

Chapter One

WHEN I TAKE a long look at my life, as though from outside, it does not appear particularly happy. Yet I am even less justified in calling it unhappy, despite all its mistakes. After all, it is foolish to keep probing for happiness or unhappiness, for it seems to me it would be hard to exchange the unhappiest days of my life for all the happy ones. If what matters in a person's existence is to accept the inevitable consciously, to taste the good and bad to the full and to make for oneself a more individual, unaccidental and inward destiny alongside one's external fate, then my life has been neither empty nor worthless. Even if, as it is decreed by the gods, fate has inexorably trod over my external existence as it does with everyone, my inner life has been of my own making. I deserve its sweetness and bitterness and accept full responsibility for it.

At times, when I was younger, I wanted to be a poet. And if I were a poet now, I would not resist the temptation to trace my life back through the delicate shadows of my childhood to the precious and sheltered sources of my earliest memories. But these possessions are far too dear and sacred for the person I now am to spoil for myself. All there is to say of my childhood is that it was good and happy. I was given the freedom to discover my own inclinations and talents, to fashion my inmost pleasures and sorrows myself and to regard the future not as an alien higher power but as the hope and product of my own strength. So I passed unmarked through the schools as a disliked, untalented, yet quiet student whom they let chart his own course finally, because he seemed to elude the strong influences brought to bear upon him.

At about the age of six or seven, I realized that of all the invisible powers the one I was destined to be most strongly affected and dominated by was music. From that moment on I had a world of my own, a sanctuary and a heaven that no one could take away from me or belittle, and which I did not wish to share with anyone. I had become a musician, though I did not learn to play any instrument before my twelfth year and did not think that I would later wish to earn my living by music.

That is how matters have been ever since, without anything essential being changed, and that is why on looking back on my life it does not seem varied and many-sided, but from the beginning it has been tuned in a single

key and directed solely to one star. Whether things went well or badly with me, my inner life remained unchanged. For long periods I might sail foreign seas, without touching manuscript-book or instrument, and yet at every moment there would be a melody in my blood and on my lips, a beat and rhythm in the drawing of breath and life. However eagerly I sought salvation, oblivion and deliverance in many other ways, however much I thirsted for God, understanding and peace, I always found them in music alone. It did not need to be Beethoven or Bach: it has been a continual consolation to me and a justification for all life that there *is* music in the world, that one *can* at times be deeply moved by rhythms and pervaded by harmonies. O music! A melody occurs to you; you sing it silently, inwardly only; you steep your being in it; it takes possession of all your strength and emotions, and during the time it lives in you, it effaces all that is fortuitous, evil, coarse and sad in you; it brings the world into harmony with you, it makes burdens light and gives wings to depressed spirits. The melody of a folk song can do all that. And first of all harmony! For each harmonious chord of pure-tuned notes -- those of church bells, for example -- fills the spirit with grace and delight, a feeling that is intensified by every additional note; and at times this can enchant the heart and make it tremble with bliss as no other sensual pleasure can.

Of all the conceptions of pure bliss that people and poets have dreamed of, listening to the harmony of the spheres always seemed to me the highest and most intense. That is where my dearest and brightest dreams have ranged -- to hear for the duration of a heartbeat the universe and the totality of life in its mysterious, innate harmony. Alas, how is it that life can be so confusing and out of tune and false, how can there be lies, evil, envy and hate among people, when the shortest song and most simple piece of music preach that heaven is revealed in the purity, harmony and interplay of clearly sounded notes. And how can I upbraid people and grow angry when I, myself, with all the good will in the world have been unable to make song and sweet music out of my life? Within me I can sense the urgent admonition and thirsting desire for one pure, pleasing, essentially holy sound and its fading away, but my days are full of mischance and discord. Wherever I turn and wherever I strike, there is never a true and clear echo.

But no more; I will tell you the story. When I consider for whom I am

covering these pages -- she who has in fact so much power over me that she can penetrate my loneliness and draw a confession from me -- I must give the name of this beloved woman, who not only is bound to me by a large sum of experience and fate, but stands above everything for me like a sacred symbol, a star.

Chapter Two

It WAS ONLY during my last year or two at school, when all my schoolfellows were beginning to talk about their future careers, that I also began to think about mine. The possibility of making music my profession and means of livelihood was really far removed from my thoughts; yet I could not think of any other career that would make me happy. I had no real objection to business or the other professions suggested by my father; I just felt indifferent to them. Perhaps it was because my colleagues were so proud of the careers of their choice that an inward voice also told me that it was good and right to make a career of that which filled my thoughts and alone gave me real pleasure. It proved useful that I had learned to play the violin at twelve and had made some progress under a good teacher. The more my father resisted and worried at the thought of his only son embarking upon the uncertain career of an artist, the stronger grew my will in the face of his opposition, and the teacher, who liked me, strongly supported my wish. In the end my father submitted, but just to test my strength of purpose and in the hope that I would change my mind, he required me to stay on another year at school. I endured this with reasonable patience and during this time my desire became even stronger.

During the last year at school I fell in love for the first time with a pretty young girl who was in our circle of friends. Without seeing her often and also without strongly seeking her company, I suffered and enjoyed the emotions of first love as in a dream. During this period when I was thinking about my music as much as about my beloved and could not sleep at night because of my great excitement, I consciously retained for the first

time melodies that occurred to me. They were two short songs and I tried to write them down. This made me feel shy but also gave me acute pleasure, and I almost forgot my youthful pangs of love. Meantime, I learned that my beloved took singing lessons and I was very eager to hear her sing. After some months my wish was fulfilled at an evening gathering at my parents' house. The pretty girl was asked to sing. She resisted strongly but finally had to give in and I waited with great excitement. A gentleman accompanied her on our humble little piano; he played a few bars and she began. She sang badly, very badly, and while she was still singing, my dismay and torment changed into sympathy, then into humor, and from then on I was no longer in love with her.

I was patient and not altogether indolent, but I was not a good scholar, and during my last year at school I made very little effort. This was not due to laziness and my infatuation, but to a state of youthful daydreaming and indifference, a dullness of senses and intellect that was only now and then suddenly and powerfully pierced when one of the wonderful hours of premature creative desire enveloped me like ether. I then felt as if I were surrounded by a rarefied, crystal-clear atmosphere in which dreaming and vegetating were not possible and where all my senses were sharpened and on the alert. Little was produced during those hours, perhaps ten melodies and several rudimentary harmonic arrangements, but I will never forget the rarefied, almost cold atmosphere of that time and the intense concentration required to give a melody the proper, singular, no longer fortuitous movement and solution. I was not satisfied with these meager achievements and never considered them as either valid or good, but it became clear to me that there would never be anything as desirable and important in my life as the return of such hours of clarity and creativeness.

At the same time I also had periods of daydreaming when I improvised on the violin and enjoyed the intoxication of fleeting impressions and exalted moods. I soon knew that this was not creativeness but just playing and running riot, against which I had to guard. I realized that it was one thing to indulge in daydreaming and intoxicating hours and another to wrestle strenuously and resolutely with the secrets of form as if with fiends. I also partly realized at that time that true creativity isolates one and demands something that has to be subtracted from the enjoyment

of life.

At last I was free. My school days were behind me. I had said goodbye to my parents and had begun a new life as a student at the School of Music in the capital. I commenced this new phase with great expectations and was convinced that I would be a good scholar at the School of Music. However, to my embarrassed astonishment, this did not prove to be the case. I had difficulty keeping up with the great variety of courses I was forced to take. I found the piano lessons nothing but a great trial, and I soon saw my whole course of study looming before me like an unscalable mountain. Of course I did not think of giving in, but I was disillusioned and disconcerted. I now saw that with all my modesty I had considered myself some kind of a genius and had considerably underestimated the toils and difficulties encountered along the path to an art. Moreover, my composing was seriously affected, for I now saw mountains of difficulties and rules in the smallest exercise. I learned to mistrust my sensibilities entirely and no longer knew whether I possessed any talent. So I became resigned, humble and sad. I did my work very much as I would have done in an office or in another sphere, diligently but without pleasure. I did not dare complain, least of all in the letters that I sent home, but continued in secret disillusionment along the path I had commenced and hoped to become at least a good violinist. I practiced continually and bore hard words and sarcasm from the teachers. I saw many others, whom I would not have believed capable of it, make progress easily and receive praise, and my goal became even more humble. For, even with the violin, things were not going so well that I could feel proud and perhaps think of becoming a virtuoso. If I worked hard, it looked as if I might at least become a proficient violinist who could play a modest part in some small orchestra, without disgrace and without honor, and earn my living by it.

So this period for which I had yearned so much and which had promised everything to me was the only one in my life when I traveled joyless paths abandoned by the spirit of music and lived through days that had no meaning and rhythm. Where I had sought pleasure, exaltation, radiance and beauty, I found only demands, rules, difficulties, tasks and trials. If a musical idea occurred to me, it was either banal and imitative, or it was apparently in contradiction with all the laws of music and thus was

bound to be worthless. So I said farewell to all my great hopes. I was one of thousands who had approached the art with youthful confidence and whose powers had fallen short of his aspirations.

This impasse lasted about three years. I was now over twenty years old. I had apparently failed in my vocation and continued following the course I had started only out of a feeling of shame and duty. I did not know anything more about music, only about finger exercises, difficult tasks, contradictions in the theory of harmony, and tedious piano lessons from a sarcastic teacher who saw in my efforts a waste of time.

If the old ideal had not secretly been alive in me, I could have enjoyed myself during those years. I was free and had friends. I was a good-looking and healthy young man, the son of well-to-do parents. For short periods I enjoyed it all; there were pleasant days, flirtations, carousing and holidays. But it was not possible for me to console myself in this way, to lay aside my obligations for a short time and above all to enjoy my youth. Without really knowing it, in unguarded hours I still looked longingly at the fallen star of creative art, and it was impossible for me to forget and stifle my feelings of disillusionment. Only once was I really successful in doing so.

It was the most foolish day of my foolish youth. I was then pursuing a girl who was studying under the famous singing teacher, H. Both she and I seemed to share the same predicament; she had arrived with great hopes, had found strict teachers, was unused to the work, and finally thought she was going to lose her voice. She took the easy way out, flirted with her colleagues and knew how to make all of us chase her. She had the vivacious, gaudy type of beauty that soon fades.

This pretty girl, Liddy, captivated me with her ingenuous coquetry whenever I saw her. I never stayed in love with her for long. Often I completely forgot her, but whenever I was with her, my infatuation returned. She toyed with me as she did with others, enticing me and enjoying her power, but she was only indulging the sensual curiosity of her youth. She was very pretty, but only when she spoke and moved, or laughed with her deep warm voice, or danced or was amused at the jealousy of her admirers. Whenever I returned home from a party where I