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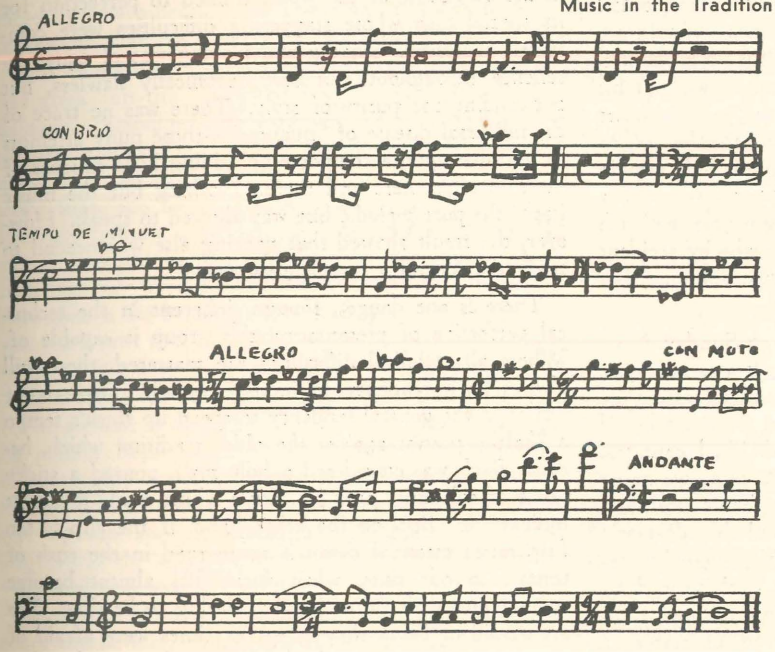
CHORUS FOR A HERO

Music in the Tradition



Text by Fleischmann & Washburn

QUOTATIONS

Bar	
1- 8	Lohengrin Wagner
9	Coriolanus Beethoven
9-10	Gross Fuge Beethoven
11-12	22 Variation on a Waltz of Diabelli (Notte Giorno Faticar) Beethoven
14-23	Damnation of Berlioz Faust (Minuet of the Will o' the Whisps)
24-25	Symphony in B Minor (2nd movement) Tschaikowsky
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Francis Jammes
Il Va Neiger . . .

Il va neiger dans quelques jours. Je me souviens
de l'an dernier. Je me souveins de mes tristesses
au coin du feu. Si l'en m'avait demandé: qu'est-ce?
j'aurais dit: laissez-moi tranquille. Ce n'est rien.

J'ai bien réfléchi, l'année avant, dans ma chambre,
pendant que la neige lourde tombait dehors.
J'ai réfléchi pour rien. A présent comme alors
je fume une pipe en bois avec un bout d'ambre.

Ma vieille commode en chene sent toujours bon.
Mais moi j'étais bete parce que ces choses
ne jouvaient pas changer et que c'est une pose
de vouloir chasser les choses que nous savons.

Pourquoi donc pensons-nous et parlons-nous? C'est drole;
nos larmes et nos baisers, eux, ne parlent pas,
et cependant nous les comprenons, et les pas
d'un ami sont plus doux que de douces paroles.

FRANCIS JAMMES

It's Going to Snow

It's going to snow in a few days. Well I recall
the year just past, remembering my sorrow
at the hearth's side. If they had asked me: what?
I would have said: leave me alone, nothing at all.

I had thought much that past year in my room
while yet the snow fell heavily outside.
And thought in vain. For now as yesteryear
I smoke a wooden pipe with amber stem.

My old oak chest-of-drawers still smells good.
But I was foolish because all these things
never could change. It is a pose.
to want to hunt down things already known.

Why do we speak or think? It's really funny;
Our kisses and our tears—those never speak,
and still we understand them. Step of friend
is softer than the sound of softest word.

Translated by Fleischmann

Bach Aria Group and Bach's Cantatas

The student who the other day said that music and the absurd were close relatives could find support for his view in pointing at the fate of J. S. Bach's Cantatas. At the time these pieces were composed people—and that includes the composer himself—cared so little about them that they wrapped their groceries in the paper on which the music was written. Yet taken as a body, these cantatas rank with Beethoven's symphonies, Haydn's string quartets, Schubert's songs. Would we know Beethoven without knowing his symphonies, Haydn without his string quartets, Schubert without his songs? We think of Bach as one of the great masters of music, and we believe we know him. Still the 200 or so cantatas of his, which have been preserved, remain buried in the libraries to this day. The discovery of a whole new continent of music, almost too vast, too rich to be explored in a lifetime, awaits those who by accident or purpose find their way to the twenty volumes that contain these compositions.

The concert of the Bach Aria Group on Sunday, Nov. 21, gave us a glimpse into these riches. It was not more than a glimpse; since what the group offered were selections from a selection, the arias and duets we heard are single movements taken out of individual cantatas. To get an idea of what a cantata is like, we must imagine these arias introduced by symphonic preludes, framed by colossal choruses, connected by dramatic recitatives, topped by moving chorals. Yet even thus restricted to one musical form, the aria, Bach proved an immensely enjoyable, moving, and entertaining composer. The variety of expression achieved, of states of mind perfectly represented and strikingly brought to life with the scantiest of musical means—often not more than one voice, one frail instrument, a few lightly touched chords of the piano—is really astounding. We think of Bach as the great polyphonic composer, the man of the many voices. Here we recognize him as the unsurpassed master of pure melody. The single melodic line, almost without accompaniment, does it all.

The group which presented this music is an ensemble in the best sense of the word, trained to perfection for its special task whose staggering difficulties were completely mastered. Singing and playing was of equal excellence throughout, not only technically flawless, but outstanding for purity of style. There was no trace of the universal disease of "nuances"—those puny attempts to improve upon a composer by adding little touches of external effect here and there. Nothing but the music itself, the pure melodic line was allowed to speak. However, the result showed that nothing else was needed to make the concert a complete success.

There is one danger, though, inherent in the technical perfection of presentation this group is capable of. Where all technical difficulties are mastered, there will always be a tendency to increase speed. There is of course in the general tendency to speed up Bash's tempo a healthy protest against the older tradition which, because Bach was considered a holy man, poured a sticky sauce of solemnity over his music which made it almost indigestible. But, on the other hand, if the clip is too fast, much essential detail is submerged in the rush of tones. In our time, when speed has almost become synonymous with value, it takes daring to be slow. We are afraid of being slow as earlier times were afraid of speed. Bach asks for both—let us dare to be slow wherever the music asks for it.

V. Zuckerkandl

Paradox of Government

During the question period Mr. Strauss suggested that he who thinks deeply about politics thinks paradoxically. During this lecture he was thinking about politics. Before the evening was over we were presented with a paradox—the paradox of the *lawful* and the *fitting*.

Before considering the paradox, Mr. Strauss concerned himself with teaching us how to read Xenephon generally and the dialogue on tyranny in particular. If we thought we knew how before the lecture, I am sure that most of us realized during the lecture that we had but glanced at it. What Mr. Strauss saw was the conflict between the wise man and the tyrant, between wisdom and power. (Who among us did not think Hiero welcomed the company and discourse of Simonides?)

Hiero, the tyrant, is confronted with an object of dread, a wise man; Simonides, with an unreceptive student who must be taught. Because of the life he led before becoming a tyrant, Hiero understood all types of men except one: the man of wisdom. Ignorance creates fear and fear asks "what subtle mischief" are they capable of? It is Hiero's task in the dialogue to dissuade Simonides from aspiring, should he be aspiring, to tyrannical rule. But it is Simonides who leads him on, who starts the discourse, knowing that for the tyrant to be taught, the tyrant must himself present his condition as one so hopeless and bankrupt that it must have help.

Simonides, feigning ignorance, asks the tyrant to become a teacher and explain how the life of a tyrant compares with that of an ordinary person with respect to the joys of the body. This is assurance for Hiero, both because the wise man has to be taught and because he considers bodily pleasures only. The latter is assurance because the consideration of bodily pleasures is, for Hiero, the consideration of a fool. Hiero speaks and indicts tyranny with gross overstatement. The preliminaries over, Hiero on the road of denunciation, Simonides thrusts the consideration of power and wealth as a field in which the tyrant is happier than other men. Hiero here again denounces while Simonides remains silent throughout the harangue. In this part Hiero introduces subjects not even suggested by Simonides. The latter silent, the former with a growing fear due to Simonides' leaving the fool's sphere, must force his point. Loftier subjects, such as friendship, are introduced by Hiero because the wise man must be made to understand that the tyrant's lot is an unhappy one.

It is Simonides' silence throughout this last passage that gives him the leadership for the remainder of the dialogue. Simonides now asks that Hiero consider the question whether the tyrant is not the most honored of man. It is the surprise and shock of this question on honor that, the fear now great, compells Hiero to so denounce tyranny that, "Ah, no! Simonides, if to hang oneself outright be ever gainful to poor mortal soul, then, take my word for it, that is the tyrant's remedy." Here then is the bankrupt tyrant. The wise man so controls the tyrant that should he wish to, he could kill him by suggesting easy ways of suicide. But an interlocuter needs a living subject and so the poet does not kill.

The student is prepared. Simonides makes a case for the greater honor that can be enjoyed by the tyrant; an honor that is worth doing evil for, for it is a "lustre effacing what is harsh and featureless and rude." And here is even another shock for the tyrant. To what lengths will the wise man not go for the honor of power—the evil necessary for attainment shall not stop him.

From this point on, Simonides tells Hiero how this honor can be his. Here is the painting of the beneficent tyrant. In this speech lies the paradox: here is the theoretically perfect, the only valid though illegitimate rule, and here also is the impossible, the necessity for the instigation of invalid though legitimate rule.

At this point, Mr. Strauss began to look for the meaning of the dialogue—what is it that Xenophon is saying in "Hiero, a Dialogue on Tyranny." Mr. Strauss' interpretation was clarified in the question period and I am taking the liberty of considering his answer in the light of both the lecture and the question period, the latter being an important aid to the understanding of the former.

First of all, Xenophon chose the form of presentation that he did because in this form, the dialogue, tyranny can be defended by a wise man. Through Simonides, tyranny is given stature. The opponent of tyranny, Hiero, is not quite the man to be respected. He is the loser! Xenophon made him lose. The indication is that Xenophon sees some good in tyranny a rule without law. What is this good and why paradoxical?

Rule by law is legal but not necessarily fitting. If we consider the following example we might better understand this last statement. A big boy has a small coat and a small boy a big coat. The big boy takes the small boy's coat and gives him his own. If this act is committed in a state ruled by law, the state will prosecute the big boy. If not, then actually there is no rule in the state for people would be allowed to take and do what they will. But it is not *fitting* that the big boy go around cold while the small boy trips on the hem of the large coat. Were these boys living in a state ruled by a beneficent tyrant, the *fitting* decree would be issued.

The tyrant rules without law. Nothing is static and determined in the state as such. The tyrant's rule is fluid and fitting—as fluid as time, as fitting as the tyrant. Theoretically, the beneficent tyrant is the only valid ruler, for only his rule can be completely just. To be ruled by a beneficent tyrant is to be ruled always by wisdom.

Rule by law, whether monarchic or democratic cannot be just or fitting rule because laws cannot think, and conditions require thought. Laws cannot at all times make all the parts of the state *fit* together. They are bound and limited to their word and even should a wise man rule under them, he is bound and limited by their word too. (To suggest at this point, the Spirit of the Law, would be begging the question. One might say that the beneficent tyrant is nothing more than law in spirit.) It is the beneficent tyrant only who can make things fit together for he alone is wisdom free to act.

But though that is all theoretically true, it is practically impossible. For a beneficent tyrant one of two things must happen; either the tyrant accepts the advice of the wise man or is himself a wise man. (He is no longer a tyrant when he becomes a wise man.) The first is impossible since the tyrant, as is clear from Mr. Strauss' reading of the dialogue, fears the wise man and cannot learn from him. The second is impossible because wise men cannot be politicians in any state that they do not rule. Socrates' death and Xenophon's exile are two examples which bear this out.

According to Mr. Strauss the last line of the dialogue expresses the impossibility of the realization of a rule by a beneficent tyrant. The dialogue closes with Simonides saying that Hiero will be "honored but not envied" if he will do all that Simonides suggests. But Hiero fears that he would be envied by the wise man if he were to rule as Simonides suggests. Not being wise, Hiero does not realize that wisdom knows no envy. Hiero would be wise were he not to fear the envy of the wise, and his being wise would preclude Simonides' advice. Hence Hiero fears and does not become beneficent and not being wise, he is not beneficent.

During the question period the issue of application was pressed. Mr. Strauss, both at the end of the lecture and in the question period, insisted (with Socrates and Xenophon) that this is a theoretical thesis and its use is to present the problem of law and validity. In the realm of practicality, a second best is chosen even though this second best is far removed from the ideal. But to get the best in our practical choice requires that we understand everything we can about government—even its paradoxes.

A. Bisberg

Sonnet

Here by the riverbank the frogs complain
With Communal damp callings in the gloom
Some lost things CQ weakly through the broom
Endlessly sending as if not in vain;
Or the first magnitudes and all the train
Of heaven stand: the stars abide, by whom
The sailor bound for Asgard and for doom
Can navigate the sensible domain;
Their music lattices the lightlessness
Always and lights always the bitter sea
For each man who will hear: *not marble nor*
The gilded monuments of princes—or
Drowning, blind Homer and that coterie
Enchoir release from bearingless distress.

BALLARD

More on Strauss

Beneficent tyranny is the tyranny of man counselled by the wise. It is tyranny because it is outside of law. It is arbitrary rule above laws. Rationally speaking this typothetically is juster than rule under law, i.e., Monarchy. This was adroitly demonstrated in the question period, where Mr. Strauss also made it clear that this government of the wise apart from law, can only be an inspiration, a theoretical image. Practically speaking it is a different matter entirely.

It seems strange for Mr. Strauss to point out that Simonides wants to control a previously oppressive and unjust tyrant. He is not concerned with how he became a tyrant. To Mr. Strauss then, beneficent tyrannical rule is, in theory at least, as legitimate as constitutional rule, if the tyrant listens and acts on the advice of the wise. Admitting that beneficent tyranny is merely a theoretical "inspiration" for the purpose of clarifying the danger of laws, their staticness, does not, establish a reason for favoring such a situation. Tyranny cannot exist for citizen as citizen. Socrates was a citizen philosopher so he could not advise the unwise and selfish tyrant. Only a wise stranger could show the tyrant how to gain this love of the people. The tyrant is still satiating his desires. It is interesting to note, according to Mr. Strauss, that there is no reference to a previously existing beneficent tyrant in any of Xenophone's works.

According to Mr. Strauss, tyranny and laws are "mutually exclusive." Wise men do not wish to rule. This has necessitated the rule by an unwise, advised by the wise. The wise does not wish to rule because such rule entails being a slave. The philosopher accordingly is obligated to rule only in a perfect society. Since there is never such a state of things, he is never obligated.

The question prime in my mind is the legitimacy of advocating a goal for just and good government (a theoretical inspiration which is admittedly unobtainable). This justification is based on the static character and rigidity of law and the clumsiness and delaying action of a governing body of imperfect men. I do not see how the conclusion follows, that if the body of persons are wise enough to recognize the beneficence of the tyrant, i.e. his governing for their good; they are nevertheless unfit to govern themselves. It is, according to the lecturer, because the people recognize this beneficence only by right opinion. They are less fit to govern than the tyrant who is outside this realm of opinion, since he is illegimate, even if not wise himself. Is not right opinion both possible and desirable? The rule of the single wise man is admittedly unattainable and I wonder how desirable?

In other words—since this government by a wisely advised tyrant is "Utopia," I cannot see how one is justified in advocating or even presenting this as an "inspirational" goal. I certainly agree with Mr. Strauss when he emphasizes the need of morality and "formation of character" in addition to the raising of the standard of living, but as Mr. Buchanan once said, it is the dialectical method which attains this. I cannot help finding a certain cynicism prevalent in the advocacy of the Philosopher King or the wisely advised tyrant. I do not confuse the two forms of "Wise Rule"; the first in the Republic, ruling by law, the later, illegitimate and outside of law. But this distinction is unimportant in observing the cynicism of both these schools.

Perhaps I am governed by the contemporary notion of democracy but I recognize the limitations of formal law, the need for an action on the part of the people against bad laws, against a law which may help to plunge the world into war, however it is the "right opinion," if you like, of the people themselves that is necessary to just and peaceful government. The cynicism of setting the wise to advise the illegitimate, or the advent of the philosopher king, leads to dangerous paths of action on the part of those who acceptthis, even as an unattainable absolute. Such a discussion may point out the shortcomings of a constitutional government. Such a discussion may separate practical from theoretical politics, but does it establish a good, which we must recognize though can never attain? I would like to hear Mr. Strauss dealing with the problem of government by the dialectical give and take of the people themselves, as well as those necessitating the unwilling return of the "Wise" into the cave.

Mr. Strauss' lecture was an invaluable example of "how to read a book," but I wonder; are the implications inherent in the conclusions not to be questioned?

PETER DAVIES

Pity the man, the hater
The rotten hater,
Calling Superiority to himself:
Looking at the masses,
Seeing affirmation,
Knows he is right,
They no wiser than he:
Each little man,
Lost in the mass,
Faith in his hate,
No Christian.

TOM FROMME