

Introduction

As evidence of a consuming interest in music, why should we trust a facility with words, poetic expression, or sociopolitical comment rather than the methods of music theory and analysis, methods presumably more germane to the matter at hand? In an effort to draw ourselves closer to a musical context and enhance our appreciation accordingly, why should we turn to the former rather than the latter? And why should we judge the former to be warmly human or “humanistic,” the latter coldly “technical,” specialist, or formalistic in its appeal?

No doubt, complaints about the “technical” in music, the separation of its study from experience, have always been current. More specifically, however, the assumptions underlying the above questions stem from today’s New Musicology, and reflect, as I understand them, a new impatience with the specialized knowledge of disciplines such as theory and analysis, the insularity of that knowledge, the difficulty of relating it to other branches of the humanities. Increasingly apparent, too, is the populism inherent in the complaint, although earlier versions appealed to the general public as well, claiming to represent the interests of that public in one way or another. (The latter are always presumed to be served by broader and more general discussion, never by closer engagement with the materials of music and their detail. Such engagement would require greater precision in the application of a method and its terminology, no doubt, but that precision would continue to

rely on an underlying descriptive or metaphorical premise, one open to general understanding and use.) What can no longer be taken for granted, however, is a degree of familiarity with the canon of Western art music (Beethoven's symphonies, for example), indeed, a degree of musical literacy. The so-called informed or common listeners of yesteryear are beginning to disappear.

New economic realities have taken hold. In California, tax relief measures and a severe recession have combined to scuttle music education in the public schools; fewer and fewer students play an instrument or read music proficiently. The demands for greater diversity in the curriculum have had an effect as well: at the college level, there is less time for the complexities of sixteenth-century polyphony, the composition of Baroque fugues, "prolongation" in tonal music, or the study of various types of hexachords in the music of Schoenberg. What I am suggesting is that the arguments for and against certain kinds of "technical" knowledge in music education and scholarship are likely to become moot in the near future. Without elementary forms of instruction, forms widely accessible, the study and the appreciation of Western art music are likely to become wholly what many ethnomusicologists have claimed they have always been at least in part, namely, elitist and professional. (The strategy of the New Musicologists, that of promoting appreciation by encouraging more and more interdisciplinary study—retreating from "technical" matters, in other words, as part of a rearguard action to "save" music—will not work. Increasingly, Western art music will be transformed into something artificial, be experienced secondhand as an artifact—that is, solely as a means to ends apart from itself, as a way of understanding, if not those other disciplines, then larger cultural issues. Its immediacy, by which I mean its point, the consciousness it has awakened, passion stirred, curiosity aroused, will become more and more irrelevant to its study, performance, and composition. And the fact that various New Musicologists may already have envisioned such a fate, finding additional fault not with their own reactive strategies but with the methods of positivist musicology and theory and analysis, need not deter us here. We shall be contesting a good deal of their argument.)

But this would be to oversimplify the concerns of the New Musicologists, a large and varied group of humanists, multiculturalists, social critics, feminists, and postmodernists. Much “technical” analysis in music is eschewed because it would imply self-sufficiency, self-containedness on the part of single musical works—would imply, indeed, Carl Dahlhaus’s “autonomy principle.”¹ That principle would seem to question not only the existence of “external” forces in and about music (the “extramusical”), but, obviously, their study as well. Such forces include large-scale historical trends, social conditions, biography, criticism, reception, and, most recently, gender and sexuality. The alternative has been to view such forces as fully a part of the immediate experience of music; apprehended, they are subsumed by that experience. However unconsciously, they are a part of the attraction of music, of the ability of listeners to understand and respond “intuitively.”

Of course, the two extremes of autonomy and experience of the “extramusical” are generally compromised. Few believe in complete autonomy, the complete detachment of music and its appreciation from a connecting environment. As Carl Dahlhaus has put it, “No-one—with the exception of scattered adherents of a rigorous aesthetic Platonism—denies that the autonomy of musical works is merely ‘relative.’”² There are degrees of autonomy, in other words, high and low degrees. In the eighteenth century, much music was freed at least outwardly from explicit texts and external social and religious functions. Earning the right to be listened to for its own sake, it began to come into its own (as Dahlhaus might have expressed it). And the aesthetics that followed stressed the indefiniteness of musical expression, music’s appeal to the infinite and, paradoxically, to the inexpressible. (Such ideas anticipated the “inner life” which, according to later figures such as Schenker and Schoenberg, music mirrored.) Becoming immersed

1. Carl Dahlhaus, *Foundations of Music History*, trans. J. B. Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 27.

2. Carl Dahlhaus, “The Musical Work of Art as a Subject of Sociology” (1974), in his *Schoenberg and the New Music: Essays by Carl Dahlhaus*, trans. Derrick Puffett and Alfred Clayton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 238.

in a musical object for its own sake, listeners forgot both themselves and the world at large. In the immediacy of such a contemplation, inner and outer worlds were joined in a unity of experience; if only for a brief moment, alienation was overcome. Dahlhaus seems to have viewed such transcending experiences and the notions of autonomy and the inexpressible to which they were linked as emancipating for both composer and listener; they were viewed as an outgrowth of the process whereby music was relieved outwardly of its dependence on texts and social functions.

Such a view is not ordinarily shared by the New Musicologists, however. Instead, they have associated high degrees of autonomy with self-sufficiency, the latter with positive knowledge in musicology (a preoccupation with music's factual environment, its dates and chronologies), formalism in analysis (Schenkerian graphs, for example, or the relating of abstract pitch-class sets). In the face of the indefinite and the inexpressible, in other words, traditional scholars are accused of having retreated to what could be defined and expressed plainly. According to the New Musicologists, such scholars have consistently ignored the more elusive problems of expression and representation, emotion and meaning—ignored, indeed, the nature of their personal engagement with music. Above all, they have shied away from critical involvement with the objects of their scholarship, which for many years has been of concern to Joseph Kerman. Theory and analysis, inherently close to music and from which, therefore, an involvement of this kind might have been expected, have failed to respond. Indeed, they have become increasingly isolated. As with positivistic musicology, the aesthetic quality or worth of musical works has routinely been either ignored or taken for granted.

In a similar vein, Leo Treitler has condemned the “ideal of objectivity” which has in his view shaped music scholarship, an ideal he characterizes further as “masculine.”³ Essentializing terms of this kind—the opposite poles at which Treitler assumes males and females to operate, poles representing reason and rationality on the

3. Leo Treitler, *Music and the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 4, 14–18.

one hand, passion and the irrational on the other—may be compared to the “models of sexuality” (male and female stereotypes) with which Susan McClary has examined the music of composers such as Beethoven, Schubert, Tchaikovsky, and Schoenberg. According to McClary, the relationship of males—white, heterosexual males, for the most part—to music has been marked by “aggression,” “phallic violence,” “domination,” “rape,” “rationality,” and the need for climaxes and cadences; that of females, by “expression,” “shared pleasure,” “community,” and “a desire to prolong the experience.” With McClary, too, there is much be-moaning of the “hard-core” paths of theory and analysis, the failure of those paths to address adequately matters of expression, politics, sexuality, and personal engagement.⁴ And under all these concerns lies the more general plea of the New Musicologists, namely, that music be judged more completely as a “product” or practice of culture, “an instance of social, political, discursive, and cultural action that traverses a larger field . . . of such actions.”⁵ In reaction to the idea of autonomy, they demand that music be studied, analyzed, criticized, performed, and composed by way of such a “larger field.”

There can be no objection to a new openness in music scholarship, a broadening of its environment, a greater recognition of the sensing subject and his or her relationship not only to music but to specific musical constructions. Why not, then, also speculate more freely about the “technical” details of music, about possible connections to less definite qualities? Starting with intuition, why not pursue critical evaluation with the same care and rigor as one might the just-noted details? Why not attempt a merger of such separated areas, pulling them together for the sake of the exchange?

Problems with this approach surface, however, at least for this

4. See Susan McClary, “Getting Down Off the Beanstalk,” *Minnesota Composers Forum Newsletter* (January 1987); and Susan McClary, “Terminal Prestige: The Case of Avant-Garde Music Composition,” *Cultural Critique* 12 (1989).

5. Lawrence Kramer, “Haydn’s Chaos, Schenker’s Order; or, Hermeneutics and Musical Analysis: Can They Mix?” *19th-Century Music* 15, no. 1 (1992): 3. Or see Lawrence Kramer, *Music as Cultural Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

observer. As with others, no doubt, a consuming interest in music may be taken for granted. Beyond the relationship itself, however, explanations are another matter. For there can be no certainty as to the matter of music, its underlying meanings or significances. Indeed, apart from the notion of music as a mirror of "inner life" or as a transcendence, and by way of the aesthetic experience described briefly above, this observer has little understanding as to why specific pieces of music should have the effects they do, why it should be those pieces and not certain others, him and not someone else (evidently), here rather than there, and so forth. The synthesis that is the whole of this complex web remains a mystery, however much individual pieces may be discussed either part by part or in terms of their general features or characteristics, separated analytically to be made whole again synthetically. (In analysis, parts are separated only to be assembled again, a process that permits a gradual assimilation, the acquisition of a familiarity, and for the purpose of enhancing what may be sensed and felt, adding to the pleasure that is to be gained from contemplation.) Perhaps the transcending circumstances of the relationship between music and the listener may best be compared to those of romantic love, individual musical works to single human beings or characters. The difficulties encountered in analysis are quite similar in the two cases.

But although music is ultimately nonexplainable, it can be performed, pointed at, and described. There are translations, ways of describing its behavior, of splitting it apart in order to test what may or may not be joined (segmentation into parts), even of determining the conditions under which that testing can take place. In the process, we can draw ourselves closer to the objects themselves, allowing those objects to become more fully a part of ourselves.

Can McClary's "models of sexuality" be of some use in this connection? Or are they based too overwhelmingly on the issues themselves, local considerations of personal-political cause and debate? Does attention shift too readily to the latter and the critic-scholar him- or herself rather than to the music? All human behavior may be colored sociopolitically, no doubt, with music and its appreciation no particular exception. Yet there are kinds and degrees of that

coloring which need not prove overwhelming or monopolizing, kinds that can allow for a diversity of outlook and thought, the cultivation of a sense of focus and concentration.

A more significant objection to the use of such models may be that they cannot be pushed into the detail of music with any degree of regularity. As they are moved in the direction of greater musical particularity they collapse. In effect, the stereotypes become more stereotypical, their relationship to particular works more strained. The overall concept of sexuality or sexual desire may have applicability, of course, imagined as mirrored or reflected in one way or another. Ultimately, however, it proves too remote and abstract; further detail undermines both sides of the equation.

What are needed are terms and concepts of greater neutrality, ones that can flex with music, acquiring meaning as a result of that flexing. Such terms, ideally, are dependent on a “close reading” of the materials themselves; they invite and encourage that inspection. Although in this respect they are quasi-technical, they need never lose their ties to an initial and more general understanding and use.

What is to be gained from a close study of music, its harmony and counterpoint? Why should we concern ourselves with the principles of voice-leading in tonal music, phrases and their lengths, pitch-class sets and their properties, motives and their developing variations? A few general answers have already been provided. Addressing analytical approaches to various types of music, this book was conceived in large part as a response to some of the complaints and assumptions of the New Musicology. The sense here is that much established procedure has been misrepresented by that group, who often confuse the aims of analysis with those of the institutions in which it is taught, practiced, and debated.

Chapter 1 will introduce a number of aesthetic concepts having to do with analysis and the detail of music; more specifically, it will offer, by way of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, a critique of McClary's feminist indictment of tonal music. Chapters 2 and 3 will deal with aesthetic immediacy and the role of much “technical” analysis in fostering a sense of intimacy with music, specifically by way of a close working with its materials. Also considered will be

the relationship of scholars to scholarship and of various modes of scholarship to the institutions. The subject-object duality will be of concern as it relates to Treitler's polarity of reason and sensibility as, respectively, "masculine" and "feminine."

Schenkerian analysis and its underlying rationale will be the subject of chapter 4. I have wanted to defend Schenkerian practices against recent criticisms depicting them as cultist, elitist, insular, specialist, and formalistic, capable of verifying a theory but not of highlighting the individual qualities of the works considered. Complaints about the "technical" ways and means of Schenkerian theory and analysis will also be discussed.

Chapters 5 and 6 will be primarily analytical. In chapter 5, a return to the Beethoven Ninth, an approach featuring motives and their varied repetitions, orderings, and contents will replace the Schenkerian model; stemming in large part from Schoenberg, the rationale of this alternative approach will be discussed from both a historical and an analytic-theoretical perspective. Emphasis will again be placed on the uncovering of detail and on the manner in which, by way of that detail, a sense of intimacy is encouraged. (A prime assumption of the New Musicology is that intimacy—a feeling, sensing, caring relationship to music—is encouraged only with music standing as a "product of culture," a reflection of socio-political, economic, and sexual relations, never by way of the quasi-technical paths to which reference has been made here, and notwithstanding the ties that necessarily bind such paths to a more general understanding and use.) Crucial here as well will be the close identification of the motive and its development with the individual context and its making. Even the much-maligned pitch-class set can assume a tangible quality under these circumstances and, notwithstanding the high degree of its abstraction, can relate music of a great variety of idioms, practices, and periods. (We shall be availing ourselves of that advantage in moving rather swiftly from the Beethoven Ninth to Schoenberg's *Suite*, Op. 29.)

The notion of the individual context and its integrity—self-reference, to be exact—will again be of concern in chapter 6, although here from the standpoint of the neoclassical works of Stravinsky, *Pulcinella* in particular. The nature of the integration in

these works will be questioned, as will the standard approach in analysis, one in which the old is separated from the new, tradition from the modern, classical procedure from Stravinsky's additions. Finally, chapter 7 will consider the oeuvre rather than the single work—more specifically, the identity of the oeuvre as a whole, its treatment in theory and analysis, relations to various immediate and nonimmediate traditions. Featured will be the problems of rhythm and meter and the octatonicism of several of Debussy's piano preludes.

An Epilogue will summarize the New Musicology and the debate in the later chapters of this book of a good many of that school's underlying assumptions. As was suggested already, the strategy will be one of exemplification: terms, concepts, and approaches will be introduced as a way of promoting experience, that close, personal contact with music so highly prized by the reforming critics themselves. A caution, however: like-mindedness in these and other matters of music and its study may not be the blessing often imagined or hoped for. There may be considerable advantage in maintaining a relatively high degree of independence when focusing closely on the materials of music, and not only for the discipline of theory and analysis, but for historians, critics, composers, and performers as well.