

MUSIC AND MUSICAL LIFE TODAY

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOSEF TAL



E. T. Mr. Tal, as a composer whose work encompasses a wide range of media, from the conventional to the most modern kind of electronic music, can you tell me where music stands today?

Tal There is no fixed position. Everything is in motion. Fifteen years ago, for example, there were fierce discussions about 12-tone music. Now, this technique is considered an orthodox way of composing.

E. T. And where are we headed?

Tal There is a state of flux. Everything changes rapidly, but two basic approaches seem to dominate the scene. One is a reflection of social nihilism, which is musically expressed through "chance" and "happenings" that completely negate all individual responsibility. The other veers towards science. In music, this means strict systematic construction of musical development,

which is the product of overall calculation and becomes identical with the invention of the work of art. The more the composer is steeped in science, the richer will be the results of his striving to combine these effects.

E. T. What is the real value derived from these two approaches?

Tal This is difficult to measure today. But if we try to view matters with historic distance, insofar as a contemporary can do this, then one can accept the fact that both approaches have their specific merits. Both will enhance musical thinking and the technical possibilities in music. It would seem that their real value will be in achieving progress in future generations.

E. T. Do you see continuity in the recent development of music?

Tal Yes, by all means. There was a natural development from tonal technique to atonality. Twelve-tone technique, for instance, is but one kind of continuity, and there are many others that exist today, still called atonal music. Twelve-tone technique has shown itself to be very productive and surely will continue to give much food for musical thought in the future?

E. T. What is the fate of our musical life now?

Tal That is a social problem, not a musical one. The composer does

not ask the question "how to write", but "for whom to write". Through technology and expanded communications the public has grown immensely, and now practically every first performance can be heard all over the world.

E. T. Does the composer write for the existing society or for an imaginary public? Can this vast public understand the language of the composer?

Tal Of course not! The individual responds faster than the public-at-large. This is not a problem of art but of education. In science, for example, knowledge is being geared to a level which conforms with the demands of university studies. In science this necessity is recognized. Education in art and music still lack any contact with the present time and real life and therefore they do not even have museum value. The same is true as regards the programmes usually performed by the great orchestras.

E. T. But, are not the demands of the public to be considered?

Tal In fact, they are not taken into consideration at present. The capacity of the public to participate in these decisions is absolutely misjudged. Every human being is naturally inquisitive, except for certain people who are particularly limited. The duty of real art-policy is to awaken and to nurture that curiosity. An orchestra whose repertoire ends with Mahler is digging its own grave. It is living off the subscribers of the past, and detaching itself from any continuity with the coming generation.

B. T. But, shall the music of the past be performed?

Tal Of course. In the music of all ages there is timeless truth. Don't we still go to see Shakespeare's plays performed.

E. T. Does the new music tend to dispense with the orchestra? And who will eventually play the great music of the past? Or will the orchestra remain as a kind of museum piece?

Tal Possibly the structure of the orchestra will change. Electronic music will not do away with the orchestra. It is in itself only an instrument. A unity between the orchestra and electronic music must be achieved.

E. T. Is this your personal approach as a composer?

Tal Yes, I am now writing my sixth concerto for piano with electronic accompaniment, and I feel that every new work brings me closer to the goal. In addition, I am writing an opera where every singer has his own 12-tone-row.

E. T. Would you call yourself a 12-tone composer?

Tal No, but it is a discipline to which I adhere whenever I think it necessary, without being bound to it in principle.

E. T. May I conclude with a more personal question? Do you believe in explanations about music?

Tal No. Music can be explained only to experts. Programme notes are a drop in the ocean. They cannot replace genuine musical education.