

A Correction

Jack Woddis

In my article "Africa's One Party Systems", which appeared in the August issue of *Marxism Today*, where reference is made to the Marxist-Leninist parties in Africa (*see footnote, p. 231*), the name of the Sudanese Communist Party was mistakenly omitted, owing to one sentence from my original manuscript being missed by me in typing the final draft. The Sudanese Communist Party, which has been illegal for the whole seventeen years of its existence, is a product of the heroic struggles of the Sudanese people and leads the struggle for complete national liberation. It is

a signatory of the Declaration of the Eighty-One Communist and Workers' Parties and its reputation stands high in the international communist movement. Those who were present in London at the 1954 Conference of Communist Parties from countries within the sphere of British imperialism will remember the moving speech read on that occasion on behalf of the Sudanese delegation. I would like to thank all those, including my friends of the Sudan, who have drawn my attention to the omission of the heroic Sudanese Communist Party in my article.

Discussion contribution on:

What Does Music Express?

Michael Short

SURELY the myth of Stravinsky's theories has been exploded long ago. This particular composer is well known for his mystical approach to music (and to life in general) and it is a commonplace that men who are adept at one form of expression are quite often inept in another. Therefore, any examination of Stravinsky's work should be based on his music and not on his writings about his music, for it is evident that apart from one or two exceptions, the majority of his work is deeply felt and has 'meaning' for the listener. How this meaning is achieved I will discuss below. To analyse vague philosophising rather than reality is essentially a non-Marxist approach. For instance, our estimation of the worth of the Conservative Party is based on its record in governing the country, not on its election promises.

Any consideration of the meaning of music should be based on a scientific view of its historical development and social function. In this context it is interesting to recall a recent criticism in the *Daily Worker* in which Stravinsky's work was described as moving towards 'anti-music'. This sounds like a term from a mediaeval theological flying and can have no real relevance except to a nihilist attitude such as that taken by Cage. Stravinsky is definitely *pro-* not *anti-*art.

However, the fact remains that Stravinsky was right when he said that music can have no meaning in itself; just as a language can have no meaning in itself, except to those who understand its conventions. Thus Chinese makes nonsense to a Dutchman, for instance. It is these conventions that are important. The sounds of music have certain physiological effects on the human ear, which in turn produce responses in the brain (i.e. 'meaning') according to certain conditions. In general, music has meaning by association, information, or by imitation. The last category is obvious and does not require further discussion.

Meaning by Association

1. *Association.* Certain kinds of music are associated with certain events, ceremonies, or moods. For instance, a layman can always

recognise a hymn as being religious music, merely by virtue of its musical style, which has become associated with religious worship. In films, sea scenes are often accompanied by surging strings with unison horns in the high register, and on television moments of tension in detective serials are appropriately scored by means of dissonant chords played by a jazz orchestra. All of these examples are conventions and are to a certain extent expected by the listener in order to emphasise the meaning of the scene he is watching. Note that in the last example the dissonance itself does not imply tension—it is only by association with the events portrayed that it has 'meaning' in this way. Oriental music seems very dissonant to Western ears, but does not necessarily imply tension to those who are familiar with it and know its conventions. It is a common belief that the minor key is the most suitable for 'sad' music, and the existence of much gay music in the minor and sad music in the major key is evidence of the fact that this is a mere convention having no basis in emotional experience, except by association.

Meaning by Information

2. *Information.* To understand the meaning of the music of a Wagner opera (leaving aside consideration of the vocal text) we are provided with lists of leitmotives and told what each one is meant to represent. This is meaning by information. Thus when certain themes are played we know that the music is signifying 'sword', or 'eternal longing', etc., which we could not necessarily have guessed by just listening to the music. In the same way in Indian classical music there are certain ragas which are to be played only at dawn, and the Indian musician would be disturbed if they were played at any other time. However, a listener who did not know that these were 'dawn' ragas would not be aware of this significance.

In a listening test, many children in a group correctly described the 'dawn' music from Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloe*, (a quasi-imitative piece), but they would not have been able to do this in the case of the Indian 'dawn' raga. There is no