music that is truly social (and, therefore, socially true), in Said's analysis, is one in which the elements manifest sociality and temporality in their relations with each other. A composition, for Said, is thus an interdependent whole, a developing process, a becoming. It has history within it and is transformed by outer historical movement in which it participates. The receiver can only appreciate such a process through actively and sympathetically participating in its development, from the inside, as it were; this demands from the receiver — to borrow a phrase from Polanyi — an "indwelling." Any such indwelling presupposes a concentrative and absorbed mode of listening in which no element, be it a rhythm, a melody or phrase, takes precedence over the developing totality.

Music and opera performance is, of course, an art of interpretation. Yet it is not plausible to expect a pianist playing a Beethoven sonata or an opera director staging *Wozzek* to produce creative misreadings of these works. Most musical performance is still held in by mimetic norms. The pianist tries to play as exactly as possible what he or she thinks Beethoven actually wrote, in the order that he wrote it, first movement first, last movement last. Similarly, opera productions, although they give the director considerable leeway, must still respect character and plot. It would be impossible to do *Aïda* without an Aïda even though impresarios today do do *Aïdas* — and *Toscas* and *Siegfrieds* without Aïdas, Toscas, and Siegfrieds. Directors and audiences (to say nothing of singers and dancers) retain a common realistic expectation of what the intactness of a piece is, otherwise there would be no opera, and no paying audience. So it has been the case that musical revivals have tended to be conservative, trying to get back to some lost or forgotten original. The vogue for early music played on original instruments, the revival of *bel canto* repertoire and style, all these have embodied not just the idea of recuperation but a usually unstated ideology of authenticity. The musical results are often satisfying. But it is not generally noted that even so apparently harmless and "correct" a notion as faithfulness to an original is itself already an *interpretation*, in which a slew of unverifiable entities (the composer's intention, the director's method, an original sound) are set up and bowed to as if they were facts of nature. Take as an illustration Said's comment on two productions of *Così fan tutte*: the 1951

Metropolitan Opera production directed by Alfred Lunt and the Peter Sellars production staged in New York in the late 1980s.

> *Così fan tutte* was the first opera I saw when I came to the United States as a schoolboy in the early 1950s. The 1951 Metropolitan Opera production was directed by renowned theater figure Alfred Lunt, and, as I recall, much celebrated as a brilliant yet faithful English-language rendition of an elegant opera that boasted an excellent cast . . . and a fastidiously executed conception as an eighteenth-century court comedy. I remember a lot of curtseying, many lace hankies, elaborate wigs, and acres of beauty spots, much chuckling and all-round good fun, all of which seemed to go well with the very polished, indeed even superb singing by the ensemble. ("*Così fan tutte* at the Limits" 95-96)

Of Sellars's production, Said writes:

> The great virtue of this production [staged . . . at the now defunct PepsiCo Summerfare in Purchase, New York] was that Sellars managed to sweep away all of the eighteenth-century clichés. As Mozart had written the opera while the ancient régime was crumbling, Sellars argued, they should be set by contemporary directors at a similar moment in our time — with the crumbling of the American empire alluded to by characters and settings, as well as by class deformations and personal histories that bore the marks of a society in crisis. Thus Sellar's version of . . . *Così fan tutte* takes place in Despina's Diner, where a group of Vietnam veterans and their girlfriends hang out, play games, and get frighteningly embroiled in feelings and self-discoveries for which they are unprepared and with which they are incapable of dealing.
>
> (*Così fan tutte* at the Limits" 96)

It is rewarding, Said goes on to say, to see *Così fan tutte* staged not only as a farce but also as a shrewdly calculating and inventive piece of conventional provocation insofar as the opera's strange lightheartedness hides, or makes light of, an inner system that is quite severe and amoral in its workings. This view, he explains, displays a universe short of any redemptive or palliative schemes, whose one law is motion and instability expressed as the power of libertinage and manipulation. Said explains the director's choice with the searching statement that "no one but Sellars has attempted such a full-scale revisionist interpretation of [this] opera, which remain[s] in the repertory as essentially courtly, classical, eighteenth-century opera" ("*Così fan tutte* at the Limits" 95). He finds Sellars's straying beyond the appointed limits attractive and daring.

Said also points out that there is another, more exigently contemporary and practical reason for interpreting Mozart as Sellars does.

> Consider that Sellars himself is the product of a culture with no continuous and independent opera tradition. Until now mainstream American opera production has derived mainly from Europe, and a boring *verismo* (i.e., mimetic) Europe at that. For such a tradition to work here you need money and stars, neither of which are handily available. Sellars's means are therefore modest. His singers in *Così* were young and of average (even mediocre) voice, with the women in general better than the men. What they lacked in musical polish, they more than made up for in physical agility; many arias were sung by characters rolling around on the stage, with results in pure vocal production that were not always satisfying. . . . In fact, so strong was Sellars's conception of his singers as functionaries in his productions that you can only imagine them singing for him.
>
> (*The Barber of Seville, Don Giovanni* 320)

The great virtue of Sellars's production, Said goes on to demonstrate, is that it can provide some direct insight into the da Ponte Mozart's motives as to why he composed the opera in the first place. Almost immediately, they put you in touch with what is most eccentric and opaque about Mozart; the obsessive patternings in the opera, patternings that have little to do with showing that crime does not pay or that the faithlessness inherent in all human dealings must be overcome before true union can occur. Mozart's characters in *Così fan tutte* can be interpreted not as individuals with definable characteristics but as figures driven by forces outside themselves that they do not comprehend and make no effort to examine. This opera, in fact, Said concludes, is about power and manipulation that reduce individuality to a momentary identity in the vast rush of things. There is very little room in it for providence, or for the heroics of charismatic personalities. Compared with Beethoven, Mozart depicts a Lucretian world, in which power has its own hunger, undomesticated either by considerations of piety or verisimilitude.

Writing about music has served as an escape from polemical politics, a way of moving from the mundane realm to the aesthetic, from social and/or ideological issues to a personal relation with various operas, recitals and orchestral performances. Having spent a lifetime dealing with the complexity and subtlety of

literature and music, Said turns his attention to discovering some basic secrets about aesthetics and the relationship between operatic as opposed to symphonic sound and silence. His love for what Aaron Copland called "*la forme fatale*" (that is, opera) has led him to cooperate with Daniel Barenboim and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra on a production of *Fidelio.* His latest project as dramaturge for a Berlin production of *Les Troyens* in the year 2000 supports the claim made here: having persuaded us that المعرفه قوّه (knowledge is power), he now wants to convince us of the moral dimension of a musical construction and of the aesthetics that is the basis of anything truly creative and liberating. Surely these same insights must ultimately prove of value in the making of a free self. Speaking of a concert Barenboim conducted in Jerusalem, in April 1998, Said writes,

> After his concert, in front of a packed house, he dedicated his first *encore* to the Palestinian woman who had invited him to dinner the night before and who was present that evening. I was surprised to see the audience, made up entirely of Israeli Jews (she and I were the only Palestinians), respond to his noble dedication with enthusiastic applause. ("La Palestine n'a pas disparu" 5)

In the interview Said conducted with Barenboim in Jerusalem, the Argentine pianist and conductor regretted that the fifty years of Israeli statehood represented fifty years of suffering for the Palestinian people. In the end, "he made it clear," Said reports, "that he was in favor of a Palestinian state" ("La Palestine n'a pas disparu" 5).

The company Said keeps is well tuned to iconoclasm, for Barenboim is none other than the brilliantly audacious conductor and pianist who in November 1989, led the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra to commemorate the transition (*Wende*) that had occurred in German politics after the fall of the Iron Curtain by performing Beethoven's First Piano Concerto and Seventh Symphony, which East Germans experienced "as in a dream."[5] It was in the cause of Beethoven that Barenboim undertook a mammoth task: the complete cycle of Beethoven symphonies and piano concertos over six concerts in London's Royal Festival Hall during May, 1998. "I have been nearly 50 years on the stage — I gave my first concert in 1950; my father, who was my teacher, never allowed me to repeat a piece more than twice in the same season, so it really increased my

repertoire at a very young age. . . . I played the cycle of Beethoven when I was 15, so I have lived with these pieces for 40 years."[6] Barenboim says that Beethoven sets him free. His approach is to bring an acute sense of focus to the music, built on long familiarity with the scores and the sense of freedom acquired by technical mastery. That Said should choose to co-conduct with Barenboim and/or write on *Fidelio* can in itself be understood as a stand against domination, for Beethoven's only opera can be seen as a symbol of liberation and the triumph of good over evil. Perhaps with the signing of Oslo I and Oslo II, which Said opposed, the liberation of Palestine had only reached the first act; only if total decolonization and democracy for all are achieved, only if Palestinian citizens all over the world have the possibility of voting freely, would Said feel it appropriate to quote Florestan and Leonore from Act 2 of *Fidelio* — "O namenlose freude" and "inaussprechlich süsses glück," sung by the liberatea, prisoners and soloists, finale.[7]

Nowhere is Said's partiality for Beethoven more amply demonstrated than in the following comment in which he compares *Fidelio* to *Così fan tutte*:

> *Fidelio* can also be interpreted as a terrific counter-blow to *Così fan tutte*, an important antecedent and part of the past that Beethoven is working with. On the one hand, he incorporates the disguises, if not the malice of *Così*: on the other, he uses unmasking to assert the bourgeois ideal of matrimonial fidelity. Memory in *Così fan tutte* is a faculty to be done away with in the pursuit of pleasure: in *Fidelio* it is a vital part of character. ("On Fidelio" 25)

From this inclination comes the intense energy of *Fidelio*, expressed in its frequent reference to justice, fidelity and conjugal love. Less a dramatic representation of redemptive love than an enactment of various principles (loyalty, conjugal bliss, and hatred of tyranny) *Fidelio* is based on Jean Nicolas Bouilly's play *L'Amour conjugal*. Originally finished in 1806, the opera was not successful until eight years later, when Beethoven shortened it considerably and changed its name from *Leonore* to *Fidelio*. The composer's admiration for the French Revolution (from which in a sense his text for the opera was borrowed) pays little heed to actual revolutionary life; what he achieves is the much more special advantage of using a political motif to get beyond politics altogether, and

beyond history as well. "Indeed," Paul Robinson notes, "one might even argue that linking the opera's liberationist theme to the events of the Revolution violates its universalist spirit and thereby diminishes it" (*Ludwig van Beethoven, Fidelio* 80). Ernst Bloch has made the inspired claim that *Fidelio* is an apocalyptic work oriented to the future; thus the famous trumpet call releasing Florestan from Pizarro's dungeon just after Leonore has made herself known is the "*tuba mirum spargens sonum*, pronouncing the savior's arrival." By the end of the opera, Bloch continues, "Beethoven's music has proved itself to be militant-religious, the dawning of a new day so audible that it seems more than simply a hope. . . . Thus music as a whole stands at the farther limits of humanity, but at those limits where humanity, with new language and haloed by the call to achieved intensity, to the attained world of 'we,' is first taking shape" (*John Cage [Ex]plain[ed]* 67). I suppose it is gargantuan egoism on Beethoven's part to pretend that he was capable of going beyond humanity into the realm of timeless principle. But his egoism, his carefully constructed subjectivity, his aesthetic norms are all part of the attempt to rise out of the particular, the historical, the political.

Early Romantic art is full of this disenchantment with the worldly, even in supposedly political works; it is interesting not because it is humanistic as it pretends but precisely because its aims are to depoliticize. "Still *Fidelio*'s overall effect is extremely powerful," Said reminds us.

> It is as if some other, deeper force moves the work and in a subterranean way compels it forward, from the darkness of the prison into the light of day. Its theme is undoubtedly the very constancy and heroism which are the hallmark of Beethoven's middle-period style, and which are premised on the need to celebrate, indeed proclaim jubilantly, the virtuous love of men and women, the victory of light over darkness, and the defeat of injustice and treachery. ("On *Fidelio*" 80)

In other words, what is needed, Said maintains, is for a spiritual regeneration of society to arise from genuine rational cooperation in social production. Beethoven's world is but a reflection of the alienated and impoverished consciousness of society which would seek to recover at a sensuous level what it has lost through instrumentality. But such a unification has no basis in social reality;

there are no means to achieve it in anything but appearance. Genuine liberation would have demanded the rational control of the labour process in the cause of freedom, but this was not possible for Beethoven: his totality was no real totality, but the fragmented world of the individual pretending to be totality.[8]

One has to marvel at people who, like Said, read music in this fashion. But more than his art, it is his life — the only subject of his art — that serves to inspire so many. By now, it is easy to forget how many of us have been all but patented — or lived out most wholeheartedly — by Said, who has been so spendthrift with himself, and so loud in praise of folly, that he has laid himself open to many charges. He opened himself to us at various times without reserve, and sometimes with flippancy, which may not have always been understood. Yet to return to his books is to find him much more complex than either memory or stereotype. For many in the West, he is still a slightly embarrassing presence, the unruly *enfant terrible* who makes a display of himself at the dinner table. Commenting on how in the eyes of some people he has become some kind of oddity, he writes:

> Occasionally, I'd notice that I had become a peculiar creature to many people, and even a few friends, who had assumed that being Palestinian was the equivalent of something mythological like a unicorn or a hopelessly odd variation of a human being. A Boston psychologist who specialized in conflict resolution, and whom I had met at several seminars involving Palestinians and Israelis, once rang me from Greenwich Village and asked if she could come uptown to pay me a visit. When she arrived, she walked in, looked incredulously at my piano — "Ah, you actually play the piano," she said, with a trace of disbelief in her voice — and then turned around and began to walk out. When I asked her whether she would have a cup of tea before leaving (after all, I said, you have come a long way for such a short visit) she said she didn't have time. "I only came to see how you lived," she said without a hint of irony. Another time a publisher in another city refused to sign my contract until I had lunch with him. When I asked his assistant what was so important about having a meal with me, I was told that the great man wanted to see how I handled myself at the table.
>
> ("Between Worlds" 7)[9]

In the East, Said is often referred to as "one of those who jump on the bandwagon of patriotism" (*Peace and Its Discontents* 166). Yet combating constructed fictions like "East" and "West," to say

nothing of racialist essences like *subject races, Orientals, Aryans, Negroes, imperialism, nativism, nationalism* and the like is precisely what endears Said to the have-nots.

Proust once said that every artist has a particular tune (*chanson*) that can be found in almost each sentence of his work: a special cadence, theme, obsession or characteristic key absolutely the artist's own. Glenn Gould's key may be the combination of rhythm and polyphony that informs all his playing. In Said's case, it is an immediately recognizable tension between simple melody and insistent, sometimes explosive and always contrapuntal developmental sequences. Said sets the form, as a dramatist sets a play — on a stage, before the audience and for a discrete span of time. Said's essays on music reflect his lifelong concern with art (in contrast to reason) as the only humanly available means for expressing wholeness, or more precisely, the longing for a transcendence whose realization represents not only a vain hope, but potential source of good and/or evil. In Said's thought, violence and myth, evil and death intrude into the world and must be struggled against by critical means both literary and aesthetic.

For a region long dismissed as primitive, which has been largely interpreted in terms of its tyrannies, wars and injustice, it is both a timely and fortunate corrective to see the first-rate literature and criticism which exists all over Palestine, that most contested of places. Every writer identifies with a special place (*Birwa* for Darwish, *al-Quds* for Said), with its own writing (memory) and history (forgetfulness). If some Arab writers still lament the loss of the past (Darwish), their attempts to claim a lost paradise may be, paradoxically, the attempt for others (Said) to exorcize it from our collective memory. That, at bottom, is the extraordinary intellectual trajectory of Edward Said, one of the most influential musicians and critics of our time. Wood expresses its importance best: "Criticism is a chance to be taken and Edward Said continues to illustrate its allure and its rewards" (*Beginnings* xv). In the upshot, the central theme in Said's life is his unstilled anxiety, a narcissistic pattern of self-concern and self- immersion that is fed and accentuated by the life of a musical performer's playing and/or writing. In the process, the extremity of being alone day after day sooner or

later catches up with one, especially if, as in Said's case, the will to control life and body is constantly challenged — not just by the rigors of a performing life, but by mortality.[10]

NOTES

[1] Once playing the piano or violin, or singing, become professional (that is, paying activities), it is hard to fault exceptionally gifted performances. Glenn Gould knew all that perfectly well, but tried always to give the impression that he was really all about something else — an ideal of perfected articulation regardless of cost, a self-awareness that defied convention. For more details on piano playing, see Lebrecht 34-54; Said, *Reflections* 216-30.

[2] The problem is that music today is as massively organized a white male domain as it was in the past. Without significant exception, peripherals, like women, play a crucial but subaltern role. This is true in almost any random sampling of recent events — operas, recitals, orchestral performances — in which issues of interest to the subaltern are in evidence, but for which critical responses are not likely to be encountered. Ruth Padel's impressively documented study of the female role in opera is an electric, disturbing, and brilliantly provocative work, truly worthy of its subject, and an essential companion to a reading of late twentieth century classical music. "So far," she writes, "Western tragedy and opera have preferred to express the pain of sexual desertion through a woman's voice. They have also made it the voice of universal solitude." See Padel 12.

[3] "A month after I was diagnosed I discovered myself in the middle of writing a letter to my mother, who had been dead for a year and a half. Somehow the urge to communicate with her overcame the factual reality of her death, which in mid-sentence stopped my fanciful urge, leaving me slightly disoriented, even embarrassed. A vague narrative urge seemed to be stirring inside me, but I was too caught up in the anxieties and nervousness of my life with CLL (chronic lymphocytic leukemia) to pay it much attention" ("Living by the Clock"10).

[4] See Ostwald, chap. 3 in particular.

[5] For more details on the subject of celebrating freedom in Germany in 1989, see Dennis 175-205.

[6] Quoted in Graeme Kay 24. See also Said, "Daniel Barenboim & Edward Said: A Conversation."

[7] In May 1997, Said gave the new Empson Lectures in Cambridge, where he spoke on "Authority and Transgression in Opera." Said, who has combined his musical career and love for music with a devotion to the cause of liberation, has written music criticism on his own terms and has been rejuvenated rather than defeated by the exercise. Anyone who, like Said, tries to grasp the significance of Beethoven's life and music finds himself faced with a daunting task. The heroic element so central to it resides entirely within human proportions: the life is neither too long nor too short, the *oeuvre* seems exactly large enough, with clearly defined outlines, periods and developments. As we enter the nineteenth century we leave behind composers like Bach, with his 20 children, his 200-plus cantatas, his innumerable instrumental works and his unendingly complex and inventive counterpoint; or Mozart, with his inhuman productivity, his 49 symphonies and 21 piano concertos, his operas, masses, quartets, trios and sonatas, all exuding formal perfection and grace; or Haydn, with his more than 100 symphonies and dozens of works in every conceivable genre; or Handel, like Bach in his vast output, exuberant, repetitious, gallant. Such men both express a kind of murmuring anonymity and evoke a distinct aesthetic signature; the net effect is that the twentieth-century listener is awed and

mystified, above all unable to identify with musical careers that were fashioned as subaltern structures framed by court and church. For more details on the subject, see Rosen 22-34; Said, "Bach's Genius" 13-15.

Beethoven appeals to musicians like Said because he is the musical vanguard of what Charles Morazé has called *les bourgeois conquérants*. Beethoven's aristocratic supporters were, he believed, his subordinates, not his overlords. Though he was a man of the middle classes, his were the stubborn, almost entrepreneurial successes of a thoroughly worldly individual who rose well above the circumstances of his birth. Everything about his music, from the large cache of sketchbooks to the laboriously worked and reworked scores, argues effort and development on a human scale. The difficulties of his life are understandable — illness, debt, loneliness, an unpleasant family, unhappy love affairs, creative blocks — and, if we take into account his extraordinary gifts and accomplishments, his artistic achievements as a whole belong to a creaturely realm: they have a dimension no lesser mortal needs to feel is theoretically unattainable. Beethoven's music is vitally committed either to sonata forms or to variation forms, the former dramatic and developmental, the latter exfoliative and circular; in both instances, his hallmark is work, not sharing insight, and although the so-called late-period style, which so fascinated Adorno and Thomas Mann (and, I could add, Said), alternates between the demonic and the quasi-ethereal, there is always a healthy modicum of gritty technical effort to be appreciated. A perspicacious view of this topic is to be found in Robinson, 7-12; Dennis 1-32.

[8] In some instances, Said reminds us of Thomas Mann, who shows in *Doctor Faustus* how the Wagnerian concept of *leitmotif* can be related "to the principle of National Socialism" (46). Taking Mann literally instead of taking him as the inventor of an imaginatively constructed constitutive symbol, Said perhaps goes beyond the pale, as when he suggests that post-Wagnerian music may represent the "catastrophic collapse of a great civilizational achievement" (11). While there is nothing wrong with an imaginative allegorization of such music, like the one Mann gives, it is quite another thing to suggest that this is part of what the real-world music itself means. This is something like reading Hemingway to learn what bullfights really are.

[9] Another instance of harassment can be found in his comment on the reception of the 1993 Reith Lectures he gave in England. "I had no idea of the limitations to which I was subject, before I gave the lectures," he writes. "It was often said by complaining journalists and commentators that I was a Palestinian, and that, as everyone knew, was synonymous with violence, fanaticism, the killing of Jews. Nothing by me was quoted: it was just supposed to be a matter of common knowledge. In addition, I was described in the sonorous tones of *The Sunday Telegraph* as anti-Western, and my writing as focused on "blaming the West" for all the evils of the world, the Third World especially." For more details on this matter, see *Representations of the Intellectual* xi.

[10] *In* and *for* the memory of Miss Ivy Mogg who died in 1999 at the age of 101. I thank my friend and colleague Wayne Tompkins for untangling many plaits in this essay and acknowledge his kind generosity.

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