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21M.542

Forum II Response

Bruce Brubaker and Deborah Stein gave me a better idea of how people perceive music. The theme for this week's forum revolved around the relationship between music and memory.

Bruce commented on the pervasiveness of pattern recognition. I believe there is an innate human tendency to connect the dots and form associations in situations completely unintended by composers. However, I think this search for patterns and attempt at analyzing the meaning of pieces and how they relate to previous compositions is one of the main activities composers want to promote when creating a musical piece. One of Bruce's comments that resonated with me was his claim that the time music signifies does not equal the passage of time on a clock. The composer plays with the medium of time as a painter or sculptor plays with the medium of space. Bruce comes from a contemporary music background, and I find it pertinent that modern composers such as Bruce readily make that comparison between space and time, a sensible relationship in the current age but radical in the days of Beethoven. Another interesting comparison Bruce draws is his assertion that making music is equivalent to making time audible. In this sense, what matters to the perceiver is not the memory of past sounds but rather the enjoyment in hearing sounds in the present, for what is in the past is no longer audible. The expectation of hearing future time made audible gives the audience an additional source of pleasure.

I enjoyed Deborah's theoretical approach to analyzing music. She leaves out the visuospatial component, and instead defines music as a temporal art. The two forms of a

temporal art are linear and nonlinear movement or being vs. becoming. This classification system helps simplify the wider universe of pattern recognition Bruce sets up as the building block for music. Deborah extends the traditional definition of memory to include dreams. The relationship she draws between memory and dreams is interesting because both are perceived as fragments. The themes of incompleteness, irresolution, and the representation of the whole by parts can be found in different art forms including the waltz. A fascinating point that was made was how a change of key could be construed as a change in the meaning or state of a composition. "Slippage" is the new term I learned that describes the action of easing into a dream-like, memory state of being. Memory leads to the cessation of time where we leave the present for the past and fantasize the unobtainable.

Our collective music memory in the present age is so much richer and more diverse than the music memory held by composers in any earlier time period. The explosion of new songs and experiences renders even Peter Child's recent composition ancient. Studies and personal experience tell me music triggers memory. What I would find interesting would be to learn how Beethoven and Dvorak would perceive Child's Skyscraper Symphony. Without the knowledge of the events of 9/11 and the rebuilding of New York, how would Beethoven and Dvorak decode the piece and what memories would this composition have triggered for them? Memory is a very individual, personal component of the mind for all of humanity. However, music triggers the exact same neural networks in each one of us, enabling all of us to share in the enjoyment of a composition.

Concert II Response

The two performances that stood out in my mind were Child's Skyscraper Symphony and Dvorak's String Quartet in E-flat Major, Op. 97, "The American." I love skyscrapers and religiously follow the list of the world's tallest skyscrapers. I had an immediate connection with Child's Skyscraper Symphony. I enjoyed the geometrical crispness and variety in the images projected in the silent film. Echoing comments I made regarding last week's concert, I enjoyed the visual and aural stimulation of the performance. A common aspect of both Child's and Dvorak's performance was my ability to perceive the musical message. At one point during Child's performance, where the camera teetered back and forth on the edge of a skyscraper, the audience laughed as we as a group identified with the musical score. Onomatopoeia is a related phenomenon in the literary world where the formation of names or words from sounds resemble those associated with the object or action to be named. Although I can't pinpoint the exact musical devices employed to give me the impression of the American quality of "The American," I readily identified with the piece. I feel like the presence of three allegro, lively movements out of four gave me the sense of dynamism and optimism present in the American spirit.

In terms of how the concert explored aspects of time, I feel like the tools composers most readily utilized were repetition and recapitulation. Repetition is such a broad term and encompasses melodies, keys, and contour. Going back to Bruce's comments regarding pattern recognition, I feel like the composers in this concert changed certain components of repeated sections to play with the audience's sense of time. As the class has progressed, I feel more adept at noticing these slight changes. In order to make

compositions more interesting, I get the sense that composers in this concert simultaneously attempt to suspend, speed up, and slow down time. As I stated in my forum response, the art of music is in its playing with time. Music makes time audible. It gives time a tangibility. Otherwise, the passage of time is notably unremarkable. Our biological clocks continue with or without conscious perception.

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