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<th>Musical Esotericism</th>
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In the musical world, "esotericism" must be interpreted rather loosely to include those aspects of music that have some deeper intention than the exoteric liturgy of performance and secular scholarship. Of the books reviewed here, two are concerned with music as a form of meditation, and two with the understanding of Western music from the Theosophical and mystical perspectives.

M.-L. Aucher has an impressive record as a singer, voice teacher, music therapist, and founder of the Association française de Psychophonie. She addresses her book especially to therapists and to those concerned with the ways music is used in Catholic worship. To both groups she offers Gregorian as the very best type of music for their purposes. The singing of it, she explains, effects a "vibratory massage" on the organs of the body, while its use in the liturgy goes beyond emotional and social needs, even beyond the intuition that manifests in the works of the great composers, to act as a vehicle for transpersonal and spiritual states. Aucher by no means limits these to worshippers, however: such states are, she says, the result of deliberate work on oneself, under the sole guidance of the Spirit, requiring "no confessional terms, no allusion to religions".
In diagrams reminiscent of Robert Fludd’s musical correspondences of microcosm with macrocosm, Aucher aligns the human body with the human voice range, male and female. The four octaves (C-C”) are allotted to legs, belly, chest and head, with the internal organs assigned to specific notes of the scale. This enables her to plot any sung melody – she uses Gregorian chants – as it moves up and down the anatomy, and thus one is invited to experience it. Her approach is a fascinating resurgence of the ancient idea of “musica humana”, of music as a regulator of the psychophysical entity. The book is valuable for this and for its perceptive analysis of the various types of “religious” music in current use, which becomes the basis for a general typology of music.

While Aucher concentrates on one’s own chant-singing as a method of therapy and a spiritual activity, J.T. Zeberio, whose intentions are quite similar, recommends the very antithesis: listening to recordings of 18th-20th century music. Zeberio, who works mainly in Buenos Aires, also heads his own institute, the Institut Argentin de Recherches Énergétiques et de Musicothérapie. His assumptions seem vaguely theosophic, his goal “the progressive elimination of the energy-blocks which hinder the harmonious development of the personality”. Like Aucher, he considers the human being as a psychophysical whole, and, in a modern restatement of the perennial idea of cosmic harmony, “every form of life [as] a vibration, an energy in permanent evolution”.

Zeberio’s book is an exercise manual for a three-year programme of musical purification of the five “vortices” or energy centres of the body: sacral, hepatic, cardiac, laryngeal and mental. One does this by listening to music and visualizing it as passing through these centres. The many diagrams show the musical notes flowing in various directions in and out of the cornucopia-shaped vortices. Here, too, there is an air of the Renaissance Hermetic engravings. Zeberio prescribes the exact pieces to be used – the same ones every time, presumably to avoid the distractions of novelty and to discourage any interest in the music as such: these symphonies and concertos are merely vehicles for the direction of energies by the imagination.

While his system of vortices, with its obvious connections with the subtle anatomy of hatha yoga, seems less artificial than Aucher’s body-scales, Zeberio, unlike her, is not instinctively musical. He does not treat the music itself with any respect, providing instead an absurd table of percentage-points to show which functions are best aided by which composers. But he does add an important section on the combination of musical with colour therapy, suggesting its use not only to further personal growth, but for the treatment of serious illnesses.

The Theosophy of Berthe Nyssens is overt, as he pays homage to H. P. Blavatsky, to Besant and Leadbeater, and to Krishnamurti. Nyssens’ book makes no claim for his own authority, but
represents, as he says, an attempt to discover the Genesis of music in the Genesis of the world as expounded by Blavatsky in *The Secret Doctrine*. The first part ranges over fundamental assumptions such as the primacy of sound in Creation, the universe as pure vibration, the search for the primordial sound in yoga, and the law of correspondences. The remainder of the book is an historical survey, with many digressions and some repetition, of Western music in the light of theosophic world-history. The cyclic movement under consideration is one of "involution", meaning the descent of the human race from a divine but largely unconscious, collective state into the obscuration and delusions of the material world, in order that it may regain those higher states in full individual consciousness.

In Western music, Nyssen sees this unselfconscious condition as manifesting in Gregorian Chant, and to a lesser extent in the sacred polyphony of the Middle Ages. The descent begins in the Renaissance, with the discovery of contrapuntal ingenuity (descent to the mental level), and continues with the invention of opera and its exploitation of harmony (the emotional level). After becoming increasingly individualized in the Romantic era, music reaches the level of the physical with the early 20th century, when the stress on rhythm (e.g. Strawinsky's *Sacre du Printemps*; jazz) effects the final stage of musical materialization. But Nyssen believes that the corner has been turned, and the upward, evolutive path begun. As symptoms of this, he cites the discovery of the Orient by Debussy (at just the same time as Blavatsky was giving out esoteric oriental knowledge); the collective, all-embracing music of national dance, folksong, and jazz; the worldwide propagation of music through electronics; the rediscovery of music therapy.

Nyssens' interpretation of the esoteric currents behind music history would only have been strengthened, had he been able to call on a musicologist's knowledge, or been informed on events since 1945, which have moved further in the same directions. His "philosophy of music" is certainly valid for the modern West, which is after all the only civilization to have taken this particular course, and his observations on composers are a source of stimulating ideas.

The prolific philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch has written several books on his secondary interest, modern French music. While he could not be called an esotericist, exactly, he shows an awareness and a sympathy for the mystical attitude that is as common among French intellectuals as it is rare among English-speaking ones. As a musicologist, he knows his limitations, and keeps within his chosen bounds of time and place: France, and to a lesser extent the Slavic countries, from about 1870-1940. Within this small compass, he manages to touch on such profundities as the reference of music to another order of being; the necessity for violence and blasphemy in 20th century art; the difference
between the inexpressible and the ineffable; the nature of silence and of music’s borderline with it.

Jankélévitch’s book is a literary work in its own right – which cannot be said of the others. Like André Gide writing on Chopin, he can illuminate by the sheer power of an intellect perfected in another school. He uses familiarly the terms of mysticism and even of alchemy, detecting in a piece of Fauré’s, for example, the “arcanum maximum” and the “divinum Nescioquid”. Perhaps there is something specifically Hermetic in his insistence that the most precious things in music lie readily to hand, where few think to look for them. Not for him the obvious public sublimity of a Beethoven or Wagner, but rather the Absolute that lies just beneath the surface of a minor masterpiece by Fauré or Mussorgsky, perfect and ideal as a crystal or a snowflake. His philosophical mind is attracted to the paradoxical and the penumbral: to the tempo that is not fast, yet not slow either; the muted loudness; the ambiguity of enharmonics. In his ear for subtleties, his assent to the contradictory, his perception of the Divine in the everyday, Jankélévitch stands for an attitude very different from that of the musical systematizers, for whom the truth is clear and to whom it is clear that they have the truth.

Joscelyn Godwin