

XIII. *A Letter of Dr. John Wallis, to Mr. Andrew Fletcher ; concerning the strange Effects reported of Musick in Former Times, beyond what is to be found in Later Ages.*

S I R,

Oxford, Aug. 18. 1698.

THE Question you lately propos'd to me (by a Friend of yours) concerning *Musick*; was not, Whence it comes to pass that *Musick* hath so great an Influence or Efficacy on our Affections, Passions, Motions, &c. But whence it is that these great effects which are reported of *Musick* in *Former Times*, (of *Orpheus*, *Amphion*, &c.) are not as well found to follow upon the *Musick* of *Later Ages*.

If that first had been the Question; Whence it is that *Musick* Operates on our Fancies, Affections, Passions, Motions, &c. and not ours only, but of other Animals, (for it is manifest that Birds and Beasts are affected with Musical Notes as well as Men :) And even as things inanimate) for 'tis well known, that of two Unifone-Strings, though at some distance, if one be struck, the other will move.)

I say, if this were the Question, I must, in answer to it, have discours'd of the Nature of Sounds, produced by some Subtile Motions in the Air, propagated and continued to the Ear and Organs of Hearing, and thence communicated to the Animal Spirits; which excite suitable Imaginations, Affections, Passions, &c. and these attended with conformable Motions and Actions, and according to the various Proportions, Measures, and Mixtures of such Sounds, there do arise various Effects in the Mind or Imagination, suitable thereunto. Thus the rough

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Musick

Musick of Drums and Trumpets, is apt to produce Courage and Fierceness in Martial Minds; and more or less according to the Degrees of Roughness. And sweeter Sounds of more sedate Musick, are apt to excite softer Passions, and of different Kinds and Degrees, according to the Slowness or Swiftnes, Loudness or Calmness, Acuteness or Gravity, and the various Measures and Mixtures of such Musical Sounds. The Animal Spirits being apt to receive Impressions answerable to those subtle Motions, communicated to them from the Organs of Hearing.

But the Question you move is only of the *Comparative Effects* of Musick reported to have been in the Days of old, beyond what appears upon that of later Ages.

In answer to which, there are many things to be considered :

1. I take it for granted, That much of those Reports is highly *Hyperbolical*, and next door to *Fabulous*; according to the Humour of those Ages, termed by Historians, *Tempus Myrbicum*, (the *Fabulous Age*) for (whatever may be thought of Men, Beasts and Birds, no Man can think that the Trees and Stones did Dance after their Pipe. And even in more modest Times, the Poetical Stories of *Olympus*, *Atlas*, and other Mountains, reaching up to Heaven, are much beyond what is now to be found in those Parts where they are said to have been; and many Mountains now well known (as the *Alps*, the *Apennines*, the Pike of *Teneriff*) are much higher than their *Atlas* or *Olympus*. And their Famed *Tyber* is but a Ditch compared with our *Thames*. And like Abatements we must allow to the *Hyperbolical* Elogies of their *Musick*.

2. We must consider, That Musick (to any tolerable Degree) was then (if not a *New*, at least) a *Rare* Thing, which the Rusticks, on whom it is reported to have had  
such

such Effects, had never heard before : and *on such*, a little Musick will do great Feats. As we find at this Day, a Fiddle or a Bag-pipe, among a Company of Country Fellows and Wenches (who never knew better) or at a Country Morrice-Dance, will make them skip and shake their Heels notably. (And the like heretofore, to a Sheperd's Reed or Oaten-Pipe) And when some such thing happened amongst those Rusticks of Old, That, with somewhat of *Hyperbole*, would make a great Noise.

3. We are to consider that their Musick (even after it came to some good Degree of Perfection) was much more plain and simple than ours now a-days. They had not Consorts of Two, Three, Four or more Parts or Voices : But one single Voice or single Instrument, a-part; which, to a rude Ear, is much more taking than more compounded Musick. And we find that a simple Jig, sung or play'd on a Fiddle or Bag Pipe, doth more affect a company of Rusticks, than a set of Vials and Voices. For that is at a Pitch not above their Capacity ; whereas this other confounds it, with a great Noise, but nothing distinguishable to their Capacity. Like some delicate Sauce made up of a Mixture of many Ingredients ; which may yield an agreeable Taste, but not so as to distinguish the particular Relish of any one : But Honey or Sugar by it self, they could understand and Relish with a more particular Gusto.

4. We are to consider, That *Musick* with the Ancients was of a larger extent than what we call Musick now a-days : For *Poetry* and *Dancing* (or comely Motion) were then accounted parts of Musick, when Musick arrived to some Perfection. Now we know that *Verse* of it self, if in good Measures and Affectionate Language, and this set to a Musical Tune, and sung by a decent Voice, and accompanied but with soft Musick (instrumental) if

any, such as not to drown or obscure the emphatick Expressions (like what we call *Recitative-Musick*) will work strangely upon the Ear, and move Affections suitable to the Tune and Ditty; (whether Brisk and Pleasant, or Soft and Pitiful, or Fierce and Angry, or Moderate and Sedate) especially if attended with a Gesture and Action suitable. (For 'tis well known, that suitable Acting on a Stage, gives great Life to the Words.) Now all this together (which were all Ingredients in what they called Musick) must needs operate strongly on the Fancies and Affections of ordinary People, unacquainted with such kind of Treatments. For, if the deliberate reading of a *Romance* (when well penn'd) will produce Mirth, Tears, Joy, Grief, Pitty, Wrath or Indignation, suitable to the respective Intents of it, much more would it so do, if accompanied with all those Attendants.

5. You will ask perhaps, Why may not all this be now done, as well as that? I answer, no doubt it may, and with like Effect, if an Address be made, in proper Words with moving Arguments, in just Measures (Poetical or Rhetorical) with the Emphatick Words, Words set in signal Places, pronounced with a good Voice, and a true Accent, and attended with a decent Gesture; and all these suitably adjusted to the Passion, Affection, or temper of Mind, particularly designed to be produc'd, (be it joy, Love, Grief, Pitty, Courage or Indignation) will certainly now, as well as then, produce great Effects upon the Mind, especially upon a Surprize, and where Persons are not otherwise pre-engag'd: And if so managed as that you be (or seem to be) in earnest; and, if not over-acted by apparent Affectation.

6. We are to consider that the usual Design of what we now call Musick, is very different from that of the Ancients. What we now call *Musick*, is but what they called *Harmonick*; which was but one Part of their Musick (consisting of Words, Verse, Voice, Tune, Instrument and Acting) and we are not to expect the same Effect of one Piece as of the whole. And, of their *Harmonick* at first, when we are told (by a great *Hyperbole*) that it did draw after it, not Men only, but Birds, Beasts, Trees and Stones: this is no more (bating the *Hyperbole*) but what we now see daily in a Country-Town; when Boys, and Girls, and Country-folk, run after a Bag-pipe or a Fidler (especially if they had never seen the like before); of which we are apt (even now) to say, All the Town runs after the Fidler; or, the Fidler draws all the Town after him; or, as when they flock about a Ballad-Singer in a Fair, or the Morrice-Dancers at a *Whitsund Ale*. And all their *Hyperbole's* can signifie no more but this; when their Musick was but a Reed or an open Pipe.

7. It's true, that when Musick was arrived to greater Perfection, it was then applied to particular Designs of exciting this or that particular Affection, Passion or Temper of Mind; (as Courage to Soldiers in the Field; Love, in an Amorous Address; Tears and Pitty, in a Doleful Dirty; Fury and Indignation, in a Fiercer Tune; and a Sedate Temper when applyed to compose or pacify a Furious Quarrel;) the Tunes and Measures being suitably adapted to such Designs.

8. But such Designs as those, seem almost quite neglected in our present Musick. The chief Design now, in our most accomplish'd Musick, being to please the Ear; when, by a sweet Mixture of different Parts and Voices, with just Cadences and Concords intermix'd, a Grateful  
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Sound is produced to please the Ear ; (as a Cook's well tempered Sauce doth the Palate;) which to a common Ear is only a confused Noise of they know not what (though somewhat Pleasing) while only the judicious Musician can discern and distinguish the just Proportions.

9. 'Tis true, that even this Compound Musick admits of different Characters ; some is more Brisk and Airy ; others more Sedate and Grave ; others more Languid ; as the different Subjects do require. But that which is most proper to excite particular Passions or Dispositions, is such as is more simple and uncompounded : such as a Nurses Languid Tune, lulling her Babe to sleep ; or a continued reading in an even Tone ; or even the soft Murmur of a little Rivulet, running upon Gravel or Pibbles, inducing a quiet Repose of the Spirits : And contrarywise, the Briskness of a Jig, on a Kit or Violine, exciting to Dance. Which are more Operative to such particular Ends, than an elaborate Composition of Full Musick : Which Two differ as much as that of a Cook's mixing a Sauce to make it Palatable ; and that of a Physician mixing a Potion for curing a particular Distemper, or procuring a just Habit of Body (where yet, a little Sugar to sweeten it may not do amiss.)

10. To conclude then ; If we aim only at pleasing the Ear, by a sweet Consort, I doubt not but our modern Compositions may equal, if not exceed those of the Ancients : Amongst whom I do not find any Foot-steps of what we call several Parts or Voices, (as Bass, Treble, Mean, &c. sung in Consort) answering each other to compleat the Musick. But if we would have our Musick so adjusted as to excite particular Passion, Affections, or Temper of Mind (as that of the Ancients is supposed to have done) we must then imitate the Physician rather than

than the Cook ; and apply more simple Ingredients, fitted to the Temper we would produce. For in the sweet Mixture of compounded Musick, one thing doth so correct another, that it doth not operate strongly any one way. And this, I doubt not, but a judicious Composer may so effect, (that with the Help of such Hyperbole's, as with which the Ancient Musick is wont to be set off) our Musick may be said to do as great Feats as any of theirs. I am,

S I R,

*Your very Humble Servant,*

JOHN WALLIS.