

# MUSIC AND THE VISUAL ARTS

**I am passionate about music and art. Some of my earliest childhood memories relate to them. Hearing Handel's Largo from Xerxes on the radio moved me to tears at a very tender age; I could not explain why to my mother but she understood. I clamoured for pencil and paper so that I could draw – anything and everything. Listening, performing, sketching and painting have been central to my emotional and intellectual life ever since. As I matured I quickly realised, however, that outstanding musical talent had eluded me and I was not destined to become the charismatic trumpet virtuoso of my dreams. Neither would I be a mad, bad and outrageously gifted extrovert such as the tempestuous painter Caravaggio or cavalier Florentine sculptor Benvenuto Cellini, so admired by the equally volatile Berlioz!**

Creativity excites me. Although my aspirations were pursued at a less ambitious level, my career in the music publishing industry later brought me into contact with many immensely talented composers, songwriters and artists for whom I have great admiration. Since then, encouraging participation, particularly by young people, in creative music making and fine art has been a major pre-occupation. I believe the two disciplines are virtually inseparable and I cannot imagine life without them. Both can enrich our existence by imparting enjoyment, excitement, beauty, drama, liberation and, often profound, truths through originality in sound and vision. Each has the potential to express and power to convey what is beyond words.

For some years I have explored the relationship between music and art by collating considerable information on artists inspired by music and composers stimulated to write, influenced by fine art or artists. I have also tried to respond with my paintbrush to some of my musical influences past and present. Here I have covered a wide musical spectrum ranging from Mozart, Richard Strauss, Stravinsky, and Schoenberg to Elvis Costello, Pink Floyd, Annie Lennox and the Black Eyed Peas! The music always dictates what eventually emerges; the art varies from representational to the totally abstract and the style constantly changes. An example appears on this page.

Many important artists have analysed the relationship between music and art, most notably Wassily Kandinsky (who corresponded with Schoenberg on the matter) and his fellow teacher at the Bauhaus, Paul Klee in the 1920s. Shape, form, colour, harmony and rhythm came under immense scrutiny during such explorations.

I greatly admire two eminent and imaginative contemporary English painters who, like many before them, believe in the totality of art. They are Sir Peter Blake



**Go Leave Kate McGarrigle  
(Sung by Anne Sofie Von Otter)**

RA, who describes himself as a music *fan* and Tom Phillips RA, who is a distinguished versatile artist, composer and performer. Phillips is not alone. The Renaissance masters Leonardo Da Vinci and Giorgione were musicians, whilst on the other hand Mendelssohn, Granados and Schoenberg, amongst others, were enthusiastic artists.

Music has been a recurring theme in the work of Tom Phillips who speaks of the sound in his life "*enlarging my prison*". His portraits of Sir Harrison Birtwistle and Dame Iris Murdoch for the National Portrait Gallery are compelling. The novelist was also a music lover and Phillips, who was her friend, writes touchingly of the disintegration of her sound world as Alzheimer's slowly condemned her to say "*farewell to its consolations*". His tribute *Last Notes for Iris* formed part of a fascinating exhibition *Drawing on Music* held at Fort Worth, Texas in 2001, which was entirely made up of music-inspired works, including such titles as *Heldentenor*,

*Gershwin, Spring Song, Music World I and II*. I am also fascinated by the homage he has paid to composers who have "*moved and interested him*", particularly Elgar, Mozart, Schoenberg and Schumann.

Sir Peter Blake's musical world contrasts sharply with that of Tom Phillips. Apart from his iconic album cover collage for the Beatles *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, his subjects have embraced Elvis Presley, The Beachboys, The Rolling Stones, The Who, The Spice Girls and Robbie Williams. In his 1983 Tate Retrospective, Rock 'n' Roll was played in the Pop Art Room and Elgar and Vaughan Williams complemented the Ruralist Room. At Walthamstow Art College Blake befriended art student and singer/songwriter Ian Dury, who wrote *Peter the Painter* for the exhibition; Blake later reciprocated by painting his portrait for an album cover. One aspect of Blake's work that I love is the wry humour evident in several of his paintings.

There are countless musical works, which owe their existence to the imagination of fine artists. The majestic Eisenheim altar-piece painted in 1515 by the German Renaissance artist Mathis Gothart Neithardt, better known as Matthias Grunewald, inspired Paul Hindemith to write *Mathis der Maler* (Matthias the Painter) in 1934. The more familiar symphony, which pre-dated his opera of the same name, represented three of the vibrant panels – *Angel Concert* serenading the Madonna and Child, *Entombment* and *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*. The composer's interest in the subject was the role of the artist in troubled times. For Grunewald the backdrop was a German Peasant Revolt, whereas with Hindemith it was the shadow of the rise of the Nazis, which eventually forced him into exile.

Hindemith realised the importance of musical education and committed himself to this cause. Personally, I have experienced encouragement, sensitivity, compassion and patience on the part of those who have taught me; I firmly believe that enthusiasm, dedication and motivation are fundamental to producing excellence in all genres of music and fine art. I have quite recently seen such inspirational qualities demonstrated by teachers at opera and art workshops for very young children in my local community.

The benefit derived by such encounters at a tender age is immeasurable and I believe every child, irrespective of their background, should have the opportunity to access music and art from the earliest possible moment. The creative arts can and should be a joy for life.

Liveryman Peter Dadswell