

IS THERE A THEORY OF MUSICAL CRITICISM?

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ABSTRACT

Alan Walker contends that criticism has always have been faced with controversies on which, due to the esoteric nature of music and to the diversity of answers, no consensus has been reached yet. Questions like: “Are there standards in criticism?”, “Can they be defined?”, “Are they objective or subjective?”, “How can their authenticity be verified?” – reveal a philosophical side of criticism. If the pragmatism of music criticism resided only in expressing judgments of value, then a theory of criticism would imply their explanation. The assertion that a work is a masterpiece and another one is mediocre has no validity without an answer to the question: *why...*? Hence it results that behind the judgments of value there is a process based on which conclusions are drawn.

This article presents, in chronological order of publication, the perspectives of five personalities who have expressed their doubts or convictions, principles or opinions, subjectivity or objectivity, in the field of musical criticism.

Keywords: critic, principle, judgment of value, taste, evaluation, subjective, objective

The *music critic* is an intelligent, logical, intuitive, epistemological and gnoseological connecting line that is finely drawn between two points that stand face to face: the *artist* and the *public*. In *Historia naturalis*, 35-36, 12, Pliny the Elder (23-79 A.D.), dedicates a few words to painter Apelles, revealing the artist's passion for his work: *Nulla dies sine linea* – “No day without a line”¹¹⁹. “When a man walks, thinks or simply watches, he does nothing but unite”, says René Huyghe (1906-1997)¹²⁰. The same is true about the music critic: he must “unite” the artist with the public, and educate the general taste by guiding it into a deeper understanding of the valuable works.

Schopenhauer (1788-1860) said that “there are critics who severally think that it rests with each one of them what shall be accounted good, and what bad. They all mistake their own toy-trumpets for the trombones of fame.” On the other hand, when thinking about the public, the philosopher wrote: “When I watch the behavior of a crowd of people in the presence of a great master's work, and mark the manner of their applause, they often remind me of trained monkeys in a show. The monkey's gestures are, no doubt, much like those of men; but now and again they betray that the real inward spirit of these gestures is not in them. Their irrational nature peeps out”.¹²¹ Here comes the role of the critic – to rationalize the taste of the public.

This scientific periegesis roughly follows the analytical path laid out by each author. To the detriment of a more complex general overview, we often considered it necessary to provide a synthesis of ideas, which led to the sporadic absence of quotation marks or page references. All the references that are foreign to the work under discussion, along with the explanatory remarks or translations related to the quotations used, represent our own contribution. Each chapter (I to V) begins with a *motto* or two, taken from the work of the author under consideration.

If the pragmatism of music criticism lied only in expressing judgments of value, then a theory of criticism would imply their explanation. “One cannot do theoretical research without having the courage to put forward a theory”, states Umberto Eco¹²².

¹¹⁹ Marian Barbu, *Dicționar de citate și locuțiuni străine* [Dictionary of Quotations and Foreign Phrases], Litera Internațional Publishing House, Bucharest, 2004, p. 88.

¹²⁰ Ion Itu, *Critică și strategie* [Criticism and Strategy], Dacia Publishing House, Cluj Napoca, 1983, pp. 66-67.

¹²¹ Arthur Schopenhauer, *Parerga și Paralipomena. Omisiuni și adăugiri* [Parerga and Paralipomena. Appendices and Omissions], Antet Publishing House, Bucharest, s.a., pp. 111, 134.

¹²² Gabriel Banciu, *Introducere la estetica retoricii muzicale* [Introduction to the Aesthetics of Musical Rhetoric], Media Musica Publishing House, Cluj Napoca, 2006, p. 93.

I. *A Musical Critic's Holiday*

1925

Ernest Newman (1868-1959)

"He [the critic] cannot hope to deduce the future from the present; but he can read the present in the light of the past."

"Teach me rightly to admire Bach and Mozart, and I will find my own criticism of living composers."

As suggested by the title, Ernest Newman dedicated this book to his personal reflections that have grown in the course of some temporary interruptions from his everyday activities as a music critic. If a well-thrown stone can cause an avalanche, if a particular dynamic of a wing can raise a typhoon, it is obvious that one or several well thought-out questions can generate an entire conglomerate of answers, designed to outline principles in music criticism.

Thus, from the beginning, Newman formulates the following questions:

- "In a context where music is subject to permanent change, improving its vocabulary and compositional techniques, is it possible to discover clear standards through judgments of value?"
- "In every generation, the musical phenomenon developed by means of innovative harmonies and instrumental techniques and colors, rooted in the contemporary aspirations of musical expression. But are there any certainties in criticism? If there are, do they have an absolute value? If there aren't, does our criticism have any value?"
- "How can a critic discern the exceptional value that makes a work of art a «masterpiece»? when Anatole France claims that the activity of the critic is "adventure of the soul among the masterpieces".
- "How can the critic's analytical judgment convince us, unless we admit that there are standards of right or justice, independent of our subjectivity? If criticism means only personal opinion, i.e. subjectivity, then is it all only a matter of taste? And if indeed so, who decides which tastes are good, and how?"

These questions remind us of J. R. Lowell's statement (1819-1891): "a wise skepticism is the first attribute of a good critic"¹²³; and by his ideas, Newman draws some coordinates in the maze of this field.

¹²³ J. R. Lowell Cf. <http://www.citatecelebre.eu>, <http://www.citatecelebre.eu/ro/citate/detalii-citat/un-scepticism-intelept-este-primul-atribut-al-23192>, accessed April 7, 2014.

1. The objectives of a music critic

A music critic's objectives follow the one-dimensional temporal axis, where, between *nunc transiens* and *nunc stans*¹²⁴, Cronos merges with Ianus into a new creature, which acquires a third eye: the inner eye. In other words, the critic's objectives imply three "looks":

- the look to the *past* (anteriority¹²⁵);
- the look into the *present* (interiority);
- the look to the *future* (posterity).

1.1. Anteriority (the look to the past)

The author argues that the duty of a critic is to write about predecessors like Bach (1685-1750), Brahms (1833-1897) and Wagner (1813-1883), who will teach him the principle of form, imitation and harmony, and that analyzing the contemporaries falls within the competence of the journalist.¹²⁶ He also confesses that his ideas were shared by Augustine Birrell (1850-1933), who, in a passage from his book *Essays on Men, Women and Books*, wrote: "the true field of the criticism is the past"¹²⁷; "The principles of taste, the art of criticism, are not acquired amidst the hurly-burly of living authors and the hasty judgment thereupon of hasty critics, but by study, careful and reverential, of the immortal dead."¹²⁸

1.2. Interiority (the look into the present)

The critic must first write for himself, and not for the others, and his writings help him to materialize the passion of his life: the act of intelligibility. After safely following the path of gnoseology, and after, like Parmenide (5th century B.C.), drawing "a clear distinction between «the way of truth» and «the way of falsehood»"¹²⁹, after separating, at home, the wheat from the chaff, and after obtaining milk from several farmers and then preparing the butter in his own laboratory, he will move to *Weltlichkeit*, or the mundane character of his knowledge¹³⁰.

1.3. Posterity (the look to the future)

¹²⁴ For Saint Augustine, time is always a "passing moment" and never "a still moment", Cf. Battista Mondin, *Manual de filozofie sistematică. Epistemologie. Cosmologie* [Manual of Systematic Philosophy. Epistemology. Cosmology], Vol. 2, Sapientia Publishing House, Iași, 2008, pp. 159-160.

¹²⁵ For the sake of clarity, I substantivized the adjective *anterior* into *anteriority*, after the model *posterior* – *posterity*.

¹²⁶ Cf. Ernest Newman, *A Musical Critic's Holiday*, Alfred A. Knop, New York, 1925, p. 318.

¹²⁷ *Ibidem* p. 319.

¹²⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁹ Battista Mondin, *Manual de filozofie sistematică. Logică, semantică, gnoseologie* [Manual of Systematic Philosophy. Logic, Semantics, Gnoseology], Vol. 1, Sapientia Publishing House, Iași, 2008, p. 195.

¹³⁰ "Earthliness (the Germans call it *Weltlichkeit*) is a trait by which our knowledge always has a relation with the world, a reference to the world, and therefore a mundane structure", Battista Mondin, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 268.

Newman argues that the *main objective of the critic is convergence*. Not being an advocate of the principle of divergence set forth by Horace (65-8 B.C.) in *Ars poetica*, 78¹³¹, i.e. *grammatici certant*, he must persuade his interlocutors to willingly accept the synchronism of his doctrinal system. This makes the difference between a mediocre and a specialist.

2. The duty of the music critic

The duty of the music critic is to judge correctly and to write well. He *treats objective things subjectively, and subjective things objectively*. A work remains a value or non-value for reasons beyond the state of mind he is in when he comes into contact with it. It is desirable that *in criticism there should be a basic technique*, just as there is also a technique of composition. The phrase “basic technique” involves, *nolens volens*¹³², a sound musical training. Just as a composer acquires a certain body of knowledge that helps him think faster, safer and more clearly, so a critic must be trained in certain principles of judgment.

3. The training of a music critic

If there hadn't been a science of composition, if each composer had had to discover everything on his own (harmony, counterpoint, orchestration etc.), things would not have come so far. Perhaps that is why criticism has made no considerable progress, because every critic had to discover its basic principles by learning from his and from other people's mistakes. Would it not have been better if some transmissible rules had existed, be they only warnings about certain things that should be avoided in criticism? – was wondering Newman. From the context, we can derive three rules regarding the objectives and responsibilities a critic must take into account during his training:

- to observe the past,
- to enlighten the present,
- to encounter the future.

3.1. Observing the past

The critic should stand at the “observation point” and constantly examine the already composed works, from which he will extract his principles of criticism; those who look only to the future will fall into self-delusion because “is not within the power of any critic to foresee the future of music or to help music to «progress» for the simple reason that «progress» so far as the word has any meaning at all in

¹³¹ “Grammarians dispute, and the case is still before the courts”, Barbu Marian, *op. cit.*, Bucharest, 2004, p. 58.

¹³² “Whether desired or not”, after St. Augustine, *Retractationum libri, I, 13, 5, ibid*, p 84.

music, depends on the coming of two or three dynamic personalities at the most in each generation."¹³³

The critic has his roots in the history of music. And this implies a *past* from where he will extract his sap and find his analysis tools; a *past* from where he will have to learn – like a student from his teachers – from those who have left their mark on the chain of events under study. He will do this by observing the compositional techniques used in the works that have withstood the “erosion” of time.

3.2. *Enlightening the present*

A critic's duty is *not to foresee the future of music, but to explain the present*, and this can be done only insofar as he is anchored in the past. Speaking about this “look to the past”, Newman refers to Monteverdi: “The first step towards a genuine science of musical criticism would be the thorough, impartial study of the typical «vigorous forward minds», and especially of the most typical of all, Monteverdi.”¹³⁴

3.3. *Encountering the future*

After following the thread of history by relating to different composers like Monteverdi, Bach, Mozart, whose genius was not recognized during their lifetime, the author concludes that a composer is more appreciated by the following generations than by their own contemporaries. And then he explains: the public rejected Stravinsky and Schoenberg simply because “they have no melody”, but looked back nostalgically to the cantabile themes of Strauss. However, it was only a few years earlier that they were reproaching the same thing to Strauss. The conclusion? – composers of genius are better appreciated by the following generations.

Newman concludes *A Musical Critic's Holiday* by saying that “the work of criticism is never finished: in this sense it is true that values are unfixable.”¹³⁵

He also adds that the critic's job is not to speculate principles and theories, but to provide present facts of aesthetic experience; he must judge the music of his time not through a *previsional* or *probabilistic* criticism, but through a criticism rooted in reality. And this type of judgment implies being anchored in the past rather than looking to the future. The critic's telescope doesn't see in the future; it can only scrutinize the past, and thus compare the incomplete potpourri of the present with another one that is complete and stands open for inspection in the smallest detail. “We must work always with the past in our minds if we are to maintain a due perspective of the music around us. The only proportionate view is the long view.”¹³⁶

¹³³ Ernest Newman, *op. cit.*, p. 296.

¹³⁴ Ernest Newman, *op. cit.*, p. 298.

¹³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 329.

¹³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 330.

II. *The Principles and Methods of Musical Criticism*

1931

Michel-Dimitri Calvocoressi (1877-1944)

“Otherwise, even if we refuse to admit that musical criticism entirely reduces itself to a matter of opinion, we shall remain unable to show that it does not.”

Calvocoressi unveils a few secret "weapons" from the critic's arsenal: how to get familiar with the *methods*, how to apply the *principles* of musical criticism, how to form *judgments of value* and how to express *opinions*.

His book, *The Principles and Methods of Musical Criticism*, is structured into three parts:

- *the theory* (standards in criticism),
- *the practice* (forming and wording judgments of value) and
- *the activity of the critic* (objectivity *vs.* subjectivity).

The author aligns the first two parts of his work with the ideology of antiquity, according to which philosophy consists of two essential components: theory and practice.

In *The Consolations of Philosophy*, Boethius (480-524) narrates that he was visited by the personification of this science, having two initials embroidered on her robe: Θ (from *theoretiké*) and Π (from *praktiké*). This is what he said about philosophy: “id est speculativa et activa”¹³⁷. Except in one chapter, Calvocoressi makes no reference to the criticism of interpretation, which plays an important role in the everyday practice of the journalist. He states that sensibility and a formal musical training are imperative conditions for a critic.

1. The Theory (θεωρητική)

“If we admit that the critic's first duty is to justify his attitude and make his course of procedure clear, it means that the investigation of the principles of criticism implies a research of the aesthetic principles.”¹³⁸ And thus, a *dilemma*

¹³⁷ Boethius and Salvianus, *Scriveri* [Writings], PSB 72, The Publishing House of the Biblical and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Bucharest, 1992, p. 63.

¹³⁸ Cf. M.-D. Calvocoressi, *The Principles and Methods of Musical Criticism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1931, p. 18.

arises in the analysis: *one conception states that aesthetic principles do exist* and that the critic's function is to discover how they "work"; *the other conception denies the existence of such principles* and claims that a true artist "must teach the art by which he is to «be seen»."¹³⁹

1.1. The music critic and his principles

Hadow (1859-1937), in his *Studies in Modern Music*, claims to have found "the permanent principles of criticism which may enable us to discriminate good from bad"¹⁴⁰. In his opinion, they differ from the purely abstract principles established by the system builders *a priori* and points to a practical application:

- "principle of vitality",
- "principle of labour",
- "principle of proportion",
- "principle of fitness".

Calvocoressi indicates a few more principles, which can be demonstrated only by concretely applying them to a work:

- "principle of form",
- "principle of design",
- "rhythmical balance".

The critic needs technical knowledge of music, just as the composer does. The difference between the two lies in the fact that a composer applies them, while a critic explains them. Robertson adds *the principle of comparison*. The critic's thorough investigations are directed at comparing works, artists and evaluative judgments; he will compare himself with himself in various situations, and his judgments with those of others.¹⁴¹

Another dilemma: must a critic judge the work, or just describe it without intending to evaluate it?

1.2. The music critic and his competencies

An act of criticism must not be confined to a description, but should also contain a judgment of value. A good critic will know *what to reflect on, how and why*. The techniques, whichever they may be, are based on the critic's competency, which will influence the quality of criticism.

It is essential that in addition to musical training, a professional critic should have knowledge of philosophy, psychology, logic, aesthetics, acoustics and music history. His experience in other areas will contribute to the development of a broader vision on music criticism. The power of discernment and the organization of ideas will propel him beyond himself, "*in veritate rei* – «in the truth of things»,

¹³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 26.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴¹ M.-D. Calvocoressi, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

as the mediaevals used to say”¹⁴². The music critic somewhat resembles the “true philosopher” that Nietzsche (1844-1900) defined as follows: “Perhaps he himself must have been critic and skeptic and dogmatist and historian and also poet and collector and traveler and solver of riddles and moralist and seer and «free spirit»...”¹⁴³ In other words, the music critic must know “something about everything and everything about something”.¹⁴⁴

And for that he needs:

- *specialized knowledge* ;
- *a sensitive ear*;
- *good memory*;
- *imagination*;
- *extensive knowledge*;
- *intuition*;
- *ability to express ideas accurately* and
- *power of persuasion by providing a rationale for every opinion*.

All this will improve in direct proportion to *experience*. Calvocoressi recommends that every emotion created by music should be verified.

1.3. Music evaluation factors

Calvocoressi enucleates three factors that determine the forming of judgments of value:

- *direct data*;
- *personal experience*
- *indirect data*.

The critic will draw his conclusions with the help of the information obtained from the *direct* data: the score. However solidly he may be anchored in reality, he will still have to face his predispositions, imaginations, tastes and intuitions. The final answer will be determined by his ability to discern, which can be acquired through *experience*. The more experience he gains, the better he will be able to control his feelings and emotions and to sharpen his intuition, about which he states: “Alone, intuition, the highest and determining factor, baffles analysis.”¹⁴⁵

Edmund Burke (1729-1797) warns: “The cause of a wrong taste is a defect of judgment.” And this may arise from a natural weakness of understanding [...] or, which is much more commonly the case, it may arise from a want of a *proper*

¹⁴² Tereza-Brândușa Palade, *Manual de filozofie primă* [Manual of Fundamental Philosophy], Galaxia Gutenberg Publishing House, Târgu Lăpuș, 2010, p. 222.

¹⁴³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Opere complete. Dincolo de bine și de rău. Despre genealogia moralei* [Complete Works. Beyond Good and Evil. On the Genealogy of Morality], Vol. 6, Hestia Publishing House, Timișoara, 2005, p. 99.

¹⁴⁴ ***, *Music Critics and Criticism Today*, in “The Musical Times”, Vol. 101, No. 1406, 1960, Musical Times Publications Ltd., p. 221.

¹⁴⁵ M.-D. Calvocoressi, , *op. cit.*, p. 53.

and well-directed exercise [i.e. *experience*, author's note) which alone can make it strong and ready. Besides that ignorance, inattention, prejudice, rashness, levity, obstinacy, in short, all those passions, and all those vices, which pervert the judgment in other matters, prejudice it no less in this its more refined and elegant province".¹⁴⁶ The critic is called to be an "elegans formarum spectator".¹⁴⁷

In musical criticism there are high chances to make erroneous evaluations of the meaning of a particular passage from a work. It is preferable for the critic to know as many informative data as possible, which Calvocoressi calls *indirect data* and which are of two kinds: those provided by the *author's biography*, with references to predispositions, ideals and events; or those which can be retraced from the *author's statements*, regarding the purpose – *telos* of the work, which, sometimes, in the early stage, was stirred by the impulse to compose. These may provide clues towards finding the significance of the work.

2. The Practice (πρακτική)

In the second part of his work, Calvocoressi attempts to explain the role of thought in the critical process and the manner in which judgments of value are formed.

2.1. From principles to evaluation

An act of criticism is not a recipe, therefore the judgments of value do not work according to a rule such as this one: *if pre-established norms are followed, the work is good* and vice versa. *Principles* do exist, but they are extracted from the *work*; and a proper *discernment* will provide a valid *evaluation*. As long as *thought* and *imagination* are in line, the difficulties in *the act of criticism* are reduced to a minimum. At the same time, the *judgment of value* must be consistent with these factors.

For a clear formulation of judgments, the author recommends that a critic should peruse notable works of criticism that would enable him follow different manners of thinking and of presentation of results, styles and opinions.

In answer to the question "how long should a critic study a work before judging it?", the author recommends the examination of the work until all the aspects related to the judgment of value to be presented to the public are taken into consideration.

¹⁴⁶ Edmund Burke, *Despre sublim și frumos. Cercetare filosofică a originii ideilor* [On the Sublime and Beautiful. A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas], Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest, 1981, p. 53.

¹⁴⁷ i.e. "a nice judge of beauty", *Ibidem* p. 55. Burke takes the quote from Terence, *The Eunuch*, I, 566.

2.2. *From evaluation to public(ation)*

After the *judgments of value* are formed they must be *worded* – says Calvocoressi, and this requires *a sense of reality, tact* and *a sense of proportion*.

The critic must also decide the *influence* he wants to exert on the *target group* (the public) to whom he addresses the analysis. *The language* must be *specific* and not reduced to generalities that would also apply to other works.

It is very difficult to render music into words. The author makes reference to Saintsbury (1845-1933), who presents the key question by which the value of a piece of criticism can be gauged: “What idea of the original would the critic give to a tolerably instructed person who did not know the original?” Thus, for an accurate understanding, the public must be familiarized with the critic's vocabulary, through his publications. This is a permanent and imperative condition for a critic to make himself understood and believed by the public.

2.3. *The ethics of musical criticism for beginners*

Calvocoressi offers a few tips for novice critics, saying that generally the public is interested in *conclusions*, or judgments of value, but that *a good critic should focus on the method* by which he reached the result, and a good strategy will help him to approach recent compositions, which are more difficult to analyze than those on which there is already plenty of material.

The author offers two suggestions for the criticism of interpretation: to observe the *technical efficiency* of the performer and *the conception of the style and character of the work*; he reduces the former to *a matter of fact*, and the latter, to *a matter of opinion*.

Calvocoressi's ideal in criticism is as follows: “we must learn things from the composer's point of view”¹⁴⁸ – i.e. “identification with his perspective”¹⁴⁹.

3. *The activity of the critic (objectivity vs. subjectivity)*

Regarding the *objectivity in evaluation*, the author borrows a few ideas from Newman and states that a critic should not provide certificates of aesthetic value, but should analyze and understand the works; and “in order to decide upon the aesthetic value of musical works, it is not needful to see them objectively”¹⁵⁰. Behind each *objective statement*, lies a *subjective hypothesis*.

¹⁴⁸ M.-D. Calvocoressi, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 160.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 163.

III. *Practical Musical Criticism*

1934

Oscar Thompson (1887-1945)

"If he [the critic] serves only as signpost, pointing the way, he may feel that not in vain has he stuffed his life with books, sounds, words."

Oscar Thompson's experience as associate editor at *Musical America*, professor of criticism at the *Curtis Institute of Music* and music critic for the *New York Evening Post* (1928-1934), resulted in a book entitled *Practical Music Criticism* (1934). The author sets out a few basic principles of music criticism and demonstrates them by applying them to the musical-professional reality of the American socio-cultural context of the early 20th century.

His work falls in between *rationalism* and *empiricism*, by intuitively associating his genuine inner voice to the principles of the 18th century masterpiece *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft*, signed by Kant.

1. The music critic's credentials

Oscar Thompson invokes the need for an exceptional professional training in the formation of a music critic. Professionalism will establish his credentials in the field and will make the difference between *qualified* and *non-qualified*, *discernment* and *non-discernment*, *professional* and *amateur*:

"[...] trained criticism is more likely to work for good than untrained criticism; disciplined judgment promises more of that is sound and fair than undisciplined judgment; the professional is more to be trusted than the amateur".¹⁵¹

Someone who evaluates music needs a thorough knowledge of composition and performance, though not necessarily in terms of practicing them, but rather in terms of being able to identify them. One does not have to produce the "musical egg" or the "musical tea" to be able to define them, says Thompson; instead, *continuous information* means *continuous training* and is a sine qua non for the specialist:

"It is not necessary to be able to duplicate the crowning achievement of a hen to be a good judge of an egg. Professional tea-tasters doubtless know far more about the varieties of tea than the Chinese coolie who makes it grow. To be a good judge of the musical egg, to have a delicately discriminating taste in this matter of musical teas [...], the critic needs all the book knowledge he can absorb, whether from the scores

¹⁵¹ Oscar Thompson, *Practical Musical Criticism*, Witmark Educational Publications, New York, 1934, p. 7.

themselves, from tracts and treatise, from the critical writings of others, from historical and biographical studies and the vaster reaches of literature in which music does not figure at all. The longer he practices his profession, the more the critic realizes that he would need several lives to encompass the reading he could easily prescribe as necessary to his background if all the presses should be halted forever and not another book brought into the world."¹⁵²

2. The duties of a music critic

The critic's duties consist of a combination of responsibility and interest. He "metamorphoses" into an intermediary who has responsibilities:

- to the *music* (the art that enables him to write);
- to the *performers* (the artists he writes about) and
- to the *public* (the persons for whom he writes).

In other words, his duties can be found in the following functions:

- the function of interpretation (music);
- the function of interception (the performer);
- the function of information (the public).

One of his duties is to bring into the consciousness of the public, as in a mirror, a clear image of the musical compositions and performances, with their *strengths* and weaknesses. This sends us to the *criterion of clarity* used by Descartes (1596-1650), applied in the rule of intuition¹⁵³. The critic's "mirror" must reflect the effects of the sonorous phenomenon, and not its causes. It should be *descriptive* for the reader, and not *corrective* for the artist. The specialist music teacher corrects the mistakes, whereas the critic only finds them. In addition to the questions (*who?*, *what?*, *where?*, *when?*) whose answers are usually given in an *Introduction*, the critic's opinion will come in the form of effective answers to questions like: *how?*, *why?*, *how much?*, and will focus on the essence, instead of sticking at trifles. In doing so, "the critic is only applying the measuring rod of his own experience"¹⁵⁴.

3. The anatomy of evaluation in musical criticism

¹⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 25-26.

¹⁵³ "I call that *clear* which is present and manifest to the mind giving attention to it, just as we are said clearly to see objects when, being present to the eye looking on, they stimulate it with sufficient force, and it is disposed to regard them", states Descartes in *Principiile filozofiei* [The Principles of Philosophy], Battista Mondin, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 219.

¹⁵⁴ Oscar Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

Thompson proposes a music evaluation method based on three coordinates:

- the *personality of the critic* (predispositions, temperament, knowledge, experience);
- *direct sources* (the score) and
- *indirect sources* (other materials).

3.1. The personality of the critic

Regarding *personality*, the *Practical Music Criticism* mentions an important thing. The critic's emotional, subjective involvement is allowed, because it is necessary; without such involvement, music could not be experienced, and the critic cannot exclude his feelings entirely in order to be purely objective. However, he is advised to not let himself be dominated by them, and thus become their slave.

3.2. Direct sources

The approach based on *direct sources* is considered under three aspects:

- *contents* (melody, rhythm, harmony, orchestration);
- *form* and
- *style* (which bears the mark of originality).

To counteract the existence of some *Procustean* attitudes, the music critic is advised to identify the structure of the work, and not force it to fit into a predetermined *form*. The purpose of the music critic is not to have biases, but to make judgments of value.

"The critic who is a stickler for form is likely to find himself on dangerous ground. His critical purpose is not to prescribe form, but to recognize it, so that he will understand the structure of a composition. Without that understanding, his mirror may not pass on a clear reflection."¹⁵⁵

3.3. Indirect sources

The only way to avoid the trap of "inventing" meanings that may not correspond to reality is to identify the true ones and make them known. To this end, consulting music history books, biographies and specialized studies is decisive and conclusive, and will contribute to a more accurate evaluation of the music.

4. Applicability of music criticism

¹⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 61.

Oscar Thompson claims that most of the work of a critic is focused on the quality and character of interpretation. He learned from his own experience that readers expect critics to focus particularly on pianists, violinists, vocal singers, string quartets, choir ensembles and orchestras. In these directions, the author provides “reference points” in evaluating interpretation.

4.1. In a *piano recital*, the critic will take into account:

- the *tone* (given by the quality of the instrument and the performer's ability to highlight the dynamic gradations);
- *faithfulness* to the score;
- use of the proper *tempo*;
- rhythmic *precision*;
- emphasis of the *theme's contour*;
- *hand coordination*.

The effect of these features should be considered from the point of view of the work, structure, meanings, emotional message and style, with a fine sense of perception.

4.2. For a *violinist*, the following will be observed:

- the *tone* (richness, depth, amplitude, vitality);
- *intonation*;
- *dexterity*;
- *tempo*;
- right and left hand technique (reflected in passages with double stops, *spiccato*, *pizzicato*, *flageolets* and the use of *vibrato*);
- *ability to convey the artistic message*.

-

4.3. For the *vocal soloist*, the critic will analyze:

- *the voice type*;
- *tone quality* (rich, full, mellifluous);
- *breath coordination*;
- *ease vs. effort* of performance;
- *phrasing*;
- *intonation* ;
- *firmness* of attack and tone.

The critic should focus his attention more on vocal than on instrumental *phrasing*, because it involves sequences of words and significances of the text in the mastery of the musical line.

4.4. For the *instrumental* or *vocal ensemble*, the following aspects must be considered:

- *collaboration* between performers;
- *framing in the style*;
- *attacks*;
- *diminutions*;
- *phrase beginnings and endings*;
- *precision of entry* ;
- *homogeneity of final chords*.

The first two features are of utmost importance irrespective of the size of the ensemble, while the last one constitutes a strategic point that reflects the performance standard of the ensemble. The critic must have a sharp ear during such a concert, because "patrician playing is for the patrician ear."¹⁵⁶

4.5. In an *opera performance*, the critic should refer to:

- *voices*;
- *orchestra*;
- *stage setting*;
- *costumes*;
- *musical content*.

In the author's opinion, *opera* is the highest form of musical expression, for it embodies the most expressive artistic forms: *singing* intertwined with *stage acting*.

5. The final statements of the music critic

Criticism makes use of words and sentences. Criticism conveys ideas, not sounds or melodies. While music is composed to be sung, criticism is written to be read. To this end, the critic resorts to newspapers, musical journals or specialized reviews. These elements of criticism must be adapted to each and every work.

The artist loves the instrument, and the writer loves the word. The critic "hears" the words just as a composer "hears" a melody. In the practice of his profession, the music critic is driven by his love for words, which Thompson considers "[...] articles of faith, icons of worship, glimpses behind the veil, flaming prophecies, disembodied spirits, elemental forces, infinities, the destiny of man!"¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ Oscar Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

¹⁵⁷ Oscar Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

IV. *Traité de la critique musicale*
1947

Armand Machabey (1886-1966)
"Criticism is rarely an art
for those who make a
profession of it."¹⁵⁸

La Harpe

The Treatise of Musical Criticism is, as the author states, the result of "30 years of musicological and critical exercise". In the *Introduction*, Machabey borrows the concept of *beauty* from Plato (427-347 B.C.) and Aristotle (384-322 B.C.). Then, in the same acceptance of the concept, the narrative thread crosses the *aurea mediocritas* up to Kant (1724-1804), Hegel (1770-1831), Stendhal (1783-1842) and Cousin (1792-1867). The critic's thought approaches *musical beauty* through Leibniz (1646-1716), Rousseau (1712-1778), Combarieu (1859-1916) and Vincent d'Indy (1851-1931). Finally, with Schopenhauer (1788-1860), Mustoxydis (1785-1860), Lalo (1823-1892), Riemann (1849-1919), Du Bos (1882-1939), Hegel and Souriau (1892-1979), the author approaches the *aesthetic emotion*, to then proceed to the *act of criticism* for which he will make nearly a thousand references over the course of two hundred pages. He proceeds "from the exact theoretical principle" according to which "criticism is the compensation of aesthetics" – an idea taken from Bougot.

After the *Introduction*, Armand Machabey marks three specific coordinates of musical criticism, contained in his 1947 work:

- *doctrine* ;
- *method*;
- *anthology*.

1. Doctrine

Included in the *doctrine* are four factors that a critic should consider in the evaluation of musical works. In other words, the critic's *doctrine* consists of four main functions:

- *Historical* (the historical information relating to the work);
- *Personal* (the immediate impression of the work upon the critic);
- *Collective* (the public's reaction);
- *Comparative* (the result of the comparison process).

1.1. Historical function

¹⁵⁸ „La critique est bien rarement un art pour ceux qui en font profession”, is the *Motto* of Machabey's work [author's note].

When we analyze a work, we must take into account its historical component. The author's personality, his origin, training, inclinations, aesthetic doctrine (if he has expressed one), his previous works known – are all factors that contribute to the explanation of a new work, or at least pave the way for its understanding.¹⁵⁹

Moreover, Machabey sets forth *the principle of survival*. The value of a work lies not in its structure, but in its capacity to survive over time. Since there is no objective criterion for the quality of a work, it is obvious that the critic's personal contribution may be quite considerable. Informing the public of the survival potential of a work obviously means launching a judgment of value.

Such a decision cannot be viable if grounded solely on personal *feeling*, because impression plays but a limited role, namely that of triggering factor in the genesis of the judgment. It requires the intervention of reflection, of conscious and careful comparison, of reasoning and intelligence. Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) advised critics to avoid the study of a work that dies with its creator.¹⁶⁰

1.2. Personal function

According to Machabey, “the critic's personal contribution can be considerable”. “The choice of the reference, the comparative study, the relative values of the terms in which the conclusions are drawn, the formulation of the judgment that classifies the work and measures its value – are all elements that fall in the responsibility of the critic.”¹⁶¹

1.3. Collective function

The public's appreciation for certain works represents a major clue that establishes important relationships between them, which the critic must take into account. The seasoned eye of the demos applies, often faultlessly, Cicero's distinction of musical works into *genus humile*, *genus mediocre* and *genus grande*. And since it is far from infallible, the “judgment-reaction of a crowd would, in turn, require interpretation.”¹⁶²

“The critic who goes along with the verdict of the public, may often be mistaken about the future of the work; and he who would do otherwise, would run a similar risk.”¹⁶³ The famous phrase of Apelles of Kos – *Sutor, ne ultra crepidam*, would definitely facilitate our understanding of the *collective function*. A shoemaker approached the painter Apelles of Kos to point out a defect in his rendition of a sandal, because one tie-string was shorter than the other. Apelles

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Armand Machabey, *Traité de la critique musicale* [Treatise of Musical criticism], Richard-Masse, Paris, 1947, p. 68.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 60.

¹⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 62.

¹⁶² *Ibidem*, p. 39.

¹⁶³ Armand Machabey, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

corrected the defect immediately. But when the shoemaker began to criticize him again, the artist exclaimed: *Sutor, ne ultra crepidam*, meaning "Shoemaker, not above the sandal!" Thus, the *ultracrepidarian critics* should stick to the "musical sandal", while the *ultra-learned* ones may progress towards judgments of value.

1.4. Comparative function

By this process, the musical work under analysis is compared with other works of reference. In the course of this process of analogy, the author presents a "a system of reference", a collection of works taken from each musical genre, endorsed by the enduring appreciation of the public, which serve as terms of comparison for the objective ranking of the musical compositions under evaluation. This process is conditioned by the similarity of the two scores under comparison in terms of their *fundamental scholastic level* -- (the same era, the same school, or the same composer).

The validity of the result is given by the comparison methods, which must have an evolutionary character: the critic should be familiar with the writing techniques of each musical genre specific to a certain era. The conclusions drawn from these varied considerations must enable the formulation of a judgment based on arguments.

2. Method

Machabey's method includes a classification of musical genres; the presentation of different types of criticism and the rules thereof; the role of the composer, critic and historian; the critic's manner of responding to the reactions that his article may arouse; and the work-composer-critic relationship.

Thus, in the context of this method he distinguishes "two major musical families":

- higher genres (instrumental and vocal works, opera and ballet) and
- secondary genres (music hall and cabaret shows, together with the substitutes: the disc, film, the radio).

The *higher genres* are in turn classified into:

- instrumental and vocal works performed in concert halls or churches;
- choreographic works: opera, ballet, ballet-opera, musical theatre.

"*The secondary genres* will not hold our attention for long", says Machabey; "they do not involve a creative musical effort, but a work of imitation, of parody, characteristic of the fair theatre, which is the ancestor of the comic opera and operetta, and then of the variety theatre, of the music hall and even of the cabaret [..]".¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Armand Machabey, *op. cit.*, p. 80-81.

After establishing this classification, Machabey makes a general presentation of the “*rules of musical criticism*”, which begins with the audition and ends with the expression of the judgment of value:

2.1. A careful and active **audition** conjures up, by analogy, the image of the previous auditions which automatically, and without our knowledge, become the terms of a comparison from which we form an immediate impression.

2.2. The awareness of the spontaneous reaction.

2.3. The provisionally subjective judgment, which can be individual or collective.

2.4. The search for an objective judgment

- The analysis of the work,
- The placement in the era,
- The choice of a reference work against which the audition is to be compared,
- The comparison of the two works,
- Determination of : - the techniques used (objective factor)
 - the impressions made (subjective factor),
 - the relationship established between them (sociological factor).

2.5. The confrontation: this result must be confronted with the composer's personality, style, originality etc.

2.6. The synthetic formulation of the judgment of value.

3. Anthology

This section consists of “texts borrowed from the successive eras of the Greco-Latin and French musical civilization, designed to emphasize the essential concepts of criticism rather than the different aspects of this special literature, and even more, than its consequences on the artistic or even social life.”¹⁶⁵

The author makes a musical foray into Antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Modern Era, crossing the centuries at lightning speed, to finally stop at the 20th century music critics. After mentioning Xenocrates (396-314 B.C.), Pythagoras (580-495 B.C.), Plato (427-347 B.C.), Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), Maximus of Tyre (2nd century A.D.), Augustine (354-430), Rabelais (1494-1553), Montaigne (1533-1592), La Bruyère (1645-1696), La Viéville (1674-1707), Fétis (1784-1871), Berlioz (1803-1869), Rousseau (1712-1778), Scudo (1806-1864), Du Bos (1882-1939), Paul de Saint-Victor (1827-1881), he quotes works like *The French Mercury*, *The Gallant Mercury* or *The French Gazette*; then he outlines the musical and critical landscape of their time, to conclude: “La postérité est un critique infallible” – “Posterity is an infallible critic”.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 156.

¹⁶⁶ Armand Machabey, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

V. An Anatomy of Musical Criticism
1968

Alan Walker (b. 1930)

"I contend that when we understand music really well, when it has become a part of us, we also intuitively come to know the potential of its material."

Alan Walker claims that "the practice of criticism boils down to one thing: making value judgments."¹⁶⁷ In each of the three main parts of *An Anatomy of Musical Criticism*, the author proposes:

- a solution : "separating the musical sheep from the non-musical goats"¹⁶⁸,
- a sequence: "creative principles"¹⁶⁹,
- a scientization¹⁷⁰: "the answer must be sought in psychology"¹⁷¹.

The theory of criticism consists of the answer to the question *why?*; here, "philosophy is philosophizing, an act of human thinking, moving between the two extreme terms," says Mondin¹⁷². To this, Walker adds the two possible extreme terms: if a work *is* a masterpiece and another is *not*.

Hadow (1894), Calvocoressi (1923) and Newman (1925) tried to introduce criteria into criticism; according to them¹⁷³ "a critic without standards was, to them, a soldier without weapons".¹⁷⁴ This point of view is misleading, concludes Alan Walker, because "you cannot have critics with standards; you can only have music with standards which critics may observe."¹⁷⁵

He makes a clear distinction between the professional critic's *intuition* and the *demonstrative* range of this intuition; both converge to a common point where the two entities that Pascal (1623-1662) speaks about, *the precise intellect* and the *mathematical intellect*, interact. According to the philosopher, the former is "able to penetrate acutely and deeply into the conclusions of given premises", while the

¹⁶⁷ Alan Walker, *An Anatomy of Musical Criticism*, Chilton Book Company, Philadelphia, 1968, p. XI.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibidem* p. 3.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 13.

¹⁷⁰ To scientize, "to treat certain subjects or fields with a scientific approach", *Dicționarul Explicativ al Limbii Române* [The Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language], Academia Română., Institutul de Lingvistică "Iorgu Iordan-Al. Rosetti", Univers Enciclopedic Gold Publishing House, Bucharest, 2012, p. 990.

¹⁷¹ Alan Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

¹⁷² Battista Mondin, *Manual de filozofie sistematică. Logică, Semantică, Gnoseologie* [Manual of Systematic Philosophy. Logic, Semantics, Gnoseology], Vol. 1, Sapientia Publishing House, Iași, 2008, p. 14.

¹⁷³ Hadow, Sir Henry, *Studies in Modern Music*, London, 1894; Calvocoressi, M.D., *Principles and Methods of Musical Criticism*, London 1923 (1st edition); Newman, Ernest, *A Musical Critic's Holiday*, London 1925.

¹⁷⁴ Alan Walker, *op. cit.*, p. XII.

¹⁷⁵ Alan Walker, *op. cit.*, p. XII.

latter is “able to comprehend a great number of premises without confusing them”. “Those who are accustomed to judge by feeling do not understand the process of reasoning, for they would understand at first sight, and are not used to seek for principles. And others, on the contrary, who are accustomed to reason from principles, do not at all understand matters of feeling, seeking principles, and being unable to see at a glance. [...] Those who judge of a work by rule are in regard to others as those who have a watch are in regard to others.”¹⁷⁶ Walker emphasizes the importance of *feeling* before a work of genius, and then requires the initiation of *the process of analysis* to demonstrate the sensory experience.

1. “A solution in search of a problem”

“In some way, music criticism has not started yet. By this I do not mean to say that musicians do not criticize. The problem is much more subtle. Rather, they don't know *how* to criticize. Separating the musical sheep from the musical goats is, in fact, an intuitive process.”¹⁷⁷ “We observe the music with somnambulistic certainty”¹⁷⁸, and determine what is good and what is not. But we almost do not know *how* to observe.

Perhaps some would object, saying that we do not need to know the method of *how*. And that a theory about our reactions would not help us become better critics. It is true, but *the essential function of a theory is not to improve practice, but to explain it*. The main purpose of this theory (defended by Alan Walker) is to bring to light some principles that are hidden behind musical communication.

What is an *a priori* path? “A definition of the principle is first proposed”, specifies Mondin, “and then it is shown that that definition necessarily implies the existence of the Principle itself.”¹⁷⁹ *Demonstratio a priori* means from effect to cause. Kant launches the meaning of *a priori* knowledge, independent of experience. In his letter to Chr. Garve of August 7, 1783, the philosopher wrote about “a whole new science, never before attempted, namely the critique of *an a priori* judging reason.”¹⁸⁰

Walker argues that a theory of criticism based on *a priori* principles is doomed to failure. An artistic work of immeasurable value contains in itself

¹⁷⁶ Blaise Pascal, *Cugetări* [Thoughts], Aion Publishing House, Oradea, 1998, pp. 156-157.

¹⁷⁷ Alan Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷⁹ Battista Mondin, *Manual de filozofie sistematică. Ontologie, metafizică* [Manual of Systematic Philosophy. Ontology, Metaphysics], Vol. 3, Sapientia Publishing House, Iași, 2008, p. 197.

¹⁸⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomene la orice metafizică viitoare care se va putea înfățișa drept știință* [Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Come Forward as Science], Editura Științifică și Pedagogică, Bucharest, 1987, p.12.

principles; there is no need for a critic to set it against a pre-established standard to demonstrate its value.

Two important consequences arise from this point of view:

1.1. The consequence of the temporal-atemporal division:

After traversing all the musical styles, all the opinions and the variety of tastes, Walker discovers that there is a simple dividing line between the works expressing the musical atemporality of the creative principles and those not expressing it. And his deep conviction is that this demarcation “separates the best music in the world from the worst.”¹⁸¹

1.2. The consequence of the degeneration of the musical taste

“Taste” is not a tool of criticism; it is a symptom of the people. Tastes change. A change of taste logically involves lack of truthfulness. “Bossuet put this in a few memorable words: «You change, therefore you are not in the truth».”¹⁸² Could the ever-changing musical taste be an appeal to *ad ignorantiam*? How is it possible for a masterpiece to turn into a mediocrity tomorrow? Is then the masterpiece a value, or is it not? Here, Walker uses a fundamental phrase in musical aesthetics:

1.3. The creative determinism

He claims that music is autonomous. It develops according to its own laws. This is one of the axioms of musical aesthetics. Paradoxically, although this axiom is accepted, there are strange reluctances in accepting its consequences.

Walker's theory, i.e. creative determinism, inevitably leads to a definition of criticism: “*Criticism is the rationalisation of intuitive, musical experience.*”¹⁸³ “All the postulates that I have assumed”, specifies Spinoza (1632-1677), “contain scarcely anything inconsistent with experience.”¹⁸⁴ The German philosopher Schopenhauer (1788-1860) follows the same empirical line; his doctrine “claims to erect, instead of some abstractions, an edifice of practical truths gathered from experience, to embrace life in all its details and to explain it through observations that everyone can verify; it appeals to the irrecusable authority of everyday personal experience”.¹⁸⁵ Walker claims that when you have listened to a work,

¹⁸¹ Alan Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

¹⁸² Miguel de Unamuno, *Agonia creștinismului* [The Agony of Christianity], Institutul European [The European Institute] Publishing House, Iași, 1993, p. 42.

¹⁸³ Alan Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

¹⁸⁴ Benedict Spinoza, *Etica* [The Ethics], Editura Științifică [The Scientific Publishing House], Bucharest, 1957, p. 29.

¹⁸⁵ Cristian Bădiliță, *Convorbiri cu Schopenhauer* [Conversations with Schopenhauer], Polirom Publishing House, Bucharest, 1998, p. 13.

intuition will tell you whether it is a masterpiece, or not. Criticism, in turn, must be a mere rationalisation of what we are intuitively convinced of.

1.4. Erroneous methods in musical criticism

What is the difference between a valuable work and a mediocre one? Walker presents three “erroneous” methods – in his conception, that are used in musical criticism:

- *The method of comparison*: a composer should not serve as standard against which to compare other composers;

- *Means versus Purposes*: the trap of criticism is to search for what a work lacks, instead of admiring what the work contains. This happens when we “no longer see the forest because of the trees.” The final target of the critic should not be replaced by the means employed in the critical process. To understand the great works, D. D. Roșca recommends that they should “be measured in the light of the supreme goals to which they aspire.”¹⁸⁶

- *Vox populi, vox Dei* is a doctrine adopted by aesthetics and it is dangerous to ignore it.

2. A sequence: creative principles

What can a composition express through its particular medium? Why that medium and not another? Thus we reach a fundamental creative principle:

2.1. The principle of unity of idea and instrumentation

Walker develops a new concept: a masterpiece “abides” by the “rules” of instrumentation. This “intuitive feeling” for instruments is a vital part of the creative process, and is born from the observation made by Carl Nielsen, right after he finished his *Sixth Symphony*: “It was as though I crept inside each instrument.”¹⁸⁷ This obviously implies the knowledge of the theory of instruments and of their functionality. The instrumental limitations are there, *a priori*, before the work is composed. Music adapts itself to them in order to live, and this is, in Walker's opinion, a *sine qua non* function for the mastery of the work.

2.2. The principle of the fundamental idea

“All the contrasts in a masterpiece are foreground projections of a single background idea”.¹⁸⁸ This idea contributes to the unity of the work. There is a

¹⁸⁶ D. D. Roșca, *Existența tragică. Încercare de sinteză filozofică* [The Tragic Existence. An Essay of Philosophical Synthesis], 'King Carol II' Foundation for Literature and Art Publishing House, Bucharest, 1934, p. 24..

¹⁸⁷ Alan Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

¹⁸⁸ Alan Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

difference between the works that *have*, and those that *do not have* musical unity. Thus, when a work lacks unity, it also lacks the meaning of diversity.

2.3. The principle of distribution of musical contrasts

A good thematic chronology generates *maximum tension which is compatible with maximum comprehensibility*. If a maestro is presented with a thousand variants to conduct a musical discourse, he will choose the one that will maintain the structural tension. The central point in the structure of a sonata is the integration of contrasts.

2.4. The principle of economy

This refers to *maximum comprehension*.

It is ill-advised to introduce in musical communication more or less material than is required to convey the message; Walker claims that this would lead to ambiguity and distortion.¹⁸⁹

The general law of economy is divided into a group of subsidiary principles that can be defined separately:

- *The principle of identity between idea and discourse*. In a masterpiece, the idea and the discourse are identical. The creative mastery “wraps” an idea in a number of notes, which are neither too many nor too few.

- *The principle of co-extension between form and content*.¹⁹⁰ Form and content are different aspects of the same thing. Ernest Newman summarized the issue as follows: “The form of a musical work is good when the work is neither too short nor too long for its subject, and when each bar of the music follows logically on the bar before it, and leads logically into the bar that comes after it.”¹⁹¹

- *The principle of audibility* - found in orchestration.

Addenda. The musical underworld

It is sometimes noticed that the creative process, just as the critical one, implies an intuitive activity. Music cannot communicate or survive on its own unless it expresses a high degree of unconscious content. The unconscious is the beginning of musical creation; all the masterpieces are born there. There is considerable evidence provided by composers who have revealed that their ideas are rooted in the unconscious. Unconscious creation is certainly in no way synonymous with velocity. Rather, it is synonymous with discovery – the discovery of something that already existed at an unconscious level.

3. A scientization: the theory of unconscious assimilation

¹⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 64.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, p.73

¹⁹¹ *Ibidem*.

To the question: *Why is a masterpiece recognized by some and not by others?* Walker's solution is this: ***the answer must be sought in psychology.*** Thus, we discover a few principles:

3.1. The principle of unconscious identification

If a work pleases a listener, is it just by accident? The author claims that a high selective principle is at work, which *pre-determines* our fundamental response to music. It is *the principle of unconscious identification.* "Where there is no unconscious identification, there is no musical understanding either."¹⁹²

3.2. The unconscious principle of attraction and repulsion

Walker presents one of the greatest paradoxes of music criticism: the confrontation of two critics who have diametrically opposed views on the same masterpiece. Who do we believe? The critic who likes the work will be closer to the truth than the one who stands on the opposite side – explains Walker. Why do some people like certain works and others do not? What determines this attraction? The author describes the concept as "moving historical backgrounds"¹⁹³:

- *Moving historical backgrounds* - the only way by which the sonorous phenomenon can be transferred from one mind to another, is through the unconscious "connection" to the music that is known by both minds.¹⁹⁴ What we know determines what we do not know.

- Any consideration about moving historical backgrounds leads us directly to a phenomenon of *communicative progression and regression*, which consists of incomprehension (fig. A), partial comprehension (fig. B), total comprehension (fig. C) and partial incomprehension (fig. D) regarding the relationship between listeners and work.

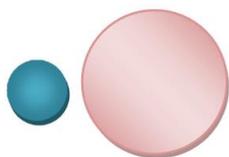


Fig. A

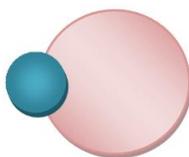


Fig. B

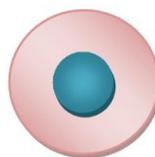


Fig. C

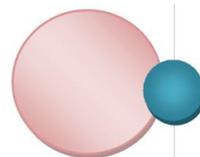


Fig. D

In conclusion, the author makes the following assertion: ***an act of criticism is an act of intuition and the role of the intellect is to explain it.***

¹⁹² Alan Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 90

¹⁹³ *Ibidem*, p. 97.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 98.

CONCLUSIONS

Clive Bell (1881-1964), in *Since Cézanne*, states: “In the first place, the critic is an indicator. He points to a piece of art and says: « Stop! Look!»¹⁹⁵ Each of the five perspectives exposed above (I-V), shapes, through its guiding lines, constituent images and range of relative or absolute meanings, the value spectrum of music criticism. To enable an efficient consideration of the critical act and to increase the comprehensibility, concision and accuracy of our approach, we have resorted to a graphical representation for each viewpoint of each author readdressed below.

According to **Newman**, an act of criticism is underpinned by *formal musical training*. In order to establish *principles (of form, imitation and harmony)*, a critic must analyze the works of the past; Newman refers to the exploration of the compositional techniques of Bach, Mozart, Wagner and, in particular, Monteverdi. It is only after obtaining these tools, or “arms”¹⁹⁶, that the critic is ready to conduct an analysis of the works of the present.

This process implies three objectives that we have presented in pyramid form: according to Newman, observing the works of the *past* enables the acquisition of knowledge



Fig. 1. Newman E., *A Musical Critic's Holiday*

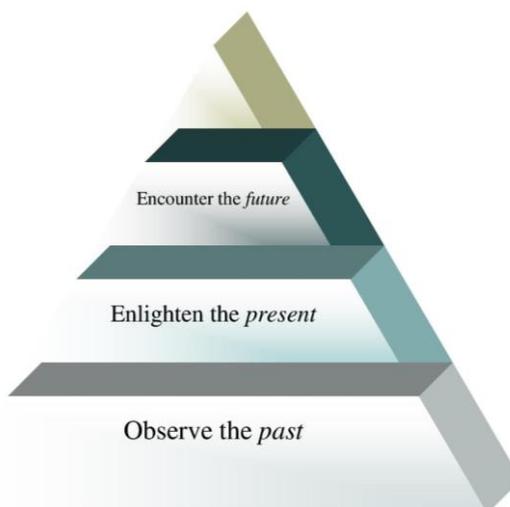


Fig. 2. Newman E., *A Musical Critic's Holiday*

¹⁹⁵ M.-D. Calvoceossi, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. Alan Walker, *op. cit.* p. XII.

required for *enlightening* the music of the *present*. And if the public does not appreciate contemporary works (“composers of genius are better appreciated by the future generations” – claims the author), the critic's efforts will provide a base for *encountering the future*. The future generations will accept what the earlier generations rejected, and for this, the music critic must adopt a long term perspective, involving the following three stages: *observation, enlightening, encountering*.

Calvocoressi

associates the information obtained from the *direct data* (score) and *indirect data* (other sources) with the *personal experience* (feelings). The information obtained from these sources will contribute to the identification of certain *principles*, on the basis of which *the judgment of value* is made. This observation can be rendered in a three-dimensional

perspective: *discernment* (which improves with experience), *reflection* (anchored in the sources of information) and *imagination*. Once the *judgments are made*, they must be *worded* by using a *sense of reality and proportion, tact, clarity and credibility* towards the public – which is achieved through the justification of value judgments.

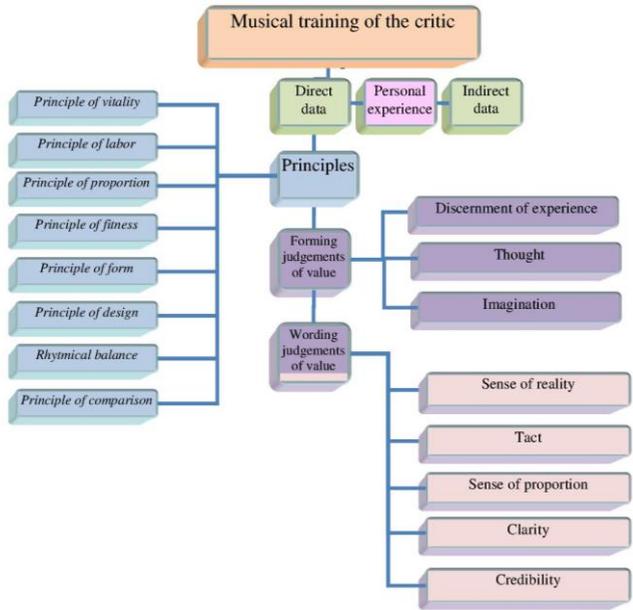


Fig. 3. Calvocoressi M.-D., *The Principles and Methods of Musical Criticism*

Thompson

places *personal experience* first among the sources of information – unlike Calvocoressi, who places it second. His method is quite similar to that of Calvocoressi, but this time the focus

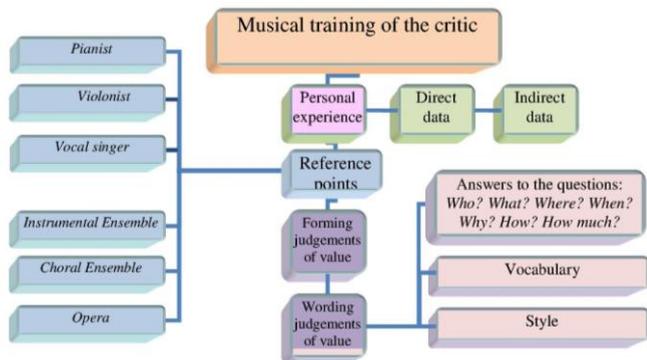


Fig. 4. Thompson O., *Practical Musical Criticism*

is on the practical side of music criticism. Instead of principles, Thompson provides *reference points* for the evaluation of the interpretation of the *pianist, violinist, vocal soloist, instrumental and choral ensemble*, and of the *opera performance*, in terms of technique, style, intonation and rhythm. The *judgment of value* will be presented to the public. It will answer the questions of *Who? What? Where? When? Why? How? How much?* and it will be expressed in an original vocabulary and style.

For **Machabey**, the *audition* is the first stage in the process of *forming judgments of value*, followed by the *awareness of spontaneous reaction*. Then follows the *provisionally subjective judgment*, which in aesthetics is called “the judgment of taste” and which must be associated with an objective judgment by means of: *score analysis* and *placement in the era*. So far, if we were to strip things to essentials, we will notice a similarity with the order proposed by Thompson, regarding the sources of information: personal experience, direct data and indirect data. However, Machabey deepens the research by stating that it is important to *choose a reference work* against which the audition should be *compared*, and then to *determine the results*.



Fig. 5. Machabey A., *Traité de la critique musicale*

Regarding *the critic's musical training*, **Walker**, just like Machabey, starts from the *audition*, but when it comes to *experience* (which he calls *intuitive*, while Calvocoressi and Thompson call it “personal”), he emphasizes the importance of the critic's *unconscious identification* with the artist. It is only if *the forming of judgments of value* is the result of a total comprehension in the relationship between the work and the listener, that Walker proposes the demonstration of the intuitive

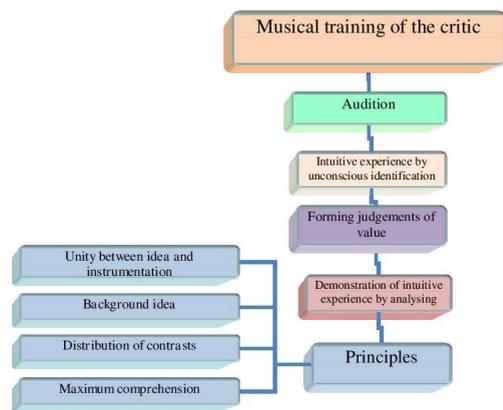


Fig. 6. Walker A., *An Anatomy of Musical Criticism*

experience through score *analysis*. Thus, the *principles (the unity between idea and instrumentation; the fundamental idea; the distribution of contrasts; maximum comprehension)* will result only from the analysis.

From these synoptic representations we observe that each author considers that *formal musical training* is a *sine qua non* in the critical act. Starting from the same premise, their unanimous purpose is forming a viable *judgment of value*. Between these two coordinates, each author presents their “method” which in their opinion will lead to the establishment of principles concerning music.

For Newman, Calvocoressi and Machabey, the forming of *judgments of value* is preceded by *principles* (or *reference points* in the case of Thompson). According to Walker, *principles* are preceded by *the judgment of value*: a critic should not measure a work against principles but derive the principles from it.

Thus he makes reference to Newman and Calvocoressi, saying that their approach is incorrect. If we examine the figures we notice that both derive their *principles* from the direct source (the score). But doesn't Walker do the same?! ... The two derive their principles in order to reach a *judgment of value*; Walker expresses his judgment of value through *intuition* and then demonstrates the principles.

In identifying the value, Machabey resorts to the *comparison method*. So does Calvocoressi, who states that the critic's thorough investigations will focus on the comparison of works, artists, evaluative judgments; he will compare himself with himself in different situations, and his judgments with those of others. Walker regards it as an “incorrect method” and claims that there is no need for *comparison*, but only for *intuition* through unconscious identification: “an act of criticism is an act of intuition”.

From the ideas expressed by these five authors it can be inferred that the judgments of value are a mixture of *objectivity* and *subjectivity*. According to Newman, a critic treats objective things subjectively, and subjective things objectively. Walker, instead, straightforwardly claims that: “objective criticism is psychologically impossible and is devoid of truth.”¹⁹⁷

At the end of this analytical approach we return to the question posed in the Introduction: *Is there a theory of musical criticism?* ... So far, we have offered five perspectives on musical criticism and, to paraphrase Anatole France, we can say that “the adventures of the soul amongst masterpieces” is not over yet.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. Alan Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

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