

THE MUSIC OF GURDJIEFF AND DE HARTMANN¹

One of Gurdjieff's greatest legacies is the body of music he created collaboratively with his musically gifted pupil Thomas de Hartmann. Over the span of a decade, from 1919 to 1929, they composed more than 300 pieces of music based on traditional and religious songs, chants, hymns and prayers that Gurdjieff encountered during his extensive travels throughout the Middle East and Asia.

Gurdjieff's music was an integral component of his teachings. It was played to accompany the Movements, before and after readings of his books, during group meetings and on special occasions. Music was one of the three principal forms through which Gurdjieff conveyed his teachings, and it reflected his concept of harmonious human development. He offered ideas for expansion of the mind, Movements and exercises to challenge the body, and music to arouse a deeper awareness of the world of human emotions.

It is clear that the music played a crucial role in Gurdjieff's inner work of harmonious development. Composer Laurence Rosenthal: "He offered food for the growth of man's being through the different sides of his nature: ideas for the mind, special exercises and dances for the body and mind together, and music as a way to awaken a sensitivity in the feelings, to arouse in the deeper level of the listener's interior world questions and intimations beyond words in order to bring the listener into closer contact with his or her own essential nature." (1)

Gurdjieff employed the language of music to communicate fundamental cosmic laws which govern the development of vibrations and flow of energy in the phenomenal world. Gurdjieff believed that certain forms of music, which he called "objective music", were the repositories of ancient esoteric knowledge and had the capacity to influence the spiritual development of human beings who were receptive to it.

Gurdjieff may have played such music to heal or transmute the inner essential being of his pupils. His students attested to the powerful effect of the simple recurring melodies Gurdjieff played on his hand-held harmonium, music which seemed to have pierced the depths of their being: "This was the music of prayer – haunting, disturbing, indescribably beautiful, a music calculated to arouse the deepest longings hidden in the heart of man." (2)

But it is the music composed by Gurdjieff and Thomas de Hartmann that commands the greatest attention of the contemporary world, thanks to recordings of their compositions made by de Hartmann and others following Gurdjieff's death. While some listeners find the music trivial, banal or monotonous, others perceive a deeply moving and sacred quality in the music which creates a mysterious sense of longing and deep transcendence. Whatever the listener's reaction, there is no doubt that Gurdjieff's music is powerful, fascinating, and deeply affecting.

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Objective Art and Music

Gurdjieff, after studying both Western art and traditional Eastern art, made a distinction between what he called sacred or “objective art” and “subjective art.” He dismissed almost all contemporary art as imitative, derivative and subjective. He believed that contemporary artists, lacking higher knowledge and perceptions, do not create but merely imitate:

Either the shoemaker’s craft must be called art, or all contemporary art must be called craft. In what way is a shoemaker sewing fashionable custom shoes of beautiful design inferior to the artist who pursues the aim of imitation or originality. *With knowledge, the sewing of shoes may be sacred art too, but without it a priest of contemporary art is worse than a cobbler.* (3)

Gurdjieff claimed that objective art exists on a much higher level than ordinary art and is a means of preserving and transmitting esoteric knowledge. He believed that sacred art is based on precise mathematical laws, which he characterized as a “script” which encodes essential laws of the structure and design of the universe. Through their objective art, artists from the past were able to consciously transmit their ideas and discoveries to future generations as food for spiritual growth and evolution. (4)

When students asked for examples of objective art, Gurdjieff referred to the Sphinx, the Gothic cathedrals of Europe, certain Sufi works of architecture, and a number of Eastern figures of gods and goddesses. He also spoke of encountering works of objective art in the course of his travels. One example was a building in Persia whose specially designed architecture produced mathematically precise vibrations of sound that had exactly the same emotional effect on each person who entered – spontaneous weeping.

One important form of objective art is sacred music. This kind of music, which may be called ‘objective music,’ is based on mathematical laws governing the vibration of sound and its relationship to the human psyche: “Objective music affects all people in the same way . . . it not only touches the feelings but transforms them, bringing the listener to a unified or ‘harmonious’ state within himself and thus to a new relation with the universe which is itself a field of vibrations.” (5) Objective music is based on melodies of “inner octaves” which are not audible to the human ear but produce predictable effects on the listener’s emotional center. Gurdjieff:

Objective music is all based on ‘inner octaves.’ And it can obtain not only definite psychological results but definite physical results. There can be such music as would freeze water. There can be such music that would kill a man instantaneously. The Biblical legend of the destruction of the walls of Jericho by music is precisely a legend of objective music . . . In the legend of Orpheus there are hints of objective music, for Orpheus used to impart knowledge by music. Snake charmers’

music in the East is an approach to objective music, of course very primitive. Very often it is simply one note which is long drawn out, rising and falling only very little; but in this single note 'inner octaves' are going on all the time and melodies of 'inner octaves' which are inaudible to the ears but felt by the emotional center . . . The same music, only a little more complicated, and men would obey it. (6)

Although objective music is believed to be relatively rare (7), some of Gurdjieff's students have identified some possible examples: the chants of Gregorian and Tibetan Buddhist monks, the recitations of the Sufi zikr, the songs of harmonic singers of Tuva and Mongolia, the music of Indian ragas and certain pieces of Bach (8), Mozart and some other classical composers.

Gurdjieff makes frequent references in his writings to the unusual physical effects produced by objective music. In *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, he claims that the Essenes were able to make plants grow in half an hour by playing ancient Hebraic music. And, in *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*, the dervish character Hadji Asvatz Troov, by playing certain musical notes, was purportedly able to influence the health of flowers and produce, and then quickly heal, a boil on the leg of another dervish.

Gurdjieff also stipulated that the creation of objective music required certain conditions and precise knowledge of the human psyche to be effective: "Objective music arises from a combination of sound vibrations produced with a conscious aim, and arrived at by making use of a precise knowledge of its possible effect on the human being." (9) He indicated that different spiritual effects were produced by stringed instruments and by wind instruments, and that the tuning of the musical instruments needed to take into account a number of factors, including local geographical conditions, atmospheric pressure, ambient temperature, the form and dimensions of the interior space where the music is performed and even the quality of the energy, individually and collectively, of audience members.

Gurdjieff learned the 'science of objective music' in his travels throughout the East and brought this knowledge to his Fourth Way path of inner development. His musical compositions became an essential component of his teaching as he was able to relate sound vibration to spiritual practice (much like Pythagoras). The basis of objective music, according to Gurdjieff, is a precise relationship between the properties of sound and the inner response of an attuned listener: "Objective music is based on an exact knowledge of the mathematical laws that govern the vibrations of sound and the relationship of tones . . . The particular configuration of sounds will evoke a response in the human psyche in which the relation of the tones and their sonic qualities will be translated into some form of inner experience. This phenomenon appears to be based on a precise mathematical relationship between the properties of sound and some aspects of our receptive apparatus." (10) Laurence Rosenthal:

Objective music will produce a specific and predictable result in the listener. Gurdjieff gives as an example a nonreligious person coming to a monastery. Hearing the music that is sung and played there, the person feels the desire

to pray. In this instance, the capacity to bring someone into a higher state is given as one of the properties of objective art. The effect, depending on the person differs only in degree . . . What is paramount, then, in objective music is the exactness of its intention and the mastery of means to realize that intention. All the arts, according to Gurdjieff, were in ancient times related to the laws of mathematics and served as repositories of higher knowledge about man and the cosmos, encoded in various forms and thus preserved from later distortion. Even if the inner meaning were for periods of time forgotten, the “text” remained intact, the essence within waiting to be rediscovered. (11)

Source and Creation of Gurdjieff's Music

Gurdjieff's earliest exposure to music was probably through his father who, as a bard, recited in verse and song, ancient legends and teaching tales. Gurdjieff spent his childhood in Armenia, a region of great ethnic and musical diversity, and as a young choir boy received musical training at Kars Cathedral. Some of the melodies and rhythms of his compositions clearly reflect the music of his youth: “The sources, quite rich and varied, include the folk tunes and dances of Armenia, the songs of the Persians and Kurds, the rhythms of the Turks, the chants of the Sayyids and the Dervishes, the liturgy of the Orthodox church, and other traditional forms.” (12)

Later, during his extensive travels as an adult, Gurdjieff encountered and assimilated a rich variety of music from many ethnic traditions (13), which he later incorporated into his own compositions: “They echo all manner of folk songs and dances, religious chants of various holy orders, as well as the sacred choral music he heard in temples and monasteries in Egypt, throughout Central Asia, and as far as Tibet.” (14) Students often speculated about the sources of Gurdjieff's music. Kenneth Walker:

Gurdjieff told us very little about the music he had collected during his travels but it was obvious that it came from several sources. Some of it was clearly occupational in origin, songs sung by peasants while carrying on their crafts. There were for example the traditional songs chanted by the old carpet makers of Central Asia as they squatted on the floor of some large barn, combing, spinning and dyeing their wools or weaving them into well-known local patterns. Gurdjieff described how on a winter evening a whole village would take part in this work in which everybody had his allotted task to do, each with its own musical accompaniment. Another source from which he drew inspiration was the sacred music he had listened to in the various monasteries he had visited, monasteries of many kinds, Greek Orthodox, Essene and Sufi . . . I can say only two things of the music he played, first that it was very old and second that it had a strong emotional effect on most of his hearers. (15)

Influenced largely by the music of the Middle East and Central Asia, Gurdjieff's musical language is typically monophonic, whereby the melody is expressed with minimal harmonic underpinning and is accompanied by either a persistent drone or rhythmic percussion, or both. What is truly remarkable is that Gurdjieff never wrote

down or notated the music he heard during his travels. He had an extraordinary ability to remember the intricate melodies and rhythms from the vast range of music he encountered over the course of many years.

Gurdjieff was neither a trained musician nor a composer, and his instrumental capacities were modest, limited to guitar, piano and harmonium. But his senior pupil Thomas de Hartmann was endowed with a highly developed musical ability and abundant creative energy, both of which were critical in bringing Gurdjieff's musical ideas to fruition. (16)

Gurdjieff recognized that de Hartmann, who was raised in the European musical tradition, required time and special preparation to become attuned to the nuances of Eastern music. Beginning in 1919, Gurdjieff began to expose de Hartmann to various forms of Eastern music to sensitize him to how he wanted his own music to be written and interpreted. Within a year de Hartmann was able to improvise music to accompany Gurdjieff's Movements and sacred dances. In de Hartmann's words, "He gave me the tempo of the exercise and a melody he himself had written on paper, from which I was expected to improvise the music on the spot." (17) The process was the prototype for all further musical collaborations between the two men.

After moving to the Château du Prieuré in France, Gurdjieff began an intensive period of creative work with de Hartmann in July 1925 that was to last for the next two years. The music that Gurdjieff created during this period was of a different type than the music composed to accompany the Movements. Many of these new pieces were based on Eastern religious themes and were often played at the Prieuré preceding or following readings from *Beelzebub's Tales* to create a certain mood or inner vibration which would sensitize pupils to the ideas in the text. De Hartmann describes the process of his collaboration with Gurdjieff in *Our Life with Mr. Gurdjieff*:

I had a very difficult and trying time with this music. Mr. Gurdjieff sometimes whistled or played on the piano with one finger a very complicated sort of melody . . . To grasp this melody, to transcribe it in European notation, required a *tour de force* . . . While listening to him play, I had to scribble down at feverish speed the torturous twists and turns of the melody, sometimes a repetition of just two notes. But in what rhythm? How to mark the accentuation? There was no hint of conventional Western metres and tuning. Here was some sort of rhythm of a different nature, other divisions of the flow of melody, which could not be interrupted or divided by bar-lines. And the harmony – the Eastern tonality on which the melody was constructed – could only gradually be guessed. (18)

Together, Gurdjieff and de Hartmann composed more than 300 pieces of music during their working relationship. (19) This prodigious output is surprising considering the technical challenges inherent in the process, yet it attests to the strength of their collaborative spirit and creativity (20), which has been called "an uncanny phenomenon, producing a result which would have been patently impossible for either one of them alone." (21)

The power of the Gurdjieff/de Hartmann compositions is evident in one of the earlier pieces, the “Essential Prayer.” Biographer Roger Lipsey characterizes it as a “statement of emotional truth” and then elaborates: “One hears in it a sense of loss – an invitation to inwardness, to a place where the fullness of human experience can be known without words. It is a remarkable composition, a *lento* providing all the time one may need to experience true feelings in a pure, uncluttered way.” (22)

Some have argued that the importance of de Hartmann’s contribution to Gurdjieff’s music deserves greater recognition, since he arranged, scored and first played the compositions based on Gurdjieff’s inspiration and suggestions. Roger Lipsey argues that de Hartmann’s role in the collaboration may have been underestimated: “Ever the modest pupil, de Hartmann gave all credit to Gurdjieff – he, the professional musician, merely harmonized the compositions, gave them finished form, followed instructions. But that has never seemed entirely believable; the mutuality must have been richer and deeper.” (23)

It is generally recognized that Gurdjieff provided the melodies and rhythms for their pieces and de Hartmann developed the themes and structure and transcribed the pieces to a definitive musical form. Even considering de Hartmann’s creative and technical contributions to these pieces, the ultimate source of the music was Gurdjieff. (24) Despite de Hartmann’s own highly developed musical talent and extensive experience composing his own musical work, he was able to channel his talents into serving Gurdjieff’s purposes and intentions with each new piece. The result was music whose essential impulse and quality of feeling were distinctly Gurdjieff’s.

Classification and Description of the Music

Musicologists have attempted to classify Gurdjieff’s music on the basis of title, content or musical idiom. (25) Although the titles of many compositions allude to particular ethnic folklore or Christian, Gnostic and Islamic traditions, they may not be accurate representations of these musical modalities. Titles such as *Song of the Aisors* or *Hymn for Easter Thursday* may be more evocative and impressionistic than literal in terms of reflecting traditional religious or folk themes.

Musicologists analyzing Gurdjieff’s music have identified some of its essential features:

- The music is largely modal with minimal modulation.
- Rhythms are straightforward and pronounced.
- Melodies are developed within limited, predetermined harmonic schemes.
- The use of textures or embellishments for expressive effect is minimal.

Laurence Rosenthal, who composed the musical score for the film adaptation of *Meetings with Remarkable Men*, describes the style and structure of the music:

The external form of Gurdjieff's music is for the most part simple, direct, and modest. The pieces are generally short. They lack any pretension to elaborate formal construction; their shapes often follow traditional modes. But they may also turn in unexpected directions, allowing the musical elements to seek their own unique musical resolution . . . The general style or idiom could be described as a particular blending of Eastern and Western elements, the oriental modes modified by the tempered scale, while the more European pieces are often infused with a degree of Near Eastern color. (26)

Ultimately, Gurdjieff's music defies easy definition or direct comparisons with other musical forms. Rosenthal argues that the best of Gurdjieff's music falls into the rare category of music which is both profound and sublime while at the same time "bafflingly simple." (27)

Musicologists, however, generally agree that Gurdjieff's musical compositions can be classified into five broad categories:

1. Music for the Movements

The musical pieces in this category (28), among the first created by Gurdjieff and de Hartmann, were specifically composed to accompany the Movements, with piano or percussion setting the rhythm and emotional tone of each particular exercise. This music was performed by Thomas de Hartmann and an orchestra at public demonstrations of the Movements and sacred dances in Constantinople, Paris and America between 1920 and 1924. Gurdjieff believed that music played an important role in the practice of the Movements:

The only music that Gurdjieff ever specified should be played for his Movements were the orchestrations he himself dictated and worked out with de Hartmann for the first demonstrations in 1923. He was greatly concerned with the effects of different instruments, their individual tones and special vibrations, not so much on the ears of the audience, but much more importantly, on different parts of the performers' bodies. His music was exactly "right" in every way to help inspire the necessary physical responses. (29)

2. Folk-derived Music

The compositions in this group are drawn from the ethnic folk songs, dances and melodies of many of the regions to which Gurdjieff travelled. Rather than reproducing traditional folk music, they seem to reflect personal impressions or feelings of particular places or people.

The pieces vary greatly in length, complexity, tempo and mood: "Their tone covers a wide range of feeling, sometimes inward and tranquil, sometimes full of charm and vitality, and in a few instances in major keys, highly charged with exhilaration." (30) For example, some of the Kurdish pieces project an elusive, underlying sadness while the

Armenian pieces radiate a directness and natural human warmth. The Persian songs convey a mood of mystery and introspection with their long, searching melodic lines and subtly shifting chromatic harmonies.

3. Music of the Sayyids and Dervishes

A third category encompasses the Middle Eastern music of the Sayyids and Dervishes. The exact source of Gurdjieff's inspiration for this music is uncertain, since the Sayyids, descendants of the Prophet Mohammed, left no music that can be directly traced to them. (31) Gurdjieff's intention with the music may well have been to evoke the spirit of the Sayyids and Dervishes.

The Sayyid pieces are more intimate and deeply emotional than the folkloric music. Some of the melodies are heartfelt expressions of great warmth and humanity. Others are deeply poignant and sad. The Dervish pieces, which often reflect the patterns of the *zikr* (Sufi recitations), are generally characterized by forceful expression, dynamic rhythms and intense passion.

4. Sacred Hymns and Prayers

Gurdjieff's sacred hymns and prayers are perhaps the most distinctive of his musical work and are generally considered the apex of the Gurdjieff/de Hartmann repertoire: "These pieces are cast in no particular form. Here qualities of style and idiom seem to pale in face of the depth and force of the feeling the music evokes." (32) They draw from Russian Orthodox liturgy and echo music that Gurdjieff heard in remote Asian temples and monasteries. The compositions are solemn, contemplative, and deeply moving. However, as Laurence Rosenthal points out, they are unlike conventional hymns in structure and content:

Each hymn, each prayer, is an interior journey, a search, an inner vision, a state. The language remains essentially simple. The melody may trace a long arc with the plainest of accompaniments, suggesting voices or stringed instruments. Or it may be fragmentary, with dissonant, bell-like interjections. Sometimes the hymn is entirely chordal, with powerful progressions of intense and poignant harmonies, often surprising, or ending unexpectedly on an unresolved sound, a questioning combination of notes, far from the reassuring tonic. Somehow, the special nature of these hymns and prayers, their seeming to speak to another quality of being, their capacity to express simultaneously depths of joy and sorrow, of searching and questioning, establishes a level of musical expression which transcends the simplicity of its speech. (33)

5. Harmonium Improvisations

Perhaps the most intriguing of Gurdjieff's musical creations are those he improvised on his small harmonium. Memoires of his students indicate that he played the harmonium as early as 1926 at the Prieuré. His melodic improvisations were usually in minor chords augmented by haunting single notes. G.J. Blom, a Dutch musician and musical

producer who compiled and produced re-mastered recordings of Gurdjieff's improvisations from 1948-1949 (34), describes his style of playing: "It never changed. The music was always described as slow, sad and in a minor key. Technical virtuosity on the instrument was never a big concern for Gurdjieff. His technique consisted of the intensity with which he played." (35)

In his own recorded improvisations on the harmonium we witness perhaps the most profoundly touching example of Gurdjieff's musical nature, reduced to its very essence. Through the primitive recordings come high, nasal, wheezing sounds. One feels with certainty that he plays directly from the heart. "It is a prayer," he says. The form could not be simpler. With the right hand alone he plays descending thirds very slowly in a minor key, with characteristic suspensions. The harmony echoes the music of the Armenian *ashokhs* he heard as a boy. The line climbs up, descends again slowly, by degree. Time seems suspended. There is no recognizable pulse. The inner octave can almost be felt in each wavering, hesitant note. Something of the mystery of sound was known to him. (36)

On rare occasions Gurdjieff explained to pupils his intention and the great effort expended in these improvisations: "He said: 'Ears are no good for this music, the whole presence must be open to it. It is a matter of vibrations.' He also said he had to put the whole of himself into these vibrations, it was very difficult for him. He is always exhausted after playing." (37)

Pupils recount that the seemingly simple music has a strange quality and emotional power unlike any other music that they had ever heard:

- "Mr. Gurdjieff began to play on the small organ those strange haunting melodies that speak in an unknown tongue to something buried deep within." (Annie-Lou Staveley)
- "What he played was so utterly sad you could cut the atmosphere of un-shed tears with a knife." (Rina Hands)
- "A strange melody flowed into the room. It produced a quite extraordinary effect as if I were listening to an echo of a ceremony from the remote past." (Robert de Ropp)
- "Strong men broke down and wept. It clearly touched somewhere very deep in a lot of people. It was really an extraordinary phenomenon. Years later, I heard Idries Shah describe it as 'cry-music' after John Bennett played him some of the recordings." (Vivien Elliot)
- "Gurdjieff's music is a world of sounds of a universe unknown to us, as it were beyond time . . . Some parts resemble a call which comes from afar and which may resonate in us in a very subtle and profound way. This very special music carries not only a message but also a question and helps us to listen to a voice

which speaks directly both to our being and heart and also to our body which registered its effects.” (Solange Claustres)

- “He then makes the strangest music – the most wonderful music. He says that it is ‘objective’ – that is, the vibrations he produces have a definite effect on people, both organically and psychologically. It affects people in different ways, tough businessmen and scientists sit with tears streaming down their faces, others are merely bored or puzzled, others again are moved but do not know why.” (Cecil Lewis)
- “One night he played a different kind of music, although whether the difference lay in its sorrowful harmonies or in the way he played I do not know. I only know that no music has ever been so sad. Before it ended, I put my head on the table and wept.” (Dorothy Caruso)
- “Then came haunting music in minor chords and in sequences of single notes. It was music which saddened one, and at the same time stirred one to the depths . . . Much of the music he played possessed the plaintive and the prayer-like quality of Church music. Other pieces had a pastoral quality . . . Gurdjieff’s music was music of a strangely moving character. It was entirely devoid of passion and violence.” (Kenneth Walker)

Influences of the Music on the Listener

Scientists now recognize the relationship between the properties of music and its psychological and physiological effects on the listener. Research suggests that music influences human beings in three ways: rhythm primarily affects the body, melody and harmony the feelings, and musical form and structure the mind. (38) Interestingly, this triad of effects corresponds to Gurdjieff’s emphasis on the harmonious development of the physical, emotional and intellectual sides of an individual.

De Hartmann would play Gurdjieff’s music on the piano or organ almost every afternoon and evening in the salon at the Prieuré. The elusive and enigmatic quality of the music “seem to reflect a world so much deeper and more unknown than their apparent ordinariness would suggest.” (39) The effects on the students were profound:

Some of them were so moving as to be almost unbearable, and the tears would stream involuntarily down our cheeks; one had to remember oneself with all one’s might in order not to have to go out. Hartmann said that he himself found some of the pieces almost too difficult to play. One of the pieces consisted of slow and solemn chords of the most divine harmony, and in the overtones one could hear a sort of joyful singing as of the voice of a seraph. I have never heard anything like these hymns of Gurdjieff, except perhaps some of the very early church music such as can be heard in Notre Dame, and some of that of Bach, who at times touches the higher emotional centre. (40)

Some students felt that the haunting, enigmatic quality of the music brought them into greater touch with their inner being: “What is the source of its compelling force, its ineffable atmosphere, its capacity to cast a spell on the listener while bringing him more intensely into contact with himself.” (41) Students also reported that the music produced a sense of meditative calm, a feeling of transcendence and a call to something higher. The music clearly captivated listeners in new and unexpected ways: “It engaged my emotions in an unaccustomed way, a way I was not able to define . . . It moved me – not to abandonment or forgetting – but to remembering something that I had long forgotten.” (42)

Not all listeners are enchanted by Gurdjieff's music. Music critic Philip Kennicott, in an article for the *Washington Post*, dismissed Gurdjieff's music as “vaporous,” “repetitious and vague,” “desperately simple-minded” and “childish.” (43) Other critics have described his music as absent of musical ideas and irredeemably kitsch. Some of the criticism is warranted, directed at the occasionally awkward form of certain pieces. Laurence Rosenthal: “The harmony is sometimes underdeveloped or naive, and the melody – even if it begins with a striking idea – may lose itself in a series of phrases in which its direction and shape become obscure.” (44)

Rosenthal rightly points out that the simplicity and the eccentricities of rhythms and harmonics in Gurdjieff's music takes it far from the Western musical model, which may cause musically trained listeners to dismiss Gurdjieff's music as trivial or derivative. He suggests that listeners without musical training may be more receptive to the music, as they are less likely to concentrate on its technical elements and more likely to respond directly to the emotional quality of the music, absorbing the intent of the pieces.

Gurdjieff acknowledged that Westerners may have difficulty with his music by virtue of their inexperience with the character and colour of Eastern music: “To foreigners, Eastern music seems monotonous, they only wonder at its crudity and musical poverty. But what sounds like one note to them is a whole melody for the local inhabitants – a melody contained in one note.” (45)

Listeners able to transcend these cultural barriers sense a depth and power in Gurdjieff's music that touches their innermost being: “He played music which spoke to the depths of my heart, like a whispered fairy-tale, resounding, vibrating, compelling one to listen, music that feeling understands without words.” (46) Some believe that Gurdjieff's music is a form of objective art. When student Margaret Anderson began to weep after Gurdjieff played particularly sorrowful harmonies on his harmonium, he remarked: “I play objective music to make you cry.” (47) C. S. Nott recounts an incident where his emotional state was dramatically altered by listening to Gurdjieff's unusual music:

For a few minutes we just sat quietly, then he took up his hand-harmonium, and keeping his eyes fixed on me with a look of deep compassion and power, began to play a simple melody with strange harmonies, repeating and repeating yet all the time with different combinations of notes. Little by little I became aware that he was conveying something to me both through the music –

the combination of notes – and by the telepathic means which he understood so well. A change began to take place in me; I began to understand something, and a feeling of conscious hope and conscious faith began to displace the dark hopeless depression. (48)

Many of Gurdjieff's followers believe that this an example of the power of objective music to heal the mind and spirit. Laurence Rosenthal concludes that Gurdjieff consciously composed and played a type of sacred music unique to the contemporary world: "It seems to have been created with a special aim, a special intent . . . It makes statements and asks questions not to be found elsewhere." (49)

The minor chords and unadorned Middle Eastern modes of the music created a deeply moving, almost meditative, atmosphere. Henri Thomasson describes the powerful effect of the "unaccustomed vibrations and unusual sequences" of the music the very first time he heard it:

I felt the world widen in me. Each note awakened an echo that had never been heard before. I was under the sway of a boundless peace. It was like an organ note sounding in the most subtle part of my inner life. After the music came to an end, the clear waves in which an unknown part of myself had been bathed began to flow in concentric motion and to disappear in me at one single point from which there arose the contrary flow of my ordinary impressions, which, however, I was still able to hold at a distance. Would I return to my ordinary state, was the experience over now? No, something still went on, like another step on a road from which one wished for no return. We remained for a long time motionless, hardly breathing, outside time. (50)

Today, various recordings of the music of Gurdjieff and de Hartmann are available commercially or can be accessed on the Internet. The most definitive collection of Gurdjieff's music is *The Music of Gurdjieff and Thomas de Hartmann* (G-H Records, 1989). The original tapes were recorded informally by de Hartmann on piano in the 1950s and have recently been digitally re-mastered. The three-CD album is an authentic rendition by de Hartmann of the music composed with his teacher, and it beautifully captures the power and mystery of the music.

Recordings of Gurdjieff's improvisations on his lap harmonium during the last few years of his life have been issued as *Harmonic Development: The Complete Harmonium Recordings 1948-1949*. Other authentic renditions of his music are *Oriental Suite*, a full orchestra recording of the music accompanying the 1923 and 1924 public performances of the Movements, and a four-volume compilation of the piano music, *Gurdjieff/de Hartmann Music for the Piano*, under the auspices of Wergo-Schott Recordings.

Interesting interpretations of the Gurdjieff/de Hartmann music have also been issued. Notable are jazz artist Keith Jarrett's *G.I. Gurdjieff Sacred Hymns* and a sensitive reading of the music by Alain Kremski – *Récit de la résurreche du Christ (The story of the resurrection of Christ)*. An Eastern rendering of the music with folk instruments and instrumentation has been released on the prestigious ECM label by The Gurdjieff Folk Instruments Ensemble: *Music of Georges I. Gurdjieff*.

NOTES

- (1) Laurence Rosenthal “Gurdjieff and Music” in Jacob Needleman and George Baker (eds.) *Gurdjieff: Essays and Reflections on the Man and His Teachings* (New York: Continuum, 1996), p. 309.
- (2) Kathryn Hulme *Undiscovered Country: In Search of Gurdjieff* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1966), p. 115.
- (3) G.I Gurdjieff *Views From the Real World: Early Talks of Gurdjieff* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1973), p. 36.
- (4) In a conversation recorded by P.D. Ouspensky in *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching* (New York: Harcourt, 2001, p. 27), Gurdjieff described a sculpture he encountered in Central Asia which he believed to be an example of objective art:

In the course of our travels in Central Asia we found, in the desert at the foot of the Hindu Kush, a strange figure which we thought at first was some ancient god or devil. At first it produced upon us simply the impression of being a curiosity. But after a while we began to *feel* that this figure contained many things, a big, complete, and complex system of cosmology. And slowly, step by step, we began to decipher this system. It was in the body of the figure, in its legs, in its arms, in its head, in its eyes, in its ears; everywhere. In the whole statue there was nothing accidental, nothing without meaning. And we gradually understood the aim of the people who built this statue. . . We grasped the meaning of what they wanted to convey to us across thousands of years, and not only the meaning, but all the feelings and the emotions connected with it as well. That indeed was art!

- (5) Thomas Daly *The Music of Gurdjieff and Thomas de Hartmann* G-H Records, 1989.
- (6) P.D. Ouspensky *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching* (New York: Harcourt, 2001), p. 297.
- (7) Normally, most music evokes associations in the intellectual, emotional and moving centers which dissipate any real connection with the higher centers: “In Gurdjieff’s view the mere enjoyment of pleasant musical sounds, however serious and exalted, does not even remotely approach the ultimate function of music as a science as well as an art, as a kind of diagram of higher knowledge, and as a possible food for human growth and evolution.” (Laurence Rosenthal “Gurdjieff and Music” in Jacob Needleman and George Baker, eds. *Gurdjieff: Essays and Reflections on the Man and His Teachings* (New York: Continuum, 1996, p. 307). Henri Thomasson contrasts popular music with higher forms of music in *The Pursuit of the Present*

(Aurora, Oregon: Two Rivers Press, 1980, pp. 99-100):

Music should, by its structure, its symbolism and the forces it brings into play, help man to recognize his true place in the world. Unfortunately, because we make such incomplete use of our instruments of perception, and because the mechanical parts of our centers are dominant, our experiences are formed purely by processes of association. Music, instead of being a means of communication with an inner system of forces, becomes nothing but the language of emotion. In our modern western world music generally arises from accidental fusion among the centers of the person who produces it, and so it may for the most part be called purely associative.

- (8) J.S. Bach's *Art of the Fugue* and *Leipzig Choral Preludes* are often cited as examples of objective music. Henri Thomasson: "The music of J.S. Bach, perhaps because of his incomparable mastery of musical technique, the richness of his ideas and the fine quality of his inner world, is of a category in which the music has shining through it something coming from a level other than our own." (*The Pursuit of the Present* Aurora, Oregon: Two Rivers Press, 1980), pp. 106-107.
- (9) Henri Thomasson *The Pursuit of the Present* (Aurora, Oregon: Two Rivers Press, 1980), p. 103.
- (10) Laurence Rosenthal "Gurdjieff and Music" in Jacob Needleman and George Baker, eds. *Gurdjieff: Essays and Reflections on the Man and His Teachings* (New York: Continuum, 1996), p. 301.
- (11) Laurence Rosenthal "Gurdjieff and Music" in Jacob Needleman and George Baker, eds. *Gurdjieff: Essays and Reflections on the Man and His Teachings* (New York: Continuum, 1996), p. 301.
- (12) Laurence Rosenthal "Gurdjieff and Music" in Jacob Needleman and George Baker (eds.) *Gurdjieff: Essays and Reflections on the Man and His Teachings* (New York: Continuum, 1996), p. 307.
- (13) Wim van Dullemen offers some possible sources and influences for Gurdjieff's musical compositions in *The Gurdjieff Movements* (Chino Valley, Arizona: Hohm Press, 2018): childhood musical memories, sketches of music he encountered during his travels, hymns from Eastern monasteries, arrangements of liturgical choral music and Central Asian folk and ritual music.
- (14) Laurence Rosenthal "Gurdjieff and Music" in Jacob Needleman and George Baker, eds. *Gurdjieff: Essays and Reflections on the Man and His Teachings* (New York: Continuum, 1996), p. 305.
- (15) Kenneth Walker *Venture with Ideas* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1972), p. 156.
- (16) Thomas Alexandrovich de Hartmann was born in 1885 in the Ukraine to a

family of Russian aristocrats. At an early age de Hartmann showed musical talent by improvising melodies on the piano. Following the death of his father in 1894 he was sent to the military academy at St. Petersburg. The director of the academy quickly recognized de Hartmann's musical gifts and he was allowed to pursue informal musical studies alongside his military training. At age eleven de Hartmann began formal musical training and eventually received his diploma from the St. Petersburg Conservatory in 1903. At twenty-one he wrote a highly acclaimed ballet, *The Pink Flower*, that was performed at the Imperial Opera and quickly established himself in the elite cultured circles of Russia. Beginning in 1908, working closely with a number of avant-garde artists, including Wassily Kandinsky in Munich, he developed a deep interest in spirituality and its relationship with art. De Hartmann returned to St. Petersburg in 1912 where his musical career flourished. His 1916 meeting with Gurdjieff was a pivotal event that completely changed the direction of his life. He and his wife Olga studied and worked with Gurdjieff intensively and continuously until 1929.

- (17) Thomas and Olga de Hartmann *Our Life with Mr. Gurdjieff* (London: Arkana, 1992), p. 155.
- (18) Thomas and Olga de Hartmann *Our Life with Mr. Gurdjieff* (London: Arkana, 1992), p. 245.
- (19) In *Our Life with Mr. Gurdjieff* (London: Arkana, 1992, p. 247) de Hartmann writes: “Mr. Gurdjieff’s music had great variety. The most deeply moving was that which he remembered hearing in remote temples during his Asian travels. Listening to this music one was touched to the depth of his being . . .”
- (20) A first-hand account of this creative process is provided by Tcheslaw Tchekhovitch in *Gurdjieff: A Master in Life* (Toronto: Dolmen Meadow Editions, 2006), p. 104:

Mr. Gurdjieff would give a certain rhythm, which Thomas de Hartmann played on the piano. Gyorgi Ivanovitch listened attentively, then indicated the accents by tapping his fingers on the piano. Next, the tonality was modified until a definite inner state was evoked. Only at this point did he begin to hum a melody of an oriental character, which Thomas de Hartmann reproduced while trying out different harmonies one after another. In the silence that followed each attempt, he would turn to Mr. Gurdjieff as if to measure his reaction. It was fascinating to see how the collaboration of these two gifted men could in a few moments give birth to an original work fulfilling precise demands and conditions.

- (21) Laurence Rosenthal “The Sound of Gurdjieff” in Jacob Needleman (ed.) *The Inner Journey: Views from the Gurdjieff Work* (Sandpoint, Idaho: Morning Light Press, 2008), p. 154.

- (22) Roger Lipsey *Gurdjieff Reconsidered: The Life, the Teachings, the Legacy* (Boulder: Shambhala, 2019), pp. 63-64.
- (23) Roger Lipsey *Gurdjieff Reconsidered: The Life, the Teachings, the Legacy* (Boulder: Shambhala, 2019), p. 115.
- (24) Some of Gurdjieff's students have attested to his primary role in the creation of the music (Jessmin and Dushka Howarth *It's Up to Ourselves: A Mother, a Daughter, and Gurdjieff* New York: Gurdjieff Heritage Society, 2009), p. 475:
- The creativity and special character of both the orchestral music for the Movements Demonstrations and the piano solos from the Twenties also attest to Gurdjieff's active participation. One has only to compare them to de Hartmann's own work through the years. All de Hartmann's training was classical and European. As he himself confesses, it was only when they were all in the Caucasus and Mr. Gurdjieff sent him out specifically to listen to and study local mid-Eastern music that he began to understand and correctly notate what Mr. G. was passing on to him. De Hartmann also credits Mr. G. with some of the most interesting effects in the orchestrations and actually describes him writing out in manuscript specific parts for certain instruments which he explained were needed to achieve special vibrations, harmonic effects or voicings.
- (25) In a lengthy chapter "Music by Gurdjieff/de Hartmann," Wim van Dullemen provides a detailed catalogue and description of the complete collection of the musical works, sheet music and sound recordings (*The Gurdjieff Movements* (Chino Valley, Arizona: Hohm Press, 2018)), pp. 116-136.
- (26) Laurence Rosenthal "Gurdjieff and Music" in Jacob Needleman and George Baker. eds. *Gurdjieff: Essays and Reflections on the Man and His Teachings* (New York: Continuum, 1996), p. 306.
- (27) Laurence Rosenthal "Gurdjieff and Music" in Jacob Needleman and George Baker (eds.) *Gurdjieff: Essays and Reflections on the Man and His Teachings* (New York: Continuum, 1996), p. 310.
- (28) An extended survey and discussion of the music composed or improvised for the Movements can be found in Wim van Dullemens's chapter "The Music for the Movements" (*The Gurdjieff Movements* (Chino Valley, Arizona: Hohm Press, 2018)), pp. 225-240.
- (29) Jessmin and Dushka Howarth *It's Up to Ourselves: A Mother, a Daughter, and Gurdjieff* (New York: Gurdjieff Heritage Society, 2009), p. 476.
- (30) Laurence Rosenthal "Gurdjieff and Music" in Jacob Needleman and George Baker (eds.) *Gurdjieff: Essays and Reflections on the Man and His Teachings* (New York: Continuum, 1996), p. 308.

- (31) In *The Sufi Tradition in the West* (New York: Alif Publishing, 1994, p. 226) the Sufi teacher Omar Ali-Shah writes: “It is quite remarkable that among this music is a piece called ‘Dance of the Sayeds’ – I am a Sayed, and I've never heard of it.”
- (32) Laurence Rosenthal “Gurdjieff and Music” in Jacob Needleman and George Baker, eds. *Gurdjieff: Essays and Reflections on the Man and His Teachings* (New York: Continuum, 1996), p. 309.
- (33) Laurence Rosenthal “Gurdjieff and Music” in Jacob Needleman and George Baker, eds. *Gurdjieff: Essays and Reflections on the Man and His Teachings* (New York: Continuum, 1996), p. 309.
- (34) In *Harmonic Development: The Complete Harmonium Recordings 1948-1949* (Netherlands: Barta Audio Visuals, 2004), G.J. Blom discusses the history and audio restoration, track notes, and recollections of Gurdjieff’s pupils of the complete harmonium recordings from 1948-1949.
- (35) G.J. Blom *Harmonic Development: The Complete Harmonium Recordings 1948-1949* (Netherlands: Basta Audio Visuals, 2004), p. 21.
- (36) Laurence Rosenthal “Gurdjieff and Music” in Jacob Needleman and George Baker, eds. *Gurdjieff: Essays and Reflections on the Man and His Teachings* (New York: Continuum, 1996), p. 310.
- (37) William Patrick Patterson *Georgi Ivanovitch Gurdjieff: The Man, The Teaching, His Mission* (Fairfax, California: Arete Communications, 2014), p. 447.
- (38) Professor D.B. Fry discusses these effects in relation to Western classical music in his monograph “Some Effects of Music” (Kent, England: Institute for Cultural Research, 1971).
- (39) Laurence Rosenthal “Gurdjieff and Music” in Jacob Needleman and George Baker (eds.) *Gurdjieff: Essays and Reflections on the Man and His Teachings* (New York: Continuum, 1996), p. 308.
- (40) C.S. Nott *Teachings of Gurdjieff* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1962), p. 107.
- (41) Laurence Rosenthal “The Sound of Gurdjieff” in Jacob Needleman, ed. *The Inner Journey: Views from the Gurdjieff Work* (Sandpoint, Idaho: Morning Light Press, 2008), p. 156.
- (42) David Kherdian *On a Spaceship with Beelzebub* (Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions, 1998), pp. 61-62.
- (43) Philip Kennicott “The Composer, the Cult and the Musical Guru” (*Washington Post*, March 26, 2000).

- (44) Laurence Rosenthal “Gurdjieff and Music” in Jacob Needleman and George Baker, eds. *Gurdjieff: Essays and Reflections on the Man and His Teachings* (New York: Continuum, 1996), p. 310.
- (45) G.I. Gurdjieff *Views From the Real World: Early Talks of Gurdjieff* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1973), p. 186.
- (46) Solange Claustres *Becoming Conscious with G.I. Gurdjieff* (Utrecht, Netherlands: Eureka Editions, 2009), p. 20.
- (47) Margaret Anderson *The Unknowable Gurdjieff* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 183.
- (48) C.S. Nott *Journey Through This World* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1969), pp. 118-119.
- (49) Laurence Rosenthal “The Sound of Gurdjieff” in Jacob Needleman (ed.) *The Inner Journey: Views from the Gurdjieff Work* (Sandpoint, Idaho: Morning Light Press, 2008), p. 154.
- (50) Henri Thomasson *The Pursuit of the Present* (Aurora, Oregon: Two Rivers Press, 1980), pp. 98-99.