

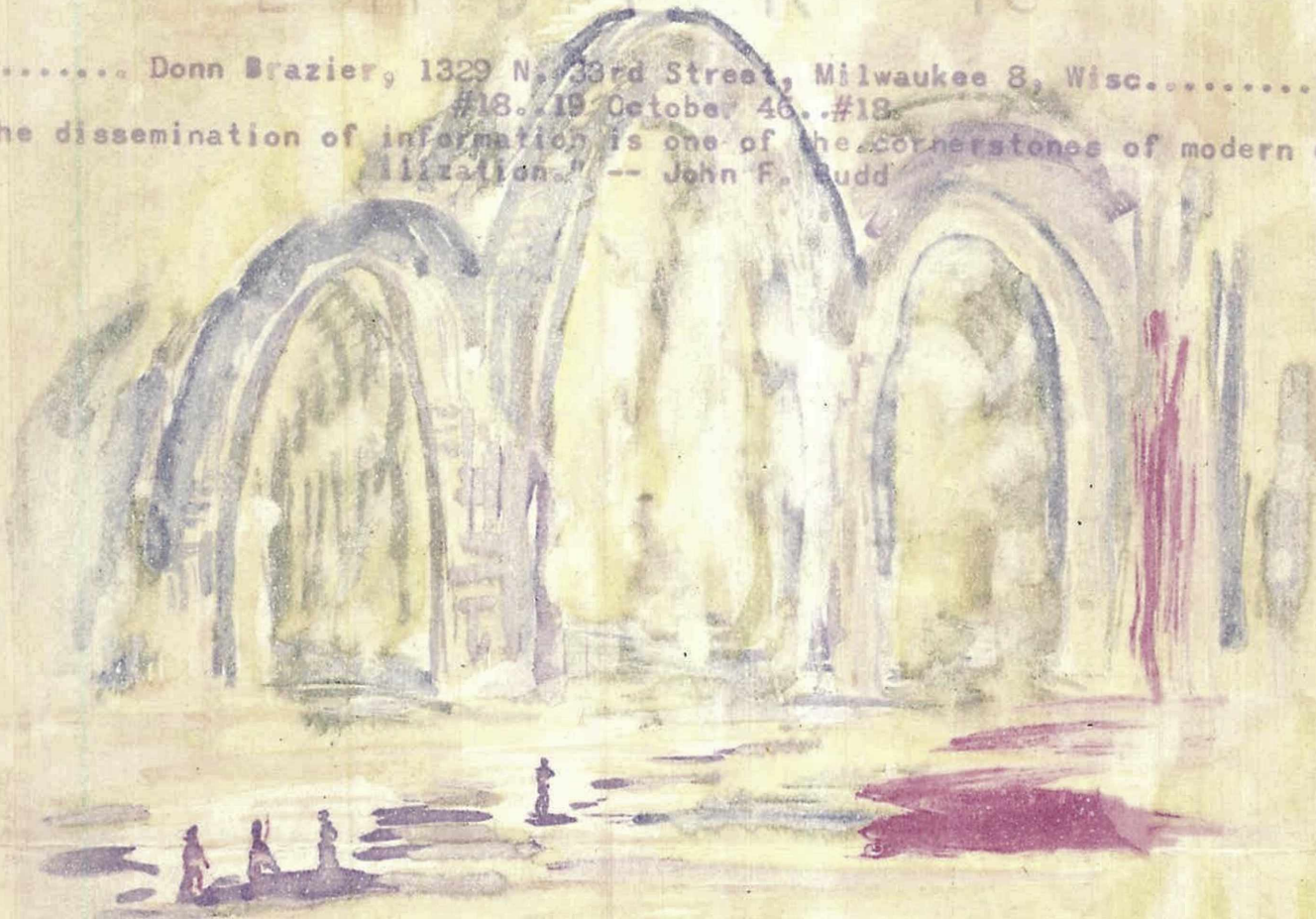
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"The dissemination of information is one of the cornerstones of modern civilization." -- John F. Budd



R.L. Stein

THE EMOTIONAL BASIS IN MELODIC LINE

BY

GEORGE T. WETZEL

Melodic contour or "line" of an individual composer is usually representative of, or influenced to a greater or lesser extent by his inner "feeling" for certain harmonic progressions that he likes above

chromatic half step, giving a sense of lamentation. Investigation into some of the modern "blues" tunes will bear out my assertion. With Franck, however, the "blues" element is more restrained, more polished and maintains a classic dignity which is anything but stuffy, despite all the followers of jive may affirm.

I would like to go on record as stating that jive and swing owe more than they recognize or admit to this great French composer. In his works are to be found elements, fully developed, which the jivests have borrowed without even a thank-you. To mention but a few: the resolution by similar motion the chord of the 9th in the Franck Symphony; a consistent and telling use of device of syncopation; and the anticipation of the "blues" style in melody and harmonic progressions.

Franck's melodic line, too, was complex. It contained many stepwise progressions united sometimes with chromatic altered tones (both of the "blues" and whole tone variety) with a mixture of occasional song-like thirds. Examples of "blues" in Franck's works: his Symphonic Variations, part of the Lied from the first movement of his String Quartet in D Major, part of the coda ending the development section in the third movement of the D Minor Symphony, and a goodly portion of the Recitative-Fantasia movement from his Violin Sonata in A Major.

Another interesting device is found most frequently in the work of Brahms. He obtains a certain somberness of tone (the "brown-study" that people so often ascribe to some of his serious works.) by a blending or mixing in the same line tones common to both the tonic major and the tonic minor of the same key. A well known example of this type of emotional content is found in the second movement of his Symphony #2 in D Major.

I would like to catalog (tentatively of course) what emotional import one can derive by a consistent use of certain interval progressions. The movement of chromatic intervals is generally representative of lamentation or sighing, depending upon the accompanying harmony as to whether this progression is one of pain, sorrow, or of a mystical, breathy sigh. Wagner's Prelude to Tristan and Isolde is one example of the minor feeling of this type of progression. The interval of a third is broad in feeling if it continues toward the remaining note of the common triad, or if developing closely along other choral tones in its movement. It generally assumes a lied-like character while at times it can wax majestic, full of grandeur. A goodly number of Beethoven's melodies fall in to this last category, both in tonal design and emotion.

Large melodic leaps of a fifth, sixth, and seventh, especially if they follow quite consistent in a line, express amorous and passionate emotion. Some of the most famous "love-songs" in symphonic literature possess these heart-tearing, emotional, and tonal leaps. To mention a few: Tchaikovsky's Romeo and Juliet, Wagner's Liebestod, and of course the popular Intermezzo.