



Europa eine Seele geben  
A Soul for Europe  
Une âme pour l'Europe

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“The Power of Music:

Europe’s commitment in the Middle East and in the world”

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I firmly believe that it is impossible to speak about music. There have been many definitions of music which have, in fact, only described a subjective reaction to it. The only really precise and objective definition for me is by Ferruccio Busoni, the great Italian pianist and composer, who said that music is sonorous air. It says everything and nothing at the same time.

Therefore, all we can do, then, is speak about our own reaction to music and life.

If I attempt to speak about music, it is because the impossible has always attracted me more than the difficult, because—if there is some sense behind it—the impossible has not only a feeling of adventure, but a feeling of activity which I find highly attractive. It has the added advantage that failure is not only tolerated but expected. I will therefore attempt the impossible and try to draw some connection between the inexpressible content of music and the inexpressible content of life.

Isn't music, after all, just a collection of beautiful sounds? Is music really more than something very agreeable or exciting to listen to—something that, through its sheer power and eloquence, gives us formidable weapons to forget our existence and the chores of daily life? Millions of people, of course, like to come home after a long day at the office, put their feet up, have a drink, put on a CD, and forget all the problems of the day. But my contention is that music also offers another weapon, and that is one through which we can learn about ourselves, about our society, about politics—in short, about the human being.

One of the most important aspects of political thinking, in my opinion, is the ability to use strategy in order to change the state of things, not unlike a composer who strategically constructs his composition, first presenting the material and only later transforming it. In the democratic process in

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its contemporary manifestations, the original Greek idea of democracy has been lost. In ancient Greece, only the sages of society could vote and determine the government's course of action for the public good. Today we have made the right to vote ubiquitous and very rightly so, but have denied the voters the right to a complete education. The political world of today is modern only in its outward manifestations: technology has made communication far more efficient, which unfortunately has led to an exploitation and manipulation of the uneducated population. The average voter in our society is not well versed in any of the arts or sciences which were, according to ancient Greek thought, so essential to any understanding of government, and is unable to think beyond the present and the immediate future to fully understand the consequences of political action. The result is a doubly poor society in which politicians are forced to act tactically rather than strategically in order to remain in power long enough to make any changes, and the public is manipulated while remaining ignorant about the most important issues.

In order to understand Europe's commitment and potential contribution to the Middle East and to the world, it is helpful to review the consequences of major political and economic shifts over the course of the last half-century. The end of the cold war brought with it freedom and many other positive social and economic changes for previously oppressed populations. At the same time, though, it threw the global political equilibrium into an imbalance from which it has not yet recovered, allowing the United States to become the sole superpower, thereby not only diminishing the role of Europe but depriving the world of a necessary antipode. The duality of human existence, as portrayed in Spinoza's Ethics, dictates that one attribute can and must be experienced through its opposite in order to attain greatest understanding. It follows, then, that the presence and participation of more than one power is an ineluctable requirement not only for responsible action in world affairs but for the establishment of true democracy in developing nations. The lack of any significant counterpoint to the voice of the United States has resulted not only in the loss of metaphorical polyphony but has brought us to a state of affairs in which terrorism has become a substitute for dialogue. Subversive opinions become dangerous when they are excluded from participating in a dialogue and are allowed to fester, quietly gaining the support of angry and otherwise voiceless masses.



The state of Israel, one of the main keys to peace and security in the Middle East and in fact the world, was conceived in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a Jewish European idea built on European culture, influence and financial support. Only when Charles de Gaulle found France's connection to Israel to be straining its relations with the Arab world did the burgeoning country adopt the United States not only as its exclusive guarantor of security but as a role model for foreign relations as well. This, in my view, has been extremely destructive to the diplomatic process in the Middle East and may ultimately constitute a threat to the very survival of Israel. One of the greatest social difficulties in the early years of the state of Israel was the fact that the Jews of European origin, otherwise known as the Ashkenazim, saw themselves as the natural leaders of the country, not really granting the Sephardic Jews, stemming mostly from the Middle East and North Africa, a similar role. This, if nothing else, is further proof of the European nature of the state of Israel in its first twenty years; only when France turned its back on Israel did its Americanization really begin. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, Jewish immigrants arrived in Palestine with a vision that combined Zionism and Socialism, preferring to work the land themselves rather than to exploit the local non-Jewish population. The "I" and the "we" were one and the same; there was neither exclusive individuality nor exclusive collectivity. As a result of the Six Day War in 1967, Palestinian labor was available at a much cheaper rate, and this is one of the circumstances that eroded the socialist structure of the state of Israel; the first fortunes were made and all eyes turned to the United States.

Europe has long since put aside the idea of colonialism, but neither a theoretical nor a practical post-colonial view of the non-European world has yet been found. In this new vision of global political relations, both former colonial powers and former colonies must be able to distinguish between positive aspects that were brought to the colonies and their own striving for and achievement of independence and sovereignty. This is, in my view, the issue at the core of Europe's difficulties between Europe and Israel and the rest of the Middle East. Now that Iran and other nations are attempting to accede to a position equal in power to the United States, it is critical for Europe to reassess its role as an important mediating power for present and future generations through education and culture, and to re-examine its links to other continents and former colonies.



In Latin America it has been possible in recent years for rulers with populist backing to become national heroes simply by defying the United States. In the Europe of my ideals, it would be general policy to be sufficiently vocal in international affairs not in order to erode the influence of the United States but to provide a necessary element to accompany it. Spain has already taken very positive steps in its relations to Latin America with very successful results. France and England have very important roles to play in the Middle East that may challenge their current foreign policies. Germany, in my opinion, has made a gigantic step in coming to terms with its history in the twentieth century and has managed to create one of the most admirable democracies in the world today, free of so many negative aspects that rear their ugly heads in politics. Nevertheless, as a Jew and an Israeli I plead with Germany not to recoil from constructive contribution to the solution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in deference to the German national conscience. It is precisely this form of participation that would be the single most tangible and constructive way to help the Jewish people in this very difficult situation.

As an emerging presence which is still seeking its own voice, the European Union carries the responsibility of establishing human rather than nation-specific values. Its discourse should not be limited merely to the political and economic necessities of countries vying for acceptance but should be imbued with a sense of the common yet diverse cultural heritage that each country brings. There is no better way for a German to understand the French perspective than through the music of Claude Debussy, no better way for an Italian to understand the Norwegian mindset than through the works of Henrik Ibsen. Throughout the history of Europe, countries have defined themselves, their values and their positions in the world through the narrative of their artistic output, and continue to do so today. This canon is an invaluable resource for overcoming social and political barriers that stand in the way of cooperation and mutual understanding, one that must be acknowledged and made available to all through education.

In times of totalitarian or autocratic rule, artists have been able to remain uncompromising in their art under otherwise very restrictive circumstances. Culture, in this context, has often been the only avenue of independent thought. It is the only way people can meet as equals and exchange ideas freely. Culture then becomes primarily the voice of the oppressed and takes over from politics as a driving force for change. Often, in societies suffering from political oppression, or from a vacuum in



leadership, culture takes a dynamic lead. We have many extraordinary examples of this phenomenon: Samizdat writings in the former Eastern Bloc, South African poetry and drama under Apartheid, Palestinian literature amidst so much conflict. Conversely, totalitarian regimes have abused their native artists, presenting their works as the culmination of a highly efficient and richly cultured society.

To return to the original Greek notion of democracy and politics, political thinking in the broadest sense of the term should be nothing other than the consideration of all issues that deal with humanity and aim to further the individual and the society. The West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, founded by Edward Said and myself, was a reaction to the state of affairs in the Middle East not in the narrow political sense but in a far-reaching humanitarian sense. It was a way to bring together musicians from Israel, Palestine, and the other Arab countries to make music together. We took the name of our project, the West-Eastern Divan, from a collection of poems by Goethe, who was one of the first Europeans to be genuinely interested in other cultures. He originally discovered Islam when a German soldier who had been fighting in one of the Spanish campaigns brought back a page of the Koran to show to him. His enthusiasm was so great that he started to learn Arabic at the age of sixty. Later he discovered the great Persian poet Hafiz, and that was the inspiration for his set of poems that deal with the idea of the other, the West-Eastern Divan, which was first published nearly two hundred years ago, in 1819, at the same time, interestingly enough, that Beethoven was writing the Ninth Symphony, his celebrated testament to fraternity—to the brotherhood of mankind.

Goethe's poems became a symbol for the idea behind our experiment in bringing Arab and Israeli musicians together. This orchestra consists of musicians from Palestine, from the occupied territories and Palestinians from Israel, Syrians, Lebanese, Jordanians, and Egyptians, and of course Israelis. Whenever one plays music, whether in chamber music or in an orchestra, one has to do two very important things simultaneously—one is to express oneself (otherwise one is not contributing to the musical experience), and the other is to listen to the other musicians, an imperative facet of music-making. The other person may be playing the same part as you—if



you're a string player, he may even be sitting next to you—or he may be playing a different instrument and be in counterpoint with the music you are playing.

In any case, it is impossible to play intelligently in an orchestra and concentrate only on one of these two things. If you concentrate only on what you are doing, you may play very well but you might also play so loud that you cover the others, or so softly that you are not heard. And of course you cannot limit yourself to listening—the art of playing music is the art of simultaneous playing and listening: one enhances the other. This is the main reason we started this workshop. Edward Said made it clear that separation between people is not a solution for any of the problems that divide people, and certainly ignorance of the other provides no help whatsoever.

In this workshop we were trying to start a dialogue, to take a single step forward, and to find common ground. And we saw what happened when an Arab musician shared a music stand with an Israeli musician, both trying to play the same note with the same dynamic, with the same stroke of the bow, if they were string players, with the same sound, with the same expression. They were trying to do something together about which they were both passionate, because after all, indifference and music-making cannot coexist. Music demands a passionate attitude regardless of the level of aptitude. The idea was quite simple; once the young musicians agreed on how to play even just one note together it would no longer be possible for them to look at each other the same way as before. If in music they were able to carry on a dialogue by playing simultaneously, then ordinary verbal dialogue in which one waits until the other has finished would become considerably easier. That was our starting point, and from the beginning Edward and I were filled with optimism despite what he termed the darkening sky, with what has sadly turned out to be all too accurate foresight. I have come to believe that morality and strategy are not exclusive of each other but rather go hand in hand in this conflict, in the same way that it is impossible to separate rational understanding from emotional involvement in music.

In the West-Eastern Divan the universal metaphysical language of music becomes the link that these young people have with each other; it is a language of continuous dialogue. Music is the common framework; it is an abstract language of harmony. In music, nothing is independent. It requires a perfect balance between intellect, emotion and temperament. And I would argue that if



this equilibrium is reached, human beings and even nations can interact with the outside world with greater ease. Therefore through music we can imagine an alternative social model, where utopia and practicality join forces, allowing us to express ourselves freely and hear each other's preoccupations.

This process gives us an important insight into the way the world can, should, and sometimes does in fact function. It was our belief from the beginning, in any case, that the destinies of our two people, the Palestinians and the Israelis, are inextricably linked, and that the welfare, the dignity and the happiness of one therefore must inevitably be that of the other, which is certainly not the case today.

The West-Eastern Divan Orchestra is, of course, unable to bring about peace. What it can do, however, is to create the conditions for understanding. It can awaken the curiosity, and then perhaps the courage, for each to listen to the narrative of the other, and at the very least to accept its legitimacy. People have often called this a wonderful example of tolerance; I take issue with their terminology, because to tolerate something or somebody implies an underlying negativity—one is tolerant in spite of certain negative qualities. The meaning of the word tolerance is misused when seen only as a quality of generosity. There is an element of presumptuousness—I better than thou—that is inherent in it. Goethe expressed this succinctly when he said: "To merely tolerate is to insult; true liberalism means acceptance." Acceptance means to acknowledge the difference and dignity of the other. In music, it is represented by counterpoint or polyphony. Acceptance of the freedom and individuality of the other is one of music's most important lessons.

Aristotle writes, in his treatise on Politics, that "no one will doubt that the legislator should direct his attention above all to the education of youth; for the neglect of education does harm to the constitution. The citizen should be moulded to suit the form of government under which he lives. For each government has a peculiar character which originally formed and which continues to preserve it. The character of democracy creates democracy, and the character of oligarchy creates oligarchy; and always the better the character, the better the government." There is a tremendous amount to be learned for life through music and yet our current system of education neglects this realm entirely, from kindergarten right through to the last years of school. Even in music schools



and conservatories, the instruction is highly specialized and often unrelated to the actual content of, and thus the power of, music. The availability of recordings and films of concerts and operas is in inverse proportion to the poorness of musical knowledge and understanding prevalent in our society. The current state of public education is responsible for a population that is able to listen to almost any piece of music at any time, but unable to really hear it or fully concentrate on it. It is, of course, possible to listen and not hear, as it is possible to look and not see. Reading a book requires not only looking at the words but also seeing them in order to understand the narrative. Listening to music requires hearing it as well, in order to understand the musical narrative. Hearing, therefore, is listening with thought, much in the same way as feeling is emotion with thought. Accessibility comes through greater interest, curiosity and knowledge. Certain locations are described as being “wheelchair-accessible.” To make a building “wheelchair-accessible,” one simply needs to place ramps or lifts wherever there are stairs. In the case of culture, education is the ramp, or the lift, that makes music, art, and theater accessible.

As I said earlier, the European Union is in the process of finding its voice both in the context of internal issues and in its relations with other nations. It is my hope that this developing voice will draw its strength from the polyphony of its many individual voices that can both support and balance one another when given the opportunity to do so. With the economic and political development of countries like China, India, and Brazil, it is important for Europe to remember that its cultural capital is its greatest resource, the one through which it will be able to play an active role in leading the world in the next fifty years. In the context of this leading role, I would like to appeal to the European Union to find the generosity to include Israel and Palestine as active members in the common pursuits of peace, cooperation and progress.