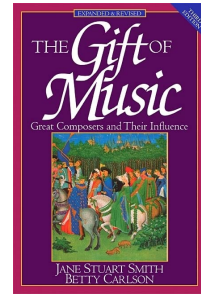


The Gift of Music

Jane Stuart Smith & Betty Carlson (1978)

*Notes by Bob Evelyn
Wilmore, Kentucky; 2023.*



I have not listened to classical music since my childhood, and I much prefer “modern” music (if one can refer to 60-year-old classic rock modern). But lately I have enjoyed reading biographies of early composers such as Bach, Haydn, and especially Beethoven. These readings have brought back some great childhood memories, before I found the Beatles, Bee Gees (early, but not too early), and a growing number of others with each passing year. Gradually I gave up classical music altogether (to the chagrin of my mother I’m sure) as I gravitated to playing on the piano what I was hearing on the radio. But I still recall going to Meadowbrook concerts in Michigan with my mother and hearing the Detroit Symphony Orchestra along with some well-known performers, such as Van Cliburn. It renewed my appreciation for my mother and father who were so supportive in my musical growth, especially with my piano lessons.

As I read about classical music I see and appreciate the roots of modern music. Tonics and circle of fifths, consonance and dissonance, resolution – these things and far more were subjects explored by the classical composers, and they are still explored by most musicians of our day.

Besides the interest in the musical side of things, you will see from the following excerpts great food for thought relating to nurturing creativity, a good work ethic, and more – things that apply to all walks of life and not just to musicians. See what you think!

Luther (p. xvii)

Luther called the Psalter “a Bible in miniature,” and it was his constant companion. It is said that whenever he heard discouraging news he would say to his family or friends, “Come, let us sing the forty-sixth psalm.”

J. G. Machen (p. 37)

“The vast majority of those who reject the gospel do so simply because they know nothing about it. But whence comes this indifference? It is due to the intellectual atmosphere in which men are living. The modern world is dominated by ideas which ignore the gospel. Modern culture is not altogether opposed to the gospel. But it is out of all connection with it. It not only prevents the acceptance of Christianity. It prevents Christianity from getting a hearing.”

Franz Joseph Haydn (p. 47)

The music of Haydn has cheer, beauty, logic, order, nobility, freshness of imagination, and humor. He respected God and the order in His creation.

He always found composition a labor, and so he set for himself regular hours to compose. When ideas did not come, he prayed for them. When they came, he worked with unremitting industry.

The quartet was his natural way of expression – organized simplicity.

Ludwig van Beethoven (p. 63)

Facing deafness, Beethoven became extremely depressed. A little later when he began to take courage again, he uttered the famous words, “I will seize Fate by the throat.” “It shall certainly not bend and crush me completely.”

God is the giver of gifts, but not all gifted persons acknowledge and give thanks to God.

Franz Schubert (p. 78)

Even when walking about seemingly doing nothing, he was searching for inspiration.

Jenny Lind (famous Swedish singer) (p. 95)

A friend asked, "How was it that you ever came to abandon the stage at the very height of your success?" She replied, "When every day it made me think less of the Bible, what else could I do?"

Robert Schumann (p. 106)

One author said concerning Schumann, "He was religious, but had no religion."

Johannes Brahms (p. 137)

"The beginning is the main thing. If only one makes a beginning, then the end comes of itself."

He did not need a large income for himself, as he felt more comfortable when leading a simple life. But Brahms did derive pleasure in helping others.

He loved independence, solitude, and freedom. He set great store by undisturbed solitude, and his friends knew he was not to be bothered when he was working

Always an early riser and a man of rigid self-discipline, Brahms would prepare his morning coffee and get to work. What brightened his days were the twice-daily trips to the Red Hedgehog Inn where he ate his meals in the congenial company of musical and artistic friends.

One of Brahms's favorite books, even as an adult, was Robinson Crusoe.

At the news of his mother's death, a friend found Brahms weeping while playing Bach's "Goldberg Variations." The incident recalls Beethoven's and Tchaikovsky's use of the "music cure" in times of special need.

Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky (p. 148)

"If one lacks the right mood, one must force oneself to work, otherwise nothing will be accomplished."

From eight to nine in the morning he would drink tea and read his Bible. Then he would work. Later in the afternoon he would walk. Having read someplace that in order to keep healthy a person should walk for two hours a day; this he did with scrupulousness. It was on the walks, many times, that the work of composition was initiated, ideas tried and jotted down in little notebooks. He felt strongly that the artist must not give in to that powerful human trait of laziness. Like most artists, Tchaikovsky craved solitude so that his ideas would not be stolen from him in breezy, indifferent conversation.

Charles Ives (p. 231)

"Art comes directly out of the heart of experience of life and thinking about life and living life."

His father felt that a person could keep his music interest stronger, cleaner, bigger, and freer if he didn't try to make a living from it.

Maurice Ravel (p. 241)

For a time. Ravel and Vines met with a group of young artists. The last member to be admitted was Stravinsky. They were a lively group. On one occasion a stranger bumped into them on the street and pushed them aside, growling, "Attention les Apaches." This was a word of insult in Paris and applied to social outcasts, so they got the idea to call their group, "Societe des Apaches." Everyone was delighted.

Ravel regularly gave his friends extra stimulus by bringing along heaps of Russian music. Borodin was his favorite. The group all became acquainted with the B Minor Symphony by Borodin, and they used the first eight notes of the symphony as a means of identification. One could whistle, hum it, or play it, and if you were an Apache, you knew a friend was near.

Bela Bartok (p. 255)

On his deathbed, Bartok lamented, "The trouble is that I have to go with so much still to say."

Sergei Prokofiev (p. 265)

Throughout his life he would ask himself, "What have you accomplished today?"

He said that he was always on the lookout for new melodic themes which he wrote in a notebook as they came to him.

Postlude (p. 299)

To some it might seem restricting to live in a small mountain village, but not when you are surrounded with good records and books and a radio that features classical music all day long and very possibly all night long too.

At times the authors come across quite narrow in their Christian commentary (and I say this as a Bible-believing Christian myself). But there is an acknowledgement that inspiration can be found in the creative works of those who are not necessarily Christian themselves. This I firmly agree with, as God is the Creator of all – and His inspiration can be found in all of His creation even if one may not acknowledge it is God behind it.

As can be seen from the excerpts I've gathered here, there is much to be appreciated in this book – many thoughts concerning work ethic and the nurturing of creativity, even if one does not appreciate classical music.

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