

Listener Psychology How We Perceive Music

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Præludium

By reading this essay you demonstrate an important and fundamental ingredient for musical appreciation: an innate drive to expand your apperceptive awareness. As professor Percy Buck once reminded us: “The power to appreciate great music is not a gift; it is a reward.” That is, the ability to comprehend and be moved by a complex symphony by Mahler isn’t just handed to us on a platter by right of DNA. We must have a desire for growth and expansion of our understanding of the world around us, and this, as the good professor says, “depends on the effort you make in readjusting your mind and increasing your receptivity.” Almost anybody can appreciate the superficial aspects of music: the sound of a blaring trumpet versus a mellow clarinet, a distinctive rhythm that you tap your feet to, a catchy tune, and the general mood, whether calm or stirring that it creates. But (for most) it’s a long road to get to Mahler or the Art of Fugue.

The principle motivation behind writing this essay is twofold: to explore why and how some people are drawn-in deeply by music, while others remain on a more passive boundary, and secondly, among those who do love music, why do we see such bitter divisions of opinion regarding what is good or bad? Obviously, music is a vital component of my life, and I agree wholeheartedly with what Nikolaus Harnoncourt has said: “We pay all too dearly for what we regard as comfortable and essential, while we heedlessly discard the intensity of life in favor of the tinsel of creature comforts.”

As for the rancor and divisiveness of critical opinion, the intemperate expression of viewpoints is only a reflection of the time: people have more access to personal choice than at any previous point in history, with seemingly limitless choices in entertainment and consumer products, internet tools and search engines which help us quickly find what we want, where we will shop, where we might like to travel, or which special-interest internet sites (such as this one!) appeal to our particular niche interests. Individual preferences have a logical root in psychological disposition, however, a greater understanding of these unique characteristics should help us have greater patience and tolerance for those whose views do not match our own.

Before we get to the psychological assessment of how we perceive music, a brief look at the historical, philosophical, sociological and neurological perspectives to provide a solid background for our exploration of music’s meaning. Throughout the essay I assume that any capable reader can easily Google topics of interest to fill in more detailed information if desired; my object here is not to exhaustively explain every point of the discussion, but merely to show the background issues that were considered in arriving at my own unique perspectives and the theories I propose. I hope to expand upon the cursory examination here and present my own theory of Intervallic Hermeneutics in a forthcoming book. All sources referenced in the essay are listed in the bibliography at the end of the essay.

The Neurological Response to Sound

As for the neurological basis for music's effect on us—why sound vibrations would elicit pleasure and emotional responses—the various theories explaining this can be explored by the interested reader in Daniel Levitin's recent bestseller, *This is Your Brain on Music*. Many writers have explored these issues, but Levitin is the most interesting because he also has a background in music. Many so-called apologists have said that music is really nothing more than abstract vibrations, 'noise' if you will, that, as one writer, Alexander Waugh, says: "merely tricks a responsive part of our brain into believing that something emotional has happened." Waugh also reminds us that we need "only to look at a simple optical illusion to realize how easy it is to deceive the brain." However, as Levitin methodically explores the issues, we find that there is more going on than simple deceptions.

At the most fundamental level, our ability to perceive and assess sounds allows us to gauge the relative safety of our environments. Loud sounds startle us more than soft sounds, smooth and continuous sounds such as a babbling brook soothe us, while a baby's cry makes us immediately jolt upright. The smooth sinusoidal wave-patterns of a clarinet are perceived as more mellow than the more angular wave-patterns of a trumpet wailing a high note. Even the ancient Greeks realized how music had the power to generate physical (metabolic) responses in the listener, slow music with a slow beat and smooth, regular rhythm instilled relaxation and a slower heart beat in the listener, while loud music with a quick pace brought up the heartbeat and the body's sense of preparedness for physical action.

We will explore later some reasons why specific musical gestures elicit specific responses, some of which are related to an individual's particular psychological disposition, others are just more refined examples of basic neurological functions. But it will become obvious as we dig deeper, that music is not just abstract noise, because composers have crafted their music in a way that very intentionally taps into these basic neurological and psychological responses. Music with a slow dotted rhythm is more likely to convey to the listener the same kind of association one would have of a person hurt and ambling about with a limp than it would an Olympic runner about to break the ribbon and take the Gold Medal. This is perception and awareness of our environment (are the conditions safe or threatening?). Music with a quick dotted rhythm conveys high energy level, perhaps a child skipping about. And why do children skip about, why do our mouths curl upward when we are delighted with something, why are we delighted with something in the first place, and so on... it's all basic neurological response (what is good or bad for the survival of the organism) taken to ever higher levels of refinement. If music is abstract and without any innate meaning, then so is a smile, or sitting with a loved one while watching a 'beautiful' sunset.

Ervin Laszlo has also looked at the core levels of neurological perception and written about the two basic functional levels of the brain in his book, *The Rise of the Integral Vision of Reality*. He describes the normal day-to-day mode of our brains which is slow, focused, analytical, and centered in one or another specific region of the brain, and the more exceptional moments of broader macroscopic utilization where all regions of the brain work in parallel. He explains that moments of aesthetic pleasure or ecstatic experience are instances when whole brain activity is present.

We'll return to some of Laszlo's and Levitin's insights later on in the essay, but there was one specific area that they don't address which I find absolutely crucial to the discussion of meaning in music, and to individual preferences in music, which is: why one listener would prefer Bach over Brahms, or, indeed, why one listener would have a strong and impassioned response to one performer's rendering of Bach yet find another performer's version of the same music irritating or even unlistenable. We see evidence of these extreme reactions in the commentaries accompanying nearly every YouTube posting: effusive

panegyric which deifies favored artists or unexpurgated execrations which rant against disliked artists, and it seems that the few people trying to referee from the middle are merely apathetic to the idea of having an opinion and drone on to the usual “to each his own” tune.

What are these trigger mechanisms that Laszlo talks about which switch us from the normal focused mode to the higher quantum processing mode? And: What are the barriers which might inhibit our ability to access such a receptive state? It will be a long journey (the length of this essay) calling upon the helpful insights of many disciplines to even touch upon a satisfactory answer. So, let’s start at the beginning and leave no stone unturned in our quest for answers.

The Concept of Tonality

Those readers well-grounded in music theory may skip this section, otherwise, it is, unfortunately, an inescapable requirement if one hopes to truly understand how we can describe some music as sounding 'happy' and other music as sounding 'sad.' If it is too much of a struggle to wrap your head around these concepts, you may still derive some meaning and insights from the rest of the essay, but it is really worth some effort at this point especially as regards the basis of my own theory of intervallic hermeneutics which comes at the end. If the information provided here is confusing (and without the aid of helpful graphics I can see how it might be), then search other sources such as Wikipedia or a good music dictionary for assistance.

Probably the best overall description I've come across of the 12-tone scale and the concept of tonality was presented by Leonard Bernstein in his Norton Lectures at Harvard in 1973. There are more detailed textbooks on theory and acoustics, of course, but these are all quite dry, and fail to put the concepts into immediate musical context. Our tonal system is rooted in the naturally occurring harmonic series. Let's say you play a single note on the piano. Depending on the brand of piano and its inherent scale design, probably only 40%-60% of what you are hearing is that actual note, the so-called fundamental. Everything else is harmonic overtones. The harmonics that the ear readily perceives are thus: the fundamental followed by the next octave up, then the fifth up from that, the octave higher, the major third and the fifth. All the other overtones are so faint that in many cases only special equipment can discern what they actually are. However, as faint as they are, they do have a psycho-acoustic (or Phonologic, as Bernstein prefers) impact on the perceived character of what we do hear, especially in more complex harmonic music.

So, let's say you played a C on the piano. The notes you actually hear are a blend of C-C-G-C-E-G. After the duplication of the first C, the first different note that you hear, the most prominent, most **Dominant**, of the ensuing harmonics is the G, or fifth note of the scale. That's why it's called the Dominant. The distance between the C up to the dominant G is a fifth (five scale degrees), if you invert that G, going down from the C to the lower G that interval is fourth, and that is called the sub-dominant.

You also see that the other note that is not a duplication of the C or G is E, and together they make up the major triad. This is important to keep in mind when we start talking in a moment about why the major triad sounds "happy" and the minor triad sounds "sad." Okay, the E note, the third degree of the scale, you invert that down and you get A, which is the major sixth of the scale. These are the consonant notes of the scale. While the fourth and fifth degrees play an important structural role, the third and sixth are the happy notes of the scale. As Bernstein describes, the reason why we hear minor as sad and major as glad has a strictly phonological explanation. The major third is heard as an audible and consonant harmonic of the fundamental, whereas the minor third doesn't occur until the 18th harmonic. Even though it remains inaudible when we play a fundamental tone, we immediately hear the clashing harmonics when the minor third or sixth are played with the fundamental, because "they are at variance with the major third which is implicitly present in the fundamental. This interference of the two frequencies causes a phonological disturbance." This disturbance or clashing sound is actually caused by irregular beats in the overtones which we hear as a slight edginess or as Bernstein says "a disturbed quality, troubled and unstable sound."

Once the early theorists discovered the all-important, pivotal, dominant interval of the fifth, they soon after discovered that you could have a fifth of a fifth, and a fifth of that fifth, and so on, continuing the cycle until eventually you arrive back at the note you started on. This is called The Circle of Fifths,

which is comprised of 12 different tones: C-G-D-A-E-B-F#-C#-G#-D#-A#-E#-B# (same as C). When you take those 12 different tones and transpose them back into the range of the original note, arranging them in scalar order within an octave span, you get our 12-tone chromatic scale. That's how we ended up with a 12-tone scale, and not a 10-note scale, or Busoni's later-proposed 18-note scale. It's all based on the natural harmonic series.

Now, the scale that Pythagoras developed, based on these true harmonic overtones, is both mathematically and musically at odds with our more modern tempered scaled. It has been a long road to get us to the standardized tempered scale which is now universally employed (though one may still hear other tuning methodologies that are favored by some historical music practitioners). Pythagoras developed the scale modal which was more or less the standard up until the 1500's, the diatonic notes of the scale, the C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C that we still recognize, but where the intervals of the whole steps were larger than what we now use, and the half steps smaller. This meant that the interval of a major third was larger (some say 'sweeter' sounding) than our current scale, while the distance between E and F, or B and C were smaller (some say more 'pungent'). Naturally, these different proportions—mathematically derived ratios—had an impact on how pleasant or unpleasant were certain combinations of notes. I don't want to retrace the history of all the different scale theories, or the effects of the Wolf tone, or the Pythagorean syntonic comma, which are of more interest to theorists. But I want to quickly take a look back even further to realize just how different the effects of music were on humans before we got to all the complex polyphony and harmonic interplays of Mahler or Scriabin.

Historical Background

Historically, music has been the most vital and most culturally-expressive conduit of all the arts. The ancient Greeks understood the value of music and poetry in a balanced lifestyle. In many ways the enlightened Greeks had one of the most balanced cultures in history, integrating physical vigor, intellectual probity and logic with emotional and aesthetic nuance into their understanding of the world and their place in it. A typical daily curriculum in Pythagoras' school consisted of studies in four primary subjects: mathematics, logic, musical therapy and cosmology. Pythagoras was also ahead of his time in teaching the values of strength in community, gender equality, and the interconnectiveness of all things based on energetic resonance which he believed was derived from musical ratios.

Bear in mind that before Pythagoras developed our current diatonic scale, the sound of music in the ancient world would have seemed very strange to our modern ears. Most ancient cultures used various sub-divisions of the octave because the octave has a logical basis in mathematical ratios with each octave representing a doubling of frequency from the preceding. These sub-divisions of the octave consisted of scales of eight, nine or eleven notes, which cannot even be replicated on modern instruments. In ancient India they didn't even use the octave as a foundation for music, but rather the naturally occurring overtone series.

Pythagoras's first meditations were based on equal divisions of the octave, using a monochord (or multiple monochords) which would equally divide a fixed length of string set at an octave. The fretboard was usually demarcated for equal divisions into halves, thirds, or fourths. As actually applied, music had two purposes: for contemplation of mathematical ratios, and for physical therapy (or what we might call physical "toning"). Melodic inventions would play upon "harmonious" ratios, thus an octave divided by 8 would play upon melodic improvisation based upon these 8 available tones. A melody was not considered harmonious unless it stayed within the prescribed mathematic ratios. Interestingly, for contemplative sessions, the musical practitioner would use the upper octave tone as the base note or "tonic", then improvise within the chosen scale in descending patterns, and eventually resolve by returning to the upper octave. This is somewhat counter to musical instincts of today where musicians improvising or even practicing scales start at the bottom, ascend upward and return to the starting "base" note.

For purposes of physical therapy students would intone (hum) to the upper octave frequency while the musical practitioner would improvise "harmonious melodies" in the various modal ratios. Students were encouraged to be perceptive to their own body's resonant point, and melodies would be derived from that particular pitch (this is similar to what we now call "toning").

Our modern twelve-tone scale lacks the internal harmony of the ancient Greek music (many of the intervals are designated as Hemitones which fall somewhere between a half and whole tone). We have also moved well away from responding to individual resonance points as a function of physical therapy or even peripheral awareness. In other words, we hardly even hear tones as tones, but mostly in context of some melodic or musical progression.

With the exception of a few traditional ethno-musical practitioners, the 12-tone scale (a division of the octave into twelve nearly mathematically equal half steps) is now universal throughout the world in both popular musical idioms and formal composition. Though we have lost touch with music as an actual vibrational energy-source, the development of the twelve-tone scale made possible the complex array of harmonic permutations that we now have, ranging from relatively simple constructs found in popular music to the exotic harmonic colors of Scriabin.

The first half of the Twentieth Century was a time of great flux and experimentation in terms of working within proscribed systems or breaking free to develop alternative methods. Schoenberg's dodecaphonic system tried to break the shackle of tonality, while others felt that the 12-tone scale itself was a limitation and experimented with quarter-tone music based on a the division of the octave into 24-tones. Conservatives argued that Michelangelo, Botticelli, Palestrina, Bach or Wagner were all perfectly able to express the aesthetics of the time without complaining of material limitations, that any such protestations against systemic limitations only reflects a lack of creative imagination.

Many different systems were proposed, instruments specially built and music written to explore these new systems. Carroll Pratt's book, *The Meaning of Music*, analyzes the various alternative systems and comes to the conclusion (as do I) that the 12-tone system we have now is the best overall compromise between two competing needs within musical expression. As he explains, a quarter-tone system (24-tone scale) does increase the range of subtlety in terms of melodic color and nuance of expression, and has the advantage of maintaining the already-established harmonic foundation of music (dominant, tonic, sub-dominant, etc.). But with such a tightly confined range of pitch variance, string players, and especially vocalists and choirs would be severely challenged in their abilities to accurately render such a system. Busoni, feeling that the pitch variance between notes in a quarter-tone system were insufficiently varied for consistent perception, and also feeling the limitations of the 12-tone system with its variance which he considered too coarse and lacking subtlety, experimented with dividing the whole-tone into thirds, thus an 18-tone scale. The advantage was that increasing the scale from 12 to 18 added greater range of color and expressive nuance to the melodic line, and made small intervals easier to discern than in the quarter-tone system, but the downside was that aside from the pivotal fifth, most of the harmonic functions that we understand would not be present. In essence, his system would have been a competing system, not a complementary system, such that two sets of every instrument, notation, performance skills, everything would have to come in twos. Sort of like VHS and Betamax (for those of you who remember). Since most readers have probably never heard about any of this, you can guess how all these experiments played out. I can safely say, in terms of all possible melodic and harmonic permutations, our now sacrosanct 12-tone scale has become the indubitable doctrine of our musical language, and is here to stay.

But let's get back to another key idea: music as a source of physical resonance within the human body. Many cultures as diverse as the ancient Greeks, Tibetan monks, Hindu Yogis, and Southwestern Native-American Shamans, have all considered the relationship of, and connection between, the physical body and its Earthly surroundings. For many of the primitive cultures music was not considered a source of "entertainment" or even a source of contemplative enlightenment. The Native American Hopi value the musical practitioners of their tribe not for inventiveness or inspiring melodic rifts, but in how closely they preserve the various "intonation sequences" that were handed down for centuries by earlier generations of musicians. To say that the purpose of music was to create a certain mood would be an almost derogatory characterization, for the Hopi consider music as a sacred gift, a key or portal to enter another dimension. Such a thing is not to be messed with or "improved upon." In a sense this seeking of another dimension mimics the so-called transcendent experience when one hears a moving aria by Bach. But with the Hopi, the level of immersion is complete, the music serving as a sort of unifying meditational hypnosis if you will. For those readers who wish to explore this topic more thoroughly I suggest the writings of Dane Rudhyar, an avant-garde composer who was deeply immersed into metaphysics and cosmological mysticism (see the bibliography at the end of essay).

Our modern music is much more cognitive, but not just in the sense of being more complex intellectually (i.e. that, our tempered scales allow multiple polyphonic lines to play simultaneously), it also has the ability to profoundly tap into the associative imagery of our senses and produce moments of

ecstatic experience (as both Levetin and Laszlo point out). Another way of looking at it is that Greek music strove to center the body within its physical environment (at one-ness with), while our music (from Bach onward) tends to take us out of our physical environment (apart-ness) and discover extrasensory transcendence. Certain twentieth-century composers strove to unify the elements of physical grounding with extrasensory transcendence, and I'll discuss that more at a later point.

Will and Ariel Durant's encyclopedic 11-volume history of civilization always include discussions of how music and the arts are integrated into the societies of the various ages. By extrapolation one can contemplate how living conditions, societal hierarchy, and the relative value of music affected the personality and professional methodology of the composer. Knowing a composer's circumstances helps explain why Handel focused on Oratorios and Operas while Bach wrote Cantatas and Passions and never an opera. Yet, if historians of the distant future were to perfectly describe the social conditions of our times, even focusing on a narrow comparison of suburbanite, advanced-degree-holding, comfortable wage-earning adults of the same age and ethnic background, this would still not describe why one listener would resonate more with Bach than with Bruckner or Brubeck. So, our quest continues

The Socio-Cultural Perspective

This section was originally nine pages and full of comparative data, but through a mishap of my backup system I lost the original document. When contemplating having to re-write this segment all over again I thought about omitting this altogether, but I do believe the concept of cultural identity and internalization accounts for some of the more close-minded opinions we see all around us. So, I guess you can count yourself lucky that the re-write is only about half the length of the original. Yay!

One topic that I'll summarize in just a paragraph concerns the perceived favorability of composers depending on the Zeitgeist. Comparing data collected from major symphony orchestra series concerts, playtime at radio stations, and various polls conducted among concert audience members, college students and music professionals, we see that the so-called Three B's—Bach, Beethoven and Brahms—have remained consistently placed among the Top Ten Composers list, while other composers come and go in popularity. Much of the variability I traced to perceived social stability; the freewheeling 1920's and 1960's, for example, favoring more 'emotionally expressive' composers such as Chopin and Tchaikovsky, periods of post war trauma placing Bach and Mozart higher in the standings. Then of course, Wagner, who for decades was placed somewhere in the third, fourth or fifth place on the listing virtually fell off the Top Ten after WWII owing to the unfavorable association with Hitler and the Nazis.

In looking over the data collected over five decades, several things stood out. First, when musicologists and professional musicians and conductors were polled as to what they consider the Top Ten compositions ever written, the statistical winner was Bach's Chaconne. When this same question was opened up to college students, concert-goers, or radio audience polls, the number one pick was almost always for Beethoven's Ninth. Could it be that casual listeners were just remembering the 'Ode to Joy' finale, or does the entire symphony really have a more universal appeal? Many of these same voters may not have been familiar with a solo instrumental work such as the Bach Chaconne. Then again, amongst professionals Bach almost always rated number one among composers, while in the broader polls, Beethoven almost always rated number one. Is it just that Beethoven is more famous, the stories of his deafness and the 'Fate Knocking on The Door' Symphony capturing the imagination of students? Or does Beethoven really strike a more universal accord?

We all have our own favorites which appeal to our subjective fancies. Some of my favorites are admittedly esoteric choices that didn't even make it the nominating stage. Personally, though I enjoy the catchy tunes of Bizet's *Carmen*, there are many works I find much more enjoyable and/or more edifying: Wagner's Prelude to *Parsifal*, Messiaen's *O sacrum convivium*, Shostakovich's Eighth Symphony, and many others. The differences in perception and discernment between a trained professional musician and the casual listener are sometimes substantial. But truly great art, as defined by the great philosophers and aestheticians (next section) is music which is highly communicative, multi-layered (able to appreciate on multiple levels) and has a transcending sense of universality. This is why Beethoven's works always rank at the top: it is music that both expert and novice recognize as something extraordinary.

The same thing happens with specific performances. I may really enjoy a certain performance even though I know it is somewhat left or right of performances that are more universally (statistically) favored among listeners. We are all entitled to our own subjective opinions, but I believe it is also our responsibility to recognize the elements in music which appeal on a broader scale. We'll examine some of these criterion in coming sections.

Another topic that can be briefly summarized was an entire discussion about Alfred Einstein's highly opinionated book, *Greatness in Music*. Einstein considered Bach the pre-eminent composer of all time, and had a very low regard for composers who fell under the evil spell of programmatic music. He dismisses Liszt entirely with a single passing sentence. Many of his opinions were based on Nationalistic tendencies which in times past did actually play a significant role in the type of music that a culture favored. For example, the whole dearth of significant composers in England between Purcell and Elgar was a direct reflection of an Enlightened Society whose academic system strongly favored the empirical sciences. Patrons of the arts had to import musical talents because the educational system did not favor creative thinking. The whole concept of Schools of Music—the French School, Russian School, German School, English School, Spanish School—styles of teaching and transferring the imprint of culturally-based favoritism, has disappeared in our current age of instant communication. Nowadays, one of the best and most feted Mahler conductors, Gustavo Dudamel, comes from Venezuela, and probably the best Mahler Second I ever heard was conducted by a Korean, Myun Chung. Just 25 years ago that would have been unthinkable.

Moving on to topics which are more relevant to the current thesis, namely, why a listener would love one performer's Bach and hate another's, we must look in other areas for our answer. Personal psychology is a big part of the equation, and we'll get to that in another section. Relevant to the social and cultural aspect, sense of identity is often traceable to one's family heritage, age group, gender, sexual orientation, religion or anything where we identify with a group.

Don Miguel Ruiz Jr. has written a short and easily approachable book called *The Five Levels of Attachment*. In it he defines five levels of attachment ranging from our most pure authentic self to levels of fanaticism. Our responses to favorite sports teams, favorite musical performers, philosophy, politics, or even noble ideas such as world peace may be passive, passionate or obsessive depending on the level of attachment.

From the time we are a child we acquire knowledge and experience which helps us communicate with and interact in the larger world. Every time we have a choice about something, every yes or no that we make then becomes a part of our accumulated sense of personal identity. When these beliefs crossover from being mere preferences to becoming an active part of how we identify ourselves, we begin to take on a biased perspective.

Ruiz defines the five levels thusly: Level One Authentic Self; Level Two Preference; Level Three Identity; Level Four Internalization; Level Five Fanaticism. In any given area, where we fall on this scale dictates whether we have passive or emphatic reactions to situations around us.

While it is doubtful that an open-minded and intellectually inquisitive person would fall into the trappings of what Ruiz calls Level-Five Fanaticism, emotionally sensitive types, or intelligent people with a more 'black and white' type of thinking, often fall into Level-Four Internalization. Ruiz himself admits to at one time having a Level Four attachment to his favorite football team. As open-minded as I try to be, there are cases where I probably veer over from Level Three to Level Four. The more passionate we are about something the more likely we are to have emphatic opinions. The thing is, these passionately held, deep levels of internalization may not always be hurtful to others, but one must always be aware of innate bias, and makes allowances as you interact respectfully with others. And of course, we don't want to wander around the world as mere dispassionate observers, we all seek communion with fellow travelers, and to say yes to or no doesn't automatically mean we are being judgmental; this is where the concept of discernment comes in which I address at length in the separate essay: **The Relevance of Criticism**.

As concerns unmitigated bias, I can share a story about a regular customer I had when I managed the classical section of a large record store. She was a petite, sixty-year old Chilean woman who only bought recordings by Claudio Arrau. I think sometime in her distant past she attended a concert of Arrau's and since then has been collecting his recordings for over four decades. This was clearly a case of identity through common heritage, both being from Chile. The less obvious issue, though much deeper in implication, is that over these decades of listening exclusively to Arrau, his very manner of playing—the long lines, the macro-dynamic arch, the smooth legato touch, and the subtle use of *agogics* (a sort of musical comma) instead of dynamic emphasis—this became the paradigm of proper piano playing for her. You can imagine that, having internalized and accepted Arrau's vision of the Emperor Concerto as Divine Revelation, when she heard Glenn Gould's Emperor playing in the store one day she exclaimed most vigorously that the music was all wrong and that "this Gould doesn't know what he is doing."

The deeper implication is not just that Arrau is her safe zone, what Ruiz would identify as a Level-Two Preference (performers we like), or a Level-Three Identity (the Chilean connection), but that she has actually internalized his entire expressive style to such a degree that she is now living in a Level-Four Internalization state, which is just one step removed from fanaticism. This internalization is a part of her passion and sense of what is right in the world. If I had put on another recording of the Emperor and lied to her, saying it was by a young, up-and-coming Chilean pianist, I can see her shaking her head and saying that the young pianist still had a lot to learn. On the other hand, if I had put on another version of the Emperor, closer in style to Arrau, she would doubtless have been more tolerant, maybe admitted it was good, but still not as masterly as Arrau. In this case, her musical internalization has trumped the initial bonding due to the common heritage.

I could go on recounting all kinds of cases where initial attractions had segued into intolerance for other perspectives. College students who only bought recordings made by young artists of their own generation, a rabid anti-European collector who spent thousands of dollars every year buying every obscure recording by every obscure American composer that ever lived, a historical buff who told me flat out that there hasn't been an artist in the last forty years worth listening to, and a somewhat eccentric amateur composer who believed only Jewish violinists understood what a true *portato* was all about. Frankly, I'm glad that such myopic thinking is in the relative minority among classical music enthusiasts. I find the idea of building up exclusionary zones around great art very disturbing. Like Hunter Meade said (paraphrasing): the opportunity and advantage of great art is that it has the ability to offer up perceptions and perspectives which we do not otherwise find in normal day-to-day life. What a precious gift to throw away with closed-minded attitudes.

The Gestalt of Acoustic Interface

Now I want explore a topic which hardly ever gets mention in critical reviews, and that is why some listeners prefer the more intimate perspective of a dry studio recording with the microphones close to the instruments in contrast to listeners who prefer more breathing room and a sense of ambiance. Preferences seem to be surprisingly emphatic one way or the other.

In theory, a recording made in a small studio or living room might convey a more personal sense of communion with the music, while a recording made in a large concert hall with more distance from the source will convey a more amorphous (some would say ethereal) and larger-than-life sense of immersion. Microphone placement is also an issue whether in a dry or reverberant acoustic because too close in and the microphones pick up all the unpleasant and distracting noises of the mechanical apparatus, and that tends to be an undesirable distraction in much music.

As I mentioned in the previous section, my time spent managing the classical section of a large record store was a very interesting opportunity to make observations on human behavior. In academic studies, test subjects will often proffer idealized conceptions about themselves, but in a real world environment you get a much more honest idea about somebody by seeing what they spend their money on.

I remember selling dozens and dozens of “Gouldbergs” to young college students who didn’t care in the slightest about any other classical piano recordings, or Bach played by anybody but Gould. Always one to try and build a rapport with my customers, I enquired about their tastes in music and their general listening habits and came to a sort of hazy realization about the importance that both sound and energy played. Obviously, they related to Gould’s manic energy, and the state of ecstasy that he conveys. But I doubt very much they’d be as keen on the new Zenph re-creation of Gould’s recording reproduced in a modern concert hall acoustic. The reason being is that the kind of recordings of pop and rock music they listened to were recorded in dry studios, with very close microphones, and often with individual instruments each in their own separate isolation booths. To my ears most pop music has a very disembodied sound, as if coming out of a void. I grew up hearing organ music in stone churches and have attended classical concerts for more than four decades, so to me, that is what live acoustic music should sound like. But they liked the sound of Gould’s dry recordings (as did Gould himself—remember, he was very active in the production phase of his own recordings). These young listeners, used to pop and rock recordings, were actively turned-off by classical recordings which gave any hint of a concert hall or church acoustic. Not only was the sound-world foreign, but the implication is that the mere triggering of any idea of a formal concert event or sitting in a church made them very uncomfortable.

On a psychological note, there are specific reasons why the type of acoustic affects our perception of the music. Most children are fascinated with the sound of their voices in a resonant tunnel or underground cavern. The reason is simply that one can hear one’s self as it extends beyond the confines of normal physical proximity (or beyond the reach of one’s aura if you want to use that as a basis), and we are fascinated by the reach of our voice as it extends beyond our normal limits. Musically, a piano piece played in a small living room not only sounds different from the same piece of music played in a concert hall, but it also instills in us a very different mood and reaction to the music. The reason for this goes back to the discussion we had at the very start of this essay about music either creating a feeling of oneness (the Buddhist philosophy of connectivity of the body with the physical surrounding) or apart-ness (an out-of-body transcendence of time and space). Different kinds of music work best in one or the other mode, and it is when the musical intentions and the acoustic venue are improperly matched that a disconnect occurs with the listener. For example, “Happy Birthday” will sound more authentic sung around the dining room table than by robed choristers in a cathedral. Conversely, the aria of Bach’s

Goldbergs has a more transporting quality when heard on a fine concert instrument in a recital hall than it will when played on an upright in one's living room.

Other issues involve impact and the sense of immediacy (or in audio jargon "palpable presence") and the concept of layered complexity. Firstly, an instrument sounded within the intimate space of our living rooms will always have more visceral immediacy than hearing the same instrument even from the front row perspective of a concert hall. A person yelling in our face in an enclosed space will impact our body differently than hearing an actor shout on a theater stage. We also respond differently to a direct interaction than we do as passive listeners in a public space. These issues concern the level of immediacy, and it is a well-known fact that certain kinds of music sound best in certain kinds of venues. Chamber music sounds best in a smallish recital hall (say, under 500 seat capacity) than it does in a large, stone cathedral. A large pipe organ sounds fine in a spacious concert hall or cathedral but sounds outsized, brutish and bludgeoning when put in a smaller, drier, physically confined space. For example, I know a classical organist who has a set-up with massive speakers in a large living room, and even with some artificial reverb, the sound is just not convincing, and ear fatigue sets in almost immediately.

The other issue is complexity. In a dry acoustic there is the advantage of textural clarity (hence Gould's preference for dry studio recordings) but the sound envelope is more one-dimensional—it is either on or off. In a more spacious acoustic which allows the sound envelope to bloom forth, one hears the musical note cycle through three different phases: the initial attack, the resonant bloom as the direct and near-field reflections interact, and finally the ambient or reverberant tail, which gracefully tapers the music back into the void of silence. This gives dimensionality and also complexity to the sound, and a perceptive artist (such as Schiff) knows how to shape articulation and dynamic contours to maximize the added layers of texture in such an acoustic (and with minimal loss of clarity due to textural obfuscation).

For these reasons, I've tried to be sensitive to the acoustic presentation of a recording, because many listeners have very strong preferences one way or the other. At this point I haven't decided if I should use a graph, or just make a point of discussing it in the text. If I use a five-point scale, "1" would be a very dry acoustic like a bedroom, and "5" would be a very resonant cathedral with a long reverb. Most music will sound best somewhere in the 2-4 range, but I can certainly envision circumstances where even the extremes would play to the advantage of the music.

The Philosophic Quandary

Philosophers through the ages have grappled with the meaning of music. Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, Schiller, Schopenhauer, and Tolstoy have all contributed ideas to the nature of art. Even the poet Heinrich Heine, a younger contemporary of Beethoven, hit upon some ideas that prompted philosophers to ponder:

Music is a strange thing. I would almost say it is a miracle. For it stands halfway between thought and phenomenon, between spirit and matter, a sort of nebulous mediator, like and unlike each of the things it mediates—spirit that requires manifestation in time, and matter that can do without space.

Another, and closer, contemporary of Beethoven was the philosopher Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), who focused on the nature of art and culture. Much of the writing is dated, but he did hit upon some ideas that later writers continue to re-visit. He defines aesthetics as the “science of feeling as it relates to the purposeful creation of artistic expression” (as opposed to appreciation of natural beauty, such as a sunset, or rainbow displayed in the spray of a waterfall). One of his ideas is that what we call musical perception and the “revelation of music’s meaning” is really our tapping into the storehouse of universal and unchanging Eleatic Ideation. The function of Art is to present this realm of ideation in a sensible form that allows the self to intuitively perceive its meaning. The valuation of various art forms would then be the degree to which they succeed in unifying Idea into manifest form.

His other principle concept is that man “reduplicates himself,” or aspects of himself, in response to art. That is, in art man sees a reflection of his own life experience. Today we would say that a listener resonates with, or has a sympathetic connection to certain kinds of music, be it Sinatra or Sibelius. He also notes that artistic expression has always straddled the line between the sensuous and spiritual (and by extension secular and sacred) but that in great art the two are reconciled and thus satisfy the intellect’s need for balance. Schiller also talks about the “unity of opposites.”

Hegel concludes that “true art ought to offer us, through our senses, all that finds a place in human experience, all that can arouse and animate the heart and mind of a human being, whether he be cultured or uncultured.” Hegel also argues that art, religion and philosophy differ from one another only in the forms in which they bring their content to human consciousness. Today we might hesitate to equivocate music with religion but leaving aside the specific dogmas of the various religions, the true religious experience, as Hegel notes, provides the same kind of transcendent epiphany as does musical art in its most potent expressive connection. Recent neurological studies have also found parallels here.

Whereas Kant could never decide how to value music—as the highest art form owing to its structural perfection, or as the lowest art form because of its basal sensuality—Hegel had no qualms about assigning relative values in the arts. In fact, a good deal of Hegel’s treatise concerns the description of, and ranking of, the various arts, to which he gives the following hierarchical ordering (in ascending order, lowest to highest):

1. Architecture
2. Sculpture
3. Painting and Poetry
4. Music

Though I understand the basis for his ordering, there can, of course, be cases where a particularly inspired sculpture is more significant than a painting or poem, and cases where generic musical

expressions are of lesser artistic value than the inspired sculpture. What he is talking about is potential. At its highest level of expression music takes us further than even the greatest sculptures of Michelangelo. Nevertheless, Hegel provides interesting insights into the expressive nature of each of the arts. The reason why Hegel places music as the highest expression of art is somewhat awkwardly argued and difficult to grasp, though much the same concept resurfaces later in Susanne Langer's lectures from the 1950's. Basically [with alternative wording in brackets suggested by myself]:

If spiritual life is indeed to manifest itself in art as subjective reflection, the material [media] corresponding to it cannot be of a kind that persists in being what it is. What is needed is a material that is inherently unstable, the sensory externality of which vanishes at the very moment of its coming into being. This cancelling of spatiality [physical form or manifestation], this complete withdrawal into subjectivity, with respect to expression as well as intuition, is made actual in music.

And stated elsewhere:

Sounds have their being in time which is the negation of spatial dimensionality. Time is space contracted, or concentrated, into a dimensionless point, which is really a restless "now" incessantly making way for another and yet another "now", in self-cancelling, abstract, indeterminate continuity.

This is what Heidegger would later call "*Da-sein*" or "in the moment." By comparison, the shapes of painting, or sculpture or poetry persist outside of our immediate interaction, while music is ephemeral and more thoroughly transforms its perceptible material. Hegel argues that such a state, "an elemental power over the soul," is required to tap into the spiritual transcendence of experience.

Hegel asks "how do musical sounds, as distinct from natural cries or shrieks, come to be charged with human feeling?" For Hegel, mere sound or tones, or what he calls the "sonoral element" cannot be called art in the strictest sense. I immediately thought of La Monte Young, Vangelis, Brian Eno, or works such as Messiaen's *Apparition de l'Eglise éternelle* which are sonority-based with slowly evolving harmonic movement. But, of course, such music was unheard of in Hegel's time.

Music, as an artistic medium, must use its mastery of sounds to express human feeling in its profoundest depths of spiritual inwardness, including every nuance of joy, serenity, playfulness, and capricious jubilation of soul, as well as every gradation of anguish, sorrow, grief, pain, melancholy, longing, and also of awe, adoration, and love.

And finally:

In all their sequences and juxtapositions, in their precisely controlled entries, progressions, conflicts, resolutions, and disappearances, [music] can be made to correspond to every possible change of animating emotion or mood of the heart and mind. The vibrancy of musical sound is of the same order as the temporal vitality of the soul, such that the two can interpenetrate one another fully.

The nineteenth century saw some fairly esoteric thinking into the nature of aesthetic expression. Schopenhauer, in particular, had some odd ideas. He relegated the function of bass foundation in harmony to the category of excess baggage. For him the real essence of musical expression resides in melodic invention. This is where the "higher ideation" (or universal spirit) occurs. Melodies can craftily summon forth spells upon the listener, weaving expressive threads upon our receptive wills, and giving us general (but never specific) appearances of joy, sadness, pain, horror, jubilation, gaiety, or calm.

Other musical writers—Helmholtz, Lotze, Visher, Leibnitz—had even more narrowly-defined views about music. Leibnitz saw music in terms of a “series of complex spiritual units.” And we would do best to forget the whole bitter feud between Wagner and Hanslick, with their circuitous reasoning and pompous posturing.

Probably the greatest waste of human energy on this topic that I’ve encountered is that of the German philosopher, Friedrich Herbart. His formalist approach to aesthetics spawned a whole generation of followers who all questioned whether music really expresses anything at all. On the one hand, Herbart recognized that music seemed to be able to “elicit certain reactions in listeners,” such that they claim to “perceive beauty, morality, grandeur, wonder, religious feeling, love, grace, naivety, sentimentality, and humor.” On the other hand, in a lifetime of searching for answers (and volumes of dense analysis) he could not find any “reason” for all of this.

This makes me ponder the question of how a tone-deaf person would perceive music. Would they recognize only the structural elements and hear the music as sort of flowing architecture? If so, this is at a far remove from how most listeners experience music. And therein is the problem with formalist musical analysis: they were all looking in the wrong place! The answers don’t come from looking at the squiggles and black dots on the printed page, music can only properly be experienced when it is sounded forth in performance. All the varied disciplines of harmonic progression, counterpoint, exposition and development... none of these bring the music to life. Music can only (or most fully) be understood as a neurologic-acoustic psychological phenomenon. We know now that even the simplest single tones can trigger basic emotional responses in listeners (even Schopenhauer’s lowly bass tones!).

For their part, composers and musicians of the nineteenth century did not fall into this abyss of formalism. Liszt said: “Music is the embodied essence of feeling; feeling is incarnated in music.” However, such statements as these from musicians of the day then prompted aestheticians to explore the semantic differences between ‘feeling’ and ‘meaning’ and ‘emotion’ and the whole topic continued in heated debates for another century.

Some of the more recent thinkers on the topic of meaning in music have been John Dewey, Hunter Meade, Susanne Langer and Leonard Meyer. Personally, I don’t agree with many of Dewey’s conclusions about the “false separation of art from everyday life,” that, as he argues, ballet, golf, sculpture, hairdressing or mixing a good drink are all equal art forms. I believe Meade is more on target in how **aesthetic edification elevates us and opens us up to experiences *not* readily accessible in everyday life.**

Meade does make a distinction concerning the type of art that achieves such edification. According to him “any music which arouses a response of great emotional feeling, sentimental association or patriotic fervor does *not* define greatness in art.” Echoing some of Hegel’s definitions Meade goes on to say that for great art “there needs to be aesthetic triggers which tap into the deepest human experiences and in a context which may be rewarding to contemplate in itself” (apart from any external associations). Without such an aesthetic core, a work “may still give us pleasing or moving experience – art has no monopoly on pleasurable or moving experience – but it cannot be considered a truly artistic one.”

One aspect of what Meade calls the “central aesthetic core” would be any work of art which compels us “to contemplate with joy and satisfaction without thought of social advantage, economic gain, or practical aspiration.” Another point that Meade stresses is that in great art one is absorbed by the aesthetic expression, transcending personal interests, and by definition carries the possibility of opening up new perspectives to the individual.

Also echoing some of Hegel's ideas was Susanne Langer, who was initially a disciple of Alfred North Whitehead but as a professor of philosophy at Columbia University in the 40's and 50's became known for her own ideas, especially as concerns art and the nature of human feelings. Her 1957 book, *Problems of Art*, takes some digging to get to the real gems of thought, but the process is very rewarding because her writing (and the transcribed lectures) are full of pithy points and insightful analogies which shine like bright rays of sunshine on some very obtuse subject matter.

Langer admits upfront that "from a philosophical point of view the meaning of music has always been more difficult to explain than the visual or literary arts. Whereas painting and sculpture have a foundation of visual metaphor, and prose and poetry have complex linguistic symbolism, the actual sounds of music have no such associations." By this she means that sculptors use visible materials (marble, plaster, wood) shaped to mimic natural bodies (human, animal, water spray...), writers and poets use words that may also be used in day-to-day communication, spoken in a voice which is also used for day-to-day communication, but that music builds its art from a foundation which (in our modern culture, at least) has no practical basis in our day-to-day lives. She goes on to say that the creak of a door, the pop of a toaster, or the cry of a baby are sounds which cannot be used as building blocks to making great music.

She also takes a different tact than Hegel in describing the ephemeral nature of music. She talks about the "Dynamic Fluid Form" of music and compares the performance of a piece of music with the evolving and ever-changing shape and contour of a water fountain's spray, or of the momentary efflorescence of a bursting firework. She says this is just an analogy of what musicians talk of when they speak of the overall arch of the work. Langer takes aim at many in the established academia who squabble over meaningless semantics, offering up arcane scholium when in fact "the inostensible elements of our perceptual world consist of many small emotions that never develop into a specific emotion that we can designate as fear, anger, love, or hate."

This latter point is actually more important than it might at first seem because it goes right to the heart of Hanslick's chief argument against there being any real emotion in music. These various ephemeral and inostensible feelings never coalesce into specifically definable emotions. The moods evoked in music are rarely as specific in cause and effect as when we whoop it up when a favored sports team wins, or when we shed a tear when a loved pet passes on. Hanslick's chief argument was that music's so-called emotion never points to any specific object that is then the catalyst for a specific emotional response. However, we know from neurological and psychological studies that music triggers many of the same responses, centered in the same focal areas of the brain as when we do in fact respond to very specific emotional events. The loss of a pet, the loss of a favored team, an investment gone bad, a parent suffering a stroke, or even taking a wrong turn and getting lost, each of these very different experiences also have certain nucleic commonalities that are clustered around a specific area of the brain. For me, this puts the final nail in the coffin of Hanslick's "music as purely abstract reflection" not to mention all the volumes of analysis that have been written since which takes us down the same dead end street.

Many of the Absolutists get caught up in the associative aspect of music, saying that finding meaning in music is as silly and ultimately as pointless as our ancestors describing shapes and personalities in the patterns they saw in the heavenly constellations. They argue that these analogous associations and morphologic transferences fail to really describe the true nature of the stars, which are in fact, fiery balls of gas out in the cosmos. Such literalness of association is hardly ever the intent of music, except in cases of 'programmatic' such as Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony which mimics the sounds of cow bells, babbling brooks and thunderstorms. Even then, the composer relies on the same neurological connections that non-programmatic music (say, a Bach fugue) calls upon. The purpose of music is not

to be another 'language of tone' which can then be translated back into the specific communicative formulations of written language. Too much would be lost in translation. The intent of music is not to say in poetic terms the equivalent of our observing a sequence of A, B, and C, any more than a normal person would read a smile as an odd uplifting of the mouth that seems to have no apparent physiological purpose. Music doesn't exist for objective desiccation.

Probing even a little deeper into the neurological component, why would sadness trigger a response of the tear ducts? Why do our mouths curl upward (☺) in response to good news? And what of Hanslick's specific object of emotion? When a loved pet dies, we may actually feel numerous specific emotions simultaneously or in succession: loss, guilt, anger, depression, longing, nostalgia, separation, etc. All of these feelings have certain core commonalities, which may easily be triggered by music. Before we explore the nature of hermeneutic implication and how that further refines our responses to more specific imagery, just consider again the power of music to even suggest a more ambiguous range of emotions. Exact associations may vary with each listener, but the general mood of music is almost universally recognized. In this way we can all agree that the slow Adagio movement of Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata more closely brings us into the zone, or range, of feelings that might mimic our reflecting upon the moon's reflection on the nighttime waters than it would bring to mind the image of a person running and screaming from a burning house. But if we didn't have the title 'Moonlight' to prompt this specific imagery, we might hear the music and find that feelings of nostalgia, or loss, or bidding for forgiveness might emerge. That's okay, Beethoven didn't actually give the title 'Moonlight' to this sonata. The key factor is that whether we find grief, nostalgia, or a sense of inward reflection while pondering the moonlight upon the still waters, these all put us within a certain zone of feeling which the composer then crafts with specific gestures that will give somewhat different meaning to each listener.

Carroll Pratt, in *The Meaning of Music*, posits an interesting in-between concept which he calls Aesthetic Emotion. This is a level of experience which falls somewhere between the vivid subjective emotional response (i.e. weeping with sadness or jumping for joy) and Hanslick's cold analytic awareness of form. As Pratt says, aesthetic emotion is emotional perception softened and relegated more to the intellect, such that "the spectator of tragedy *comprehends* the emotional circumstance but is not himself infected by it." We'll come back to this idea later.

Finishing up with Langer, she also offers some helpful guidelines in defining the differences between craft-work and fine art. In contrast to John Dewey's supposition, Langer says that we may appreciate quality craftsmanship and handiwork for the skill required in making it, and for its pleasing aesthetic design which elevates it from mere utilitarian function. But that what distinguishes such work from fine art is really a matter of the *underlying expressive intention*:

A work of art expresses a conception of life, emotion and inward reality. But it is neither a confessional nor a frozen tantrum; it is a developed metaphor, a non-discursive symbol that articulates what is verbally ineffable. The ways we are moved by art are as varied as the interplay of light and shade in a forest: they may intersect, take shape and dissolve, conflict, explode into passion, or be transfigured.

After reading Langer, I find Leonard B. Meyer (1918-2007) an irritating chore. Stylistically, he writes like that most boring professor you always dreaded in college. Yet, he is considered one of the most influential musical theorists in the second half of the twentieth century. The thrust of his thinking concerns the interplay of *expectation* and *manifestation*. As example, consider the following excerpt from the C-minor Fugue of Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier:



He argues that what defines great art is that “A-ha” moment of delight when we realize the clever interplay of expectation and manifestation. In this case, one could easily anticipate that the B-flat to C in the soprano line is going to be a continuation of the imitative sequence of the previous two measures. But alas, the actual manifestation is that Bach has cleverly made an elision of ideas, such that the modulating sequence comes to an end and now we have a reappearance of the actual fugal-thematic motive. In practical experience, most listeners, even trained musicians, don’t listen like that. When most of us, other than Schenker or Meyer, listen to this fugue, we let the bouncing play of imitative and strict contrapuntal writing form a sort of ongoing dialogue, and are not caught off guard when we are fooled by the switch up from sequence to fugal iteration. Come on! Far more important than such silliness is the manner of the articulation, the degree of metric emphasis, the tempo, or even the expression on the musician’s face, than matters of compositional craft. We’ll get to this subject in depth later, because it is very important.

Meyer also uses the false concept of “Probability of Progressions” to bolster his arguments for expectation and manifestation. Through statistical analysis he ranks various possible harmonic progressions in terms of which provide the most, or least, amount of resolution, and how this may be utilized by composers for harmonic prolongation and release. The cadence I-V-I, for example, is very self-contained, and because of various complex psycho-acoustic factors, seems more satisfying, and hence is used more often than say a I-III-I cadence. Meyer also goes on at length about the “Laws of Continuation” and harmonic movement. But as regards all of this theoretical minutia, nobody listens to a Beethoven Sonata with an ear toward harmonic movement, or to what degree it follows the “Probability of Progressions.” Again, I say that articulation, phrasing, meter, harmonic color – all of these are concepts which are much more pertinent to how we perceive, and react to, music.

So much for Meyer the theorist. Now, Meyer the musical philosopher is another matter. After developing his theories of aesthetics in the 1950’s he began to take a more reflective view of music and in particular the effects of modern atonal and aleatory music which did not fit neatly into his theory of expectation and manifestation. There are many points that he brings up that are worth pondering. I don’t recommend everybody run out and get a copy of the book, because the writing style is just as dense as before, to the point that I found I couldn’t go more than a few pages at a time without putting the book down and absorbing all the meanings and implications of what I read. So, for your benefit, I’ve culled some of the best gems of wisdom so you won’t have to slog through the book yourself. ☺

One of the most important concepts to understand is that great art is goal-oriented, or *teleological*, as Meyer puts it. There is a sense of purposeful progression toward some sort of resolution. In a novel, there is a setting, a premise for action, and various characters acting out in situations within this framework which then works toward some end point of resolution. Even if the novel is a cliff-hanger, or has an ending open to interpretation, there has still been a logical sense of progression along the way that has guided the reader. Even difficult works, such as those by James Joyce, still follow certain laws of action and reaction. With painting, there is usually a central point of interest, or in some cases, merely the direction of very subtle brush strokes which lead the eye to an area of focus. These same principles apply to great music, whether Haydn, Wagner or Messiaen. Aleatory music, such as that of Stockhausen or Cage, uses purely random sounds and rhythms, or even silence, to assiduously avoid any sense of

direction. Some interesting 'sounds' or combinations of sounds may result, but the effect is like I felt the first time I wandered St. Mark's square in Venice during Carnival: all the masks, the sounds of laughter and feigned crying, dwarfs, people on stilts, people spinning, people dancing with flowing scarfs, in other words a veritable *mélange* of chaos. For me, as a non-participating observer outside of the "flow" of hysteria, my senses were overwhelmed, occasionally piqued or irritated, but in the end certainly not edified. Truth be told (party pooper that I am), I would have preferred to stay home and listen to a Beethoven string quartet.

This idea of music taking us someplace (either inward and Zen-like, or outward and transcendent) is what all great art has in common. This sense of forward direction is why I rail against performers who noodle with the line or dawdle excessively to the point of undermining this very sense of direction. So the concept is important not just in composing, but also in the re-creative interpretation from the performer. This goal-oriented concept is what led Meyer to develop his famous theory of expectation and manifestation, which I maintain is a faulty premise. However, in his later books he offers some other ideas which make more sense to me. These ideas also bolster and help further clarify some of my own positions which I have written about, in particular *empathetic connectivity*.

Meyer describes how the stochastic process of music serves to make the several stimuli of events mutually relevant to one another and how this is vital in achieving that sense of goal-oriented progression. Here is a paraphrased summary of his four-page explanation:

Imagine we hear a song which begins with the lyrics "She is as tall." When the singer first formulates the "sh" of the word "she" in mere milliseconds our minds are already actively anticipating what the word will be. Might it be Sheep? Shiva? Shiver? or ... then we hear that the word is "she." Okay, now we have a person and a gender. If the "sh" of "she" had turned out to be "Shvin," then our minds would have been momentarily snagged by an unknown word. But, now we have "She is as tall as." Our minds are already wondering, as tall as what or whom? The musical lyrics continue to unfold: "She is as tall as blue." Huh? This goes against all expectations of syntax and progression. Then the full line is revealed: "She is as tall as blue lilacs are."

Now here's the crux of the argument: If the line had been "She is as tall as Bill," the comparison is complete and doesn't elicit in the listener's mind the need for further clarification. The statement is also simple and unambiguous. And such is not the stuff of great art. But "She is as tall as blue lilacs are" is sufficient to follow the laws of logical form, but also piques our interest about the underlying meaning of the comparison.

In this case, the comparison is probably not that lilacs stand 3 feet tall, and therefore she stands at three feet, but more likely that they are a tall and showy plant which stand out in most gardens. The standing tall also conveys pride or self-confidence. In any case, the lyrics have followed the laws of grammatical structure but have also presented the listener with certain ambiguities which may then be further developed.

Bernstein also talks about ambiguity in his Harvard lectures and points to deletions of syntax as a primary tool for creating this sense of ambiguity. For example, a simple statement such as "Cats eat bats" may be immediately flipped to "Bats eat cats" leaving the listener to wonder which is it between these opposites. Or we may have Eat cats bats? Which is stated poetically and is both ambiguous and open-ended. In this sense Bernstein considers music as 'transformed poetry.'

The greater the work of art, the more complexly it weaves these various layers of ambiguity and resolution. If the music is too simple it can seem banal, formulaic and predictable. The very nature of ambiguity in great works of art also allow for various interpretations to nuance each performance. No

matter how vigorously or unenthusiastically one sings “Happy Birthday” there is simply no layered complexity about it. This is why we find repeated hearings of Beethoven’s Ode to Joy more edifying.

Meyer also describes three primary aspects of composition: *Sensuous*, *Associative-Characterizing* and *Syntactical*. These are then further sub-divided into three modalities of processing according to the individual psychological dispositions of the listener: *Formalist*, *Kinetic*, and *Referential*. Obviously, some abbreviation is required here or this could become a mini-essay in its own right.

Meyer compares the sensuous compositional style of Debussy’s *Afternoon of a Faun* to the syntactical compositional style of Beethoven’s Ninth, and asks how we could proclaim one superior to the other when both are, in fact, near-perfect examples of their respective archetypes. How can you compare Baked Alaska with Prime Rib? The answer, at first, would seem to be that neither archetype is superior to the other, but it would depend on the quality of crafting involved in each individual composition. In other words, if the Prime rib is a day-old warm-up served with a scoop of simple mashed potatoes, versus a rum-flambéed baked Alaska, then we’d say the latter demonstrates superior culinary skill. However, if the prime rib is freshly sliced and served with savory truffled risotto and peak-season Nurenburger white asparagus, then we might give the nod to the prime rib dinner as the more complete and satisfying experience. In any case, Meyer says that our entire line of thinking in this direction is misleading. So back up the rabbit hole.

Before he lets us off the hook, squirming for an answer, he gives us another comparison, this time between two of the same archetype: Debussy versus Delius. Both were sensualists of the highest order, but why is Debussy universally held in higher regard? His answer is that Debussy is superior because of its syntactical organization, not because its sensuousness is superior. My answer would be that while Delius was obviously a sensualist, his harmonic colors were simpler, and his use of orchestration somewhat less imaginative, such that the listener’s sense of discovery of the unexpected is much less than with Debussy.

Meyer’s answer to the Beethoven versus Debussy question is that Beethoven is superior, and not just because Beethoven offers us music on all three of the primary compositional elements (hence more complexity of layers), whereas Debussy gives us two layers (albeit with utmost mastery), but that most crucially of all Beethoven has the higher order of syntactical processing. Irrespective of the individual listener’s primary mode of processing, Meyer avers that the value of music as an artistic expression must be evaluated syntactically.

Syntax involves all the intricate and subtle interconnections between musical events, whether simultaneous or successive, which in a complex work gives the listener considerable resistance and uncertainty, more associative meanings and informational references, and thereby creates greater artistic value. But complexity and internal associations have their limits on what may be processed by the listener. “If a work is so complex that the musical events eclipse one another... or become dissipated in the course of overelaborate deviations, then meanings will be lost as relationships become obscure.” This is, of course, the big problem with Boulez and many other austere modernists.

Of keen interest to me was how Meyer tackles the problem of comparing miniature gems such as Chopin Preludes versus a complex symphonic work. He posits the following: “We evaluate not only the amount of information in a work but also the relationship between ‘input’ and the actual informational ‘output.’ **When we compare the ratio of musical means invested to the informational income produced by this investment, those works are judged good which yield a high return.**” By this methodology he says that a simple song by Schubert may indeed have higher artistic value than a complex but overwrought work such as Richard Strauss’s *Don Quixote*.

I say that great music makes us aware of experiential orders beyond mere syntactical approbation. Meyers also addresses this issue of what he calls “profound wonderment” and “the mystery of existence.” Here is a nugget worth pondering:

Suffering may lead to a higher level of consciousness and a more sensitive, realistic awareness of the nature and meaning of existence. All self-discovery is in the last analysis more or less painful. The wonder of great art is this: that through it we can approach this highest level of consciousness and understand without paying the painful price exacted in real life and without risking the dissolution of the self which real suffering might bring.

Now we get to the three listener types: Formalist, Kinetic, or Referential. The Formalists understand music based on such factors as symmetry, balance, and perfection of proportion. To them, as Meyers puts it: “music is mobile architecture.” These are the type of listeners that I refer to as the Ansel Adams types, with a keen ear for balance and the overall arch of a work, but whose black and white world is less receptive to color, sensuality or idiosyncratic expression. The Kinetic type of listener, such as Langer, hears music as a dynamic or fluid process. “Understanding and enjoyment depend upon the perception of and response to attributes such as tension and repose, instability and stability, and ambiguity and clarity. Because music is seen as a developing process, this viewpoint tends to be prospective, dramatic, and Faustian.”

The Referential position (held by many composers and performing musicians) holds that

Music depicts or evokes the concepts, actions, and passions of ‘real’ extra-musical experience. This referential mode focuses attention not primarily upon the evolving, changing aspect of music, but upon the more or less constant, enduring moods and connotations delineated by tempo, timbre, dynamics, accentuation, and other attributes of music that themselves tend to be relatively stable for considerable periods of time.

Whichever type of listener you are, Meyer makes the following observation regarding the benefit of repeated listening:

Because listening to music is a complex art involving sensitivity of apprehension, intellect, and memory, many of the implications of an event are missed on first hearing. For to comprehend the implications of a musical event fully, it is necessary to understand the event itself clearly and to remember it accurately. Hence it is only after we come to know and remember the basic, axiomatic events of a work—its motives, themes, and so on—that we begin to appreciate the richness of their implications. It is partly for these reasons that a good piece of music can be reheard and that, at least at first, enjoyment increases with familiarity.

As an extension of this idea, and a topic I will explore further later, I believe that an understanding of basic hermeneutic expressions allow a listener to grasp the latent meanings of musical gestures even upon first hearing a new piece of music. However, such an ability may be derived only with extensive listening experience.

Psychological Perceptions

Now that we have breezed through a sort of Cliff's Notes of three millennia of thought on music as a phenomenon, we can now proceed to explore the issue of how and why individuals develop very specific preferences in the type of music they like and dislike. I looked long and hard at various defining methodologies: the Four Classic Temperaments, Enneagram types, Briggs-Meyers types, Buck's Habitual Conation theories, and many others. However, none were easily and directly transferrable to music experience, at least as I wish to discuss it. For example, the Four Classic Temperaments: If we assign all rhythmic and energetic music to the ambitious, leader-like Choleric, all the introspective music to the creative-sensitive Melancholic, all the happy and pleasing music to the pleasure-seeking Sanguine, and leave the sonic wall-paper of Satie to the quietly indifferent Phlegmatic, then how do you describe a work like Beethoven's Ninth, and which listener it is most likely to appeal to? True, there is not much about it that I would describe as Phlegmatic, but as for the others, it has them all in abundance.

Before espousing my own theories, let's first get a helpful and solid foundation on musical psychology from Carl Seashore, who in 1938 wrote the seminal work, *Psychology of Music*, which is now available as a Dover reprint.

The first thing that Seashore says is that it isn't important to understand all the complex theories of music in order to enjoy music. Seashore says that "The lover of flowers may derive deep pleasure from flowers through his senses without knowledge or thought of the physics or chemistry of their structure." To that I'd also make the analogy that the person who enjoys wine from a purely hedonistic capacity doesn't need to understand Geosmin, Pyroxene or Brettanomyces in order to know whether they like a wine or not. Minor bacteriological imperfections are going to be of interest only to the buyer or collector of wine who needs to anticipate how the wines might develop with aging.

The person who simply enjoys (or not) what they hear on the classical radio station is not likely to be reading this essay. The purpose of this entire undertaking is to try and explain why people have different preferences, not to just give a dismissive shrug and say "to each his own" which is at the root of the rampant relativism which undercuts and undervalues true artistic merit. In this regard, the internet has proven to be a vicious double-edged sword: freedom of dissemination to share insight, but also as a soapbox to spout off unbalanced viewpoints.

The next thing Seashore establishes at the outset is that there are four main trunks in the family tree of musical psychology. Listeners will tend to dwell on one or the other aspect by innate preference. Even the greatest artists and performers will favor a dominance of one of the four trunk lines, though they tend to have developed a better overall balance, or what Seashore calls "symmetrical branching" of the four characteristics. They are:

- **Tonal:** Melody, harmony, relative setting of pitch (tonality)
- **Dynamic:** Dynamic stress and contrasts between soft and loud dynamic levels
- **Temporal:** Rhythm, meter and tempo
- **Qualitative:** Peculiarly sensitive to timbre and harmonic color

"What a person shall like or dislike depends upon the degree of aptitude, sensitivity and comprehension that he has for the **tonal, dynamic, temporal, and qualitative** aspects of music."

My own default is largely for Qualitative, and this was clearly manifest as a youngster of 3 or 4 years of age when I used to pester the church organist to play all the different sounds of the pipes (the actual music didn't interest me). My weakest link, or the one that comes last when I'm perfecting a piece for

performance is the **Temporal** aspect (specifically tempo relationships in large-scale works). The Italian opera lover would clearly fall into the Tonal-dominant category and be able to talk all day long about the different pitch modulation (vibrato) of all the great singers. Drummers, and athletic persons, would likely fall into the Temporal-dynamic category.

Here's an example of how this plays out when I conduct my comparative surveys. Although the focus of this website is piano and keyboard music, I do listen to other music between surveys in order to clear my mind, and cleanse the palate, so to speak. In such cases I usually go for music that is highly contrasted from what I just completed, in this case the Bach Goldbergs, and also from what I will set upon next, which was to be the Beethoven Concerti. So by random selection, and since I hadn't heard the piece in a couple of years, I pulled out Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony. The CD performance I selected didn't seem to hit the spot in the famous Andante cantabile, so, being who I am, I set up a brief mini-survey of Andante cantabiles to try and divine what seemed to be missing. After quickly cueing up the movement in all the CDs I have in my collection, I then went to my online streaming source and listened to those. In all, I listened to 19 versions.

Although the range of timings seemed extreme, from a slow of 16:28 for the lugubrious Bernstein, to a fast of 10:08 for Lande and the St. Petersburg Sym. Orch., the matter of tempo one way or the other didn't seem to be the decisive factor in which performances I favored. Somewhat more important to me than overall tempo was the manner of rubato in the solo horn part, where, in the version with Stokowski, with the star soloist, Alan Civil, who showed good expressive range, but had a persistent tendency to elongate phrase endings which made the line limp along and drag to the finish line. Also of some issue was the balance that the conductor (or recording engineers) favored, in some cases with the clarinet line obscuring the more important horn part. But, the really decisive factor for me was that the lamenting and melancholy mood of the famous melody, as delivered by the French horn, should not be too despondent or even catatonic as it was in some versions, but demonstrate a fuller expressive range even to the point of anguished outcry. In many of the versions I heard, the conductors seem to reign-in the expressive range of the soloist, thereby flattening the natural, expressive arch of the melody. In point of fact, I only liked four of the renditions I sampled, one of them being the Bernstein, which despite its extreme approach was nevertheless very communicative. This was because balances were correct and he gave the horn player sufficient dynamic range to convey the natural expressive arch of the line.

Bottom line, for this particular movement, it was neither the tonal nor temporal aspects which provided the defining characteristic, but to a certain degree the qualitative element, and to the greatest extent the dynamic contour which made a performance most effective. That the focus of my search turned out to be dynamic is neither arbitrary nor a result of my innate musical tendencies (which are more qualitative), but rather due to the fact that this movement has neither a strong rhythmic or harmonic profile (thereby eliminating the tonal and temporal dominants), somewhat minor (non-thematic) issues concerning the balance of orchestral color (my qualitative mode), and really because that leaves the spotlight of our attention only on the dynamic contour (expressive range) of the slowly evolving, doleful melody.

But getting back to Seashore, he brings up a very important point about the difference between performer's and listener's perceptions; how and why passive listeners hear and respond to music in a manner that is sometimes different from that of the musician engaged in the act of re-creative performance.

According to Seashore, what distinguishes the musician from the typical listener is that he hears the music in his mind's ear, imagining permutations of rhythm, tone, harmony and articulation of phrasing,

and plays out variables and combinations of emphasis in his head until reaching a satisfying conception of how the music will be rendered. "...the most outstanding mark of the musical mind is auditory imagery, the capacity to hear music in recall, and to supplement the actual physical sounds in musical hearing." And: "The significance of auditory imagery is perhaps best recognized through its analogy to the visual imagery of the sculptor and the painter. A sculptor who has no good visual imagery is a mere mechanic, modeling by measurement."

I know from personal experience that I can spend a whole day mentally playing various articulations in my head, at different tempos, until the music seems to yield a specific characterization that flows organically. However, what I hear in my head may not be so easy to extract from the mechanical beast, and this is why artists rile against instruments that are out of regulation, or which have a particular voicing that is not conducive to the type of music being played (that will be a separate essay).

Again in Seashore's words:

This imagery is so fully at his command that he can build the most complex musical structures and hear and feel all the effects of every detailed element before he has written down a note or sounded it out by voice or instrument. This capacity, more than kinesthetic or physiological responsiveness, is what distinguishes the finest musicians.

By kinesthetic and physiological he is referring to the matter of technical mastery of the instrument, or the degree to which physical strength and endurance play into the performer's musical renditions. The same can be said of figure-skaters: some may be able to pull off amazing quadruple turns or death-defying back flips but otherwise have no sense of timing, grace or fluidity of motion. In music performance, the casual crowds may be wowed by the flamboyance of Lang Lang, but more experienced listeners cringe at the disconnect between exaggerated gesture and the underlying structure and organic flow of the music.

Seashore also points to a sad reality that I have borne witness to over and again: "Many individuals employed in the business of music actually have no developed imagined life or concrete musical imagination. Even though they be engaged in the practice of music, their musical life is quite devoid of the genuine musical experience."

Seashore briefly mentions that those who have the power of vivid imagery may be sub-divided into five archetypes—sensuous, intellectual, sentimental, impulsive, and motor—which each tend to approach expressive nuance from their unique perspectives. However, one disappointing aspect of the book is that he doesn't give but a few paragraphs of elaboration on this point. But that is because the book is really a selective and condensed version of much more detailed studies which were published in the musical and psychological journals of the 20's and 30's. I haven't taken it upon myself to dig that deeply into obscure, dusty-old publications in some library archive. As you will see, I have taken up this idea and made up my own three sub-divisions which I will soon discuss.

The first topic I'd like to tackle is the distinction between how performers and listeners experience music. One might think that an introvert listener and introvert performer would share the same preferences in their listening habits, but the performer's processing of the music is greatly affected by physical and environmental conditions. A young and physically fit virtuoso, having just had a cup of coffee, will dissipate a good deal of residual energy through the re-creative performance process, whereas an older performer with less physical energy will have a very different base-line from which the interpretive and performance realizations emerge. Comparisons of Claudio Arrau's recordings from the late 20's and 30's until the 80's shows a remarkable transformation of interpretive approach based in

large part on decreased physical stamina as he grew older. Not that one way is better than the other, but the way we process the world around us is very much determined by the amount of physical energy we have. I know from personal experience that during periods of recovery after a major surgery, the slower level of metabolism profoundly affected the way I interacted with people and situational circumstances as I got out and around.

As I see it, beyond temporary conditions (elation, physical illness, etc.) the whole tactile-musical interface of the performer will be determined by three innate characteristics:

- Physical
- Emotional
- Intellectual

I agree with Seashore that most successful artists will have a blend of various characteristics, but that, usually, one aspect will be dominant over the others. Certain types of compositions also bring out one aspect over another, but almost never to the point of complete exclusion. As the musical pedagogue Percy Buck once said: “There is plenty to ‘*understand*’ in Chopin, and plenty to ‘*feel*’ in a Bach fugue; but the ratio is different.” These ratios affect everything from tempo, macro vs. micro inflection, musical and stylistic preferences and even choice of piano.

While most of us have days where we feel more energetic, or more reflective, more optimistic or more cynical, the basic manner of how we process stimuli around us is fairly consistent. Some of this stems from our physical stance in the world (dominating leadership type, or the supplicant follower type), some of it from our level of patience (quick to act, or slow and deliberative), and much of it also stems from our basic pragmatic worldview. Let’s take each of these concepts in turn.

A person’s physical stance in the world will, in fact, greatly influence their worldview and the decisiveness of their actions within it. A person who is a natural leader, or a physically commanding person who goes unchallenged in life, will likely be happy to keep things pretty much the way they are. In most cases, these are individuals who are quick to respond and quick to take charge. Of course, there are exceptions, and this is what makes for truly exceptional people. Think of Al Gore: a tall and commanding physical presence, a natural born leader, but also with a reflective capacity and empathetic concern for others. It is this fine balance of the reflective aspect which gives him a more measured response in leadership capacities. It is also why he is not easily taken over by frivolity or spontaneity, and why some perceived him as being stolid and inexpressive. For a more socially expressive personality you would have to recall some of the antics of Bill Clinton. On the other side, think of John McCain with his military background, or Mitt Romney with his experience as a CEO, or even Margaret Thatcher and her “Tough Love,” all of whom demonstrate a more “take charge” energy than Ron Paul with his quiet demeanor and background as a doctor concerned with the well-being of others.

The relative level of confidence and decisiveness in the world also impacts the person’s comfort level when faced with long and focused tasks which require a great deal of patience. Of course, with self-imposed discipline, some of these natural tendencies may be counterbalanced. But I’m quite sure the natural-born CEO would not be the type of person to undertake the massive comparative surveys I’ve undertaken, or indeed, to ponder psychological preference profiles of classical music enthusiasts. Such a person is less tolerant of performances that might disrupt the equanimity of their immersive experience, and they typically have a degree of emotional reserve that makes them uncomfortable with overt emotional drama in music. In other words, such a person may enjoy classical music as a sort of alternative meditational experience, like a good swim in the pool, or a long drive in the country to “clear

the mind,” and would most likely respond to the ending of Mahler’s Resurrection Symphony with a sense of exhilaration or enthrallment rather than emotional catharsis or a teary eye.

The particular worldview a person has greatly influences what they perceive as right or wrong within that framework. Probably the most cogent exegesis I’ve read on this subject was Thomas Sowell’s book *A Conflict of Visions* in which he focuses primarily on political idealism and how it stems from a person’s particular vision of how the world should be ordered. When I use the term “pragmatic worldview” I mean the distinction between a satisfied, status quo, conservative worldview and a more liberal viewpoint with its ever-questioning attitude and experimental openness to change. A good indicator of this is to ask the simple question: How do you envision the world to look in fifty years? The conservative person may say that technological advances will help simplify our tasks and improve health conditions while the appearances of normal day-to-day life will look very much the same: suburbs and cities much as they are today, the role of personal transportation much the same, the foundations of economic security and private property the same, religious and political parties much the same. The more liberal person might entertain fanciful notions of utopian ideals with Roddenberry-like marvels of technology and societal evolution which would literally transform the very look of how we live and work and entertain ourselves. In essence, are we more comfortable inhabiting the world of *Leave it to Beaver*, or *Star Trek*?

From a musical point of view, a conservative person will be bothered by performances which veer too much in the direction of quirky idiosyncrasy. This type of listener prefers to have just the straight facts, and eschews any “fiddling” or “highlighting” of the text; they don’t want to experience the performer’s joys or sorrows, but have the music laid out unadorned so that they may divine their own response to its message. Such a person is not likely to enjoy the highly individual approaches of Glenn Gould or Olli Mustonen, yet perversely, they may enjoy Liberace or Lang Lang in small doses and write it off as comedic entertainment!

A liberal person would likely be challenged and captivated by the unorthodox creative expressions of Gould or Mustonen. This is a listener who is energized by the human connection and derives added enthusiasm through a vicarious experience shared with the performer. However, such a person might also become easily bored and disengaged if a performance is too literal, predictive or “mainstream.” Many listeners develop a cult following around certain musicians of outsized personality, enjoying performances that manifest this imposition of will (personality, charisma) upon the music even if the particulars of the musical realization are questionable.

Obviously there is a range of responses between these extremes. An open-minded listener may enjoy the energetic input of the performer, and highlighting of certain textural details may yield a new perspective to a familiar classic, yet they may draw the line at any perceived self-indulgence or self-aggrandizing disregard for the spirit of the music. A conservative listener may also appreciate subtle distinctions in performance—a slight shift in voice-leading here, or more forward impetus there—sufficient to keep the music fresh and enhance the listening experience.

Performers come in all kinds of personalities: some wear the simple, unadorned frock of the monk (Richard Goode), others wear bright colors and jewel-studded glasses (Elton John), and a few really crazies are like the Emperor who wore the robe spun of invisible gold (Pogorelic). My job as a critic is to recognize that some listeners may prefer the simpler attire, others the more flamboyant, but to weigh the argument closer to what the composer’s intentions were, and in any case to decry the musically depraved who wear no clothes at all. To delve more deeply into the reasons why I so adamantly oppose the idea of “to each his own” subjectivity, please refer to my separate essay: [**The Relevance of Criticism.**](#)

To help separate and define the perceptive inclinations of each listener I've provided sub-divisions and clarifications to the three over-arching categories I mentioned before:

Physical:

- The perceived energy level of tempo and metric contour
- Micro, meso or macro inflection of dynamics and articulation.
- Overall level and threshold of tactile physicality.

Emotional:

- The perceived degree of connectivity and empathetic connection
- Range of expressive/dramatic gesture
- Gestalt of acoustic space (intimate/connected or diffuse/apart)

Intellectual:

- The balance of interior phrasing and external structure.
- Voice leading and balance of musical textures
- Cohesion of physical and emotional elements of the whole

As an example of how these aspects of performance play out in the real world, I'll compare the quite different performance styles of Andras Schiff and Murray Perahia. I've attended concerts by both, and have all of their various recordings, and can say that I enjoy the musicianship and performance perspectives of both. But I also recognize that I have a more innate sympathy with Mr. Schiff's manner of playing. Knowing exactly what it is that accounts for this preference also allows me to see what it is that other listeners may prefer in Perahia's performance. It's like comparing apples and oranges, and unless the composer's intention are crystal clear and beyond dispute in calling for one or another style of performance, I consider both equally valid musical expressions. Even some otherwise perceptive music critics tend to forget this, and certainly on the internet and YouTube entire rants or raves are based on listener bias.

I was recently undertaking a survey of all the recordings of Brahms Handel Variations, and as I had just finished my survey of the Goldberg Variations I recognized the same manner of performance by Schiff and Perahia in both works. In reading reviews by major music magazines and newspapers I saw the same issues played out over and over again where the critic would side with one or the other, and even call into comparison other recordings that are clearly rendered in one style or the other. So this is a big issue that is not very well understood.

Let's take a closer look at the real distinctions which differentiate Schiff from Perahia. Don't assume that when I say "more" it means "better" or when I say "less" it means "worse" because—assuming both are rendered to the highest professional standards—it all depends on the listener's preference which version will provide the most enjoyment. In either work, Bach or Brahms, Schiff is characterized by a great deal of micro-dynamic inflection (I'd say about a "9" on a 1-10 scale), whereas Perahia is much more macro-dynamic (about a "3" on the same scale). What this means is that within individual phrases Schiff will impart a lot of sculpting of the dynamic contour, with lots of characteristics "digs" (like an emphatic bowing on a violin or cello) and always maintains a clear metric profile. Perahia tends to stay within a proscribed dynamic level for an entire 8 or 16 measure phrase, or perhaps with a subtle upward and downward arch, and rarely uses barlines as a signpost for dynamic division of the line.

So why would one listener prefer one style over the other? Refer back to my descriptions of conservative and liberal listeners. The conservative listener does not like textural highlighting, voice-leading, or to feel “goosed” by sudden moments of metric emphasis. Schiff does all three: he actively seeks to differentiate textures (thereby adding complexity), he weaves the emphasis of voices and chordal balances (again to achieve more complexity) and he imparts a sense of joyful swing to the line through metric impulse. Perahia does none of that. Perahia takes pride in uniformity of touch (itself a feat of instrumental mastery), avoidance of metric division to lend inner logic to long lines, and he almost always maintains a steady manner of articulation, almost always preferring the legato over the staccato or detached.

A liberal listener will find that Schiff more actively imparts a sense of energy, and they experience a sense of vicarious enthusiasm. The conservative listener will be irked by Schiff’s continual external promptings into the music, and thus spoil the unperturbed equanimity of the longer, more over-arching mood of the work as a whole. The manner of touch (articulation) also plays a big role in how listeners respond to different pianists. Schiff seeks variety of articulation, but as a general tendency prefers the staccato or non-legato touch whenever it provides clarity of texture in a line. Perahia almost always prefers a smooth, cultivated tone. Staccato touch and metric accents convey a sense of greater energy, whereas minimal metric distinction and a long-lined legato touch convey a smoother, less energetic disposition.

Although our own moods and energy levels change even within the course of a single day, I find that that **most listeners prefer the style of rendering which most clearly mirrors their own innate psychological character**. Some listeners will identify more with the energetic (higher metabolism) style of Schiff, others may be more comfortable with the suave and cultivated approach of Perahia.

Finally, before leaving the section on personal psychology, two topics of recent research involve Affective Attunement, and the idea of Safe Zones. We’ll get to Affective Attunement in the section of Empathetic Connectivity, but to look at the idea of Safe Zones we’ll return to the neurological observations of Levitin.

Most of us have preconceived ideas of what kind of situations we would feel comfortable in and which we wouldn’t. Oftentimes we create “safe zones,” and the opposite, “exclusionary zones” which directly influence the manner in which we look at the world. In musical terms, this translates into strong biases. Levitin talks about the intimate bond we have with composers, how we allow them to control our emotions, and how we accord them a deep level of trust by bringing them into our living rooms and bedrooms when nobody else is around. He talks about how music moves in tandem with the trust and vulnerability of our souls:

Wagner has always disturbed me profoundly, and not just his music, but also the idea of listening to it. I feel reluctant to give into the seduction of music created by so disturbed a mind and so dangerous (or impenetrably hard) a heart as his, for fear that I might develop some of the same ugly thoughts. When I listen to the music of a great composer I feel that I am, in some sense, becoming one with him, or letting a part of him inside me. I also find this disturbing with popular music, because surely some of the purveyors of pop are crude, sexist, racists, or all three.

Now, I believe this aptly characterizes and explains some odd behavior that I’ve witnessed, and I’ll share that story in a moment. But on a personal level, his confession prompted me to consider how this association of personality might affect my own willingness to embrace or reject certain kinds of music. In music that I don’t like, I find that that I use this very same ‘excuse’ about vicarious morality. I often

rile against Bob Marley and Rastafarian music, asking how anybody would find it edifying to be serenaded by a person whose marijuana-induced state flattens normal emotional response and stunts normal levels of intelligence. That's just not my vision of the direction humanity needs to take. I also react negatively to Hip Hop music for the reasons of overt sexism and self-destructive lifestyle.

I often recall an incident that I experienced when rap music was first coming out back in 1992. I was shopping at a large department store in Munich, Germany, and heard over the storewide music system this rhythmic, rhyming sing-song, obviously performed by a black-American musician, and noticed that all the clerks behind the counters (mostly older 50 and 60 year old women) were bobbing their heads back and forth to the music. So I stopped to listen to the lyrics and was absolutely stunned by the vulgarity of it which bragged of sodomizing dominance over a woman during her time of the month. Obviously these clerks had no idea as to the exact meaning of the music they were bopping along to. Now, I'm not so puritanical as to allow that some people may enjoy this kind raw, sexual dominance in the privacy of their own homes, but there is a time and place for everything.

The Munich incident was probably the most extreme example I've ever encountered of music (and mostly the explicit lyrics) inappropriate for a public forum. But I also took issue with Joshua Bell playing Bach in the subway and how he bemoaned that people wouldn't stop to listen to great art even when it was given for free. Similarly, I wouldn't care to hear intense Wagnerian opera if I've popped into a convenience store for something. Great art requires an environment conducive to immersion, contemplation and edification. And Muzak, if we must have it, should be of an innocuous and non-polarizing character; Mozart's *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* would be a step in the right direction.

But the point I wish to make is that in the case of Jamaican Reggae or Urban Hip Hop, I don't even need to know what the lyrics are about, I just don't like the music. In the case of Reggae, I find it saps my metabolism, while, for me, even the slowest Brucknerian Adagio has a sense of *Spannung* (internal tension) which seems to lift me to a more elevated state. In the case of Hip-Hop, it sounds like a giant ghetto pissing match: who can be the loudest and most vulgar and be the baddest in bragging about it. Where's the contrasting reflection? I guess in terms of popular music, I find the more reflective aspects of ballads more approachable. Something like the Beatles *Eleanor Rigby*. Therefore, in describing the types of music I dislike, it is often easier to fall back on associative stereotypes, or this sense of vicariously imposed morality.

But to ask which I find more distasteful—the simplistic music, or the lifestyle espoused—it would be the lifestyle choice that I more emphatically and philosophically reject. If Reggae music were set to words by Mother Theresa and the low metabolism beat was intended to convey a prayer-like sense of humility and service, I suppose I'd have a little more tolerance for it. As for Hip-Hop, I'm not sure the music could be separated from the lyrics and lifestyle message; imagine the room-rattling bass and the exaggerated enunciation trying to rouse a positive community spirit: "we're going to build a bridge to a betta' tomorrow, boom-boom, you heard me boys and girls, boom-boom, a betta' bridge, oh, yeah." I don't see it happening.

On the other hand, for music that I do like, I can find ways of justifying or coping with these conflicting external issues of morality or sexual orientation which may be quite the opposite of my own sense of identity. There are aspects of the lifestyles of composers (Chopin and Berlioz), painters (Picasso and Gauguin), or writers (Hemingway and Wilde) that bother me. And yes, among all composers, I find Wagner's lifestyle one of the most abhorrent, and not just for the obvious anti-Semitism, but also for how he abused relationships, and for his cowardly behavior in running away from all the problems he started. I can't even look at a portrait of him and not have an immediate gut-level negative reaction.

Yet, I find his music utterly compelling, and my own list of Top Twenty favorites features two of his works.

When I listen to Wagner I do not associate myself with any grand Romantic-era Teutonic supremacy, and for this reason I'm not as fond of the Ring cycle which is deeply infused with these highly allegorical Germanic heroes. Instead, I favor the musical adaptations of others stories and legends: *Tristan und Isolde* (an old Celtic myth), *Meistersinger* (a tale of medieval minstrels), *Tannhauser* (sensual temptation versus virtuous nobility), and *Parsifal* (a story of Knights and the Holy Grail). In any case, it is the music which I find utterly beguiling: the expressive chromaticism, the masterly ambiguity and prolonging of resolution, the weaving of layered tapestries of sound and motivic permutation. Even Debussy had this to say about Parsifal: "Incomparable and bewildering, splendid and powerful; one of the loveliest monuments of sound ever raised to the serene glory of music." As with Debussy, I find this sumptuous sound-world much more layered and evocative than the simplistic and reactionary "anti-art" music of Satie.

But returning to Levitin and his description of how we create 'safe zones' which allow us to open up to music's fullest communicative power. This perfectly explained for me the perplexing behavior I observed in an individual some years ago. Back in the mid-nineties I managed the classical section of a large record store (remember those?), and I made a habit of observing the browsing and buying habits of customers. Oftentimes, I would establish a rapport with repeat customers, and many lasting friendships or professional associations were the result. The perplexing case involved an unmarried male in his late forties, who was a highly-successful business owner who spent all his extra time and money on his hobby of classical music and hi-fi sound. The first time I noticed some quirky behavior I was right in the middle of enthusiastically recommending a certain recording when he wandered off and started browsing in a nearby bin, oblivious to anything I was saying. Finally, I just let him direct the conversation, and I began to understand by his levels of enthusiasm just what his real interests were.

It turns out he had no concern with which recordings I thought were the best (he also disdained all of the critical review publications), but was single-mindedly focused on new releases by female artists. If I started talking about a recording by a male artist he walked away and pretended to be absorbed in browsing rather than tell me directly what was going on in his head. Occasionally he'd buy recordings with male conductors but only if there was a female soloist. It wasn't because he was homophobic, because we had a gay clerk on staff whom this customer interacted with and took recommendations from. No, the reason has to do with what Levitin talked about. For this customer, a business owner responsible for the paychecks of some 44 employees, the only time to relax and let his guard down was in his home, and especially in his music room with its wall-to-wall sound system to bathe him in complete euphonic glory. For this lonely man, these female artists were then like surrogate intimates, singing and serenading to his soul, a healing balm to his tough and unsentimental world.

I'm not sure to what degree he was conscious of any of this, but even after we had developed a good rapport, a *mano a mano* level of trust, I saw how perplexing this issue of music and vulnerability to emotional states was for him. When I invited him to attend a concert that my piano trio was giving, he appeared worried and wanted all the details of the music and who was performing. It wasn't until he discovered that the violinist was female that his expression relaxed and he agreed to come to the concert.

This was a case where a music lover had a very specific safe zone which he never ventured from, and his unwillingness to look outside of this safe zone was absolute. As I said before, I find these rigidly imposed exclusionary zones contrary to the concept of great art's primary intentions, namely to open us up to

new perspectives which we do not otherwise find in normal day-to-day life. What a precious gift to throw away with closed-minded attitudes.

Micro versus Macro

One thing that I should clarify sooner rather than later is that when I talk about levels of energy in music performance I don't mean who plays the loudest. For example, I say that Perahia more often plays louder and with a more robust tone than Schiff, but Schiff is clearly the more energetic of the two. In fact, most loud players are decidedly macro-dynamic in approach, in the sense of macro meaning only the big contrasts in dynamic levels, a loud fast movement, or a slow, soft movement. I use micro-dynamic or micro-articulation to mean many small and incisive adjustments, macro means few and very broad applications of change. An example of a performer who has a lot of micro-dynamic energy but also a bigger overall dynamic *projection* than Schiff, would be Martha Argerich.

So, getting back to our three arch-type listeners, the person that responds to physical element of music is likely to prefer more micro-dynamic engagement, more emphasis on meter, and generally prefer faster, more up-beat renderings than slower, more contemplative renderings. The listener responding to the emotional currents of the music may find consistent micro-dynamic emphasis tiring to the senses, or distracting, though the total absence of emphasis at key points may also fail to satisfy. The intellectual element of musical appreciation almost never aligns with the physical element, though it may overlap some aspects of the emotional camp inasmuch as there be an underlying "spiritual" dimension to the music. However, in some cases, as in Schiff's rendering of the Goldbergs, his use of micro-dynamic inflection, and his ability to imbue each line of the counterpoint with its own vitality also satisfies the intellect's need for complexity over simplicity.

Obviously each of these characterizations really requires its own exploratory chapter which is beyond the scope of this present essay. But let's discuss the one distinction which seems to elicit the most impassioned response from different listeners, and that is macro versus micro inflection.

Dynamic inflection conveys a lot about the psychology of the performer. More inflection of articulation, more vigorous accents or staccatos gives a perception of more energy, less inflection conveys a more relaxed, less energetic approach. **Just as we feel more comfortable talking with people who mimic our own body language and energy level in speech, the same also applies in musical preferences.** I've spoken with a lot of concert goers and found that many listeners have no tolerance for nervous energy in performance, whereas others are attracted like magnets to this source of energy.

For example, Alfred Brendel. His overall style I'd characterize as meso, a seemingly happy middle ground between micro and macro renderings. He also seems to have won over a mix of different kinds of listeners, each of whom find something to enjoy in his art: the physical/temporal listeners enjoy the energy he imbues and the sense of giving 100% commitment to his art, the emotional/poetic listeners resonate with the deeper undercurrents which always seem to find the right mood for each work, the intellects appreciate the probity of his musical mind, and the insights he provides especially concerning the integration of transitional materials into the whole. Yet, in concert (or in video productions) many people are bothered by his quirky mannerisms which seem to fuss like a hovering hen over every finessing detail. It is an incessant and restless type of micro-management that conveys a sort of nervous energy that will inevitably bother certain listeners. One thing is for certain: Brendel is not a Zen-zone type of player. In other words, he does not willingly immerse himself into the stream and then let the currents carry him where they will. Brendel is an observer of life, finding its humor, ambiguity, irony, and even its moments of bliss. But the nature of his psychological disposition relegates his experience of life to a more vicarious mode, and this is reflected in his artistic conceptions. Furthermore, once a listener experiences Brendel in a live concert, it is easy to hear these fussy micro-manipulations of the music even on a CD reproduction.

To give you another perspective on micro vs. macro, Donald Ferguson talks about some of the same concepts, though without the term micro vs. macro, in his book *The Elements of Expression in Music*. The specific chapter compares music to poetic meter and inflection in actor's voices or operatic singers, but it applies just as well to any instrumental music. Here is a good quote:

Clear as words are in their definitional meaning, and coherent as the thought may be when embodied in finely ordered syntactical structure, there is required in actual utterance not only syllabic accent which is appropriate to conventional word form, but many types of subtler dynamic and inflectional gradation, indicative of the relative importance of a word in the phrase. This inflection often becomes the effective 'sign', not only of the increment but also of the more fundamental definitional sense. Misinflection, in consequence, may impede or even quite distort our understanding of the very sense of the words.

Before I go on, it is important to understand the underlying psychological implications of each of these styles. Micro dynamic inflection, whether realized by the listener at a conscious level or not, immediately signals more direct input from the performer. More input means purposeful interjections upon the music, more personal interaction with the music, more involvement, more energy, more vigor. Macro dynamic players signal a more relaxed and flowing rendition of the line which can create a Zen-like submersion into the music (without all the needling heard from micro-dynamic players). To me, Zen-like submersion is also a style that requires less focus from the listener, less following of individual details, less attention to the bark on the trees and the ferns in the undergrowth, and more a general appreciation for the size, color and scent of the forest. And that distinction is a very important realization about our own sense of interaction in the world in which we live.

I'm less of a man to be seduced to "oohs and aahs" by the broad expanse of Vermont's rolling hills in Autumn, and more to be transported to a magical state when I'm down walking among the trees, looking up or down, and awed by the array of infinitesimal nuance of shades and textures. Another way of putting it would be that I tend to be a person that enjoys an immersive (experiential) environment, walking in the forest, rather than observing from a distant (non-immersive) perspective. Perahia is more of a Zen-like overview, Schiff is more like walking among the ferns. Although certain creative individuals will always be able to find justifications for their own biases—for example, a fan of Perahia might say that his musical realizations soar above the minutia and reveal a higher level of purity, like an eagle soaring above the Vermont hills, while Schiff is like the rodent scurrying about on the forest floor looking for little bits of fodder—my own view is that when we look at the pros and cons of different methodologies in a fair and balanced manner, one way of perceiving the world cannot be considered better than the other, they are just different.

The purpose of the critic is to realize the type of conception the artist is trying to convey, and if the artist is going for the soaring eagle approach, but seems to have a clipped wing and cannot glide at a steady pace or scrapes the tops of the trees, well, then it is the realization that is flawed, not the conception. But too many critics align themselves with just one type of conception, and often seem to prefer a flawed rendering of such a conception to a masterful rendering of another type of conception. This is something I try to be keenly sensitive to before I make pronouncements or recommendations.

Artistic perspective is all about choices, because no single rendition can encompass all the latent potentialities of the music. Many of the choices are in fact mutually exclusive. This is why I say there can never be an absolute perfect, reference standard in music performance. However, it is also obvious to most astute listeners and critics that certain performances have made better choices along the way and revealed a greater degree of a work's potentiality than a lessor (less successful) rendering by another performer.

Phrasing and Articulation

Having made it thus far into the essay, I needn't belabor the fact that music does indeed evoke certain strong reactions in listeners. Many of the clues we perceive about the character of the music and whether this elicits a passive or emphatic reaction is determined through musical gesture. Gestures may be subtle and almost imperceptible or they may be very dramatic and command immediate attention. Harvard professor, Carroll Pratt (*The Meaning of Music*), discusses the various attributes of musical gestures that are universally conveyed via expression of dynamic energy levels, and the corresponding response from the listener which may be described with words such as "forceful, weak, languid, agitated, restless, calm, excited, quiet, indecisive, graceful, awkward, clumsy, fluent," and so on. Tying in closely with intervallic hermeneutics, he talks about the specific gestures of movement as used in music which are characteristics derived of both interval and intensity, and how such gestures convey responses in listeners which may be described with words such as "rise, fall, ascent, mount, leap, bound, spring, shoot, tower, soar, surge, drop, sink, slide, swoop, tumble, shift, swerve, tremble, quiver, flutter, pulsate, etc." The professor's choice of words shows just how varied responses may be.

Think of a musical phrase like a line of verse in a poem, or a single sentence in prose. A melody or musical theme is usually a catchy group of notes that stands as a unifying aspect of the music as it undergoes various forms of development and expressive nuance. A musical 'gesture' within a longer phrase is like a cluster of words with strong associative meaning, or perhaps even a single word which has a strong triggering response. Gestures may be the equivalent of verbs or nouns or even strong modifiers. Oftentimes they are used to signal a change of direction, which may then be followed by sequential mechanisms (the musical equivalent of 'thinking about it'), or rhetorical mechanisms employed to set up analogies, or opposite and contrasting permutations of the subject matter. In writing, phrases such as '*In other words*', '*I hate to say*', or '*believe it or not*' though imparting no direct meaning to the overall message nevertheless serve to guide us and keep us on the path of proper understanding.

The phrasing of music is therefore like enunciation and emphasis in speech. Without places of emphasis, speech becomes monotonous and inexpressive. Hence the adage "It's not what you say but how you say it." Just as writing evolved in the Middle Ages to gradually acquire the grammatical tools of the comma, period, exclamation and question marks, so too has music evolved (though much later than written language) a very specific range of tools to help guide the delivery and understanding of the communicative intent. Donald Ferguson (*The Elements of Expression in Music*) says "Phrasing is a general mingling of subtle variations in pitch, intensity, color, or rhythm which may give to the musical utterance a strong resemblance to the inflections of speech."

The German musicologist, Hermann Keller, wrote a short guidebook about phrasing and articulation which is easy to digest and has many salient observations. He reminds us straight away that "it is given to language to make specific assertions, whereas music is destined to express indefinite feelings and experiences." In discussing the nature of musical syntax versus expressive inflection, he states that the innate character [*meaning*] of the musical syntax remains fixed and immutable, even if a theme is transposed, or given new tone colors, or subjected to extreme variations in tempo. However, as soon as one starts mixing up points of emphasis or manner of articulation [*expression*], then whole new moods and meanings may be created. In further comparing language and music he has this to say:

The relationship between meaning and expression in music is differently proportioned than it is in language. In language, even in the freest poem, the meaning will always stand in first place; the meaning outlines the contours, the shading is given by the delivery (the expression). In music on the other hand, this situation is often reversed so that the expressive elements (tone color, tempo, dynamics, articulation) affect us more powerfully than does the content of the specific theme.

That is something important to understand, and worth re-reading if you glossed over it the first time. It is something that Meyer never fully grasped. In his book *Explaining Music*, Meyer takes 18 pages to try and prove the validity of a certain phrasing in the theme of Mozart's Sonata in A, K. 331. He warns us right away that "there is invariably a disparity between the speed and ease with which music is experienced and understood, and the length and complexity of the discussion needed to explain why and how it is experienced and understood." Nevertheless, his 18-page analysis is one hell of a rabbit hole to fall down into. His basic premise is that phrasing and metric emphasis should be considered based on the rhythmic patterns of the theme: iambic, anapestic, trochaic, or amphibrach. In the case of the Mozart, the composer did not indicate specific phrasing, so Meyer considers that the long-short trochee patterns [– ~] should place the emphasis on the longer, tenuto note. This goes in opposition to some of the older editions of the music (such as we find in the Peters Edition) which phrase the music quite differently. I believe both phrasings are incorrect.

The traditional phrasing (Peters) actually sounds more flowing and natural if all you consider are those first eight measures. If Mozart had written an upbeat to the first measure, this manner of phrasing would be beyond dispute. However, by looking at the subsequent development of the theme in measures 9-16 we see that Mozart assiduously avoids any cross-bar phrasing. The cadence at the end of ms. 15 and downbeat of ms. 16 with its *sf-p* indication strongly suggests a cross-bar slur, but elsewhere in measures 10-12 we see that Mozart consistently places a staccato on the third and sixth beats, which affirms Meyer's theory that cross-bar phrasing is not Mozart's intention.

The problem with Meyer's phrasing is that it sounds quite stiff and unnatural and goes against the flowing nature of the 6/8 meter. By strictly observing the tenuto of the trochee meter the repeated short note then sounds like a disruptive stutter or hiccup. This is certainly not the effect you want in a tender *Andante grazioso*.

The only way to make the passage smooth and naturally flowing and to be consistent with the passages that Mozart does provide phrasing for is to play with a *portato* touch (smooth and tapered separation between the long and short), disregarding the long tenuto aspect of a trochee. Glenn Gould attempted something like this, but his articulation was too insensitive, too emphatic with the *pizzicato*, and most listeners remain unconvinced by it. Of course, one way to avoid the problem of phrasing is to just play the whole eight measures legato. As I was writing this I did a cursory sampling of seventeen performances available on my online streaming service, and the only one to even hint at any *portato* phrasing was De Larrocha. The others all played with an undifferentiated legato from beginning to end: Brautigam, Brendel, Eschenbach, Giesecking, Gulda, Jando, Katchen, Kempff, Kraus, Ozawa, Perahia, Pires, Rosenberger, Schiff, and Uchida. Boo! To my ears this is completely unnatural; the music just does not breathe when you pedal and play *legatissimo* for eight measures without coming up for air.

I imagine, instead, a string quartet, with a sweet *mezzo-piano* tone, using gentle and even, up and down bowing:

Andante grazioso Mozart

I urtext *p*

II Old Editions *p*

III Meyers

IV Author's Suggestion

V Modern Performance Practice *dolce e molto legatissimo egualmente*

The problem with Meyers is that even when he is half right, it is for the wrong reasons. Strictly applied musical analysis almost never produces an aesthetically satisfying result. Ignoring phrasing altogether doesn't help either. Hand-in-hand with phrasing and articulation is hermeneutical implication, which we will get to soon enough.

Empathetic Connectivity

An important aspect of the performer-listener interface is a concept I call *empathetic connectivity*. This is a powerful form of communicative connection, such that we are not merely being entertained and observing passively, but are actively drawn into the ongoing sense of drama along with the pianist. In many ways this concept is closely allied with the psycho-therapeutic concept of Affective Attunement, or, as I prefer it, in its more musical sounding Latin: *sinfonia afectiva*. Paraphrasing freely from Richard Erskine's work I would define the concept as when a friend, family member, or therapist—anybody with a sincere and vested interest in your well-being—has a keen perceptive kinesthetic sense in reading your facial clues, breathing patterns, gestures, and hesitations, and can tune-in empathetically to your perspective to a degree where they can actively anticipate what you will say, or even finish your own sentence. This is called a “resonating response” and creates a “safe zone” for the person who may be conveying intimate thoughts or feelings. An important bi-function of this bonding is that so-called “mirror neurons” are activated in our brains (an important ability for infants to learn about the world through mimicking behavior) and this creates a bridge between raw emotional states and the higher functions of the brain. The toddler may be hungry but the activation of all available higher functions of the brain are also observing which types of behavior bring about the most expedient results (getting fed).

Daniel Levitin talks about some of these ideas from a neurological point of view in his book, *This is Your Brain on Music*. I already quoted his thoughts in the preceding section regarding ‘safe zones,’ but corollary to *sinfonia afectiva*—though without the directly kinesthetic one-on-one visual and body clues—he tells us that the reason why we bond with one performer more than another is that we may be picking up on the subtle breathing patterns of the performer, or a crescendo may be more emphatic than expected, or a myriad of other subtle clues that indicates that the performer is fully engaged in the music. Just like having a conversation with somebody who is passionate about something will elevate our blood pressure and put our sensory preceptors on high alert, even though the topic may be regarding something that we are not normally so passionate about.

Remember when I asked how or why one listener would respond more favorably to one pianist's Bach than to another pianist playing the same music? Take just these two aspects of music—dynamic energy and gestures of movement—and consider the performer-listener interface. It is not only the music itself, with whatever innate expressive potentiality is indicated in the score, but the performer who brings the music to life. Not just the music which sparks a reaction, but the manner of the performance which may emphasize one or another aspect, and indeed, the same aspect but to varying degrees by different performers. Remember what we learned from Hermann Keller in the Phrasing and Articulation section, in essence: the expressive elements derived from the performer affect us more powerfully than does the content of the specific theme.

Starting from a basis of Pratt's neutral ‘aesthetic emotion,’ the performer who can direct our responses toward more vivid experiential emotions (joy, sorrow) or conversely, through subtle indications of emotional detachment brings our corresponding level of emotional investment down, can be said to have achieved a greater degree of empathetic connectivity with the listener. The performer who catches the listener in a certain mood and merely maintains that mood may find welcome in the listener's safe zone, but otherwise does not manifest any real degree of empathetic connectivity. The performer who catches us at a high metabolic rate and can still bring us down to a deep pathos, without resistance on our part, even dissolving our external defenses, that is a performer with the power of conviction, and through *emotional directivity*, achieves a powerful *empathetic connectivity*.

In undertaking the massive comparative surveys that I do, I've found that certain performers create a very strong degree of empathetic connectivity, such that the resonance or "after-glow" of the experience may affect me for days. Arrau usually affects me in this way and I cannot go on to listen to any other recordings without bias or criticism compared to Arrau. Such is the power of conviction in Arrau's masterful rendering that it resonates long after the listening session and makes all other approaches seem superfluous. This is not the same thing as saying that his interpretations are the "best" or most "perfect," for there are instances, even under his "spell," where certain indulgences can try my patience. But that's maybe 5% of the total experience, the other 95% is powerful and compelling to the utmost degree. This assumes, of course, that one is really listening and receptive, and not using the recording as background music while doing other activities. So then, let's explore how such a powerful bond might occur.

One aspect of empathetic connectivity concerns the narrative flow of the music, or from a psychological perspective, the dynamic and fluid course of *emotional directivity*. Much of our perception of emotional directivity is at the subliminal level, yet we are always perceptive enough to it that we can feel lapses in our degree of empathetic connectivity. Here I am talking about lapses on the performer's part, not lapses in attention on the listener's part. Such lapses may occur when a performer loses energy and a thought sort of "peters out" before its full realization, or it may occur when there are uncontrolled spikes of energy or adrenalin which distort the relative context of the musical gesture.

When we are fully engaged in conversation with another person, the conversation may take a number of directions and asides, but we are always led along by the body language of the other person to help us navigate any sudden shifts. The intensity of the dialogue (or monologue rant, if that's the case) may ramp up to a fevered pitch, or drop down to a ruminative note of doom and gloom, but we are always right there following the story. Hence, a progression of intensity may be: 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5, or perhaps, the peak is rolled back, 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 3, as if in a moment of self-awareness and expressive "self regulation," or maybe the expressive arch is 1 - 2 - 3 - 2 - 1, or 3 - 2 - 1 - 2 - 3, or any number of variants that have a stepwise progression of intensity that we can anticipate or follow.

In moments where the emotional direction takes a startling turn either upward or downward, we are taken out of the natural discursive flow, out of the experiential level of empathetic connection, and we experience a disconnect with the performer. This isn't to say that some startling contrasts—even jarring juxtapositions—are not often required in certain dramatic pieces, but those moments are recognized as legitimate expressions within the overall context. What I'm talking about are moments when within a single phrase, a singular musical-expressive idea, there is a lapse in the performer's rendering. Now, maybe the piano was out of regulation and a certain note popped out of context beyond the artist's intention, but such instances are rare coming from well-regarded artists playing on top quality instruments in a recording studio. I'm talking about, within the context of an extended half hour piece, such as Liszt's B-minor Sonata, certain tiny lapses in concentration are almost to be expected of any normal human being, yet the really great artists will have fewer such instances. In this regard, of all of the thousands of pianists I've heard in concert, at competitions and on recordings, I've found that Arrau has one of the highest degrees of immersive focus and concentration, and very rarely any lapses.

When we experience a performance that firstly captivates us such that we flow in the same current as the performer, and then when the expressive arch of the work is conveyed with consistent emotional directivity such that there are no momentary lapses in our empathetic connection, these are occasions when we can be deeply moved by a performance and even achieve an elated sense of transcendence through the experience.

Now, here's a further distinction: whether our musical engagement is based on temporal, sub-conscious alignment, or whether the higher functions of the brain are engaged. And here we go back to what I discussed earlier with Levitin's and Laszlo's insights into the neurological aspects of how we perceive music. But at a non-technical level, what I'm talking about is whether we are just tapping our toes and bopping our heads along with the outer contours of the music (mostly the metric pulse) or whether we are truly engaged and following the moment-to-moment emotional current of the music. Some of this depends on the nature of the music, for example, we listen to Bach's Brandenburg Concerti differently than we do to Liszt's B-minor Sonata. And this in itself explains why some listeners prefer certain kinds of music; some are simply uncomfortable letting themselves flow in the immersive currents of emotional music.

I know a talented amateur pianist who only plays Bach and a little Mozart, because he finds emotional drama in music repulsive. At 55 years of age he is also single and never had a serious relationship in his life, despite being otherwise successful in life. Monks and ascetics may live in controlled environments that allow purity of thought and deed without the influence of emotion, but to truly be part of the human (corporeal) experience, one needs to come to terms with emotion.

Somebody listening casually to Arrau's rendering of the Liszt Sonata will be aggravated by how often the outer contours of the music, the metric pulse, is disrupted for expressive purposes. Most music of the romantic era does not serve well for background music because it lacks this subconscious toe-tapping sense of regularity. As Carl Seashore points out in his discussion on rhythmic perception: "All our mental life works rhythmically, that is, by periodic pulsation of effort or achievement. This periodicity is one of nature's contrivances in the interest of conservation of nervous energy." He compares our mental perceptions to a light bulb. He points out that the current which supplies the energy for the light bulb is not really a steady state direct current, but actually fluctuates in on-off pulses at the rate of about sixty cycles per second. If the current is maintained at a steady pace, we have the perception of steady illumination. The same concept holds true for motion pictures and frames-per-second, or even with digital sampling. Obviously the higher the rate of saturation upon our senses the less chance there is for any residual artifice to be perceived (hence the whole oversampling theory).

Rhythm and metric pulse are a potent component of musical expression, and as Seashore says, even "children sense the rhythm of poetry before they do the meaning." As Seashore points out, the brain looks for ways to segment and categorize experience, such that in music, our minds can be less vigilant when the music is ready-segmented into metric units that come at a steady rate. This in turn results in what is known as secondary passive attention which is a more "economical and efficient form of attention than voluntary attention." Furthermore, once a pattern is grasped, the brain relaxes, figuring its work of decoding is done. And again, according to Seashore, "pronounced rhythm brings on a feeling of elation which not infrequently results in a mild form of ecstasy or loss of consciousness of the environment." This no doubt explains the popularity of Raver gatherings and the use of ecstasy in the underground popular music scene.

But all this to say that when we are fully engaged (not passively engaged), when flowing in the stream with Arrau, all of his grand *rallentandos* and heavy agogics are the only conceivable way to resolve the great amounts of tension that he builds up. Arrau often talked of "harmonic tension" and the only way to dissipate this inner intensity is to fill our musical lungs with oxygen.

After the concepts of energy (micro or macro) and passive or active engagement, another often overlooked aspect of music performance is articulation. Perhaps the easiest way to define articulation would be to say that it is the manner in which phrases and musical-thematic ideas are rendered, either

smoothly with legato touch, or distinctly with staccato or non-legato touch. Of course, metric accents can also help define the perceived characterization of the musical-expressive idea.

A Semiotic Aside

Structural and semiotic analysts also find many little rabbit holes for us to fall into. The writings I'm most familiar with are those by Heinrich Schenker, Leonard Ratner, and Eero Tarasti, but there are dozens more. Semiotic theory seeks to explain the narrative capacity of music (how it guides both our rational and emotional responses) through the use of innate symbolisms and gestural-thematic allegory. Ratner points out that listeners in Mozart's time would have recognized certain figurations and musical gestures as representing particular aspects of real life, for example, the hunting horn signal, or the graceful bow and curtsy of the Galant manner. But, firstly, many of these associative symbols have disappeared from our collective-societal language, and secondly, even back then, such references were recognized more along the lines of an "insider's joke" or a clever use of pun, not for any deeply satisfying sense of aesthetic pleasure.

This manner of musical analysis starts with some basic and universal concepts that make sense. For example, the chaos and despair segment of Liszt's Dante Sonata is portrayed in musical terms with turbulent chromatic and minor-mode textures in the lower region of the bass, whereas the hope segment is set in the upper treble with pianissimo tremolos in the major key. The idea is that musically, bass = dark and murky, treble = bright and luminous. Even most casual listeners would say that the dark and murky and turbulent section would more closely represent the concept of Hell, and the shimmering and hovering pianissimo tremolos would more closely bring to mind a concept of Heaven in the imagination of the listener. Such concepts would be consistent (universal) for a majority of listeners. Semiotics merely attempts to put forth a system of clearly defined terms and concepts which then proves by inter-relations exactly why it is that we perceive these universal representations as we do.

The problem, as I see it, is that the further you sub-divide all the various components, and then devise formulas and conceptual axioms that support the argument, you begin to paint yourself into a corner that then does not begin to address why different interpretations of the same music can have such a profoundly different affect upon the listener. I maintain that the truth of the music is only manifest by the particular inflections of the interpretive performance.

To the semiotician the truth is the score. Just as Reinhold Niebuhr argued that the written word of God is actually the Spirit of the Trinity, entire essays have been devoted to debate between the printed score and actual performance, and which really defines what music is. As a preface to a long discussion, professor of philosophy, Robert Martin writes:

The work itself is not any performance or set of performances; this is clear because there can be works that are never performed; it is possible for a person to admire the work without admiring any particular performance or set of performances of it. A musical work is none of the relevant physical objects or acoustic events.

My own experiences in composing have shown that before I ever set a note to paper, I hear the note in my head as if it were a note physically sounded. From everything I've read of the methodology of traditional composers, they all hear music as a physically sounded idea, that is, their mental memory of actual sounds from the physical world. Recall also what Seashore said about the musician's ability to hear sounds in their heads. My view can be very simply stated:

- The score (written notes) = Latent Potentiality
- Performance = Manifest Realization

When Martin writes about a person who admires a score but hasn't heard a performance that he admires, he is talking about somebody who has assessed the music's structure, taken measure of the composer's craft in setting themes to textures and relational movements, and who has sufficiently advanced musical experience to allow him to play through the work mentally in his head to get an idea of its basic potentiality. This person has an idea of what, for him, is the potential of the score, yet he hasn't yet heard a particular performance that reaches this perceived level of potential. I often have such ideas myself when I undertake my comparative surveys, and often during these surveys I will imagine a hypothetically perfect hybrid of characteristics I admire from different performances. All this is a simple fact that the potentiality has not been realized. But the intention, the purpose of music, is to sound forth and be heard.

There are other even more unusual ideas concerning the nature of music. Neurologist Oliver Sacks' book *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain*, talks at length about mnemonic imprinting, and how some consider these mental barbs to be a "living" (as in active) virus. I also discovered that whenever I hum or whistle a tune over and again like a stuck loop, this is actually a mild form of epilepsy. Good to know.

But back to semiotics and the Holy Writ. In discussing one of the early developers of semiotic theory (Ernst Kurth), Eero Tarasti talks about the nature of melody: "The essence of melody does not consist in the succession of tones, but in the transitions between them. Transitions involve motion, and from this it follows that only the motion between tones and one's experience of this motion lead to the true nature of music." This comes very close to some of the ideas I will expand upon in terms of hermeneutic implication (more later). Also latent in the expressive nature of a melodic line is the level of inner tension (*Spannung*) that it conveys. Semiotics then attempts to prove the relative amount of tension or relaxation by ascribing certain kinds of meaning to certain kinds of figurations. And this is where the problems of the theory are borne.

I can hardly offer adequate counterbalance in just a few cursory paragraphs to decades worth of scholarly writing in the field of structural and semiotic analysis, but I'm convinced that the entire approach is seriously limited in both methodology and the conclusions it derives. One of the key aspects of semiotic analysis is that it looks for ways in which music balances itself with its own internal form of grammar with the musical equivalents of nouns, verbs, and prepositions. The structuralists look at the long line (the entire sentence or paragraph), whereas the semiotic analyst breaks down the line into smallest units that are self-contained, which act as the noun, verb or other grammatical function in the narrative.

The field of semiotics is rife with obtuse terms such as epistemic modalities, musical actants, and syntagmatic taxonomy which describe some very contrived and contorted methods of thinking. For example, epistemic modality describes the "being or not being" and the "doing or not doing" of the musical narrative. Here are a few musical examples which show how such thinking works:

An example of 'being' would be the pianissimo tremolos in the opening of the Bruckner Seventh Symphony which are assessed as a form of existential stasis, that is, alive and 'being' but not with any purposeful will or action.

An example of 'action' would be the first eight measures of the Rondo from Beethoven's *Pathétique* Sonata which works its way upward with a sense of bold purpose and forward propelling motion. In the greater structural context, this theme may be viewed as the characterization of a musical protagonist in the story.

My thinking is that a theory of hermeneutical intervallic implication would much more deftly describe not only latent musical potentiality (the score) but also the real world distinctions that occur through interpretation. For now just a brief note about the hermeneutic theory on motivic symbolism. Bach's use of motivic symbolism—for example the use of slurred descending seconds to represent the Christ figure staggering under the weight of carrying the cross—remains a very powerful form of musico-symbolism even today, and whether we listen to the *Passionsmusik* of Bach, or *La Croix* from Messiaen's *Vingt Regards*, we fully understand the symbolism which arouses in us a deep emotional empathy. This type of associative meaning falls into the category of hermeneutical implication based on intervallic progressions and articulation, whereas semiotic analysis would look for thematic “actorants” and “deferred resolution.” I'll be discussing this in more detail later.

Hermeneutical Implication

Hermeneutics is any theory of understanding which attempts to explain meanings of texts or notations. It is usually associated with philosophy or Talmudic studies, but is also a branch of semiotic music theory. As I use it, Intervallic Hermeneutics would probably be the proper term, because my focus is on the innate expressive tendencies (or implications) of each interval. I have so far written about an 80-page piece on Hermeneutic Implication, a bit short for a book, but too involved to distill adequately within this essay, so I'm not sure what will come of it unless I can somehow reduce it to a more manageable length like the present essay.

To summarize in the simplest terms possible: each interval, say an upward major second, will tend to convey a similar feeling in a broad range of melodic and declamatory contexts, and this consistently so irrespective of whether the music is an aria by Handel, a declamatory section of the Liszt Sonata, or even something atonal by Schoenberg. Furthermore, the type of articulation employed to render the upward major second—legato, staccato, with or without accent on the first note or the second, and the degree of emphasis of the accent—all these variables really do tend to have a consistent musical-expressive character no matter the type of music. I talk about this at length in the interpretive analysis section in my survey of the Brahms D-minor Concerto.

In Meyer's sprawling book of musical analysis, *Explaining Music*, hermeneutical implication is not mentioned once. The topic is obliquely referenced in a one-sentence dismissal of Donald Ferguson's *Music as Metaphor*, which was a seminal work attempting to explain the basis for characterization in music. Instead there is a chapter on intervallic gaps and gap-fill (a leap from C to A suggests the missing F as part of the overall harmonic outline) and "typology of compositional gesture" which states that in essence any melodic leaps or intervals larger than a third leave the listener expecting that the "gap" will then be filled (his expectation and manifestation theory again). Firstly, a gap implies that something is missing, and this certainly does not categorically describe the use of large intervals. Now, it is true, that on a purely statistical level, going back through centuries of music, most gaps are indeed filled in, especially those that outline a point of harmony. However, such usage has hardly been *de rigueur* in the last 150 years. The obvious question which Meyer never addresses is: if a "gap" then why a perfect fourth? or major sixth? or minor seventh? And, no, not because a leap to a seventh will leave the listener expecting a quick resolution to the nearby octave. ***What expressive purpose (implications) do these intervals have?***

This natural tendency of intervals to convey a certain implied expressive base can be very clear in intention or more subliminal depending on the degree of emphasis, and of course, each musical gesture or thematic cell in turn refined in character by association with what happens before or after it. Taken alone, upward intervals tend to portray a sense of striving, or lifting of the spirit, just as a physical gesture of open palms and upward motion of the arms indicates a question, or desire for explanation, or in speech where an upward gesture indicates an interrogative inflection. These upward gestures also indicate hope, optimism, surprise, or affirmation.

The opposite in terms of rhetorical inflection or physical motion is the downward gesture which indicates a closed statement, doubt, pessimism, negation or acquiescence. In musical terms, descending intervals tend to portray a sense of resignation, or dampening of the spirit.

When you then add minor or major coloration to these physical gestures, and then degrees of emphasis, we can then narrow the range of probable associative implications. Thus, the open harmonies of fourths and fifths in upward motion tend to convey transcendence, or spiritual purity and in descending motion

remoteness, existential emptiness or self-reflection. Major thirds and sixths tend to convey optimism of spirit, inward nobility or self-affirmation. The greater the intensity of emphasis, the more emphatic or resolved the point being made, such that emphatic major intervals become statements of conviction or heroic resolve. Minor thirds and sixths convey a sense of loss, sorrow, or melancholy, with the corresponding emphatic being dissolution of spirit, despair, or tragedy.

Meyer does give brief mention to a concept he called “ethetic experience” which he describes thusly: “The ethos of a musical event will often suggest some aspect of the extramusical world. The musical event is felt to be sad or joyful, restrained or exuberant, calm or agitated, and the like.” These impressions may even be more specific, such as “a summer evening’s calm, or the gaiety and bustle of a social gathering.” He also talks about effects imitative of nature, such as birdcall, wind, or thunder.

In talking about the “wistful regret” which seems to be implied in the opening chords of Beethoven’s *Les Adieux* Sonata, Meyers concedes that diverse interpretive effects might greatly affect the “ethos” of the music, and alter the bedrock of his thematic analysis: “Ethos is the result of a combination of factors. Register and sonority, tempo and dynamics are obviously crucial. Had the same pitch-time relationships been presented in a higher register, at a fast tempo, and with forte dynamics, the character would have been very different.”

So while he suspects other issues are at play, he never considers that the three descending melodic notes in combination with the “quietly consoling” harmonic intervals produces the net result of what we experience as “wistful regret.” This is what hermeneutic implication helps to clarify.

Bernstein also seems to miss an essential element of musical meaning when he spends the better part of an entire lecture on describing Mozart’s G-minor Symphony in terms of the struggle between chromaticism and diatonicism. It makes for fascinating reading because his analysis is masterful, but in my opinion hermeneutic implication tells us all we need to know in the first two measures. Much like Meyer, Bernstein sees much of music in terms of ambiguity and resolution. Bernstein overall makes the far more persuasive case by comparing musical techniques with literary and linguistic techniques. Thus, as in poetry or prose, antithesis, alliteration, contrast, or anaphoric litany can become powerful structural elements binding together a work into a cohesive whole. Deletions of such elements when expected also provide the needed sense of ambiguity to keep the music from being banal and formulaic. He also demonstrates the purpose of diatonic tonality as providing a sense of foundation and security so that we always know where home (the tonic key) is at. Chromaticism is then the freedom of expression which can add some spice to the routine. In *Tristan und Isolde*, Wagner took this chromatic ambiguity to new levels, almost leaving us entirely without a rudder to find our way home. For Bernstein this progression toward ever increasing phonological and syntactic ambiguity led the way toward the point of total tonal dissolution in the Twentieth Century.

Obviously, all of what Bernstein says is quite correct and fascinating to study. But as for the first few measures of Mozart, we have three elements which immediately convey the spirit of the work: the unambiguous minor key already puts us in a certain mood, the constant repeating figurations in the accompaniment convey a sense of restless agitation, or trepidation, and the hermeneutic implications of the intervals used completes the pictures with the emotional turbulence of the fretful repeating minor seconds (sigh motive = burden, disappointment, worry) and the upward beseeching ‘why me?’ minor sixths. All of Bernstein’s linguistic formulas, ambiguities and deletions, make the music interesting as it unfolds, but the mood and meaning of the work are completely determined by hermeneutic implication. The fact that these intervallic implications have almost universal interpretation among listeners, and yet

are hardly ever recognized and discussed in music appreciation classes, demonstrates just how far off the mark we've been in explaining the expressive capacity of music.

Obviously, the subject will need much more thorough and systematic explanation, but this is the basic gist of the theory. It is by such a framework of musical understanding that I can hear a work completely new to me and derive not only great understanding of its expressive implications, but also perceive any disconnect with the performer who may be placing the *em-Phas-is* on the wrong *syl-Lab-le*.

And here it is, the real revelation, the real purpose and motivation for writing this essay which answers the question I posed earlier: Why would one person prefer one performer's Bach (or Brahms or Bruckner) and yet find another performer's rendering of the same work irritating? The answer: Hermeneutic Implication. By that I mean the innate expressive implications of each interval in combination with the manner of articulation (the degree of emphasis) rendered by the performer. This is why the expressive realization of a score cannot be determined by looking at the dots and squiggles. Just as any dramatic script can be substantially altered in character by the manner of its delivery, the same is true of a musical performance.

Before we ever make ourselves vulnerable to empathetic connectivity, we very quickly align ourselves—or go on guard against—the type of energy that the performer is conveying. Let's say we've equalized every variable except articulation. We have two performances of the same music, both recorded in the same acoustic space, on the same piano, tuned in the exact same manner, using the same over-sampled audiophile recording equipment, the performer being of the preferred gender or national background (so there are no psychological or sociological conflicts), and every other issue we've explored that can account for perceived differences in music. The music is the c-minor fugue from Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier, Book One (the one with Meyer's Ah-ha moment). One rendering is done with legato phrasing and minimal metric delineation; the other is done with emphatic slurs (contrasting legato and staccato touch). Both are ornamented sparingly, and in the same exact manner, and both tempi are identical to the second. Yet listeners will have very strong preferences one way or the other, and comments posted on YouTube will be of all manner of extremes. And all this is due to articulation. And the difference in articulation is itself due to the performer's interpretation of the hermeneutical implication of the music.

Why? As I said before, staccato touch always conveys more innate energy than legato which simply sounds forth. Metric emphasis also conveys more energy. Some listeners like to feel energized by music, others to look upon the music with composure and serenity. And always in the back of the mind, usually buried deep behind unknown strata of subliminal neural connections, is the hermeneutic profile. A vigorously ascending second conveys a very different psychology than a smooth and unassuming ascending second. Listeners are most comfortable when gestures and musical implications in music mimic their own worldview, and their physical stance in the world.

I listened afresh to Wagner's *Parsifal* after a hiatus of some twenty years of not hearing it and listened to the amazing utilization of hermeneutic expression. Just listen to the opening sequence: it ascends and ascends and you know it can't keep going upward, but how to turn the melody back downward without losing the euphoria and the sense of striving? Wagner achieves a sort of landing on the stairway which gives a sense of self-affirmation and inner nobility of spirit. I happen to have only two recordings on hand in my collection, Solti and Barenboim, but I made a point of going to my online streaming service and listening to several other versions, and even in these first few minutes of the *Vorspiel* you get a different feeling from each based on which intervals the conductor places dynamic emphasis, or subtle applications of tenuto. I happen to like the immersive effect that Solti achieves, with an underlying intensity that grabs me right away and never lets go. Solti emphasizes the inner drive of purposeful

conviction, while Barenboim conveys more of Amfortas' world-weary resignation, both of which are valid perspectives. Of course, once the singers enter, then there is the potential that their individual inflection may conflict with the subliminal hermeneutic interpretations of the conductor. Such was the case with conductor Valerie Gergiev and bass René Pape (as Gurnemanz) where Gergiev's phrases cycle upward and close back in again and the singers phrases move linearly toward more plusive and projected closure, the two effects being quite different psychologically. I prefer a more inward reflection (self-closure of phrases) as rendered by singers such as Gottlob Frick or Franz Crass.

Before I really knew about hermeneutical theory, or had formulated my own theories about it, I had an instinctual inclination toward "intervallic expression." During my junior year in college I began expanding my horizons in terms of Twentieth Century composers. I had already been a fan of Messiaen and performed some of his works, but now I began to look at Busoni, Rorem, Creston and other mostly American composers, and I played a few of those pieces at juries or student recitals. However, the single most taxing piece I ever tried to tackle was Milton Babbitt's atonal and serial-composed Piano Piece II from Three Compositions (1957) which I played for a jury evaluation in order to meet my modern composers requirements. Given that there is no defined metric element, rhythmic patterns, harmonic progressions, or melodic threads to grab hold of, I attempted to interpret the entire piece with hermeneutic expression. In this case, every upward fifth, every descending minor second, every vigorous upward tritone, every subdued descending tritone, every descending chromatic pattern (buried within complex serial rotation), each of these intervallic gestures had their own innate expressive meaning, which I tried to convey with the same emotional intensity of say, the Liszt Sonata. The concentration required for something so abstract and unnatural, and the sheer intensity of imbuing each gesture with its maximum expression (in order to get my point across), well it was far more taxing than playing the Liszt Sonata or Beethoven *Hammerklavier*. For a relatively short and physically undemanding piece, I felt utterly exhausted and had to lay down on a bench in the hallway afterward. Years later I heard a recording of the work and found the rendition utter doo-doo (pardon the technical jargon) because it attempted no expression at all. Might as well have been programmed by a computer. Of course, in some regards that is what many of the composers such as Babbitt were after: to remove emotion and implied meaning from music.

Boulez always talked about "motivic anonymity" and the quest to find musical gestures that wouldn't stick or draw attention to themselves. T.S. Eliot, a poet I enjoy, once made the baffling statement that "Poetry is not turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not an expression of personality, but an escape from personality." In this sense I think he might mean that poetry may be a conduit by which we can lose our sense of self, that by becoming "lost" in a work of art, be it poetry or music, we temporarily leave behind our own emotional issues and sense of interaction in the real world (our manifest personality). Irrespective of the intentions of Babbitt, Boulez and Eliot, there is no question that hermeneutic expression can be a powerful interpretive tool. There is also no question that for all music that is goal-oriented, be it a Renaissance motet by de Victoria, or an Elegy by Busoni, proper understanding of hermeneutical implications is absolutely necessary in order to plumb the deepest depths of meaning latent in the music. Performances that skim over this meaning, apply meanings with mixed expression, or send subliminally conflicting messages by shaping gestures in an unnatural fashion, these are the very issues which audiences and critics pick up on, inflections that however subtle, create a disconnect between the performer and listener. Those performers who express the natural meanings of hermeneutic gestures (intervals + articulation) seem to communicate more effectively with a majority of listeners.

As I was looking through my shelves of books for material pertinent to this essay I found an old library-discard that I finally got around to reading. It is a book by composer, teacher and writer, Erich Sorantin,

entitled *The Problem of Musical Expression*. His motivation in writing the book was to try and settle the old debate between Wagner and Hanslick. Wagner, of course, believed that music could express very specific moods and emotions, whereas Hanslick (the prominent music critic of his day) believed that music had no other associative tendencies and, in essence, “has no other content than itself.”

Sorantin took several elemental emotional states—Lamentation, Joy, Longing, and Love—and purposely and systematically looked for musical examples that were known to convey these feelings and emotions. There are as many as 47 musical examples given for each topic, plus more in the abbreviated section at the end which briefly explores a dozen or so other emotional or associative concepts. In every case, there is a commonality of gesture and—guess what—use of specific intervals to convey certain feelings. Obviously, he was preaching to the choir here, because I didn’t find anything that I disagreed with, and I think he pretty thoroughly eviscerated any of Hanslick’s formalist arguments. Since this book is so old, I may very well undertake a further exploration of these ideas, updated with musical examples that were not so well known when the book was written in 1932 (there are no examples from Ravel, Bartok, Shostakovich, Messiaen, all of whom are rich with associative musical works). This may very well give me the second part for my book on intervallic hermeneutics.

Here are a few samples of Sorantin’s findings:

Lamentation: descending minor second (in the form of a slurred appoggiatura), ascending minor sixth, minor key, frequent dissonance on the strong beat (“psychic conflict”), and often with deep tones or tremolos in the low register which render a fearful or foreboding sense. Some examples: Liszt’s *Funerailles*, inner voices of the Adagio from Moonlight Sonata, Bach C-sharp minor fugue, Wagner’s Parsifal (*Lamentation of Amfortas*), Bach Matthäus-Passion (aria *Erbarme Dich*), etc.

Joy: major key, almost exclusively diatonic (no coloring accidentals), prominent use of the perfect fourth (“affirmation of the will”), confident rhythm, articulation or phrasing with lightness or lift (not heavy). Examples: Beethoven’s Ode to Joy, Finale of Mendelssohn Violin Concerto, Bizet’s *Carmen* end of Act II.

Longing: There are two aspects of Longing, one of which is hopeful in attaining the desired object, the other where attainment seems hopeless and hence with tragic undertones. In either case, the interval of the seventh is very conspicuous, the resolution to the nearby octave consonance conveying optimism, re-direction away from the resolution signifying inability to achieve the goal. Major key harmony more hopeful (frequent use of the dominant seventh), minor key harmony further dampening the spirit, often with elements similar to lamentation. Examples of tragic longing: Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*, Chopin G-minor Ballade. Examples of hopeful longing: Wagner *Fliegende Holländer* Act II:6, Beethoven *Fidelio* Act I:2.

Love: major key, many aspects similar to joy, but often with tender or confiding intimacy, often with the “*dolciata*” hugging gesture (slow melodic turn which encircles itself with upper and lower tones). Example: Schumann Piano Concerto, A-major section of first movement. One example given which I might quibble with semantically is Bach’s Sarabande from the B-flat Partita, in which I’d characterize the mood as one of contentment, rather than love. But then again, contentment may be viewed as a form of self-love, or love of life.

Music as Transformed Poetry

Re-reading Bernstein's Norton Lectures and the books by Donald Ferguson reinforced for me the aptness of considering music as transformed poetry. One of Ferguson's key concepts is that music doesn't intend to describe the circumstances which bring about agony or delight, it deals only with the end "meaning-resultant" of those circumstances. As he puts it in *The Elements of Expression in Music*:

Filled with some high excitement, 'bursting' as we say, with emotion, we are seldom articulate. It means only that we have no words in which to delineate our feeling. So we gesticulate and squirm and scowl, and behold, those to whom we address these most inartistic ebullitions understand us much better than if we try reason about our feeling.

Of all the arts music is the most capable of producing these meaning-resultants of life's experiences. Also, unlike the other arts, with music we cannot ascribe to the subject matter any specific representational meaning. Hermeneutical implication is about as close as we get, and in many cases that is enough to generate a surprising universal interpretation of meaning or at least mood.

Another key concept is that form and aesthetic emotion fuse together into an utterly new element which we call sense of beauty. This sense of beauty needn't be a weepy sentimental romantic work, or sensually euphoric Impressionistic work, we may respond equally well to this sense in even the most pure and absolute music of Bach. Formal structure and feeling (hermeneutical implications) together create aesthetic beauty which arouses a stronger and more multi-layered reaction in the listener than either form or feeling by itself.

When I talked earlier of knowing/perceiving the meaning of Mozart's G-minor Symphony in the first few measures it is true that the meaning was clearly articulated by hermeneutical implication of the minor key, the agitated figurations of the accompaniment, and the types of minor intervals used for the melodic theme, and this would have been true even if the overall structure/form of the work were unimaginative or even banal. Bernstein was right in acknowledging that the varied structural tools (alliterations, ambiguities, deletions, etc.) 'keep our interest' while the cumulative effect of the meaning saturates deeper and deeper into our psyche. So, yes, I was right that the meaning is clear at the very onset; he was right that the greater meaning occurs when the music is allowed to seep deeper into multiple levels of our perception.

Ferguson reminds us that in poetry form (structure) and content (meaning) are easier to discern than in music which remains elusive and obscure. In poetry we can readily recognize formal modalities, and "the poetic content, residing partly in the definitional meanings of the words, is to that extent unmistakable." Let's look at a stanza from a famous poem by Tennyson, *Tears, Idle Tears*:

Ah, sad and strange as in dark summer dawns
The earliest pipe of half-awaken'd birds
To dying ears, when unto dying eyes
The casement slowly grows a glimmering square;
So sad, so strange, the days that are no more.

To illustrate the importance of form, Ferguson offers us a transformed version of the poem set to a more prose-like form:

Like the days that are no more, to dying ears the half-awaken'd birds' earliest pipe in dark summer dawns is strange and sad while slowly the casement grows a glimmering square to dying eyes.

Although the wording is almost identical and hence the definition of the words should impart the same meaning of content, the prose form runs so conversationally smoothly to tempo that the deeper aesthetic beauty is lost. The poem makes us stop and ponder, the prose we can read right past with minimal impact. The use of deletion in the original, and juxtaposition of strong and weak phonic elements makes us pause a bit longer and dwell more deeply on the implied meanings. To recapture the same artistic intent in prose, to convey the same communicative power, one would need to abandon quasi-poetic deletions and contractions, and the semantic allegories, and the overall length would increase. Here is my own free re-working which attempts to put the artistic intention into prose form:

Out of dark summer night I hear the faint call of sleepy birds announcing another new dawn. Another new day for the living, while for me the cycle draws to a close, dwindling and fading. I neither desire to leave nor to stay, but lay here indifferent, too tired for melancholy rumination. No memories, no dreams, just now. Outside, out there, apart, the new day grows brighter and more confident until the window frame glows with vibrant light against the darkness of the room. A portal? A passageway to the next life? Does it draw closer? Where are the sounds of birds now? A strange and eerie silence descends. Where is the song, the sad song of life?

I think we can all agree that neither Fergusons' nor my own re-workings have the same succinct, gripping, thought-provoking power of the original. Firstly, Tennyson achieves the same or even greater sense of rueful loss, while keeping the specific imagery more ambiguous and open to interpretation by the reader/listener. Secondly, the evocative power of the phrase 'sad and strange' and the more emphatic 'so sad, so strange' as the singular conceptual repetition of poem seems to be a critical missing element in both the prose re-workings. In any case, much more can be communicated with less material when both content and form are happily united. Let's not forget Meyer's maxim on input versus output: "When we compare the ratio of musical means invested to the informational outcome produced by this investment, those works are judged good which yield a high return."

Ferguson's own analysis of the poem yields further insights: "If so much or so little can be conveyed by different arrangements of the same words, it is evident that not only aesthetic interest but also a great wealth of meaning must itself either reside in or depend upon form." Regarding the prose version: "A considerable part of the original meaning still remains—that part which resided in the words as definitional symbols, as well as a fraction of that which was conveyed by the mere fact of syntax." And regarding specific word choice in the poem: "Strange is not suggestive merely of the unfamiliar, it takes on a sense of foreboding, of dread, of the imminence of catastrophe. It also looms large because of its antithetical position, its alliteration with sad, and its intrinsic heaviness of sound, all of which primarily are facts of form."

As Fergusons says: "It was relatively easy in the stanza to identify a fact of meaning, and to distinguish that from the fact of form. In music, the fact of meaning is so obscure that its definition, in other terms than those of the musical utterance itself, seems almost impossible. The awareness of beauty is neither an awareness of form nor an awareness of meaning, nor even an awareness of form and meaning. It is a response to the accomplished fusion. The sense of beauty is an awareness of form and expression in apparently indivisible union."

Concerning Tennyson's use of formal techniques to enrich definitional meaning: "In every instance, details of form were chosen and applied to the creative purpose, not because they were clever, nor because the sound-sequences and syntactical curve were objectives in themselves, but because these things were suited, as no others among the thousand devices at the command of the poet were suited, to the expression of this idea precisely, and no other. Such technical manipulation is a difficult and absorbing task; so difficult that it often demands the artist's whole store of energy for its mastery."

In concluding his assessment of Tennyson, Ferguson demonstrates through other lesser examples of poetic expression that mere technique and tricks of manipulation are not sufficient to achieve a lasting greatness. Considering the more general application of these principles to include musical composition Ferguson says that "The cradle of genius is in the world of experience, not in the technical laboratory."

In further expounding on this idea of formal and expressive fusion, he contends that Aesthetic Beauty appears to be the compound of two essential factors: our perception of perfect form and an equal perception of expressive content, the form serving to focus and make vivid the expressive content of its various musical gestures. The whole purpose of artistic endeavor is to attempt to awaken in us this latent capacity to appreciate Aesthetic Beauty.

Ferguson relates a story of his having attended a concert where after the slow movement of the Bach Violin Concerto in E, the entire audience sat in rapt silence as if contemplating a revelation. As he pondered the significance of that experience he concludes that: "Aesthetic Beauty creates in us an awareness, sometimes an exalted emotion, to which our only possible reaction is a profound stillness of the spirit."

Considering how mankind delights in the awareness of formal perfection (an area which almost seems to validate Dewey's golf clubs and mixed drinks as art) Ferguson states: "The enjoyment of form thus becomes a very special order of experience—an emotion whose vibration seems to course through every sentient nerve; whose motor response is a stillness even to holding of the breath; whose consummation is the awakening of a vision of perfection."

Goethe once wrote about the problems inherent in art criticism, and came upon three simple questions:

- What has the artist tried to do?
- How has he done it?
- Was it worth doing?

Ferguson would say to the last question that it depends on the manifest expressive significance of the work. Formal perfection by itself or highly charged emotional music with minimal structure may appeal to a limited group of listeners, but where the two are fused so that neither aspect is overt, the power and significance of the expression then has almost universal relevance. Ferguson cites Beethoven as probably having the overall highest percentage of works which fit into this 'highly significant' realm.

Ferguson also takes some time explaining that life without emotional significance is hardly satisfying. He contends that our every activity—our play, our work, our planning and study—all these are not for the activities themselves, but for the 'payoff' that they bring in terms of some emotional satisfaction. Here is a quote worth pondering:

Labor and strife are hardly at all for the sake of the things upon which our effort is expended, but in order that we may feel their significance in the general activity of life. The importance of all experience is measured in terms of its ultimate emotional consequences for us. The evidence of bereavement is grief; the evidence of humor is laughter; the evidence of comprehension is

alertness. Without this evidence, we doubt the significance of the conditions of those experiences. Art, accordingly, when it offers a convincing expression of emotion is justly regarded as a valid summary of the very meaning of experience.

He also reminds us that whenever we have a passion about something, there is a persistent awareness of the object of that feeling. “We cannot just love. We must love something or somebody; and the character of our feeling is largely determined by its object.” However, music is the one art form that circumvents this associative causality and takes us right to the primary state of emotional experience. This is because music arouses internal stimuli of muscular, visceral and neurological agencies which affect emotion. These physiological responses may trigger remarkably vivid states of feeling.

After discussing these broader observations of how music affects us, he then begins to look at the specific methods by which music achieves its potent expressive capability. While Ferguson never talks in specific terms about the idea of unique intervallic implications as we discussed in the previous section, he does thoroughly examine the basic units of expressive and thematic function, including the nature of intervals from multiple perspectives as a way of bolstering his primary thesis (which is that, contrary to the ideas posited by Hanslick and his followers, music does indeed portray rather specific expressive meaning). His take on intervals concerns mostly the jumping from rest-tones to active-tones, or sequences of active-tones avoiding resolution to the rest tone (the tonic or primary triadic tones, 3rd and 5th of the tonic). His argument, exhaustively argued over the course of two dense books explains the push and pull of melodic contour better than Meyer’s *expectation and manifestation theory*, and it also neatly ties in with ideas presented by Bernstein (the naturally occurring harmonic series as the basis for tonality), Sorantin’s investigation of common figural gestures, and my own theory of intervallic implication.

I like Ferguson’s concept of the tonic having gravitation attraction. “The tonic’s gravitational ascendancy over the other notes of the scale enables it to contribute to the sense of tone-stress.” The further we stray from the tonic, he says, the more implied stress and tension we perceive. This is why atonal music seems rudderless, and why I had to resort to interpreting Babbit’s piano piece with strictly intervallic implication. In Ferguson’s words:

The tonic serves as the gravitational attraction to other tones. Every note in a musical sentence is related to the tonic, just as every word in a verbal sentence is related to every other word, and so finally to the verb. We perceive in music a kind of thought-current, and so long as the current flows smoothly in familiar patterns, we perceive that the discourse makes sense.

Melodic line arises from the appearance of tone-successions moving in upward or downward motion. Larger intervals, or ‘leaps’ as musicians call them may indeed imply a corresponding expression of kinesthetic motion, or bodily movement. Harmony “may suggest for the whole musical substance an appearance of three-dimensional mass.” The denser and more complex the harmonies (or implied harmonies from multiple contrapuntal lines) the weightier the music feels. Ferguson has high regard for how Wagner uses density or lightness of texture to express the sense of emotional burden or buoyant spirit, but little regard for Reger’s dense counterpoint, which he considers merely technical craftsmanship. I like both, but of course one appeals to the left brain, the other to the right, though neither exclusively so.

Ferguson distinguishes the expressive tendencies of melody (defined as tone-succession) and harmony (defined as tone-combination) which can either work in concordance with one another or in discordance, the manner in which they combine enhancing or amplifying the expressive implications of each. In either melodic or harmonic application the sense of rest or stress is conveyed chiefly by tone-

relation. “Active melodic tones, harmonized with the harshest discord, and placed in the strongest rhythmic positions, give the extreme of tension. Rest tones, harmonized by pure concord, and without rhythmic emphasis are largely inert.”

He also talks of the value of rhythmic stresses as representative of moments of accent or non-accent in speech or poetry. And just as we already discussed in the preceding section on articulation and phrasing, it is not only the regular metric pulse, or individual note values that define rhythmic energy and inflection, but also the degree of connectivity or separation between those individual events.

Changing dynamic intensity and varied timbre contribute vitality and nervous energy to the depicted movement, giving an impression of heaviness or lightness in the moving melodic stream. General characteristics of melodic curve, such as suavity or angularity, are similarly attributes of motion. From rapidity or slowness with which accents, or articulated notes between accents, succeed each other, we draw a convincing suggestion of speed.

Just as we noted in the analysis of poetry, where form and meaning create a seamless expressive bond, the same is often true of tone-stress (the melodic or harmonic component) and motor suggestion (the rhythmic component). As Ferguson states, both “are simultaneously conveyed and apprehended.”

So far, then, we have the two basic elements of musical expression according to Ferguson: tone-stress and motor suggestion. “To be convincing, the suggestions given by the two expressive elements must be both amplified and sharpened in focus.” Regarding the fine-honing and focusing of the primary expressive elements the most conspicuous attributes would be tone quality, register, tempo rubato, shading, vibrato, and phrasing. These refining or inflectional attributes “may either heighten the elemental symbolism of feeling or enrich the musical utterance in other ways which aid our comprehension of its expressive purpose.” Regardless of the particular inflection or combination of inflections, “**without some distinguishing emphasis musical phrases carry little conviction.**”

Register (whether the music setting is high, singing range, or low) “conveys a general sense of acuteness or gravity.” “There is a potent suggestion, in the analogy of various registers with the four main types of human voices [soprano, alto, tenor bass], implying various hints of masculinity or femininity.”

Tempo rubato incorporates variations in metric regularity in the form of subtle application of accelerando or ritardando. Vibrato (in singing or string instruments, for example) can be fast or slow, wide or narrow, and also fluctuate in dynamic intensity; each of these variables conveying relaxed or intensified inflection.

I’ve already quoted Ferguson’s take on micro versus macro energy in the preceding section, but here is what he has to say about the value of tone quality. “Tone color may be both prescribed by the composer and, in finer detail discriminatingly chosen by the performer. In orchestral writing particularly, color is prescribed by the composer’s choice of desired instruments for the utterance of the expressive idea. The peculiar vividness of a culminant musical tension might be weakened or lost if not conveyed with appropriate tone color.”

Furthermore: “The orchestra palette embraces as many shades as that of the painter, and it would be folly to ignore the purely aesthetic interest of finely discriminated judgment in the application of this resource.”

With the composer putting together the basic expressive elements of tone-stress and motor-suggestion, and the performer further enhancing these innate characteristics through the discriminating application

of touch, tone, and tempo, it still falls upon each individual listener the exact musical inferences to be derived. As Ferguson puts it:

Musical inference can be drawn only from the individual's store of experience and imaginative sensibility. That which most appeals to the individual hearer's sensibilities will naturally be most stimulating to his imagination; and with so complex a fabric as that of music, the hearer's absorption with that which is to him most striking may well obliterate from observation other values, equally interesting to another hearer.

The thing is, with a modicum of inferential effort, there can be a surprising degree of uniformity regarding the basic mood of a composition (sad, mad or glad). Once these basic contours are absorbed by the listener through the familiarity of repetition or the experience of hermeneutical understanding, the bigger differences of opinion then become that of the interpretive inflection of a performer. We know first-hand of these often irreconcilable ideas by perusing the heated exchanges on discussion forums and YouTube commentaries. And this is precisely what we discussed earlier with the different psychological profiles of listeners.

Regarding the nature of interpretive inflection, it is clear that some performers convey the proper, elemental (tone-stress and motor suggestion) ideas of the music, while others seem to have the emphasis in all the wrong places, or to send confusing, mixed signals. This is one reason why any significant divergence from performance tradition should be seriously scrutinized. Part of the performer's learning experience must be to absorb the basic expressive implications of Sorantin's common musical gestures, or Ferguson's elements of expression.

Although Sorantin and Ferguson use different terminology, they both convey similar concepts and come to similar conclusions regarding the expressive power of basic, germ-cell, motivic units. Sorantin calls them "common gestural configurations" while Ferguson compares them to the etymological values of word-roots (what we now call root words). Wikipedia defines a root word as the "smallest lexical unit of a word which carries the most significant aspects of semantic content and cannot be reduced into smaller constituents." Examples would be: act, activity, interaction; disrupt, corrupt, rupture; art, artifact, artisan, artistic.

Ferguson takes a chapter to explore this idea that "kindred emotional states are often expressed in kindred musical terms by different composers." He also talks about not just common music phrases but also the meaning of what he calls intervallic meaning-value, which I call hermeneutic implication. Different terminology, but we both agree that these expressive building blocks can be compared to root words. These musical root words are explored in great depth in his book *Music as Metaphor*.

Whether we regard music as transformed poetry (its nearest relative among the arts) or music as metaphor, there is no question that great works of art are imbued with many layers of expressive potential. While basic meanings seem to have near universal apprehension, the degree of emphasis and inflection have a wider range of responses according to the psychological disposition of each listener.

Summary

It has been a long and circuitous voyage through many different disciplines to arrive at a fair answer to our initial question: why would one listener adore one performer's Bach and despise another performer's version of the same music? The purpose of this exploration was never to answer why a listener would prefer Bach over Brubeck, or Mozart over Madonna. The answer to that could have been addressed much more directly with just the section on listener psychology and worldview. Every genre of music, acoustic folk, jazz, pop, classical, avant-garde, whatever it may be, will always have listeners whose general psychology tends toward introvert or extrovert expression, so that is hardly the answer. The answer as to type of music preference stems mostly from innate neurological disposition—kinesthetic, emotional, or analytical—and to a large degree upon worldview.

To re-cap the key points of this discussion, here is a summary of the "Preference Profiles" which I use as a basis for my own reviewing:

Physical. Combines elements of what Seashore describes as the Temporal- and Dynamic-oriented listener. Strong meter, rhythm, energy, and upbeat presentation of the music is the dominant characteristic of this listener.

Emotional. Combines elements of what Seashore describes as the Qualitative- and Tonal listener. This listener is more sensitive to mood and atmosphere (Gestalt) of the work, and also to timbre (tonal color).

Intellectual. The Ansel Adams types who look for perfect balance and find color and sensuality a distraction. Many listeners with a prominently intellectual approach align themselves with the formalist school of analysis, with its emphasis on form, proportion, and minimal inflection or 'distortion' from the performer.

Empathetic Connectivity. When the music finds the listener in a receptive state, and the performer establishes a sense of Affective Attunement, and the listener allows both into their "safe zone," then arising out of a neutral basis in Aesthetic Emotion, the performer can then direct in subtle measures through continued pressure points a more vivid emotional experience, or through subtle indicators of emotional detachment, a more cool emotional climate which focuses our responses to more objective and analytic perception. Performers who can stir responses one way or the other have a higher degree of connectivity.

Hermeneutical Implication. Whether the performer's perspective is physical, emotional, or intellectual, do they convey a convincing understanding of hermeneutical implication and maintain a consistent point of view, or does the accent slip here and there to reveal a disconnect of underlying musical intention?

Gestalt. Do the combined elements of the pianist's articulation, phrasing and pedaling within a given acoustic space give the listener a sense of immediacy, or of more distant remove; a sense of Zen-like oneness and connectivity, or a sense of transcendent expansion of the self? Either perspective may be valid, but I make an attempt to describe one or the other in order to help listeners find performances that may better connect with them.

The answer to the more difficult question, why two people who like the same type of music can have such divergent viewpoints, required a thorough review of all studies that might be germane to the discussion. As it turns out, the answer was not found in any of the subjects typically taught in music

schools; in fact, in perusing the curricula of three well-known music schools, I see that the real answers are either not taught at all, or only reserved for graduate studies. Obviously a complete re-write of curricula is order. I know for a fact that none of the really pertinent issues were discussed in my own schooling (even at a specialized music conservatory), but were found out either on my own, or through books, or from the teachings and role modeling of deep-thinking musical artists.

The answer is, of course, those secondary expressive elements known as performer inflection, and those distinguishing aspects in turn most specifically related to phrasing and articulation, the very enunciation and stress-emphasis of the core musical elements. To fully understand how, when, where, and why to apply suitable articulation emphasis, one must understand Sorantin's musical gestures, Ferguson's etymological root words, and have an intuitive understanding of intervallic hermeneutics. All the other topics—the gravitational pull of the tonic, Bernstein's tonality based on naturally occurring harmonics, Meyer's expectation and manifestation, Langer's fluid dynamics—none of this is really, truly even necessary for the performer to understand. There are plenty of unschooled musicians who can communicate music's essential meanings far better than the studied and stifled attempts of the most learned music professors.

In simplest terms: more than anything derived from the printed score or structure of the work, it is the performer's own inflection which determines why one listener would prefer one performer over another. The two most vivid contrasts in performer perspective would be: a performer actively engaged in the drama, forward and present, as if the story were unfolding at the moment, and energetic to command our attention, or as a passive observer or neutral conduit of the essential elements, more recessed in presentation as if telling a story that has already happened, and with less energetic interjection from the performer. Present tense or past tense, the performer's inflection to the fore or more neutral and recessed. Those are the dividing lines in listener preference.

Obviously, if the performer does his job well enough, the listener certainly doesn't need to understand all the behind-the-scenes details of the music-making process. However, given the current climate of intemperate pronouncement of opinion, often leading to rubicund bellicosity, I hope the present essay has at least instilled some degree of understanding as to why these divergent opinions are just a natural extension of innate psychological differences between people. This doesn't mean that all opinions are equally informed or valid, and that is why there still remains some relevance to art criticism, if for no other reason than to act as referees in a field which obviously has emotions running high.

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