

Eric Schoones

Walking up the Mountain Track: the zen Way to  
enlightened musicianship

There are many ways to write about music. In an academic context, it seems easiest to approach music-related topics through the written word. The number of musicological writings is therefore almost unmanageable. But when it comes to writing about the experience of music and music-making itself, when it comes to aesthetic experiences and the inner perspective of musicians, the field thins out considerably. For the attempt to derive objective views from subjective artistic insights seems difficult.

Eric Schoones, however, succeeds in this feat. He puts his own thoughts and feelings, his insights as a pianist and musician in the background in an impressively modest way and lets legendary musicians of the present and the past have their say. Hundreds of carefully selected quotations from the greatest in their field are sensitively woven by Schoones into a work of art through which his central concern takes shape: To recognise the wisdom of Eastern philosophies in Western music-making practice. The reading of his book is astonishingly entertaining. Schoones knows how to express his own thoughts and feelings through quotations from the greats. He quietly steps back as an author behind the quotations. And yet his sometimes philosophical, sometimes didactic, sometimes pedagogical message is conveyed impressively and powerfully.

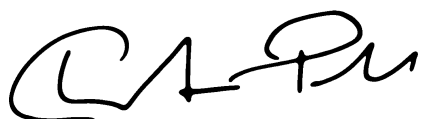
The quotations and aphorisms of important personalities selected by Schoones on the one hand and the description of approaches of Eastern philosophy on the other hand make it clear that the same subject is circled and illuminated here: Experiencing something entirely in the now and overcoming the limits of thought. With each quotation, the outlines of that which can be experienced but not expressed in words become more clearly recognisable.

One aspect makes this book particularly valuable for me. We can only really relive what we have experienced ourselves. In the same way, we can only perceive and experience in music what is within the scope of what we can perceive. A realisation remains in the

unattainable darkness for us until we bring it into the light through our own experience. Thus, we may not be able to experience certain layers of musical expression and interpretation in a concert because these layers are still in the dark and thus outside our perception. Only when we have come to realisation will these layers also convey themselves to us in the concert. Personally, I suddenly became aware of this with regard to the aspect of architectural listening a few years ago. I realised what Celibidache probably meant when he spoke of the "end in the beginning". Before this realisation, it was not possible for me to recognise and experience layers in this respect.

Eric Schoones' book is almost infinitely rich in thoughts and suggestions. It is one of those books that you can't get enough of reading. Personally, I find myself in many aspects of this book with regard to my own horizon of experience. It makes me happy when I read that my own experiences are similar to those of Eric Schoones and so many other musicians I admire. And yet I feel that there are still many blind spots for me in this book. They represent insights for which I still lack the necessary experience. In a few years, the blind spots will have turned into vivid reflections of artistic experiences. Through our own maturation, reading the book will always reflect new insights as we discover our newly gained insights in the formerly blind spots.

For this reason, Eric Schoones' book will inspire and enrich me in my life as a musician and teacher for many years to come. It is one of those books, like Gombrich's History of Art or Rilke's Letters to a Young Poet, that I return to again and again. Eric Schoone's book should not be missing from any musician's library.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. A. Pohl', with a stylized, cursive script.

Christian A. Pohl, Leipzig, 19 February 2022

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