

Star Melodies by Dane Rudhyar

As long as there have been human beings on earth who felt that life was more than a series of physical activities necessary to provide food and shelter, there has also been music. Of course the music of what we call "primitive" man was very different from the symphonies of Beethoven and Tchaikowsky or the Nocturnes of Chopin. Yet the urge to produce sounds which have a special kind of meaning has been basically the same in the nomadic folk-singers of Central Asia, the court musicians of ancient China seeking to attune their melodies to the motions of the planets, the Biblical David singing hymns to God, Bach improvising majestic music on the organs of the 18th century German churches, Liszt's rhapsodic soul-cries, or the jazz-player seeking emotional release in saxophone melodies and blood-pulsing drum-beats. However, if we clearly want to understand the nature of this urge, we have to realize that it is essentially two-fold. And here astrology will strikingly help us to analyze two basic types of musical temperament. One is characterized by the planet **Venus**, the other by **Neptune**. At times the two temperaments are found united in one composer, but more often one definitely dominates, as the birth-chart will show.

Venusian Music

Music inspired by Venus is primarily music which expresses the elements of charm, beauty, and significance prevalent in the culture and society of the composer. It gives form to cultured emotions, that is, emotions which seek to express themselves according to traditional principles of proportion, form, and harmony. These principles do not have to be learned in school. They may be stamped upon the instinctive nature of the peasant, the nomad, the folk-singer. They have become part of what is now called "the Collective Unconscious." The born musician "feels" these principles spontaneously, and, of course, absorbs them through imitation of the music heard in childhood.

This kind of music is therefore usually associated with other artistic activities, particularly with dancing or dramatic story-telling, mime, etc. It is essential in religious ceremonies of a formal, traditional type. It is the "soul" of any ritual or dramatic performance, especially in cultures which have not as yet evolved a strong preoccupation with intellectual and psychological analyses, rely almost exclusively upon words and verbal discussions.

I spoke in the first paragraph of this article of music being the outcome of "the urge to produce sounds which have a special kind of meaning." Words are also sounds, but we, nevertheless, differentiate music from ordinary speech. Ordinary speech, first of all, refers to activities which are matter-of-fact, practical and concrete. At a more abstract level, as when scientists or philosophers discuss ideas and laws, speech deals with thoughts, with

intellectual concepts. Musical sounds, melodies and chords, have no particular relation to everyday activities and the business of living; nor do they deal with abstract thoughts. They have to do, rather, with an elusive something which, for lack of a better word we may call "soul."

The soul of a man is the essence of his being. It is a mysterious quality which is often related to the man's spontaneous feelings, or, in any case, to that which is most characteristically "himself." The soul, however one may think of it, is a dynamic something; it has energy, movement, purity, and at least a relative degree of transcendency and of permanence.

In many ways, Venus, in astrology, represents the soul, the source of **personal magnetism**, the essence of whatever a human being considers worthwhile, worth living for. Thus Venus symbolizes in a chart that which has value, the quality of one's emotional response, whether accepting or repudiating — a man's "heart's desire." And, in a social, collective sense, Venus is what a community or a nation desires most — the "soul of a people."

Music is, more than anything else, the expression of this "soul of a people." It is the dynamic quality of a culture, of a ritual. Thus, astrologically we often find great musicians with a strong Venus. An outstanding example was **Richard Wagner** who sought to express in his great mythological music-dramas — now unfortunately called "operas," and he hated that word — the "soul" of the Germanic peoples and their racial character. This, of course, is the reason why the Nazis tried to "own" him, for they were intent on proving the unparalleled excellence of the "pure" Germanic type. Wagner had Venus and the Sun in close conjunction.

A similar conjunction is found in the birth-chart of Wagner's devoted friend and supporter, **Franz Liszt**, whose music has an equally strong popular appeal today; and Liszt's musical compositions stressed a good deal the music of his native land, Hungary. Also Liszt's music was often self-consciously "social" in its aims, for, being a famous virtuoso of the piano, he sought to popularize the works of other musicians who he felt to be worthwhile. Today an American composer, who sought determinedly to write "American" music, Roy Harris, was also born with Sun and Venus conjunct.

Chopin, whose music was strongly linked with the nationalistic aspirations of the oppressed Polish people, also had Venus close to the Sun. And in the chart of the German composer, **Richard Strauss**, who was, in a sense, Wagner's successor and the composer of many operas, we find Uranus, the Sun, Pluto and Venus within a span fifteen degrees and in the sign Gemini, in sextile to a conjunction of Mars and Neptune in Aries, and in trine to Saturn in Libra — quite a planetary set-up!

Neptunian Music

With the mention of a Mars-Neptune conjunction, we come now to the second type of music — Neptunian music. This music is primarily the expression of a deep yearning for the

Infinite. That is, it reflects an urge to reach **beyond** all intellectual forms and objective realities of everyday life, and even beyond what I have called the social, cultural traditional — even beyond the "soul," if by soul we still refer to something which represents a definite; limited, personal or national sense of value.

Neptune is the vast ocean, the atmosphere, the infinitudes of galactic space. It signifies whatever is, or at least seems, limitless and transcendent. Neptune's keyword is "beyond." Therefore music, insofar as it takes us beyond the world of definite and concrete physical realities and into a magical realm of vibrations and dynamic emotional feelings, is typically Neptunian. **Music is the most mystical of all arts.** It seizes our ego-conscious and loosens into that which surrounds it, the vast unconscious. Thus through music, whatever is tense, ego-centric, bound in us, can be released. Music acts like a great love, a religious ecstasy, freeing us from our narrow self, our little pet ideas.

This is, indeed, the essential power of music. But human beings are often afraid of this vast ocean of music which seems so boundless, which brings emotional experiences too intense not to be also disturbing and frightening. Thus, music is forced to conform to set and known patterns. Form is stressed, and intellectual technique. Thus music is tamed, as it were, for cultural enjoyment, for esthetic appreciation. Neptune's immense lure is toned down and shaped into familiar, comfortable Venusian charm and beauty.

Often, as I said, great composers are able to blend the Neptunian and Venusian tendencies. Wagner had his Sun conjunct Venus, but both were relatively near an opposition to Uranus and Neptune. Liszt had, beside his Sun-Venus conjunction, a conjunction of the Moon and Neptune. The romantic pioneer, **Berlioz**, only now being fully appreciated, had also Moon conjunct Neptune. Tchaikowsky, whose haunting melodic passages have often been rearranged for popular American songs, had his Sun squaring Neptune, and this Sun is in exact conjunction with Mars, perhaps to produce the tragic intensity evident in such works as his *Symphonie Pathetique*.

Another tragic musical genius, Robert Schuman, had also Sun conjunct Mars, this time opposing Neptune and Saturn, and with the Moon also squaring Neptune. Gounod, the composer of the so often performed French opera, Faust, had his Sun in exact opposition to Neptune, and also to Uranus near by. On the other hand, another French composer of opera, **St. Saens**, (*Samson and Delilah*, etc.) had his Libra Sun conjunct Venus and Saturn.

Popular American Composers

Two composers, writing in a more popular vein, Gershwin and Grofe, have no particularly emphasized Venus or Neptune, but both have conjunctions of the Sun and Jupiter, conceivably resulting in the fact that they were more motivated by social ambition (Jupiter). But Irving Berlin, born May 11, 1888, had at birth a triple conjunction of Sun, Mercury, and Neptune in Taurus, with Venus also in the same sign, but at some distance. He is famous for his songs, and Taurus is typically related to the throat and thus the human

voice. The famous popular singer, Perry Como, for instance, also has the Sun in Taurus. **Bing Crosby** and Kate Smith are also Taureans.

Another famous composer and pianist, Sergei Rachmaninoff, had at birth a conjunction of Sun, Neptune, and Mercury in Aries; while one of the greatest of Western composers, **Beethoven**, was born under a square of Moon to Neptune, and his works constitute the very source of the romantic impulse in music which has certainly very strong Neptunian characteristics.

It is true that it would be impossible to say that Neptune or Venus always plays an important role in the birth-charts of great composers. I have mentioned mostly aspects between these planets and the natal Sun or Moon; but obviously other kinds of aspects may have focal importance. The conjunction of Mars and Neptune may often give musical ability of a sort, especially if placed at birth near the horizon or the zenith.

Actually, what the birth-chart of a composer more particularly reveals is the place which his musical activities occupy in his own life, what they mean to him as a person, and to the development of his character and personality. It is quite impossible to say from a birth-chart if the person will be, or should be, a composer. Rather, the chart will show him as a pioneer, ready to break precedents; or as a supremely well-trained technician and craftsman; or as a teacher, bound to a tradition and using music to demonstrate his knowledge; or as a man of deep, tumultuous emotion or mystical insights for whom music is life itself and a door to spiritual experiences.

Builders of New Music

Of the last-mentioned type, the great Russian composer, **Scriabin**, is the outstanding representative, (c.f. his symphonic *Poem of Ecstasy*, *Prometheus*, or *Poem of Fire*, etc.). In his birth-chart the Sun in Capricorn, squares Neptune in Aries, and loosely opposes Uranus and Jupiter in Cancer, while Mars is at the apex of a T-cross with Pluto and the Moon, which is near Venus. Here we see a tremendous intensity, a passion to break through traditional (Saturn-Uranus) and cultural (Venus) limits.

In the chart of a still more extreme musical rebel, Arnold Schoenberg, who challenged the whole system of western tonality and became the head of a new musical school — Atonalism — we find a complete cross-configuration of planets in which Neptune opposes Venus, and Uranus opposes Saturn. Mars, near Uranus, moreover squares Pluto. The Sun and Mercury are together in the intellectual and critical Sign Virgo, stressing preoccupation with reform, analysis, technique; yet the planetary cross just mentioned links the four emotional fixed Signs. Thus the intellect serves as the regulator of, and the outlet for, an intense, tragic emotionalism.

A Russian composer, greatly publicized during World War II, Dimitri Shostakovitch, has also a tense birth-chart, with the Moon and Uranus in Capricorn, opposing Jupiter and Neptune in Cancer, squaring the Sun and Mercury in Libra. Venus in Scorpio is there the integrating factor, holding the chart together. Another Russian, whose impact upon modern

music has been extraordinary — in the ballet theatre, as well as in the concert-hall, **Igor Stravinsky** — has, on the contrary, a tight birth-chart, with all the planets packed within just one-third of the zodiac; that is, between a triple conjunction of Neptune, Saturn, and Pluto in Taurus [signifying his ultimately conservative, neo-classical musical direction], Uranus in Virgo, and Venus, Moon, and Mercury in Cancer [representing his return to secure, traditional musical values] standing in the middle of the planetary trine, and the Sun in late Gemini.

Music is a world in itself, a world which somehow reflects a realm of spiritual, psychic, or, vital energies. To contact this realm directly, and even more, to become pervaded and identified with it, requires the activity of those transcendent faculties in man which Neptune represents in astrology. But this type of contact with and absorption in music, is often confusing and bewildering. Thus human groups and societies seek to capture this vast Neptunian flow of super-normal tones and to tame it within more normal, more charming and thoroughly pleasurable Venusian forms. Music, thus, becomes one of the "fine arts."

This does not detract from its importance and significance. Yet it forces its vast cosmic flow and its vital-instinctual rhythms into cultural molds. These are then analyzed and taught in colleges and conservatories; or they are spread by imitation through more popular channels. As a result, we have musical styles, fashions in jazz and in popular music, and the like — which is good and also necessary — for the people are afraid of what is not recognizable and easily grasped or understood.

Venus must always triumph, in music as everywhere else!