LISTENING TO MUSIC
The best tranquilizer and antidepressant

By Doctor Leonidas Samouilidis

(Second of two articles)

The second movement, which paradoxically is a scherzo, creates a mood of hysterical joy with the intoxicating effect of the tympani. No nobler note of humanity, no profounder note of contemplative calm, no more poignant note of compassion, no more moving note of sublimity, is sounded anywhere in music, than the third movement. It brings one to heavenly heights of immeasurable intensity. This is interrupted twice by predominant trumpets in outbursts, to return again in the warmth and serenity.

With the introduction of the fourth movement, Beethoven brings one back to earth. The main theme is first introduced by the cellos and carried on by the violins, gradually to lead to the explosion of the full orchestra. Friedrich Schiller's "One to joy" is used as a text for the human voices and chorus. The ode symbolizes the brotherhood of man and erlids in a pandemonium of voices and orchestra.

Gustav Mahler's 2nd symphony follows Beethoven's ninth, as, after lengthy 1st, 2nd and 3rd movements, the human voices enter. Mahler got the inspiration for his second symphony at von Bulow's funeral. It gave him the answer to his preoccupation with matters of life and death. At von Bulow's funeral the choir of the church intoned a choral setting of Friedrich Klopstock's ode "Aufersteh'n" (Resurrection) and suddenly Mahler recognized that only in the idea of resurrection could the conflict of life and death be resolved. Thus he included in the fifth movement of the symphony the words of Klopstock "Aufersteh'n, ja aufersteh'n wrist du, mein Staub nach kurzer Ruh." The final choral explosion of a Beethovenian style has absolutely penetrating qualities, goes deep through one's skin. It is a piece of unsurpassed majesty and power. I was utterly awed and impressed, when I made my first contact...
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for charity. The offer lifted his spirits, so much so, that he was able to create the greatest oratorio. He used the music, so to speak, as an antidepressant. Of course the most solemn and exhilarating passage is the well known "Hallelujah chorus." I personally would like to put a little more emphasis in the final chorus "Worthy is the lamb that was slain," which starts with a great depth of feeling and gradually leads into a powerfully majestic and monumental closing "Amen" which, with its repetition and persistence, reaches out to the skies.

A similar situation of using music as an antidepressant applies to Sergei Rachmaninoff and the creation of his second piano concerto.

One of Bach's greatest works for piano, the Goldberg variations, was commissioned as a soporific for Count von Kayserling, a Russian envoy to the Dresden Court, who was suffering from insomnia and thus, he had his clavichord performer Johann Gottlieb Goldberg (a pupil of Bach) play music for him, until slumber was induced. The variations are written on a saraband theme, of quiet and tender beauty. If that piece of music indeed induced the count to sleep, that would be called in modern psychiatric terms an overdose!!

Chamber music, as I indicated before, can have a tranquilizing effect. Of the rich repertory of chamber music, from the Italian Baroque to Bella Bartok, I want to single out Franz Joseph Haydn's String Quartets. Haydn composed 83 quartets that are classified under different opuses and numbers. Collectively, I characterize them as being graceful and charming. Other characteristic feelings they evoke are transparency, neatness and clarity. Qualitatively they produce feelings of tenderness, playfulness or pathos. Gaiety, exuberance and boynacy. There is not one that I can single out against the others. They are like Rossini's overtures.

I come now to a somewhat lighter and more romantic type of music that is connected with loveliness, sweet feelings of love, and affection. It can move someone into a fantasy world, or into an actual experience with the person that we are in love. Representative pieces of this kind are:

Franz Schubert's "Serenade". My characterization of the Serenade is that of an old friend that makes me happy to be in touch with from time to time.
The question is now, for people who have not or have been not exposed to music, how does one use music to such levels of powerful influence and affectation of one's moods? Certainly, no one would expect to hear for the first time Beethoven's ninth, and arrive to great heights of exhilaration. This is a process. In other words, at first you have to atune your ears to something that sounds pleasant. For example the first pieces that I remember having heard in my youth, from the classical repertory, were: Schubert's Serenade (This is why I called it an old friend), Carl Maria von Weber's "Invitation to the dance," Peter Tchaikofski's "Capriccio Italian" and Frederick Chopin's "Polonaise Heroique." All these had a very pleasant effect on my ears and stimulated my interest in this kind of music that is called classical. So, when we experience something pleasant, we want to have more of it; and the interest deepens.

Second step is wanting to know something about the composers who produced that lovely music; so you read about them. Gradually you move in other areas. Giuseppe Verdi's "La Traviata" is a very good opera for the uninitiated. Thus, progressively, you broaden and deepen, not only your acoustic acumen, but also your knowledge about music. You start, for example, to compare different performances, orchestras, conductors, singers etc., etc. and you become more familiar with the individual interpretations of the music. You may even expand yourself socially and you start to attend recitals, concerts, going to the opera and even national and international music festivals that take place annually all over the world. The more involved you become, the more satisfaction, fulfilment and joy you receive.

Someone may ask. Is it absolutely safe to become so involved with music? Well, you could become addicted to it! But there are no bad side effects. However, even in music, the recommendation is that you do it in moderation and full control. After all, these are two of the most important elements of a healthy life.