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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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son intelligence, de ses aptitudes pédagogiques et de sa vaste culture, de même que des bases musicologiques qu'il est censé avoir jetées. Or, nous devons croire sur parole cet honnête verdict, car le « quoi » comparatif manque. En effet, à quelles sources profondes sa pensée s'abreuve-t-elle, quelle en est la portée véritable? Questions auxquelles les solutions font défaut, sans doute parce qu'il y a eu trop peu, à ce jour, d'études de fond sur la musique du Québec contemporain.

À cet égard, l'ouvrage de Marie-Thérèse Lefebvre comble une lacune à laquelle il était plus que temps de remédier. J'aurais souhaité, toutefois, une approche plus critique, pouvant justifier, par exemple, un sous-titre tel que « et la vie musicale du Québec », auquel s'adjoint arbitrairement les dates marquant la naissance et la mort de Vallerand. Même si les opinions de Vallerand sur la musique nous sont révélées dans le livre, la vie musicale comprise entre ces dates n'y est pourtant ni définie ni montrée. J'aurais, pour ma part, préféré un titre plus modeste et proche du sujet, comme « Vallerand vu à travers ses écrits ». Le titre n'enlève cependant rien à la valeur historique et documentaire du livre dont la lecture est un source d'enrichissement appréciable.

Johanne Rivest

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I

Hans Keller died on 6 November 1985. A few months later a documentary programme about his life and work was aired on British national television. Tributes were offered by Lord Yehudi Menuhin, Alfred Brendel, Sir William Glock, Robbins Landon, members of the Dartington String Quartet, and prominent individuals from the world of sport and journalism (about which more later). Menuhin talked of Keller's insistence on the highest standards of music criticism; Brendel referred to a public lecture he had once heard Keller give on the Haydn string quartets, delivered extempore ("the finest I have ever witnessed"); while Glock mentioned Keller's well-known ability to read modern scores with fluency. It would have been an impressive enough tribute for a film star. For a musicologist it was unprecedented.

Keller himself has told us about his early childhood and adolescence in Vienna, in language both memorable and moving.¹ Both his parents were musical and used to play the standard orchestral repertory in piano arrangements at home. His mother was also a string player, and the quartet in which she played also rehearsed at home. All his childhood, then, he was surrounded by the Viennese Classics, a repertory he soon knew intimately. Keller himself was trained as a violinist, and played in string quartets. His usual role was to play the second violin, while his mentor, Guido Adler (who had earlier been Schoenberg's friend and teacher), played the first. Not surprisingly, these early years laid the foundations for two of Keller's lifelong passions: the string quartet and the music of Arnold Schoenberg. Although he never pursued a career as a soloist, the practical business of making music was important for his later work in music theory and criticism; for he maintained that it is impossible to have a secure grasp of either unless you play an instrument — however imperfectly. You must come to music from the inside.

Apart from music, the other great love of his youth was soccer, a game he played well, on which he became expert, and about which he later wrote some stimulating articles. He was a supporter of the *Hakoah* team (a Hebrew word for "strength" or "power"), and knew by heart the names of all the great players and their scoring averages. Danny Blanchflower, the captain of England's famed Tottenham Hotspurs team, considered Keller the best writer on soccer of his generation.

In the spring of 1938 his world came tumbling to the ground with the *Anschluss*, and Hitler's arrival in Vienna. As a wealthy, middle-class Jew (his father was a highly successful architect), Keller was an obvious target and was picked up by the SS, interrogated for three days, tortured, then released. After months of delay, he was given a visa for England. Such pieces of paper were often considered worthless by the Nazis, and the railway stations were manned with checkpoints. Keller's uncle (the influential editor of the *Prager Tagblatt*) arranged for him to fly from Vienna to Prague, a rare mode of locomotion in those days (unlikely to attract the same level of attention as trains), and thence to London. He arrived in the city that was to remain his home for the rest of his life, in December 1938, not long before the outbreak of World War II. But his troubles were by no means over; he was interned by the British in 1940 as an enemy alien and imprisoned for a while on the Isle of Man. Keller appreciated the irony of the situation. He had been detained and abused by the Nazis in Vienna, had arrived in England as a Jewish refugee, and was now regarded as an "enemy." Far from developing any grudges, however, he came to regard England as "the only civilised place in which to live." He told me that by comparison with Vienna under the Nazis his experience as a British internee was "a piece of cake." He and his fellow inmates were allowed to form a chamber group and practice to their heart's content. It was Vaughan Williams

¹ In *1975 (1984 minus 9)* (London: Dobson, 1977), later re-published as *Music, Closed Societies and Football* (London: Toccata Press, 1986), 28–48.

who secured Keller's release by writing a letter of protest to the Home Secretary.

Keller now had to set about earning a living. He survived those first, difficult years by playing in orchestras, "an utterly unmusical occupation," as he put it, since (unlike chamber music) you have to surrender your artistic personality to that of the conductor, and "thirty string players are never quite in tune with one another."² He also set about mastering English. The conquest came slowly, but when it came it was complete. Nicolas Slonimsky (no slouch when it came to foreign languages) wrote of Keller that "he mastered the English language to an extraordinary degree, and soon began pointing out solecisms and other infractions on the purity of the tongue to native journalists."³ Keller supplemented his income by translating various things from German into English. His best known effort is his translation of the memoirs of Carl Flesch. (Typically, he added a "translator's epilogue," in which he took it upon himself to disagree with Flesch's cautious opinion of Bronislaw Huberman, a violinist Keller revered.) But he came to dislike translating, and once he had acquired total comfort in English it became his language of preference. In 1947 he founded (with Donald Mitchell) the periodical *Music Survey*, a magazine which introduced a breath of fresh air into the stuffy halls of the British Musical Establishment. Much of its space was devoted to new music — Arnold Schoenberg, Benjamin Britten, and Béla Bartók. Keller's championship of the first two composers quickly earned him the reputation of "the Bad Boy" of English music criticism; but he gave as good as he got, and was soon feared as a polemicist of exceptional aggression. More about that later, too.

II

I became Keller's pupil in the early part of 1957 and worked with him (mainly in the field of musical analysis) for the next four years. In those days he lived on Willow Road, Hampstead, and our lessons took place in a large room of the house he shared with his wife, the artist Milein Cosman. He was then in his late thirties. Looking back on those times I can see that it was an important period in his own development as well as mine. He had just composed the first of his wordless analysis scores, which he called "functional analysis" (or "music about music," as he put it); he was starting to construct a major theoretical picture of music; and he was writing a number of seminal articles for such journals as *Tempo*, *Music Review*, and *The Listener*. We had long discussions about music, usually on Saturday afternoons, some of them lasting more than three hours. Although I generally prepared specific scores for the next lesson, they often served merely as the starting-point for further wide-ranging conversations the following week. The range of topics was vast, but I now see that it was fundamental. What kind of language is music? What, if

²Keller was amusing on this topic. The experience of playing in orchestras gave him headaches and introduced him to "Veganin" — a powerful pain-reliever, the English equivalent of Tylenol 3. It was the only way he could allow himself to give up his personality and sink into the anonymous sea of sound.

³*Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*, 7th edition, revised by Nicolas Slonimsky (New York: Schirmer, 1984), 871.

anything, does music express? Is musical talent inherited or is it acquired? What is the difference between talent and genius? What is the nature of absolute pitch? What are the requirements for a good musical memory? What can we learn from infant prodigies? And so on and so forth.

In those days Hans was a pacer; he liked to teach on the move. At the commencement of each lesson he used to position himself in a rocking-chair and sway back and forth while he talked. And when the conversation grew complicated, the rocking would become agitated, at which point he would propel himself at high velocity out of his chair and onto the carpet and start pacing. From chair, to settee, to fireplace, and back to the chair, he would zig-zag across the room in an endless journey, describing circles both literal and metaphorical around me. Meanwhile, I sat in an armchair, immobile. The point having been made, the conclusion drawn, he would once more settle into his rocking-chair until the next idea sparked his imagination and prompted another perambulation. Even in his public lectures, he disliked standing behind a podium. I have seen him deliver his lectures while walking back and forth across a forty-foot stage. The heads of the audience followed him, producing an effect not unlike that of the spectators at a Wimbledon tennis match — in slow motion.

Hans's talents as a writer were spotted by William Glock, who in the 1950s commissioned a number of articles for his magazine *The Score*. He also engaged Keller to teach at the Dartington Summer School where, among other things, Keller coached the Dartington String Quartet. These were fertile years during which Hans made his living almost entirely as a writer, and honed his skills as a maker of aphorisms:

“Laziness is the supreme virtue of the ungifted.”

“Light music is serious music whose seriousness goes unobserved.”

“Authority increases with the decreasing need to use it.”

“To be wise after the event is better than not being wise at all.”

“The history of music is the history of bad sounds gone good.”

Keller had what all musicologists most desire and rarely obtain: an audience. Week after week his pieces appeared in *The Listener*, *The Radio Times*, *The Economist*, and people turned to his column first; they knew that they would always find something illuminating, provocative, and true. I well recall a set of programme notes he had written for a Promenade Concert in the 1960s (the main work, I believe, was Schoenberg's *Gurrelieder*). The next morning the critic of the London *Times* devoted two-thirds of his piece to a discussion of Keller's notes, leaving hardly any space for the concert. Keller was justifiably pleased that a set of notes he had dashed off the week before had caught the attention of *The Times*. But he was also incensed that one of the major orchestral works of our century had received such short shrift in consequence. “What are things coming to,” he exclaimed to me, “when a critic can attach more importance to words about music than to the music itself?” “Even your own words?” I replied. The paradox was not lost on him. All his life he had

downplayed the importance of words about music; yet all his life he wrote and published them, and was admired for them.

In 1959 Glock was brought in as Controller of Music at the BBC, and shortly afterwards he brought Keller in with him. During his twenty years at the BBC Keller held a number of influential positions: Music Talks Producer; Chief Assistant (Chamber Music); and Chief Assistant (Orchestral Music). He was also on the BBC's Reading Panel for New Music and read every new score submitted for broadcasting, making recommendations for and against — an unenviable task that made him both friends and enemies.

One of the highlights of Hans's tenure at the BBC was the Piotr Zak affair. Hans had become convinced that as far as new music was concerned, the critics had lost the ability to distinguish between music and rubbish. He maintained that modern composers themselves had brought about this lamentable condition by habitually composing rubbish which they then proceeded to call music. With the concurrence of BBC officials, he and his colleague Susan Bradshaw concocted an elaborate hoax. They went into the studios and created a recording of acoustic garbage. They hit things at random, whistled and moaned, and generally produced senseless noise. The resulting tape was called *Mobile* and it was attributed to a non-existent, up-and-coming member of the Polish avant garde, Piotr Zak. The *Radio Times* even carried a brief biography of this worthy, and the "work" was given its world premiere on the BBC's prestigious Third Programme. Not a single critic declared the piece to be the rubbish that it really was; all of them saw merit in the piece — just how much merit has become a topic of fierce debate across the years. The resulting scandal produced repercussions both within the BBC and without. But the point was made: modern music had reached such an impasse by the 1960s that even the experts could not tell the difference between sounding sense and senseless sound.

III

I referred to Keller as a "musicologist." He hated the term, and he hated still more to be known by it. The reason was quite simple, and it takes us to the heart of his theory of music. He made a fundamental distinction between knowledge *of* music and mere knowledge *about* music. Almost anybody with a modest intelligence can acquire knowledge *about* music, he argued. It is the simple accumulation of details that gives musicologists their purpose, and puts them into a similar category as stamp-collectors and train-spotters. You do not have to be particularly musical to become a musicologist, Keller maintained, and he used to point to some prominent examples. Knowledge *of* music, on the other hand, is of a radically different order. It involves a deeply instinctive relationship with the language of music itself, without which no understanding of a work is possible. Moreover, musicians are born into their art; they cannot be recruited into it. A musician's relationship with music is as natural as that of a fish with water, or a bird with air. If the musical experience is a Garden of Eden, then knowledge *about* it is a form of original sin. For Keller, music was a mode of thought quite separate and distinct from conceptual thought. The latter requires words through which to express itself. But music expresses

itself without the encumbrance of concepts. And what does it express? Truths that cannot be revealed through words. Music is a purely intuitive experience, there to be appreciated on a purely intuitive level.

From this basic distinction, Keller drew some far-reaching conclusions. One of the most important was that, contrary to the common view, knowledge about music cannot increase our understanding of it. Since words and music unfold along parallel planes, it is useless to look for a point of intersection. Musical understanding comes unbidden. We find it in children, we find it in gifted amateurs, we find it in gypsies. We also find it in professional musicians, of course, but since they have usually collected a lot of intellectual baggage in the course of their careers, they generally assume that the one is the cause of the other — that their knowledge about music somehow made them musical. Far from being the “way in,” Keller maintained, knowledge about music is the “way out”; it is there to help us rationalise our intuitive understanding of the art. And where no such understanding exists, there is nothing to rationalize. As he put it: “Music you have not experienced does not for you exist.”

It was in the field of musical analysis that Keller’s ideas were to have the greatest impact. His belief that words and music are natural enemies led him to abandon verbal analysis and compose a series of wordless “Functional Analyses.” He had come to the conclusion that just as literary criticism uses words about words, so musical criticism must use music about music if it was to progress beyond the pre-natal stage of its development. He had in any case always made a distinction in his work between “description” and “analysis.” Description tells you what is there; analysis tells you why it is there. Description is basically a tautology, since it merely tells you what you hear in the music anyway. When Keller announced that he was abandoning the use of words in his analytical work, he foretold “the twilight of twaddle”; his critics hit back with the phrase “the dawning of drivel,” and began a controversy in which Keller was only too happy to engage. He loved a good argument and entered the fray with relish. He always seemed to be skirmishing with such critics as Frank Howes (*The Times*), Martin Cooper (*The Daily Telegraph*), and Jack Westrup (Editor of *Music and Letters*). He was often accused by them of being too aggressive. But as he himself pointed out: “If the critics tear one or two composers to pieces each week, they are never considered aggressive. But if I tear one or two critics to pieces each week, I am considered to be highly aggressive. What I am leading down to is this: We are all aggressive; but I have learned to use my aggression fruitfully by placing it in the defence of something worthwhile.” And it was as counsel for the defence that he was at his brilliant best. He was the most skilful debator I have ever met. He had a disarming habit of pausing in the middle of his argument, looking you straight in the face, and asking you whether you agreed with him — “so far.” If your answer was yes, then he proceeded to the next logical stage of his exposition, pause, and extract a further agreement from you. (This might happen three or four times in the course of his elaborations, by which time it was too late to retreat: disaster stared you in the face). If the answer at any point was no, then he would happily begin all over again, re-stating his arguments yet more forcefully. It is not

surprising that composers, by and large, admired him for taking on the critics, and he numbered many among his personal friends. Alexander Goehr, Peter Maxwell Davies, Robert Simpson, Matyas Seiber, and Benjamin Britten were all part of the large circle within which he moved. Britten once said: "Hans Keller knows more about the string quartet, and understands it better, than anybody alive, composers and players included." It was a source of particular pleasure to Keller when Britten dedicated his Third String Quartet to him.

But back to Functional Analysis. Keller regarded it as the best and most direct way of demonstrating the underlying unity that lies behind all great music. You can write words about such a thing, and even provide music examples to illustrate the words, but a performing score will do it far more directly. There are, I believe, about twenty of these F.A. scores, but only four or five have so far been published. Keller acknowledged a debt to Schenker, but I have always thought that he was wrong to do so. While he, like Schenker, talked in terms of foregrounds and backgrounds, his theoretical picture of music was vastly different. It owed far more to Freud's theoretical picture of the dream — with its "manifest" content and its "latent" background, and the dynamic interplay between them, terms which Keller used constantly. Moreover, since Schenker's background is always harmonic, and since it is always the same — some variation of the chords IV, V, I — his theory demonstrates what all compositions have in common. For Keller such a view was meaningless; his analyses are there to demonstrate the uniqueness of each and every individual piece of music, including its background. And his theory of foregrounds and backgrounds goes deeper still. Those two words "dynamic interplay" hold the key. Keller thought that music works because it consists of a foreground whose meaning is derived through friction against the background across which it unfolds — the "foreground" being the piece as we know it, and the "background" being the received vocabulary in use at the time. All good music, he claimed, arouses a set of expectations which it then proceeds to contradict. His model was primitive, but clear. It is to be found in the interrupted cadence. A phrase that leads toward the dominant arouses the expectation of the tonic — a full close. Enter the submediant instead, and a contradiction ensues. The tension thus created between the background expectation and the foreground contradiction is what gives the progression its musical "meaning." Whoever invented the interrupted cadence, he once declared, was a creative genius. Keller pointed to hundreds, if not thousands, of examples in the standard repertory of expectations aroused, then denied (*Essays on Music*, pp. 123–25).

IV

After his retirement from the BBC, Yehudi Menuhin offered Hans a teaching position at the Menuhin School for gifted young musicians. There he gave instruction in chamber music and coached several string quartets. Hans was in his element. He found himself surrounded with outstanding talent, and he was able to follow his precept that the chief role of a good teacher is to make himself unnecessary.

I have often wondered what Hans would make of the latest trends in musicology. In the decade since his death the discipline has been hijacked by special interest groups: feminists; ethnicists; revisionist historians; and the early music movement (with its emphasis on the Urtext) — to say nothing of those musical voyeurs who devote themselves to what they call “Reception History” (i.e., watching others listening to music), an activity which in certain other fields would be against the law. “A plague on all their houses,” I can hear him saying. “It was bound to happen the moment you let words take over.” What Keller found especially galling was that the younger generation of composers had also ventured into the word game, in defiance of all historical precedent, and were now intent on providing their music with a framework of conceptual thought. He could not help observing that:

A hundred years ago there were no composers’ programme notes. Today there are composers, and leading composers at that, whose programme notes and self-expositions are more voluminous than their output; and they are the first to protest [against the idea] that any discussion of their music is irrelevant. However, our “advanced” critics don’t discuss their music anyway; they discuss their programme notes (*Essays on Music*, p. 226).⁴

And on another occasion he observed still more shrewdly that music theory was becoming so complex (he had in mind those space-age thinkers who write for the *Journal of Music Theory*) that the music was there to illustrate the theory, rather than the other way around. And where the music failed to do so, it was the music that was wrong.

V

I remarked earlier that Keller “dashed off” his programme notes. That phrase is not used in a pejorative sense. He wrote very quickly (two to four thousand words a day was not unusual for him) and published his work in every conceivable journal. When I brought him to McMaster University for the Arnold Schoenberg centennial celebrations in 1974 (the only Canadian university to mark this important event) Keller was commissioned to write a brief essay on Schoenberg for the *Hamilton Spectator*, and was given just two days in which to do it. He wrote it over lunch in the Faculty Club. The circumstances are not without interest. Present at that lunch were Milton Babbitt, Richard Hoffman (Schoenberg’s nephew), Denis Matthews (the English concert pianist), and various members of the music faculty of the University of Toronto. In order to give himself the necessary time to reflect on his forthcoming article, Keller introduced the guests to one of his favourite games. He invited each of us to draw up a list of twenty musical masterpieces, and he bet all of us that each list would have at least four titles common to all — proof for him of the importance of such works. Sure enough, we all came through with *Tristan*, the *Eroica*, the B-minor Mass, and the *Jupiter* Symphony, and Keller collected his

⁴Keller returned often to this theme of words about music, most notably in his book *1975 (1984 minus 9)*, 217–18.

money. Meanwhile, while everybody else had been wracking their brains and letting their soup go cold, he had put the finishing touches to his Schoenberg article, which I myself delivered to the *Spectator* offices later that afternoon.

I invited Keller to McMaster University on two later occasions as well. He took part in our three-day International Symposium on Music Criticism in 1976, and he returned in 1979 as a Visiting Professor for a three-month stint as a teacher in the Departments of Music and German. (For an important public lecture in Convocation Hall, we sat him in a very deep armchair from which it was so difficult for him to extricate himself that for once he was immobile. He expounded on “The Laws of Musical Thought,” a tape recording of which was discovered in McMaster’s Music Library quite recently and which has been transcribed for publication.) I recall that for the German Department he taught a course in opera, the two main works being *Tristan* and (highly typical of Keller) Hans Pfitzner’s *Palestrina* — a work he had grown to admire in Vienna and which he regarded as a neglected masterpiece. For the Music Department he taught music analysis. During this relatively long stay in Canada he visited other universities, including Brock and Guelph, and even went out to Princeton and (I think) to Calgary. The CBC heard about his presence and offered him a broadcast. Because of Hans’s well-known dislike of using scripts, and because he was completely at home inside a recording studio, the CBC let him loose on an unscripted two-hour programme simply called “An Evening with Hans Keller.” He dealt with all his favourite themes, for which the CBC were doubtless ready; but he also dealt with two for which they were not: he attacked Glenn Gould for walking away from live, spontaneous music-making (“the only form of music that means anything”), and he criticized the generally low standards among the music students with whom he was working at that time at Canadian universities. This was not well received in some academic circles here, yet he had to speak his mind. He found it incomprehensible that undergraduate students knew so little music that it was possible for them to acquire a B.Mus. degree without even knowing the Beethoven symphonies, to say nothing of the leading string quartets of Mozart and Haydn. As early as 1969, and long before his first trip to North America, he had expressed his dismay at the decline of music education in an article called “Education and its Discontents”:

In proportion as a student is talented, institutional education ... tends to be unnecessary and can be positively harmful, inasmuch as it may deflect him from the ruthlessly purposive pursuit of self-education. On the other hand, institutional and group teaching has proved the ideal education for the untalented: they come out the other end not only convinced that they know something and can do something, but with the ability to convince others of this mixture of a bit of truth and plenty of illusion (*Essays on Music*, pp. xviii).

All in all, however, the Canadian connection was important. Hans liked Canada, and often praised it as the “only classless society in the world — except Israel.”

Anyone wishing to come to terms with Keller’s ideas will find his collected *Essays on Music* a good place to begin. And for those readers already familiar

with his work, it is still rewarding to re-visit such classics as “Knowing Things Backwards,” “Strict Serial Technique in Classical Music,” and “Key Characteristics.” These vintage articles come across as freshly as if they were written yesterday (in fact, all of them were first published in *Tempo* more than forty years ago).

Christopher Wintle has done a major service in bringing this book to press. It was a long time in the bringing, but now that it is here, Wintle’s editorial work must be acknowledged. Among the difficulties he faced was that Keller wrote for so many journals and magazines (at least twenty-five) and that he often published simultaneously a variety of articles dealing with similar topics. Wintle has worked his way through hundreds of such articles in order to give the reader a correct impression of the range of Keller’s output. And to each article he has attached a list of further titles for those readers in pursuit of a more complete understanding. Perhaps the most valuable pieces are the ones bearing directly on Keller’s theory of music, especially those which he called “Principles of Composition,” which first appeared in *The Score* in 1960, and which began life as a series of lectures for composers at the Dartington Summer School.

Of interest, too, is Keller’s “Three Psychoanalytical Notes on *Peter Grimes*,” to which Wintle has provided some intelligent annotations. Wintle is also the guiding spirit behind the first publication in the *Two Studies* of Keller’s Functional analysis of Beethoven’s String Quartet in F minor, op. 95. This is of special interest to me because I was Keller’s pupil at the time of the score’s completion and I studied the quartet with him during his deepest involvement with it. Anyone familiar with the original quartets will find Keller’s “music about the music” utterly compelling. Christopher Wintle’s penetrating study of Beethoven’s C-sharp minor Quartet, op. 131 is certainly one of which Keller himself would have approved; he himself is quoted in it quite extensively. As a bonus, the editor has reprinted yet another F.A. score in the book of essays itself — Mozart’s Piano Sonata in A minor, K. 331. All these scores should be played and studied in conjunction with Keller’s own comments on Functional Analysis, first published in a series of wide-ranging articles in *Music Review* during the four-year period 1957–60, but not included in the present collection.

Even in such a carefully edited book as this, there are some slips that have escaped detection. Keller did not edit and translate the memoirs of Carl Flesch “in conjunction with their author” who had already died in 1944, but rather with their author’s son (p. 234); and when Wintle comes to quote Keller on Shostakovich (p. 249), and Britten (p. 238), he does not quote him exactly. (I can see Keller wagging a friendly finger at Wintle and telling him that word-substitution is not quotation, and that those missing italics are meant to throw his thought into “highly functional relief.” And what’s all this about William [*sic*] Furtwängler?” [p. 57]) More of Keller’s functional italics go missing from his explanation of the feisty character of his magazine *Music Survey*, which Mr. Wintle quotes with approval — “a musical [*sic*] music journal,” that is, a publication of the sort which did not at that time exist.

There was one quality in Keller that I admired above all the others: his belief in the sanctity of human individuality. That is what made him such a great teacher and a great human being. He never intervened. He taught you to teach yourself. He gave you just enough information to get you started on an intellectual odyssey, and then watched you handle it. All his life he fought against conformity, and particularly against those organisations that imposed it — whether it was the BBC, the music colleges, or even the government. He fought in the most practical way against the death penalty (by joining protest marches along the streets of London in the 1950s; when this infamous punishment was eventually repealed he celebrated), and he wrote scathingly against the laws governing the private behaviour of homosexuals, which in the Britain of the 1960s still carried heavy sanctions, including imprisonment.

I saw Keller a number of times just before the end, and witnessed something of the physical deterioration caused by the motor-neuron disease that eventually killed him. But I never saw him not working. He went on writing and publishing to the last. And he never lost his impish sense of humour. Across the years, he and I had gotten into the habit of exchanging Jewish jokes, and the one I told him on the last occasion we met brought a grin to his face and a twinkle to his eyes, although he was in pain and spoke with difficulty. He could well have written Freud's own declaration on work, life, and death:

I cannot face with comfort the idea of life without work; work and the free play of the imagination are for me the same thing, I take no pleasure in anything else ... I have one quiet, secret prayer: that I may be spared any wasting away and crippling of my ability to work because of physical deterioration.

Perhaps the tribute that would have meant most to Keller was the Memorial Concert at London's Wigmore Hall shortly after he died. It was given by artists who admired him and whom he in turn admired, including the Allegri String Quartet, the Mistry String Quartet, the clarinettist Thea King, and the violinist Ida Haendel. They represented a wide range of contrasting styles and musical viewpoints, and they came from very different backgrounds, but all were united in having learned from Keller's writings, or in having been inspired by his teaching and conversation. It is not every day that artists come together in such a way to pay homage to a critic.

Alan Walker