

Daisaku Ikeda's Recollections of World Figures
Amaral Vieira —
Internationally Acclaimed Brazilian Composer and Pianist

OUR society is like a piano that is badly out of tune. So discordant is its melody that listeners are left with a sense of disquiet. Even when well-intentioned people play a heartfelt melody in this midst, their beautiful notes degenerate into jarring noise. How is such a piano to be tuned?

Amaral Vieira, the internationally acclaimed Brazilian composer and concert pianist, who is also the current president of the Brazilian Society of Musicology, remarked to me with a warm smile: "We live in a dualistic world. There is a plus and minus, a good and bad to everything. I believe music has the power to lead us from disharmony to harmony." He also observed: "Today, everything is moving forward; everything but the human spirit. Music, a symphony of many sounds, can express the eternal, the universal, and the limitless.... Music has the power to change our emotions even transform the way we live. I want to contribute to a new era of harmony by reviving the human spirit through music."

Mr. Vieira's eyes shine with a crystalline strength and clarity that is like the purity and undefiled innocence of a child—they seem to embody the art of music.

The fine arts, by definition, should strive toward perfection in bringing out the best and the brightest of humanity. In reality, however, exactly the opposite can be true in many cases. In the midst of this, Mr. Vieira is regarded as a true musician, one who cares more about people than popularity. It isn't applause that he is after; his only thought is to bring others joy.

Sidney Lanier (1842–81), American poet and musician, has said that music is love in search of words. And isn't it the kind of pure-hearted love that brings happiness and encouragement to others that makes art great? A small-minded person, whose life is shriveled around a tiny core of ego, can produce only a petty and inferior kind of art. True art enhances our humanity. The heart of a great artist beats in time with the hearts of the people.

Mr. Vieira is well known for the intensity of all his performances. He says: "I relish each concert as an opportunity to reach my audience—people whom I may never see again. Some may come to my performances searching for hope. That's why I take my concerts so seriously."

He is utterly without the spoiled and selfish nature that we often regard as "artistic temperament." He has the strength to preserve his integrity as a human being, without becoming arrogant, without stagnating, and without becoming influenced by the superficial fashions of the times.

The Brazilian pianist declares: "We mustn't become robots. Mechanical performances are of no value. We mustn't become complacent but should always be reaching for the next stage of our development. Isn't that the meaning of *soka*—to create value?"

Mr. Vieira's remarkable life seems to point to an innate mission. Although he

did not come from a musical family, he began playing the piano at the age of 6. Listening to the piano lessons of his sister, five years his senior, he fell in love with the sound. He told his sister, who wasn't all that enthusiastic about her lessons, "You just play for five minutes, and I'll play the remaining fifty-five." While their parents thought their daughter was practicing, she in fact sat nearby reading a book, while their son played the piano. When young Amaral tried to persuade his parents to let him go to music school, they discouraged him, saying that a boy should be out playing soccer instead of sitting at the piano. But he was not to be deterred.

The famous Brazilian composer and conductor Souza Lima recognized the young boy's talent and arranged to give him special private lessons. Lima said: "I'll teach you, but on one condition. I won't make special allowances for you because you are young. I will treat you as an adult."

Mr. Vieira began composing music at the tender age of 8. In 1965, when he was 13, he went to Paris to study alone. His entire family was strongly opposed to this move, which, considering his age, was perhaps not unjustifiable. The thought must have caused them untold worry. They finally agreed to let him go, however, on the condition that he phone home every ten days. He eventually passed the examinations for the Paris Conservatoire with top marks.

Living alone in Paris, he had to become entirely self-sufficient—doing all his own cooking, cleaning, laundry, budgeting and paying bills. Whenever he called home, his mother would tell him, "If it's too hard, you can come home any time." But he always replied, "I'm doing fine"—in spite of the fact that he actually was finding it very difficult. "The hardships I encountered back then created the foundation of my personality as a musician and as a human being," he declares.

Eventually, he traveled to Germany and England to continue his studies. The boy became a young man. At age 25, he reached a turning point. He was recommended for the position of head of the Music Department at the distinguished Yehudi Menuhin School for musically gifted children in the United Kingdom. This was an enviable post, carrying with it both prestige and financial stability.

But Mr. Vieira hesitated. "I am a Brazilian," he thought. "Don't I have a duty to work for my country?" After a great deal of agonized soul-searching, he decided to return to Brazil. Everyone around him tried to dissuade him, saying that he was throwing away a golden opportunity. Today, Mr. Vieira recalls: "If I had accepted the offer then, I'm sure I wouldn't have developed to the extent that I did. I might have been blessed with opportunities, but my life would have been one without challenges. And it is challenge which makes us grow as human beings."

Mr. Vieira constantly reflects on his purpose. He has his philosophy, his code. He always determines to devote himself to a lofty purpose, transcending egotistical desires. It is this sense of mission that purifies the self, the arts and society.

After his return to his homeland, the Brazilian composer consistently devoted himself to offering genuine music for the people. In order to accomplish that, he has not only performed and composed music, he has also written many columns in

newspapers and magazines; in addition, he has participated in music education programs for youth and musical exchanges with other nations.

“The nation of Brazil does not belong to the elite,” he maintains. “It belongs to the people. No human being is better than any other. We are all the same, all equal.”

He also says, “Musicians who do not share the same heart as the people cannot be called genuine — and neither can their music.”

Mr. Vieira has been attacked because he pursued his ideals and convictions. But the truth will not remain hidden. For his talent and accomplishments, he has received many awards, both from Brazil and from other countries, including the Arthur Honegger Composition Prize, the Grand Prix-Foundation de France and the Prix Liszt. The piece he wrote for me, “Sounds of Innovation,” won Brazil’s 1993 Symphony Award.

At our first meeting, Mr. Vieira told me how happy he was to be able to meet me. From that time on, he pledged to exert himself as a musical ambassador, conveying to the world through music our message of humanism, for which he had sought so long. He proclaims: “Those who believe we must devote our energies to culture after we have become a great nation have things backward. A nation never becomes great unless its culture flourishes at the same time.”

Art is a form of self-expression. Someone has remarked that the reason Japanese artists don’t produce true art today is that they lack a solid identity, a strong sense of self. No matter how popular it may be, any art that lacks the humility, honesty, thought, philosophy and prayer to seek a higher perfection is ultimately mere vanity. Such shallow art cannot enrich the human spirit.

An old Chinese legend tells of a great musician who played the zither with such mastery that his music made a cool breeze blow in spring and brought on autumn, and even caused the trees and plants to bear their autumn fruits. When he played a different melody, he invoked summer; and then, again, his music changed the season to winter. And in a climactic finish, his music brought forth a perfumed breeze, auspicious clouds in the sky, and a bubbling spring from the earth all at once.

Spiritually charged music contains the power and harmony of the universe. It is the breath of divine life. Plato said that a change in music can change an entire society.

In this cacophonous, discordant age, we must open the door to our hearts and sing with joyous and vibrant voices. Through our great cultural movement of the people, we need to find new ways to “tune” the human spirit. Mr. Vieira continues to help us in this work by striking at the deepest chords of human feeling.□

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