

Music & Politics: a shared responsibility for Symphony

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Symphony is considered to be the highest work of art in the musical creation. You might imagine how huge my surprise was when I came into European Parliament and heard the Greek colleagues talking about *Sinfonía* and *armonía* in their political speeches, which I did not understand anyway. When we Spaniards listen to speeches in Greek, we have a feeling as if someone was talking to us in our language without understanding the meaning of it except words like symphony, harmony, crisis or chaos. The reason is that our phonetics, the music of language between Spanish and Greek, is almost the same. Many Greeks have told me about their reverse experience.

The fact is that symphony, word derived from Greek *συμφωνία* (*symphonia*), meaning "agreement" is a key concept in both Politics and Music. And *sinfonía* takes to *harmonía* (harmony). The question that emerges from these considerations is the following: in which sense it was used first, the political or the musical one?

This question has a European answer: the 9th Symphony of Ludwig van Beethoven. It is the unofficial anthem of the European Union, degraded after being enshrined in the failed Constitutional Treaty. In spite of that, when the Ode to Joy reverberated in the signing ceremony of the Lisbon Treaty, the leaders of the EU stood up and paid their respects.

But to understand the basics of this answer, I must refer to History. The poem originally written by Schiller in 1785 was originally called *Ode an die Freiheit*, an '*Ode to Freedom*', and the word '*Joy*' (*Freude* instead of *Freiheit*) came as a substitute aimed at evading the censorship thereafter. In the oncoming revolutionary age, the German students sang it with the music of La Marseillaise. The paradox resided in singing for joy in a song conceived for giving spirit for fighting the enemy. In the case of the Verdi's "Vai pensiero", a choral song of Jews slaves conceived as a protest song against the Austrian occupant has become a universal anthem of hope.

Music and politics have walked hand in hand since the beginning of the process of civilisation. And this is not only a European privilege. The symbolic “*mise en scene*” of Power in such different and distant civilisations in political and religious terms as the Pharaonic Egypt, the Aztec Mexico or the Chinese Imperial Forbidden City was always seasoned with a musical background. However, the aim of music was not always harmonic: Joshua destroyed the walls of Jericho thanks to the priests blowing their ram's horns, Nero played his lyre while witnessing how Rome was being burnt to the ground.

That said, politics and music have in common too the search of a certain type of harmony and order through creation, through what the Greeks called *poiesis* (the process of creation). And, as I see it, this is the main reason for trying to implement a good symphony. Both items are created in the same way: their origin is disharmony, a non-structured chaos that can lead to something if correctly ordered. Think about an orchestra whose rehearsal is starting: there is a chaotic mix of instruments playing out of tune until the arrival of the conductor. The basic difference is that harmony is reached following a script, the “*partitura*”. In politics, starting from a hobbesian world of anarchy and conflict, the reference is the program, but without previous rehearsal. The script is written while playing the piece.

In sum, following political history through music and recreating the atmosphere in which political events did take place is one of the most enriching and fascinating that curious men can ever do.

The point is that becoming a musician requires time-consuming learning, dedication and discipline. In politics charisma, opportunism and fortune play a greater role. However, to play music is a shared responsibility, like implementing good and sound policies.

In my case, although I am a passionate *aficionado*, my musical culture from my school time is very poor, in line with what was imposed during francoism. My most interesting lifelong opportunity of putting together music and politics has been the participation in the MUS-E® program that was launched 20 years ago here in Bern by the great violinist and humanist Yehudi Menuhin with my good friend Werner Schmitt. Yehudi was born in America out of Russian roots, and he was European by option, citizen of the world and a committed fighter for freedom. He was one of the founders of the International Music Council and played in the Concert of San Francisco in 1945 celebrating the

creation of the United Nations and in Paris in 1948, for the UNESCO and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The two most beautiful Symphonies of Humanity in the sad and short 20th Century, from which we can nonetheless drag great inspiration.

At the foundation, our first and foremost goal is to continue the work started by Yehudi Menuhin in order to improve the environment of the children through the Arts at school, starting from a the earliest age. The MUS-E® Programme promotes artistic exchanges, encourages the expression and representation of cultural identities (especially those endangered) and to organise concerts and other events in the spirit of Yehudi Menuhin's humanism. The IYMF now coordinates MUS-E® in 12 countries (10 from EU, Switzerland and Israel) with 1,000 artists working with 60,000 children in 450 primary schools. In 20 years, more than a million children have lived the experience of MUS-E®, developing as Menuhin said in his own words, *“their self esteem, self-consciousness in the widest sense, and ends with the communication of what we see of ourselves and others, and of what they see of themselves and of us. An artist’s self-dialogue is a constant adjusting, correcting, re-balancing, of elements within himself”*.

This is the reason why classical Greeks considered arts so important for education, the *“paiedia”*. Nowadays, the progressive disappearance of arts and humanities at school is one of the most worrisome aspects of current education programs in many countries. Artistic teaching is not a way of escaping reality but a fundamental part of a good education of responsible citizens, thus, one of the most valuable tools to understand and transform reality in a fruitful fashion. The admirable initiative of the West Eastern Divan, created by Daniel Barenboim and Edward Said, an experience of Arabic, Jews and European young musicians rehearsing in Andalucía, the land where people of the 3 faiths of the book lived together, shows the political force of music for peace and reconciliation.

On broader grounds, let me refer to the current political situation in the European Union. Although culture was present in the Congress of the European Movement in The Hague of 1948, it was not a foundational pillar in the creation of the United Europe. There is a very famous quotation of the founding father Jean Monnet about culture: *“if I could begin again, I would start with culture”*. It seems that the quotation is apocryphal, although this doesn't mean it is not right. By the way, Jean Monnet had close links with Switzerland, like Yehudi Menuhin, who was Swiss citizen of honour. Most of the

Europeans projects he launched were created wandering Swiss mountain paths and his personal archives are in the University of Lausanne. And what he did with other founding fathers was cultural in the sense of transforming a deeply rooted culture of nationalism, dominance and war to one of common values and shared destiny. This was and is today the cultural blowing spirit of the whole process.

As President of the European Parliament I worked to introduce European citizenship and the single currency in the Maastricht Treaty as the key foundations in order to transform the existing European Community in the European Union. Culture was part of the package as *“a contribution to education and training of quality and to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States”*. On this basis, I lobbied very actively with Yehudi Menuhin to upgrade culture in the next treaties. Another step was climbed in the Lisbon Treaty drafted by the Constitutional Convention. The text of the Treaty states as an objective of the EU to *“respect its rich cultural and linguistic diversity, and shall ensure that Europe's cultural heritage is safeguarded and enhanced”*.

Being this true, it is not enough. Culture is not only about building Museums or Auditoriums. All along the EU, 500 million people live their everyday life with portions of art and music in it. Many sing in Choirs, play in folklore groups, amateur orchestra or rock bands. From a small village to a big capital, a feast without music and without musicians is unthinkable. We must transform this potential in an active force of searching harmony.

Our most important asset is that we have, for the first time in history: shared principles and common values. In the Treaty's own words, *“This Treaty marks a new stage in the process of creating an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe, in which decisions are taken as openly as possible and as closely as possible to the citizen”*. (art 1) and *“The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail”*. (Article 2). My good friend Werner defines this as a Choir of 4 voices, the role model for a balanced society. In other words, we have got the partitura of the symphony. Now, we have to play.

Now, let us skim through the facts! In the last years, the public debate has been centered almost exclusively on Money and the adoration of money, not on making a more human and balanced society along ethical principles. This was already prophesized by Keynes, an arts *connoisseur*, nearly 80 years ago. We have been saving the casino capitalism responsible from triggering the crisis through irresponsible financing with policies that have broken solidarity and equality among Europeans. We have turned our faces away from a European Union that was granted with the Peace Nobel Prize in 2012 for bringing peace and democracy to the continent after centuries of housekeeping wars. As Kafka accurately depicted, it was the mask of an infernal machine -Höllmaschine –, residing out of reach of its citizenship.

Culture is not an ornament, it is a key sector in every developed and balanced economy. I welcome the fact that in this meeting there is a panel on the TTIP, the newest acronym on the on ongoing EU/USA trade negotiations, a relevant item for both partners end for artists. Intellectual property rights and copyright are very important issues for musicians whose biggest struggle is to figure how to survive and adapt to the world of Internet, which must not be the end of rules protecting cultural creation. We cannot accept a future dominated by robots playing a gigantic karaoke with all the musical creation in history but without human beings creating and playing music.

Most recently, the European citizens have expressed in the EP elections their anger, but also that a majority of voting citizens would like to keep pushing forward in the process towards a more united Europe. In some countries, the skyrocketing rise of populist forces reveals mixed feeling of fear and hopeful return to an imaginary past where each one ends up playing alone in its own corner while feeling like a victim. Happily, the mainstream opinion of three-quarters of the electorate is still committed with the idea or ideas around a European Symphony. For me, the key message is to reinforce self-confidence and solidarity, transforming diffidence to the neighbour in a basic positive force in European democracy. Yehudi Menuhin liked to use the example of martial arts, like Brazilian *capoeira*, to explain how you can change violence for shared responsibility through art.

In the same spirit, let me address a message to our Swiss hosts. First, I would like to thank them for their warm hospitality. Second, I also must express our feeling of disappointment in the EU on the current relationship with Switzerland. It is no

acceptable to build barriers among us when we are praising the same democratic values, and following the federal path of the “*Confederatio Helvetica*”, that is exactly in the middle of Europe, in our heart.

For these reasons, the message of music is so important. This is the added value of this European forum and all the nets that we can create. This is the experience of our MUS-E®, born in Bern and present today in the EU. One century after the beginning of the Great War, we can agree with Yehudi Menuhin that “*there cannot be authentic art under the bombs, hunger or torture*”. Our shared responsibility and mission is to work together for gathering music and politics in a symphonic way. Our best symphonies will be a United Europe and a democratic world.

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