

**IS MUSIC A LANGUAGE?  
TOWARDS A MORE ACCURATE DESCRIPTION OF MUSIC  
EDUCATION**

by

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B.A., Simon Fraser University, 1987

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER of ARTS

in the Faculty

of

Education

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SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

July 1994

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**Is Music a Language? Towards a More Accurate**

**Description of Music Education**

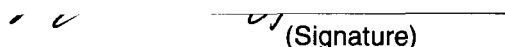
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## Abstract

Today there are many approaches to music education reflecting many different beliefs about what is its goal. Most music educators would agree that their goal is to help students understand music and the practice of making music. The differences arise out of a confusion about what it means to understand music, and in what is significant about the practice of making music.

The central problem impeding progress toward a universally applicable, yet logically derived, music curriculum is the lack of clear analysis about exactly what music is, what music does, and how music functions in a society. Particularly, the question of how, and if, music functions as a language, leads to widely different pedagogical approaches which must be justified. This paper is an attempt to show that music has many distinct differences from, as well as some similarities to, what we normally refer to as language, and that these differences and similarities have ramifications for the planning of music curricula.

After disputing claims that music is a language or languages, it must be admitted that many cultures, including our western culture, have used, and do use, music as if it were a language. Showing that music is not necessarily a language, does not prove that music cannot sometimes be a language, or at least language-like. After rejecting the above claims that music is necessarily a language, a model will be constructed which shows how music and language work together, and borrow from each other, as mutually dependent constituent elements of culture.

Understanding the important role that music plays in culture not only gives us a clear justification for the inclusion of music in our public education systems, but it also gives clear objectives for what kinds of things a student must learn during a public music education. Learning music is not just learning a series of physical skills, nor learning about specific composers and pieces of music. A true music education will help students to think more clearly, listen more acutely, and better understand what it means to be part of a culture, and part of a society of human beings.

## **Dedication**

For Rosamonde, Devin, & Nigel  
Whose music speaks, and whose words sing

## **Acknowledgments**

A special measure of gratitude belongs to Rosamonde, Bob, and Cornel who mutually encouraged me to embark on this project, and who made their time available in their different ways so that I could get started.

For conversations leading me around to some of these questions, and for lending me books from their personal libraries, I must include (in chronological order) credit to Tasos Kazepides, Stuart Richmond, Robert Walker, Cornel Hamm, and Donna Zapf. Thanks are also due to Dr. Manley-Casimir for helping with administrative concerns beyond the call of duty.

Lastly I must thank my students for inspiration and for keeping me in touch with the wider reality beyond my study and my library.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction: The Problem of Defining Music

"... the perception of something important in either particular works or in the arts in general moves people to talk (and write) about them incessantly. Something that meaningful to us cannot be left to just sit there bathed in pure insignificance, and so we describe, analyze, compare, judge, classify; we erect theories about creativity, form, perception, social function; we characterize art as a language, a structure, a system, an act, a symbol, a pattern of feeling; we reach for scientific metaphors, spiritual ones, technological ones, political ones; and if all else fails we string dark sayings together and hope someone else will elucidate them for us."<sup>1</sup>

Few educators would argue that a well-designed curriculum should not follow, at least in part, from the nature of the subject matter. Music educators are no exception. Music teachers also seek to justify their ends with some explanation about the nature of music. In fact, a variety of educational goals in music have led music educators to propose a variety of programmatic and contradictory definitions of music.

It seems an educator looking for logical reasons why music should be taught one way rather than another, should avoid making up definitions of what music should be in order to justify teaching music the way one would have taught it anyway. Using value-laden programmatic definitions of what music purportedly is to justify a specific curriculum is not only a pointless tautological activity, but it will actually prevent, or at least discourage, the natural evolution of new styles of music, and new pedagogical methods because of a restricted social perception of what is possible in music.

Arbitrarily defining the term "music" as a certain style of music, or to include within "music" only those attributes identical to specific styles of music, excludes many possible and interesting, types of music. For example, if one were to include in a definition of music that music has some kind of periodic rhythmic pattern, which on the surface seems quite general enough, one would exclude many accepted aleatoric musical practices. Furthermore, this definition does not take into account that it is sometimes possible to legitimately conclude that a

set of sounds is music even before the listener has discovered the pattern of the rhythm. In other words, our acceptance of sounds as music is not conditional on our recognizing a rhythmic pattern, even if we believe that this is an important aspect of music.

Similarly, defining music as necessarily having specific pitch structures (such as scales), as has been the practice of early western musical ethnographers, ignores the differences that various cultures have in their use of pitch, and may overemphasize the importance of pitch systems which may be much less significant in cultures other than our own. A complete survey of the limitations of hundreds of such definitions should not be required to make the point that the general concept of music cannot be defined adequately in terms of describing specific physical and acoustical attributes of specific pieces or even of whole styles of music. However one were to describe what a piece of music sounded like, one could then immediately invent an exception.

The normal use of the word "music" by English speakers includes activities undertaken by other cultures. Even though examples of what we call music can be found from a variety of cultures to help us clarify what we mean by this word, it is still the English concept, not some foreign word, that is the subject of this paper. Practices which we can easily recognize as music have a wide variety of different acoustical attributes from culture to culture, and from subculture to subculture. Yet all these things which we recognize as music must have some common element, or family resemblance, which anglophones recognize to be music or musical. It shall be argued that this common element has more to do with social context than with its acoustical properties alone.

In educational terms, if cultural context helps us to recognize certain sounds as music, we cannot ignore our students' cultural backgrounds if we wish them to gain more than a superficial understanding of what music is. This is more than maintaining a polite facade for ethnic minorities. It is essential, to recognize our students' different musical background

experiences for the inclusion of our diverse Canadian population in any kind of meaningful understanding of musical practice. Particularly as our classrooms are filled with a wider and wider range of musical interests, and cultural backgrounds, it becomes necessary for educators to understand the broadest possible bounds of what we call "music" so that students can cope with, and understand, an ever greater variety of musical cultures. At the same time, we must still maintain some outer limits so that we can be clear about what we are teaching when we teach "music".

One of the reasons for a lack of clarity about the concept of music, is that music is occasionally considered a language. This thesis will argue that a close analysis of the modern concepts of language, meaning, and the communicative signs which can carry meaning, can show that music is not a language in the normal sense of the word, although it does have some similarities with language. We ask if music is a language in order to add some small degree of clarity to our understanding of the social context of music. Chapter 2 will compare how various types of signs and symbols convey meaning in music and language. Chapter 3 will look even more closely at the nature of "meaning" in music and language in an effort to see if the same thing is going on in each. Chapter 4 will examine the social and cultural context of music and language, to compare their purposes and their functions in society. Finally, chapter 5 will outline some significant consequences for curriculum choices in music education. Although the arguments presented here center on music, and music education, it is likely that some of these arguments may apply to education in other art forms.

Before launching into an analysis of signs, symbols, meaning and language, and looking at some specific theories of music as a language in the proceeding chapters, the remainder of this chapter will discuss what we already know about the concepts of "music" and "language", and theorize why there is such a strong tendency in our culture to call music a language.

## *The Concept of Music*

"Art is notoriously hard to talk about. It seems, even when made of words in the literary arts, all the more so when made of pigment, sound, stone, or whatever in the nonliterary ones, to exist in a world of its own, beyond the reach of discourse. It is not only hard to talk about it; it seems unnecessary to do so. It speaks, as we say, for itself: a poem must not mean but be; if you have to ask what jazz is you are never going to get to know.

"Artists feel this especially. Most of them regard what is written and said about their work, or work they admire, as at best beside the point, at worst a distraction from it. 'Everyone wants to understand art,' Picasso<sup>2</sup> wrote 'why not try to understand the song of a bird?' "<sup>3</sup>

The above quote by Clifford Geertz implies that there is likely to be disagreement when talking about music, especially amongst those to whom it is most dear. While artists themselves might afford a more intuitive approach, and a narrow definition of music, teachers and critics must have a much clearer idea of what is music in general. This is particularly so for a public and liberal education system in a multicultural society. However, in spite of the difficulty getting a unanimous opinion of exactly what music is, the term "music" is not, in itself, at all vague.

Even though people will argue vehemently over the precise definition of music, most English speakers have absolutely no difficulty in recognizing what kind of thing the word "music" refers to. Often people can even identify what is music within a culture with which they are not familiar. For example, Europeans first meeting native Americans recognized easily that the natives had a wide variety of music and dances, without necessarily either liking, nor understanding either the cultures nor their art practices. There must be some common element to all of what we call music which we can easily recognize, even if we are not always aware of what it is. It will be argued in chapter 4 that this common element is the globally similar social and cultural purpose of all music.

The problem in recognizing the common features of all music comes when we try to identify which examples of music are better than others. If someone is using a typical programmatic definition of music such as "Music is beautiful sound" (a popular belief) or "Music is singable

and danceable"<sup>4</sup> then that person will have trouble classifying "bad" music (i.e., unbeautiful, or undanceable sound). In normal speech, though, we can usually recognize "bad" music (i.e., unsuccessful attempts at fulfilling some musical objective) as still belonging to the category of music. When most people say "That noise is not music!" it is in the same dramatic sense as one says "That piece of charcoal is NOT a hamburger!" while recognizing at the same time that it is actually just a very overcooked hamburger.

Generally people agree on what is and is not music. When there are disagreements as to whether a set of sounds should be considered music, the problem is not usually in recognizing what is music, but in determining the status and properties of the sound event involved.

Since we all tend to have different tastes in music, and we live in a world with a plethora of accepted styles, everyone could invent their own programmatic and value-laden definition of music to include whatever is to their taste. This leads to the insidious relativism in such statements as "This is music to me even if it is not music to you." Such a way of defining music can be of no help whatever in choosing a music curriculum since there cannot be any fixed boundaries to this way of thinking. While anything could be considered "someone's music," at the same time the concept of music comes to mean nothing at all in particular.

Value-laden definitions of music come about honestly from the classical notion of art being beauty. This, however, cannot be accepted as our modern definition of art after generations of accepted and recognized art that is intentionally unbeautiful. Furthermore, we must have some other meaning of art that enables us to recognize that the art of other cultures (such as unfamiliar native American singing, or Italian opera to an unexposed Chinese immigrant) is indeed art even though it does not conform to our values and expectations, and we may not yet have discovered and learned the values of the new culture.

To further confuse the issue, the value laden connotation of music leads to many metaphoric uses of the word music such as: "Your apology was music to my ears." or "Did you hear the

music of the wind in the trees this morning?" Few would actually consider these two examples music, though many use the word "music" occasionally as an indication of beauty in this manner.

In spite of all of the above, it is still possible to give a fairly simple account of the actual concept of music, which we all know and recognize. If we ignore, for the present, metaphorical and historically obsolete uses of the word music, and avoid evaluations of "good music" and "bad music," it should be fairly clear that the central notion of the concept "music" is that "music is sound-art". This might be taken to mean that "music is sound that has, in some manner, intentionally been given some culturally defined artistic significance." "Sound" in this case, refers to the actual sensation of sound, rather than the object of its symbols, although imagined sensation of sound might be included.

Most disagreements about what music is are not over whether or not music is artistically significant sound, but rather are concerned with how and why a particular culture recognizes a particular set of sounds as being significant and artistic.

While this may be an apt definition of the concept "music," it is still far too wide to be of much use to the curriculum designer who wishes to know which examples of sound, and which pedagogical methods are most appropriate for the music classroom. It is likely that we need more than a definition of what music is, but also a description of what kind of significance music has, or can have, within various cultures. In looking for this cultural significance, Geertz reminds us that "the giving to art objects a cultural significance, is always a local matter."<sup>5</sup> In other words, we cannot assume that the specific things which give music significance in one style, or culture, will be universal values of all that we call music. It is possible however, and a goal of this work, to find some general principles as to how various cultures appoint significance to music, and what kinds of things tend to be significant.

## *Why do some people want to call music a language?*

In the western world we have often attributed the significance of music to it being some sort of language. While thinking of music as a language can be very misleading to educators, there are also some strong reasons for the tendency of westerners to think this way.

"The talk about art that is not merely technical or a spiritualization of the technical -- that is, most of it -- is largely directed to placing it within the context of these other expressions of human purpose and the pattern of experience they collectively sustain."<sup>6</sup>

In this quote, Geertz recognizes that it is a natural tendency for people to give art, and music, significance by categorizing it along with other important cultural phenomena, such as language. For example, aboriginal Australians might equate a melody with the spiritual and totemic identity of an object. Ancient pagan Greeks considered music, and all art, a gift from the muses, and some Hindu cultures describe music as one of the powerful forms of magic. It is likely, in our rational and literate society, that calling music a language is a way of increasing its importance and legitimizing its pursuit.

If music is just another language, why do we pursue it at all? We already have several fine European languages, so how does one justify the pursuit of art, or music, over learning Spanish, or Hungarian? Conceiving of music as a language can actually undermine its importance. John Neubauer<sup>7</sup> has observed that when people have historically followed the Platonic model that "words are the language of reason" and that "music is the language of emotion," music has lost status in our culture. The Platonic model, thus simplified, serves to give art some justification as a language. However, the priority we traditionally place on reason above emotion demotes art to a language of, at most, secondary importance.

These values are so deeply rooted that little notice is taken of the usually false stereotype that an artist is someone who can't do other things, and tends to be unreasonably emotional, irrational, and disorganized. Furthermore, art is often assumed to be something one consumes, or creates, in one's spare time, or is even relegated to mere background activity with little actual

time intentionally devoted to it, as is the case with muzak, radios in the background or in the car, and "living room paintings".

In the face of this attitude, musicians and music educators are reluctant to abandon the "language" status of music because that is what seems to give music what little credibility it can muster. The problem is that it is precisely the reduction of music to language that ensures that it remains of secondary importance to "rational discourse," and further emancipates music from its non-language qualities such as its sensuality, and its performance context, which are likely its true *raison d'être*.

Bennett Reimer<sup>8</sup> goes so far as to say that even though "art requires to be treated very differently from subjects that are taught for their conceptual meanings." and even though art may have no concepts and might not even have symbols, that art still has the right to claim "meaning" and "Knowledge"..." because those words are too powerful, especially in education, to let go of just because of traditional prejudices."<sup>9</sup> When Reimer uses the phrase "traditional prejudices" in this context he seems to mean "the accepted meanings of the words 'meaning' and 'knowledge'." To paraphrase this powerful conclusion, Reimer seems to be saying that we should allow music to use the concepts of "meaning" and "knowledge," even though they don't apply in any usual sense of those words simply because of the status they lend the pursuit of music. This extreme argument is a strong indicator of just how powerful is our bias toward discrete quanta of facts, and identifiable concepts, and of how we use this prejudice to improperly describe music in an attempt to increase its status.

There is a lot at stake in the question of whether or not music is a language. If it is, then we must teach its symbols to those who don't presently understand the language. If, however, music is not a language, then we must find out what it is, and find other more appropriate ways of justifying its pursuit. To determine if music is a language, we will first look at some of the properties of language to see if they are similar to the properties of music.



## *The Concept of Language*

"What is language? ...

1) A language is made up of units interrelated in some sort of systematic way.

...

2) Units at the word level have meaning by 'convention'.

3) This system (language) is used for communication."<sup>10</sup>

The *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* defines language according to the three criteria above. This use of "conventional" must be taken to mean "usual" or "common" because nobody is making the claim that people explicitly decide how most words are to be used. If we note that the word "symbol" itself connotes "conventional," or common use for intentional communication, we can simply the above definition to Alston's:

"Language is often defined as a system of symbols, and this can be accepted as a summary statement."<sup>11</sup>

Normally the word "language" is used consistently and without too much confusion. However, as with many words in English, there is also a wider, perhaps sloppier, use of the word. The specific and narrower use of the word language is concerned with the specific kind of communication described above, an interdependent system of symbols, but occasionally there is confusion when "language" is taken to mean any sort of communication at all. "Body language", and the "language of flowers", are both such expressions referring to kinds of communication which are not true languages because they are not systems of interdependent symbols.

The claim that will be made in the following chapters is that music is not a language, although it is often referred to as one metaphorically. Similarly, some people observe that football is a metaphor for modern military organization with its quarterback-generals, its punter-artillery, and its other ground units. Further, cheer-leaders, fans, and the field itself can be seen to represent male/female role stereotypes, civilian population, and the country defended. Even though football is a system of culturally organized actions which may include symbols, its function is not solely to communicate these symbols, and it cannot be considered a language in

the specific sense. Anyone who feels that music is at all communicative, and that is most people, could talk about the "language of music". A more interesting question, however, and the topic of this thesis, is whether music is actually a language in the specific sense that it is a system of communication built of interdependent symbols.

If one takes the definition of language to include more than just our verbal languages, one could label any system of symbols a language of sorts. Perhaps we might even go so far as to say that the major criterion for what we might include as a language is that it be a system of interdependent symbols. This must be qualified, however. A system of symbols is more than just a collection of signs that happen to be used together.

"The notion of language as a system of symbols will be misleading if we suppose that each of the symbols that enters into the system is what it is independent of its involvement in the system, so that it could be just the same symbol if it were in no system at all."<sup>12</sup>

When we say that words, or even sentences, are part of a system of symbols we mean that the meaning they can be used to construct comes not only from the words, expressions and sentences, but also from the relationships between the words, between the sentences, between the speaker and the listener, and between the speaker the listener and their mutual context of environment and culture.

Some philosophers would go so far as to say that words are not complete symbols by themselves, but that sentences are. Most non-verbal symbols seem to make statements such as "Stop here!", or "Don't smoke!". This is more analogous to sentences than words. The Encyclopedia of Philosophy explains it like this:

"First, we naturally think of words as the sorts of symbols that are organized into a system when we have a language. But the linguistic analogs of symbols which exist outside language are sentences, not words."<sup>13</sup>

Even this does not go far enough. Even sentences are not complete by themselves. As part of a language, or symbol system, sentences still depend on yet a wider field of context for their interpretation:

"for to say that a sentence ... has a certain meaning, is to say that it is usable, in accordance with the rules of the language."<sup>14</sup>

Whether the symbol is the word, the sentence, or the paragraph, the meaning of the symbol still rests in its use in a given immediate context, as well as a socio-linguistic cultural context. Perhaps, rather than deciding that words, sentences, or paragraphs are individually symbols we should take a slightly different tack:

"(There is an indefinite number of sentences in a language, whereas there is a finite number of words and a much smaller number of phonemes.) A sentence is something which can be constructed for the given purpose at hand out of the elements which make up a linguistic system. Thus, a language is not a system of items which are symbols in the same way that nonlinguistic symbols are symbols. It would be better to say that a language is a system which provides the opportunity for constructing an indefinite number of 'symbols'."<sup>15</sup>

Thus language can be seen as a kind of symbol construction set, with rules to allow the construction and recognition of various original and standard sentences which act as symbols.

As with any kind of construction equipment, the materials can be misplaced to create junk:

"It is an important fact about language that it is possible to construct expressions that at first glance look to be perfectly in order and yet are unintelligible.... [such as] 'Quadruplicity drinks procrastination.'"<sup>16</sup>

While "quadruplicity," "drinks," and "procrastination" each have rules for use which imply that they are used to refer to specific ideas, these ideas are not compatible in this format. This implies that the meaning of each word does not inhere entirely in its individual use, but also in its placement within a series of such words.

While the main purpose of language is to communicate meaning, it must be pointed out that language can do much more than just communicate meaning. To start with, it must be recognized that the use of words goes beyond giving information in statements as Austin points out.

"... not all 'sentences' are (used in making) statements: there are, traditionally, besides (grammarians') statements, also questions and exclamations, and sentences expressing commands or wishes or concessions."<sup>17</sup>

Tyler concisely paraphrases the thesis of Austin's book "How To Do Things With Words," which deals precisely with the ways in which words can be used.

"In the act of speaking we recognize three different effects: (a) what is said (the locutionary act), (b) the force of what is said (the illocutionary act), and (c) the intended effect, results, or consequences of what is said (the perlocutionary act) (Austin 1960<sup>18</sup>)." <sup>19</sup>

Austin goes even farther with his classifications. Illocution can be broken down into demonstrative and denotative effects. Acts of perlocution include: verdictives (giving a verdict, pronouncement), exercitives (exercise a right: vote, etc.), commissives (promise, commitment, etc.), behabitives (social graces: apologizing, etc.), expositives (acts of conversation, argument).<sup>20</sup> It must be noted however, that no matter how we classify the acts that can be committed with language, we must keep in sight that it is the symbolic, and communicative properties with which we imbue language with meaning that allow us to perform each of these acts. In other words, whatever else language is capable of performing, it does so through its communicative powers. For example, one doesn't apologize instead of communicating, one apologizes by communicating one's feelings. One doesn't vote instead of communicating one's choice; voting IS a way of communicating one's choice.

Austin does indicate that there are rare exceptions, where the meaning of an utterance is somehow nullified, in a literal sense, by the act or circumstance of its utterance; but, even in this case the reason for the utterance is parasitic on the meaning of the words used.

"... a performative utterance will, for example, be in a particular way hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy... Language in such circumstances is in special ways -- intelligibly -- used not seriously, but in ways parasitic on its normal use -- ways which fall under the doctrine of etiolations of language."<sup>21</sup>

Of course an actor doesn't mean that there is actually a real fire when he yells "There's a fire!" in the middle of a performance on-stage, but the act of acting requires that the audience enter into an illusion in which there is a fire to which the actor is referring. Although the act of acting deals with a type of untruth, it is no less parasitic upon the audience and actors sharing a recognized meaning (or two) in words uttered.

To conclude, a language is a complex system of interdependent symbols whose intended meanings are determined in part by convention, syntax, and cultural context. Languages, such as verbal languages, are not just collections of symbols, but a system for constructing new symbols. Lastly, the communication of meaning may be instrumental in some other act executed by the speaker, but such communication is still the main purpose of language upon which other uses are parasitic.

With these aspects of language in mind, we can now examine whether music is used in the same way as language is used, and whether music is capable of supporting the same sort of symbols, and the same sort of meaning.

### *Is Music a Language?*

The observation that one can often appreciate foreign music much more easily than foreign language has occasionally led people to think that music is a universal language. Today this view is easily disproved by the wide variety of ethnic and experimental musical styles that are obviously satisfying and understandable to some, and worse than abrasive and confusing to others. The following is a more typical approach today:

"Music should not be regarded as a universal language so much as a universal phenomenon that manifests itself in many different ways as a product of its cultural environment."<sup>22</sup>

Certainly there is no "one universal language of music." A more common thought today is to say that each way of composing music in each culture is its own musical language. This gets muddled when we start to realize that each composer has his or her own style, and his or her own way of composing, and sometimes several. Yet, in spite of the fact that everyone seems to be speaking different musical languages, we still try to say that there is a form of communication. Harold Fiske addresses the problem of how we can tell whether music functions like a language in the sense that it communicates in a similar way:

"Music aestheticians have a long standing problem. The problem concerns whether or not music is a language. Not the music-is-a-universal-language sense, since most philosophers and theorists seem to agree that the problem concerns multiple, quasi-local music systems and not a single multicultural one, but rather whether music functions like a language in the communicative sense. But 'language in the communicative sense' is really two different problems: first, whether music is [a set of] processes cognitively either in a parallel or identical way to language and, second, whether music has content and whether content is specifically communicated by music as it is in language"<sup>23</sup>

Fiske goes on to show, in an attempt to solve his first problem (i.e., how music is cognitively processed) that music and language are in fact processed, in a very similar way, by what we know of the auditory system in the brain. It is by no means conclusive, however, that we know enough about neural auditory processing to enable him to have discovered a significant difference between the processing of music and language in the higher cortexes, if there is one.

A bigger problem for his argument, however, is that there is no established logical necessity for two phenomena that are perceived by the same process in the same manner, to be the same type of thing. While his analysis is an interesting study of hearing, it says nothing about the respective nature of the conceptual categories of music and language. By analogy, if Fiske could show that our brain reacted exactly the same way to furniture as it does to household appliances it would not show that our mind includes both in the same logical category. The issue at stake is not mainly one of the physical sensation of sound (i.e., hearing) but of the appropriate use of the words, and the bounds for the concepts of "Music" and "Language" in English.

Fiske's second problem is more interesting. If a style of music, like a language, has meaningful content and is communicated in a way similar to that of language, it would be reasonable to consider that particular style of music a type of language. Even if this is true, it still does not show that what we mean by music, in general, is always a type of language, but this does give us a basis for comparing the communicative properties of music against those of language.

"It is tempting, of course, to relieve some of the pressure on the argument by claiming that both speech and music (and other systems as well) are all communicative systems, but that speech (since it is denotative and extensional) is a language and music is not. But if we did this, we would have to go to the trouble of explaining how music serves as a communication system without being language-like, then explaining what sort of communication system that would entail, before explaining what it is that music communicates. Although it may be possible to do this, it is difficult to imagine what the advantages would be ..."<sup>24</sup>

What Fiske proposes, is actually similar to the goal of this thesis. In asking if music is a language we will need to consider what, if anything music communicates, and how this communication takes place. Another possibility, though, is that it is entirely possible for music to be sometimes communicative, without the communicative properties of music ever being its main purpose. This alone would be more than enough to conceptually separate music from intentionally communicative language. A third distinct possibility is that some styles of music are language-like, but that others are not. This also would underline the importance of considering music as a whole, not as a set of languages, but as a set of practices which might include some languages, or language-like behavior.

If the basis for claiming that music is a language rests on whether or not music communicates some type of content as language does, we must ask the following questions before reaching any conclusions: Does music have content (what we usually call meaning), and if so, is it the same type of content as that communicated in language? If music has content like language, how do music and language each communicate this content? What kind of meaning do various types of symbols and signs communicate? Which of these signs exist in known languages and styles of music, and which are essential to them? Is the status of meaning in music alone enough to satisfy the claim that music is a language? It is these questions we will explore in the next two chapters.

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**Notes:**

<sup>1</sup> Geertz, Clifford. *Local Knowledge*, 1983. P.95.

<sup>2</sup> quoted by op. cit. P.94

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from R.Goldwater & M. Treves. *Artists on Art* , New York, 1945, P.421.

- 3 Geertz, Clifford. *Local Knowledge*, 1983. P.94.
- 4 popularly attributed to Zoltan Kodaly
- 5 Geertz, Clifford. *Local Knowledge*, 1983. P.97.
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- 7 Neubauer, John. *The Emancipation of Music From Language*, 1986.
- 8 Reimer, Bennett. *A Philosophy of Music Education (2nd ed)*, 1989. P.93.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Alston, William P. "Language", *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* Vol. 4, 1967. P.384i.
- 11 Alston, William P. *Philosophy of Language*, 1964. P.59.
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- 18 Austin, J. L. *How To Do Things With Words*, (1st ed,) 1960.
- 19 Tyler, Stephen A. *The Said And The Unsaid: Mind Meaning and Culture*, 1978. P.380.
- 20 Austin, J. L. *How To Do Things With Words*, (2nd ed,) 1975. P.151.
- 21 op. cit., P.22.
- 22 Walker, Robert, *Music Education tradition and Innovation*, 1984. P.12.
- 23 Fiske, Harold E., *Music and Mind*, 1990. P.1.
- 24 Ibid.



## **Chapter 2**

### **Signs & Symbols**

One of the reasons that music is sometimes considered a language, is that it appears to contain symbols which "have meaning" in the same way that verbal language does. If one is to show that music is a language, or set of languages, in the usual sense of the term (described on p. 9), it must first be shown that music can and does communicate meaning through a set of interdependent symbols as do other languages.

To claim music is a language by virtue of its use of symbols, it would have to be shown that symbols in music are used the same way as those in verbal language. For music to be considered a language, its symbols would have to be dependent on each other for context in order for their meaning to be understood. They would have to be part of a fairly complex system of interactions and expectations as are the words in a language. Furthermore, the interaction and interdependence between the musical "words", would have to be a condition of the music itself. For example, the words of Morse code are interdependent in the way we expect words to be in all languages, but their relationship is not a function of the dots and dashes. The structure of words in Morse code is a function of the existing verbal language which the code is representing. For music to be a true language, rather than merely an alternate expression of an existing language, its symbols must have relationships internal to the musical sounds, and not merely patterns borrowed from speech or from some other form of language. For music to be a language it must do more than represent the concepts and symbols already used in other forms of language, it must have its own unique symbols, which are used to refer to its own unique concepts, and which have rules for use relevant to the musical sounds themselves.

In order to look more closely at this argument, we must first recognize that there are several types of communicative signs, which are often lumped together as symbols, and which can all be used to express some sort of meaning. Furthermore, the word "meaning" itself has several different uses. If music is a language because of its similar use of signs, then it must be shown to use the same kinds of signs as does language (i.e., symbols) to carry the same kind of content. In this chapter we will look at the nature of various types of signs and symbols used in language, as well as the manner in which these signs carry meaning, in order to see if music is like language in this respect.

As we look at various categories of signs, it is apparent that some confusion is occasionally generated by calling all signs "symbols", when in fact, there are some specific and important differences between various kinds of signs. If a "symbol" is designated as anything that communicates meaning, or a synonym for "sign", then our definition of language as "a system of interdependent symbols" becomes generalized to "a system of communication". If we use "symbol" in the sense of a specific type of sign, described below, the properties of language are much clearer, and the differences between music and language are more evident. Susanne Langer recognizes that there is a distinct difference between what she calls "symbols" and other kinds of signs that have the ability to confer meaning:

"There are, first of all, two distinct functions of terms, which both have both a perfectly good right to the name 'meaning': for a significant sound, gesture, thing, event (e.g. a flash, an image), may be either a sign or a symbol."<sup>25</sup>

However, Langer has no name for the general category to which "signs" and "symbols" belong. If we, in the manner which Alston borrows from Peirce<sup>26</sup>, designate the most general category as "signs", we can then divide "signs" further into "symbols" and other kinds of signs. If we call the most general category "signs" it should include all things which communicate meaning. Thus the expressions of language, casual gestures, and road signs, amongst other things, can be considered to be composed of signs in this way.

"Peirce<sup>27</sup> has made a popular threefold distinction of 'signs' into icon, index, and symbol. ... 'Icon -- a sign which refers to the Object that it denotes merely by virtue of characteristics of its own ... (par 247) 'Index -- a sign which refers to the Object that it denotes by virtue of being really affected by that Object. (par 248) 'Symbol -- a sign which is constituted as a sign merely or mainly by the fact that it is used and understood as such ... (par 307)' ... "We have extended the notion [in Index] of 'being really affected by' to cover any sort of de facto correlation ..."<sup>28</sup>

Note that the claim has not been made by either Langer or Alston that these categories are exhaustive and that there is no possibility of other kinds of sign. The categories are, however, adequate for our purposes. Let us consider each of these kinds of sign in turn.

### *Indices*

"What is a decisive difference [between indices and symbols] is that the status of indices, unlike that of symbols, does not depend on their being used in communication. This has the interesting implication that even when x is being used in communication as an index of y, an interpreter can correctly take it to be an index of y without realizing that it was produced or exhibited for the purposes of communication."<sup>29</sup>

Indices refer to their object by the fact that there is some natural de facto connection between sign and object. In other words the connection between sign and object is natural, or causal, and not invented for the sake of communication. As Alston points out, an index does not have to be used to intentionally communicate: its implications are, by definition, inherent and obvious to any observer who knows the nature of the object itself, and are never dependent on a social communication system for meaning. "Where there's smoke there's fire." is a good example. If one knows about fire, smoke *indicates* fire irrespective of cultural context, or anyone's intention. Langer refers to these as "natural signs":

"A sign indicates the existence - past, present, or future - of a thing, event, or condition. Wet streets are a sign that it has rained...

"All the examples here adduced are natural signs. A natural sign is part of a greater event, or of a complex condition, and to an experienced observer it signifies the rest of that situation of which it is a notable feature. It is [like] a symptom of a state of affairs."<sup>30</sup>

While "natural signs", or indices, do not need to be used for intentional communication, they can be. Leaving footprints to be followed, or making a fire smoky so that it is found, are two

signs which naturally indicate the presence of the communicator. Communicating with indices is like leaving a trail of clues. It doesn't matter if there is a common culture or language, nor if it is known by the observer that the clues were left on purpose to communicate something. The clues speak for themselves.

This simple form of communication is useful for some specific messages to those that do not speak a common language, but it can never be a full communication system as is a language. There is simply no way to express many important things including any abstract ideas or generalizations. As indices are not dependent on any other signs, nor on cultural context, it would be difficult to include them as part of a language (which is necessarily an **interdependent** system of symbols), although indices are undoubtedly a part of communication, at least occasionally, by speakers of all languages.

Although language does not include indices as part of its regular fare of communicative signs, and cannot do so as a consequence of the indices' inherent independence from other signs, music does rarely include sounds which can act in a similar way to indices. Even in music however, there are very few things which could be considered indices, and these communicate only the most basic and simple of the things which music can convey.

A musical index might be described as follows: The human organism has some instinctive reactions as well as learned ones. Music is capable of summoning these instinctive and learned reactions. For example, when people, regardless of culture, get excited, their pulse and breathing quickens. When music has a regular pulse which quickens, people of a variety of cultures easily recognize that something "exciting" is happening, and many will actually get excited themselves complete with faster pulse and breathing. This generated excitement is not dependent on the composer's intentions, nor the audience's understanding. How the excitement is explained, and what the excitement might represent is certainly culturally dependent, but a correlation between energy level, or level of excitement, and what we call the "tempo" of music in the West, is certainly a natural correlation.

This example is very similar to an icon, as explained below. The essential difference is that when the music causes the listener, directly and physiologically, to become excited then that segment of music is acting as an index. When the music only represents excitement rather than embodying it, even if the recognition of this excitement then causes the listener to become excited, then that segment of music is no longer a sign which has a causal relationship with its object of reference, and therefore cannot be considered an index. This latter kind of sign is called an icon.

### *Icons*

Icons are constructed signs that remind us of their referents by virtue of their natural similarity to them. Although the icon has a natural similarity or resemblance with its object of reference, it is not itself a natural artifact. It is created for the express purpose of referring to its object, or, if it is a coincidentally naturally similar object to its referent, it is at least presented in such a way that its referential nature is intentional. The referent of an icon is usually obvious, by reason of its similarity. For this reason Icons with simple symbols, such as "X"s and arrows, are often used at airports and on road signs to indicate things to people who might not know the language.

While the interpretation of icons is somewhat universal, some cultural understanding is often required, to recognize that the sign is indeed an icon. For example, one must know that road signs are instructions to drivers, and that the overhead icons in the airport are not merely decorative. The form of presentation for the icon depends on social context, even though the referential relationship between the icon and its object does not. Once one recognizes that an icon is indeed an icon, the referent is usually obvious if the observer has any experience at all with the referent. Actually this is a bit too simplistic because even though the content of an icon is nearly universal, it remains somewhat culturally dependent. Since an icon represents a

class of objects, rather than a single individual object, it will never represent a class for which the issuing culture has no concept.

A simple picture of something is the most common type of icon. For example, a cigarette with a red "X" through it is an icon for not smoking. Actually, to be more specific, the picture of the cigarette itself is an icon (a constructed sign referring by way of resemblance to a class of objects); the "X" could be considered a symbol. The picture of the cigarette clearly represents the class of all real cigarettes if the viewer is aware that the picture is a sign at all. If the picture were abstracted to the point that one had to be told it was a cigarette, then the picture would be acting as a symbol rather than an icon.

Langer<sup>31</sup> makes an important observation about what she calls "signs" (i.e. non-symbol signs) that is applicable to icons in particular: Icons and their objects must always have a one to one relationship. That is, an icon should only ever refer to one thing, or class of things. Of course a drawing or sound may have natural similarities with more than one referent, but this drawing or sound is a poor choice of icons because an icon is expected to be unambiguous. A drawing that looked a little like cigarette, and also a little like a locomotive might make interesting art, but would not normally be a good choice of icon unless the communicator is intending to be ambiguous.

Since icons are not very dependent on each other for correct interpretation, they cannot be central to a language system on their own, but are sometimes used to facilitate communication along with elements of a language, such as feigning emotion with vocal inflection to give a warning. However, many icons are used often enough that they develop new culturally dependent meanings, including more abstract, and more specific ideas than those that can be pictured, or sounded, by the icon itself. For example a cigarette with a red "X" through it doesn't really mean "no cigarettes" it means "NO SMOKING (anything)". These icons are actually being used as symbols, and are no longer purely icons. Icons being used as symbols, are commonly used in language. Onomatopoeia, hieroglyphs, and totem

pole faces, are but a few icons that have come to be used more specifically than just what they picture or sound like.

While not central to language, some icons are used along with the words of our and other languages. Some words may directly act as an icon, such as new onomatopoeia that haven't yet earned a common usage. Some emotive sounds are also written this way as if they were words such as Hmph, or Urrrg. These can be recognized as they usually do not yet have a standard spelling, and frequently sound similar in unrelated languages. Similarly, longer expressions are used to describe an image where the entire image acts as a form of second order icon. This latter usage is the function of a metaphor. The thing or idea described with language in turn communicates something about the real object by virtue of its natural similarity. Sometimes this is the only way we can communicate about something for which we don't have enough experience to have developed a common method of symbol use.

"Even in the use of language, if we want to name something that is too new to have a name ... we resort to metaphor ..."<sup>32</sup>

It is important to recognize that even though the words, or expressions, which comprise a metaphor are acting as symbols to create the image, or object of comparison in a metaphor, the comparison itself is acting as an icon. Thus a metaphor does not need to have a common use to be recognized. If a metaphor becomes commonly used it may take on the aspect of a symbol and become part of the language, but this is not required of it.

"A metaphor is not language, it is an idea expressed by language, an idea that in its turn functions as a symbol [what we are referring to as an icon] to express something. It is not discursive and therefore does not really make a statement of the idea it conveys; but it formulates a new conception for our direct imaginative grasp."<sup>33</sup>

Music, on the other hand is filled with icons. Flute trills are used to sound like birds. The shimmering effect of Balinese gamelan tuning mimics the shimmering of the sunlight on waves. A temple block can be used to imitate a ticking clock, and chimes are used to repeat the sound of church bells. These Sounds which remind us of specific things, are not dependent on common use for recognition, and are therefore as much icons as are pictures.

This can be true even when the sounds are highly stylized and organized, as they usually are in music. While various forms of music can, and do, contain a variety of communicative signs, the icon content of music is much higher than that of language. This point shall be made more clear while we discuss the nature of symbols below. Because music, and other art forms, have a relatively much higher incidence of icons than do languages, they are sometimes referred to as "languages of metaphor." However, since metaphor is not actually language, but a way of using language to compare something in a way that the symbols of language are otherwise powerless to do, we have to take the "language of metaphor" description of the arts itself as a metaphor rather than as a literal description.

### *Symbols*

Icons and indices have referents which are fairly obvious, sometimes even to outsiders of a culture, because of their similarity to, or their natural relationship with, their objects respectively. While this is sometimes an advantage, as when communicating to outsiders of a culture, this can also make the use of these kinds of communicative signs very limited. Abstract ideas are difficult or impossible to express using only icons and indices. Also, the availability of the actual signs to use as icons and indices can be very limited. As social animals, humans have developed sophisticated systems of communication, and have thus found the need to create a much more versatile kind of sign to be used to imply almost any possible meaning, in almost any possible circumstance. This is the purpose of language. Our use of symbols includes language, but goes far beyond our regular verbal language.

Words, sentences, hand signs, gestures, and some non-iconic street signs are but a few of our most commonly used symbols. These are easily distinguished from indices by the fact that they are constructed for the sole purpose of communicating, whereas indices are naturally occurring with innate connotations. For example, words are a commonly occurring form of symbol. Words are considered as symbols **because** they do not have natural associations



beyond their understood use as symbols, and their occasional iconic heritage. In this quote Langer points out the value of words as symbols:

"Another recommendation for words is that they have no value except as symbols: in themselves they are completely trivial... Peaches are too good to act as words; we are too much interested in the peaches themselves."<sup>34</sup>

While icons are also constructed, they can be separated from symbols by the manner in which they carry meaning. Icons have a natural resemblance to their object, whereas symbols need not. Symbols are capable of being used to imply meaning only because a society has a common usage which implies a common meaning. While icons can sometimes also act as symbols, such as onomatopoeia (which are understood as a result of similar sound to the referent), the difference in usage is still clear. If the meaning is primarily a result of similar sound, smell, or look, the sign is being used as an icon. Whereas, if the meaning is understood because of a particular culture's way of using the sign, then it is clearly being used as a symbol. This distinction is true whether the sign is a visual image in a painting, a word, a sentence, or a phrase of music. Langer has a slightly different way of saying essentially the same thing:

"the fundamental difference between signs [(i.e. icons and indices)] and symbols is this difference of association, and consequently of their use by the third party to the meaning function, the subject; signs announce their objects to him, whereas symbols lead him to conceive their objects."<sup>35</sup>

One way of developing the common usage necessary for interpreting and using symbols, is with a system like language. Thus symbols are often part of a language, or language-like system. Symbols, however, are not only used in language. Human communication includes a variety of indices, icons, and language symbols, as well as isolated non-language symbols, such as a gesture. The Encyclopedia of Philosophy agrees:

" ... there is no suggestion in any of this that language is the only basis of communication. Communication can also be carried out by 'isolated' symbols of the sort mentioned earlier, as well as by pictorial representation [-- here called icons --] and in other ways."<sup>36</sup>

"There are symbols which do not fit into any language, for example, fire sirens, such gestures as a shrug of the shoulders, a red light as a traffic signal, and a deliberately produced cough which means 'It's time to go.' Where symbols are organized into a system of considerable extent, we have language."<sup>37</sup>

As implied by the nature of symbols, languages are constructed out of sounds and actions, etc., which have little or no innate meaning, and are put to use for the specific purpose of communicating some sort of meaning. This is different from icons and indices which may be constructed signs, but which have a natural resemblance or relationship with their object of reference rather than invented and arbitrary meanings. Thus meaning in language cannot be associated with every word, but most words are used to refer to conceptual categories of objects or to specific objects, and communicate their meaning according to their use within a language system.

One last thing about symbols, Langer<sup>38</sup> says, and this is relevant to all types of signs, that a sign must be more easily recognizable by the user, and be less important in its own right, than the object. If the sign itself is too important, it won't be recognized as a sign. Another way of saying this is that an object's value as a sign must be greater than its inherent importance or we simply won't notice the sign function of the object. Thus again we are forced to recognize that the best symbols do not have inherent meaning as is the case with icons.

While language is, by definition, a system of symbols, music can and does include a wide variety of icons and symbols, and possibly indices as well. This is not to say that everyday communication is limited to symbols, just that everyday communication includes language (a complex system of symbols) as well as other signs (including other symbols) which are not part of the system we call language.

Music has varying degrees of index, icon, and symbol use. Javanese dance-drama music, Noh theater music from Japan, and Wagnerian opera all have very specific agreed on meanings for certain sounds that have to be considered symbols in every sense. These symbols have an arbitrary and specific relationship to their conceptual object, which can be either concrete (as with a specific character) or abstract (as with heroism, or the indicated character is entering). Perhaps it can even be shown that these three systems of symbols are interdependent enough, and specific enough, to be called languages. However, most of the signs used in music are not symbols in the specific sense that they do not have an invented meaning which has come into common use by all or most members of musical culture. Rather, most musical signs are icons in that they are constructed signs which show resemblance to other sounds, and to human reactions and emotions.

Still, some music clearly uses symbols. Furthermore, Langer, and most others, agree that this use of the word "symbols" is the usual one. While the symbols themselves may be somewhat different than verbal symbols, they are indeed a common method of communication available for use by both language and music.

"Symbols occurring in art [i.e., all the arts] are symbols in the usual sense... They have meanings, in the full sense that any semanticist would accept. And those meanings, as well as the images that convey them, enter into the work of art as elements in its composition."<sup>39</sup>

Some symbols do exist in music, such as recognizable cadences which tell us that a phrase or section is ending, or that we are arriving at some imaginary destination. Also, rhythms and other rhetoric devices from speech are often borrowed by music to refer to the kind of mental or physical state of a speaker who might use these devices. However, most of what we usually call "symbols" in music are actually icons. This distinction, although subtle, is critical to our question of whether or not music is a language because a language is a system of symbols. While music may have many actual symbols, and there may even be a few styles of music which are so filled with interrelated symbols that they might be considered languages,

most music is more concerned with icons, and occasional indices, than with actual symbols and therefore cannot be considered language.

Perhaps even more important than asking if specific pieces of music contain symbols, because most human communication uses symbols at least occasionally, is asking whether the symbols used in music are important to it. In some music (such as Noh theater, and Wagnerian opera), symbols are an important part of what the composer expects the audience to experience, but it is highly questionable whether this is a necessary condition of all that we call music.

So far it is clear that music can, occasionally, act like a language in terms of its use of symbols. When required, some musical forms can make propositions such as a series of notes played on a particular instrument which always mean in that context that: "the prince is coming." or "the hero is dying". It can make propositions, but it doesn't always. Furthermore, even when it does, there seems to be something more to music than just a collection of symbols as in language. We will look more at why this difference is so important to music in chapter 4, but for the current point, recognizing this difference is sufficient.

Before concluding this chapter, there are two more observations which highlight some of the differences between music and language, particularly in their uses of symbols.

Briefly, a sentence has meaning according to the syntax of the words within it. Many, but not all, of the conventional "rules" which music is said to follow are of a different type than the linguistic rules which give language symbols their meaning. Music doesn't use parts of speech, and individual concepts in the same way. For example, if a desired message is "The hero is coming," there are not specific sounds associated with "hero" and "coming" placed in a grammatical context, there is merely a series of sounds which are recognized together in their context to be both heroic and in motion, such as a French horn voluntary. This is a single signal or symbol, but is not the result of a set of interrelated symbols. This example

could just as easily have meant "Someone thought a hero was coming," or "The preceding event is to be thought of as heroic." Without the interconnectedness of symbols found in language, music will always lack the specificity of language. Of course, this description is extremely simplified, but it suffices to show that there is some difference between the syntactical requirements of language and those of music.

"In fact, we cannot know purely from the musical sounds what they are intended to represent unless they clearly imitate some natural sound, such as a birdcall or a barking dog; but musical art, of course, operates on a different level from this kind of simple, literal reproduction.

"It might be argued that language also comprises word sounds that are incomprehensible without their cultural reference. But with word sounds, each social group agrees on their fixed meanings, which can then be translated into other languages so that other social groups or cultures can understand their meaning. Thus in each language there is not only clear symbolic meaning for words but also a grammatical and syntactic structure. This enables one to make a statement that the sun has risen in one language and have it translated into another language so that it has the same meaning in both. With music, Western music in particular, this is not the case. Composers can invent their own musical language and its symbolic reference that few but themselves might fully understand."<sup>40</sup>

This quote of Walker's reinforces our observation of the relative abundance of icons to symbols in music. If we can only know what musical sounds represent if they imitate natural sounds, this is iconic meaning. Musical sounds are more complicated than just simple icons, however, because they also include metaphor, visceral sensations, and even occasional symbols and indices. Furthermore, music does not only represent the sound-making things of the world with its icons, but also strives to refer to relationships and patterns and other abstract ideas.

The above quote also acknowledges the importance of cultural context for interpreting the signs that are in music. Walker correctly indicates that while symbols and even symbol systems are used in music, the audience's response to and understanding of the music is different than if the music were solely a language. Even when we cannot be aware of all the symbols in a new style of music, or even a new piece by a familiar composer, we can still get something from music that we cannot get from language composed of words we don't know.

To summarize the findings of this chapter, first we can see that there are three distinct kinds of signs which: icons, indices, and symbols. While languages are systems of symbols (in the proper and specific sense) which get meaning from their interrelationship and their use according to rules of grammar, music can involve all three kinds of signs, and may do so in a systematic or in a haphazard way. Symbols can only be used to intentionally cause the listener to conceptualize, (that is to recognize the category for which the symbol is a name). Music and language both use symbols, but linguistic symbols do this far more easily since they have no natural relevance to get in the way. Music also has a visceral and sensual aspect which can be, but need not be, clarified by icons and indices, and this cannot be explained by music acting solely as a language.

It is clear that the use of signs by music and language is similar sometimes, but frequently substantially different. There are still those that would lump music and language together because they both have "meaning" and are both assumed to be forms of communication. While the different kinds of sign used in language and music imply meaning by different methods, this is not adequate proof that the actual meaning implied by music and language is different. In order to make that point, it is necessary to look at what we actually mean by "meaning".

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**Notes:**

<sup>25</sup> Langer, Susanne K. *Philosophy In A New Key (3rd ed.)*, 1957. P.57.

<sup>26</sup> Alston, William P. *Philosophy of Language*, 1964. P.55.  
reference from: C.S. Peirce. *Collected Papers*, Cambridge Mass, Harvard University Press, Vol. 2, 1931. P.35.

<sup>27</sup> C.S. Peirce. *Collected Papers*, Cambridge Mass, Harvard University Press, Vol. 2, 1931. P.35.

<sup>28</sup> Alston, William P. *Philosophy of Language*, 1964. P.55.

<sup>29</sup> op.cit., P.56.

<sup>30</sup> Langer, Susanne K. *Philosophy In A New Key (3rd ed.)*, 1957. P.57.

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- 31 op.cit., P.58
- 32 Langer, Susanne K. *Problems of Art*, 1957. P.23.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Langer, Susanne K. *Philosophy In A New Key (3rd ed.)*, 1957. P.75.
- 35 op. cit., P.61.
- 36 Alston, William P. "Language", *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* Vol. 4, 1967. P.385iii.
- 37 op. cit., P.384ii.
- 38 Langer, Susanne K. *Philosophy In A New Key (3rd ed.)*, 1957.,P.58.
- 39 Langer, Susanne K. *Problems of Art*, 1957. P.138.
- 40 Walker, Robert. *Musical Beliefs Psychoacoustic, Mythical, and Educational Perspectives*, 1990. P.5.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Meaning in Music and Language**

There are several uses of the word "meaning". If we recognize that it is accepted for people to say that both music and language have meaning there are, logically, two possible outcomes. It is possible either that music has meaning in the same sense as language does (as claimed by Lawrence Kramer<sup>41</sup>), or else that when we say, "Music has meaning," we are using the word "meaning" in a different sense from the statement that "Language has meaning". To show that music is a language by virtue of its meaning, we would need to do more than show that music has some claim to one of the uses of the word "meaning": we would need to show that the meaning communicated by language is the same kind of thing as the meaning communicated by music.

If, when we say that "Music has meaning," we mean that music has significance, there can be no argument. Everything intentionally created has some sort of significance, however small, at least to its creator if no-one else. However, when we equate music and language because both have meaning (in the significance sense), we are missing the point somewhat. The question is: what kind of significance does each have?

The significance of language is that it is intentionally used to refer to specific conceptual objects. To make the claim that music is a language because it has meaning, it would need to be shown not only that music has significance, but that its significance was its intentional referential use. It would need to be a system of symbols which refer specifically to something, and in which the reference function is understood mostly as a result of common usage. The acts of football, war, and making love all have intended significance but are not normally considered language, even in the widest sense, because there is no system of interdependent symbols involved.



William Alston gives many examples of uses of the words "meaning" and "mean"<sup>42</sup>. Most of these can be reduced, although with some loss of subtlety, to showing intention, reference, or significance. It is not immediately clear, which of these categories includes what Alston refers to as "linguistic meaning".

Sometimes the above uses of "meaning" are easily distinguishable. For example: "That flower will always have meaning for me," clearly talks of significance, and "What's the meaning of shouting like that?" asks plainly about intention. When we talk about the meaning in music and language, however, there is not always agreement about the type of meaning to which we are referring.

There are several theories describing how symbols, including those in language, can have or convey meaning. Some believe that words and phrases refer, inherently, to their object of reference. Others would tell us that meaning is contained in a universal, or at least commonly held, idea or concept that is identified by symbols including words and/or phrases. Lastly, some philosophers think that meaning in language simply refers to the intended communication of the speaker. Alston refers to these "three types of theories of meaning" as "referential, ideational, [and] behavioral."<sup>43</sup>

Each of these theories contributes something to our understanding of the way symbols (including those in language) are used to communicate "meaning". By looking at each of these three types of theories of meaning in more detail it will become clearer exactly how language use has significance, reference and intention. After this analysis it should be easier to see that the significance of music is not always, and not only, the kind of significance that language and other symbols have.

## *Referential Meaning*

"No notion of meaning appeals to common sense quite so directly as reference, for it only seems to claim what we take to be an obvious fact of the use of language, that words are names of things."<sup>44</sup>

This intuitive and straight forward approach is certainly part of the story. We can all agree that words, expressions, and other symbols, are used to refer to things. Alston, however, reminds us that this can be seen in either of two ways:

"The more naive view is that the meaning of an expression is that to which the expression refers; the more sophisticated view is that the meaning of the expression is to be identified with the relation between the expression and its referent, that the referential connection constitutes the meaning."<sup>45</sup>

The naive view overlooks the fact that most words -- all words that are not proper nouns-- simply do not have the same referent with each iteration. The expression "my chair" today does not have the same referent as "my chair" did twenty years ago. Even then, most people would not say that the meaning of the expression "my chair" had changed. Only the referent changed, which clearly indicates that reference is another kind of thing than the "meaning" of the an expression. In spite of this it is also clear that the referent has something to do with the meaning of a symbol.

The sophisticated theory of referential meaning can account for changing referents if there is a constant referential relationship (as in "my chair"), but there is another problem. Many expressions can have different relationships with their referent depending on the circumstance. Simply, people use words differently even when they are referring to the same thing. For example: "She acts like a mother." could mean "She tries to take care of, and advise, people." or "She is overprotective, and a nag." Both interpretations mean the same thing, in a strictly literal sense, but have disparate emotional connotations. The referent is the same but the relationship is different.

Although there is a correlation between meaning and reference, it is not a simple one, and is certainly not a one to one correspondence. Symbols do refer to objects, states, and ideas, etc.,

but that they do so is not innately part of the symbol, nor of the referent. We must also take into account the mental state of the speaker.

In the following quote, Langer favors the ideational approach for explaining the meaning of symbols. An idea, or concept, of an object becomes what the symbol represents, rather than the object itself. Of course the conception of objects must include some kind of mental representation or image of the referent, but this is clearly beyond the mandate of the representational view of meaning which claims that the referent, or the speaker's relationship to it, is the concept.

"Symbols are not proxy for their objects, but are vehicles for the conception of objects... In talking about things we have conceptions of them, not the things themselves; and it is the conceptions, not the things, that symbols directly 'mean'. "46

One of the significant differences between language and music is that language, as a system of symbols, is aimed at leading one to conceive of certain ideas or images. While music may do this, music is also concerned with directly portraying sounds in a visceral, not just conceptual, manner. Part of the ability of music to create this immediacy, is music's use of icons, and occasional indices, rather than depending solely on symbols.

One may argue that our sophisticated use of language and other symbols may be intended to cause, in the listener, certain vivid experiences. The difference is that these experiences communicated by language are arrived at solely through the conception of the symbols. Music, on the other hand, may stimulate such vicarious experiences through the use of symbols, but the direct experience of the sound is also important, not just for the conveyance of symbols, but in its own right. If the sound were not important of itself, we would not recognize the sound as music, but merely as some acoustic symbol or signal.

Let us now look more closely at what is meant by the "conception of symbols" on which language depends so heavily, and which music may also put to use.

## *Ideational Meaning*

"Naming does more than attach labels to things, it orders things relative to a system of concepts, and that is one of the reasons naming has so often been associated with the act of creation ..." <sup>47</sup>

Most words, and other symbols, are names for states, actions, and things. As names they associate our minds with both the object of reference and a concept of it. The ideational theory of meaning recognizes that mental imagery is as much a part of communication and meaning as are the objects of communication. Alston explains:

"This presumably means that whenever an expression is used in that sense, 1. the idea must be present in the mind of the speaker. 2. the speaker must be producing the expression in order to get his audience to realize that the idea in question is in his mind at that time. Finally 3. insofar as communication is successful, the expression would have to call up the same idea in the mind of the hearer ..." <sup>48</sup>

One important element of this theory is that it recognizes that we don't just refer directly to objects by a specific name, but we usually refer to them by classification -- what Georgia Green refers to as "kinds" <sup>49</sup>. The concept identified by a word in the context of a sentence gives us specific boundaries about what to expect about the object. As long as there is a common understanding of which classes are referenced by which linguistic expressions (a form of symbol), then there is no problem with saying that these expressions refer to classes of objects, actions, ideas, states, or whatever.

If naming things "orders things relative to a system of concepts" we must name them correctly, if we wish to understand them or teach them clearly. This is one of the reasons why we must be clear about whether or not music is a language. It is precisely because our categorization of a phenomenon colours our future perception of it, that calling music a language will make us listen for the symbols we expect in a language, rather than experiencing the sounds themselves which we shall see is important with music.

Believing in a commonly used concept or idea for each word or symbol is well and good, but often we have meanings for words that we don't share in common. For example, some people

use the word "music" to refer to a form of communication, others refer to a kind of activity, still others refer particular kinds of sounds, while others refer to an abstract set of principles and values that are often realized in sound. All of these meanings are referred to by different people with the same symbol. When there is trouble understanding the meaning of a word or phrase, or conversely, when we have trouble choosing a word or phrase, Green has two ways of explaining it:

"When we don't know how to classify an object it might be because we don't know its properties and therefore don't know what kind it belongs to, or it might be that 'we may know what its properties are, but still not know if it is a member of a kind we have previous knowledge of, or, perhaps a novel kind.' i.e. the problem is with knowledge of 'kinds' rather than knowledge of which kind a word is used to refer."<sup>50</sup>

"If I use the word water like a normal speaker, I merely need to know what kind of stuff 'water' is the name of. I don't have to know everything about water to use the word."<sup>51</sup>

Knowing whether an event belongs to the category of music or that of language is not the current problem. All English speakers know what kind of phenomena are referred to by these words, even if there are occasional ambiguous cases such as some forms of poetry. Understanding the properties of music and of language so that we can see if one category is contained within the other is our immediate question.

"... For example, he [(Putnam)<sup>52</sup>] says that if lemons came to be universally blue then the MEANING of the word lemon would have changed. I would say that the REFERENCE of lemon had not changed at all -- it is still the name of the same kind of fruit -- but lemons would certainly have changed."<sup>53</sup>

Thus we see how the ideational theory still involves reference to an object. The difference is that in this case, the meaning inheres in the concept, classification, or mental image, of the object rather than in the object itself, or in the object's relationship with the expression, as is the case with the referential theory of meaning.

This theory works well in a homogenous society where everybody has had similar experiences, and shares a very similar conceptualization of the world. The problem is that in our heterogeneous world we must concede that each person is likely to have very different

images associated with each word or expression in our language, and is likely to have slightly different ideas as to the bounds of many concepts. In spite of this, we are usually able to recognize when a word is being used in an unusual way, according to our prior experience, and still understand its new meaning in its new context. Concepts, images, and reference are important parts of how symbols have meaning but we must also take into account the intentions of the speaker (or writer), and the context of the situation.

### ***Behavioral Meaning***

"... the meaning of an utterance is not just a function of the meanings of its constituents, but is determined by reference to the context in which the utterance occurs (cf. Hymes 1972:57<sup>54</sup>)."<sup>55</sup>

The behavioral theory of meaning attaches meaning to the use of an expression by a speaker, rather than to the expressions themselves. This is outlined in the following quotes by Green and Tyler respectively:

"Speakers USE words to REFER, but it is the speakers who do the REFERRING, who MEAN something, or mean (i.e., intend) to refer to something by the words."<sup>56</sup>

"The philosopher has substituted, as if they were equivalent, the notion 'The word X refers to Y' for the common-sense notion 'I refer to Y by means of X.' He confuses what words do with what speakers do."<sup>57</sup>

In other words, the behavioral theory of meaning says that meaning is performed, a behavior executed by people who are trying to communicate. Reference and conceptualization, though an important part of meaning, must be interpreted according to the communicator's intentions. In this way it is reasonable to say that symbols don't innately have any meaning whatsoever. It is only when they are used in the context of a specific culture, to intentionally represent some idea of an object, event, or state that they can be said to convey a meaning.

Acknowledging ideational, and referential theories of meaning, Green then ties them together in her version of the behavioral theory of meaning:

"The meaning of a word is variously: a set of criteria, an abstract prototype, ... a function of resemblance to specific exemplars, or some sort of characterization of its use. I would like to make the case for the proposition that for most words it just doesn't make sense to say they MEAN anything, that there is no such thing as "the meaning of a word," and that such words don't HAVE meanings. Most words are, rather, names for kinds of things, and, as names, may be used to REFER to things as rigid designators ...

"In calling words rigid designators, I am referring to Kripkes (1972)<sup>58</sup> theory, which says that an expression is a rigid designator if it designates the same object in all possible worlds in which the object exists. Thus, the phrase the pope is NOT a rigid designator, since it will refer to different individuals on different occasions."<sup>59</sup>

By rigid designator, Green is not saying that most words are proper nouns. She is merely making the case that most words are used to refer to specific classes of things. For example, "chair" does not refer to any specific chair, but refers to the category of chairs. Even though "the pope" is not a rigid designator, "the papacy" is. While "the pope" refers to a specific person, a different specific person at different times, "the papacy" always refers to the same institution.

If most symbols are used as rigid designators, or names, the meaning (or designation) implied by words is found in the rules by which we use them. In this case a concept is no longer seen as a fixed image of the object, but is a set of rules governing the use of the word. By the definition used here, symbols are arbitrary signs; any sound or mark could (at least in theory) represent any concept. For these signs to have meaning members of a community must all use roughly the same sounds and marks in the same way to refer to the same object categories. It is these rules, perhaps better described as coincidences of common application, which allow us to recognize which category is being referred to by any given speaker at a given time. Such a set of rules may, or may not, include an image or a paradigm, to delineate the class of things named, but, whatever contributes to the bounds for appropriate use of a word or symbol, it must be shared publicly by members of a culture.

This leads us to another important difference between icons and symbols. Icons are rigid designators referring to the class of things with which they have a resemblance, but this

reference is not based on common use, as is the case with symbols. The object of reference of an icon is a feature of its resemblance to it. How an icon is used is important for recognizing that it is indeed an icon, but not for knowing its intended referent.

Symbols, unlike icons, depend on a repeated usage so that members of a community can recognize their meaning. The conditions under which the use of a symbol is deemed, by a community, to be appropriate actually become the concept itself, although these "rules of use" often include memories of experiences, images, paradigm examples, and even icons.

"Even though a blind man obviously has no image of red, he uses the word appropriately in sentences. Burke thus anticipates Wittgenstein's much later doctrine that the meaning of a word is its use in language. More important, however, is the fact that he challenges the underlying notion that language is solely a cognitive instrument for the representation of ideas as facts or descriptions. In addition to representing ideas, words have effects and create emotional reactions often stronger than their referents."<sup>60</sup>

The above quote by Tyler not only supports the claim that it is the use according to rules which gives the meaning to symbols (in the tradition of Burke and Wittgenstein), but also reminds us that language does have uses and effects other than simply conveying dry information. It remains though, that the other effects and uses of language are parasitic on there being a content which is understood according to the normal use of a complex set of symbols.

It should also be noted that a large amount of the emotion portrayed during speech is not actually conveyed by the language itself, but is elicited and communicated by isolated symbols, and icons, and even indices, in the character of the voice and in the gestures of the speaker. This aspect of speech is much like music and other performing arts, often intentionally so. However, one should not confuse the similarity of speech with musical performance, as a similarity between the method and structure of music and language.

The behavioral aspect of meaning has important ramifications for our question of whether music is a language. If meaning is "a behavior executed by people when communicating",



then whether or not the meaning of music is similar to the meaning of language will have something to do with the behavior (or at least intended behavior) of the speaker and the musician. If a hypothetical culture had a system of highly interdependent musical symbols which a composer or performer used only for communicating specific messages, then one would have to admit that the situation looked a lot like the use of language. If there were no specific message, but the composer intended the listener to arrive at an experience or feeling solely through the conceptualization of the symbols presented, the music would be no less a language. Perhaps this is a large part of the experience of some styles of music, but one has to ask why, if the only intention of the composer is to stimulate the audience's conceptualization of certain ideas with symbols, does the composer use such a sensuous and visceral form of communication. Words, and phrases of words, are far better symbols since, as Langer pointed out, they have no importance of their own. The complex and visceral sounds of music take much more effort to recognize as symbols than words, and are far more distracting for their own sake than many other kinds of symbols. One has to suspect that even if music did occasionally behave as a language that there is some important reason for using music instead of words.

We have seen how the use of symbols must be considered along with the concepts and referents associated with the expressions, in explaining the meaning of expressions in everyday language. This is the last of Alston's "theories of meaning", but there is still another important factor for understanding the meaning in language. The intended meaning of an expression depends not only on referent, concept, and intention, but also on the context in which it is uttered.

"The text, after all, is not a self-contained world, because the sentences of which it is made do not succeed in freeing themselves entirely from the external world of speech acts." <sup>61</sup>

To recognize a speaker's intentions, one must often know something about what happened, and what was said before the current communication. More importantly, one must know what

are the normal uses of the symbols used in the culture in which the speaker is participating, and one must know enough about the situation of the speaker to accurately choose which of several possible interpretations are valid, and which are likely, in the current utterance. The context of the communication is important both for the issuer of the symbol to choose the appropriate form of expression, and for the interpreter to recognize what possible concept, and referent is intended. Of course, the different experiences of the speaker and the listener, will lead to at least slightly different ideas of what are the "rules of common usage" for the words and phrases used. This will in turn lead to minor or major differences in understanding what was said. However, the point here is that: as far as two people share the same concept, they must also be aware of the communicational context to make sense of most language.

An important point is that while context is essential for any meaningful interpretation of language, this is also true of most music. Context is important for the recognition and interpretation of all symbols: those organized into a language, as well as those that stand on their own. Context is also sometimes required for the recognition that icons are indeed icons. That music is dependent on context for interpretation might indicate that it contains some kind of icons or symbols, but it does not prove, by itself, that music is a system of interdependent symbols as is a language.

After the foregoing discussion, it should be reasonable to conclude that for music in general, or even for a specific style of music, to be considered a language, music must not only have significance and some sort of sign content, but it must have the specific kind of significance: that of a system of symbols. The significance of symbols, according to the behavioral theory of meaning, is that they are used intentionally to refer to specific objects (concrete and abstract). Language does this, not in a haphazard way, but with a system in which each of the symbols reinforce, and illuminate each other.

There are two major ways in which philosophers still try to show that music is a denotative language. Langer develops the notion, which dates in a simpler form back to Plato, that

music is a language of emotions. Langer<sup>62</sup> did not intend to say that musical symbols refer directly to the specific emotions of the composer. However, many of her contemporaries, claiming her as a source, argued that music was a language in every sense, with a system of symbols directly referring to the concepts of various emotions. Another intriguing theory which explains how musical symbols are necessarily referential, describes music as a structure of symbols which refer only to themselves and each other. Edward Lippman<sup>63</sup> and Harold Fiske<sup>64</sup>, in particular have made strong claims in this regard.

Both the "music is a language of emotions" theory, and the "music is a language about itself" theory which describe music as a system of symbols with specific referents are described in turn below. Following this, in chapter four, we will look at another way of reconciling our use of various kinds of signs in music and language.

### *Music as a Language of Emotions*

For most people there is, at least, some kind of music which has strong emotional connotations. The ability of music to conjure strong emotions in the listener has encouraged people to use music as a method of communicating and inciting emotions since ancient times. Perhaps this is the reason that some philosophers going back to Plato have referred to music as a language of the emotions. The following quote by Deryck Cooke is fairly typical of the attitude of most lay persons and even some philosophers today.

"... whatever else the mysterious art known as music may eventually be found to express, it is primarily and basically a language of the emotions, through which we directly experience the fundamental urges that move mankind, without the need of falsifying ideas and images - words or pictures."<sup>65</sup>

Cooke<sup>66</sup> goes on to explain his theory of the expression of music as follows: 1) First the composer has an "impulse," which means that "it must be that he has something to say, whether he knows it or not.". He says there must be some emotion "welling up inside" of which the composer might be "completely unaware". 2) The impulse is followed by "inspiration - the sudden materialization of a musical idea in the composer's mind." ... "every

composer draws continually on his experience of this tradition."<sup>67</sup> 3) Through the composer's, and then the performer's inspiration, the audience is moved by the composer's original emotion. A listener who does not feel the appropriate emotion from the music is DEFINED as "unmusical."<sup>68</sup>

This fanciful historic theory of musical expression is somewhat beautiful, but has several glaring flaws. Firstly, Cooke has chosen to look at only examples of Classical, Romantic, and early Modernist European music, which may include many emotional pieces but which is not representational of everything we mean by music in general, even in the West. Secondly, since he has defined, without justification, that any composer, performer, or listener who does not feel the appropriate emotion is "unmusical", his argument that musical people feel emotion in music is tautological and superfluous.

A third problem with this way of thinking, is related to the forgoing discussion of meaning. If in music "we directly experience the fundamental urges that move mankind, without the need of falsifying ideas and images" he cannot be talking about a medium of symbols. Icons also depend on images and ideas. Rather he must be talking about a different kind of communication which functions much closer to, although not identical with, indices which have implicit cause and effect relations, or at least some natural correlation. Such a form of direct effect which bypasses our ability to conceptualize and form images, is actually the antithesis of language, not a form of it. That music can have an effect like this is recognized by Langer and most others:

"Music is known, indeed, to affect pulse-rate and respiration, to facilitate or disturb concentration, to excite or relax the organism ..."<sup>69</sup>

However, the recognition that music can directly incite some forms of simple emotions, or feelings in the more general sensual sense, does not imply that this is the only way music affects us. Of course music is also capable of including all manner of signs, including icons and symbols, which can be used to represent emotions and emotional ideas as easily as they

are used to express logical deductions and observations. To see if music should be considered a language, it is these symbols we must look at, to determine if they function independently, or as a system.

Another big problem with Cooke's model of musical expression is that it claims that the composer must actually experience the emotion, before he can communicate it to the audience. This is the opposite of what many composers, including Andrew Lloyd-Weber, explain about their ability to elicit emotions through the music. For some composers, eliciting the exactly chosen emotion from the audience can be almost mechanical, like tuning an automobile engine. The idea that the emotional content in music is not necessarily a symptom of the composer's mood is explained by Langer, among others:

"Now, I believe the expression of feeling in a work of art - the function that makes the work an expressive form - is not symptomatic at all. An artist working on a tragedy need not be in personal despair or violent upheaval..."<sup>70</sup>

In fact the emotional content in music is no more a symptom of the composer's mood, than is the emotional content of written words, a mere symptom of the writer's mood. The composition may be influenced, consciously or subconsciously, by the composer's feelings, but how these feelings are expressed depends greatly on the composer's method of composition, the composer's intentions, and most importantly, the composer's ability. Even if a composer is trying to express his or her own emotions, this will only happen if the composer has adequate skill, and knowledge of the publicly accepted symbols and of the usual presentation of icons. For example, John Cage's aleatoric pieces, and much computer music, do not express their composers' feelings because these composers went out of their way to use systems of sound production which are not directly controlled by the composers' decisions.

If music is to be compared to language, we must look at how the signs in music are used to intentionally communicate meaning, not at whether some hidden force allows the listener to divine the composer's unrecognized innermost feelings. In the following quote, Langer

describes another of the ways that musical signs, in this case metaphors acting as icons, communicate an intended emotional quality.

"A work of art expresses a conception of life, emotion, inward reality. But it is neither a confessional nor a frozen tantrum; it is a developed metaphor, a non-discursive symbol [what we have called an ICON] that articulates what is verbally ineffable ..."71

Keep in mind that the above use of the word "symbol" is not the same as the one described in chapter 2 of this thesis. Our "symbol" is by definition discursive because it is used intentionally to represent something specific. A "non-discursive symbol" in Langer's verbiage, must be something like an icon or some other sign. If music communicates emotion through metaphor (a second order iconic use of symbols), it is referring to emotion by similarity and comparison with the sounds presented, not by referring to the concepts of the emotions directly as with symbols in a purely linguistic sense. For example, a French Horn voluntary might remind a listener of a hunting horn sounded during an aristocratic European hunt and thus remind the listener of the noble qualities which such aristocrats associate with the hunt. These images are brought to mind by the similarity of the musical sound, to the environmental sound, rather than through a description of the event. While the above quote refers to musical metaphors, the following quote indicates that music can also use symbols in the way of verbal language, although to a different end.

"If music has any significance, it is semantic, not symptomatic. Its 'meaning' is evidently not that of a stimulus to evoke emotions, nor that of a signal to announce them; if it has emotional content, it 'has' it in the same sense that language 'has' conceptual content -symbolically. "72

In this quote, Langer is using symbol in the specific sense of a denotative sign. It is important to recognize, though, that by "meaning" she specifically is referring to "significance". Furthermore, what she is calling an "emotion" are those specific feelings one only has when, and directly as a result of, listening to music. Nevertheless, here we finally have a claim that music is using symbols in the manner of language. Even then Langer only makes the comparison and never the claim that music actually is a language in the normal sense.

Here we have descriptions of music acting to elicit emotions directly, in a manner reminiscent of the way indices rely on natural cause and effect. We have emotions being implied by metaphor, a kind of icon; and we have the recognition that music uses symbols to represent emotions. If the latter were exclusive, we would have good reason to call music a language, but music, unlike language, operates in all three ways: sometimes indexical, sometimes iconic, sometimes referential and conceptual, and frequently all three at once.

We have looked at theories which claim that metaphor, direct effect, and symbol are each the only possible way that music can have an emotional effect. A common flaw in each of these theories, however, is that they concentrate on the "meaning inherent in the music" rather than on the "meaning intended for the music to communicate". If, as we have already discussed, the composer has no intended message, then the meaning of the music is limited to "some sort of culturally defined significance". For there to be meaning in the linguistic sense of "a message communicated" we must recognize that such communication necessarily implies the intention to communicate.

When music has a strong effect, particularly an emotional one, it is very difficult for the listener to know immediately what kind of effect was intended by the composer (if it was intended at all), and therefore, it is easy to believe any desired theory of how music is inherently emotional. However, if we look at composers' intentions it should be obvious that music can be intended to have direct effects, which it then in turn actually has. Music can be metaphoric of emotions, and it can be deliberately filled with symbols of emotions themselves, and with symbols that have emotional content. The presence of any of these does not prove an absence of the others, nor does it show that the presence of any of these is absolutely essential to describing a series of sounds as "music".

While language can also be used to create what seem like direct effects, and metaphors, these non-symbol effects are a result of the symbols in the language. Where this not the case, we would attribute the emotional effect to some other aspect of speech than the use of language.

Language is, by definition, a system of symbols. When music is said to directly instigate emotions, it is not always done through symbols as with language.

Another interesting concern for considering music a language of emotions is that much of the emotion elicited by some pieces of music are not intended by the composer at all. In this case music is not only not a language of emotions, it can't even be said to be any kind of method of communicating emotions. Perhaps, though it still would be acting as an instigator of emotions. This is possible even if the listener, in feeling the emotion, imagines identifying with an extra-musical source such as the composer, or the subject of a song.

Even when the intended effect of a composition includes emotions, it may be in an instigative manner rather than in a communicative manner. That is, a composer may wish to cause the audience to feel an emotion directly, rather than merely communicating his or her emotions, or communicating ideas about emotions. If a specific emotion or feeling is instigated by the composer this might be considered communication by a type of index, in that it would be the predictable and intended effect of some musical cause. However, music which intentionally causes an emotional reaction, but not of any specific emotion, would be hard to call communicative, because it is not clear what is being communicated. "Communication" implies a fairly specific and intended meaningful objective which cannot be found in such a general type of instigation. In this last case, there would not be meaning in the communicative sense, only meaning in the significance sense.

Whatever the intentions of the composer, emotions are always personal in the subject. Emotions can be imagined, stirred by an external source, or brought about by the awareness of set of symbols (linguistic or not), but they are always specific to the individual feeling them.

"'Whatever we feel in music,' writes [Adam] Smith<sup>73</sup>, 'is an original, and not a sympathetic feeling: it is our own gaiety, sedateness, or melancholy; not the reflected disposition of another person.' "<sup>74</sup>



John Neubauer<sup>75</sup> sites Hanslick, Stravinsky, Popper, and Leahy as vigorously criticizing the idea that art expresses emotion. In fact, quite a number of authors favor this interpretation:

"Hanslick<sup>76</sup> says, 'It is, aesthetically, quite correct to speak of a theme as having a sad or noble accent, but not as expressing the sad or noble feelings of the composer' (P.74)"<sup>77</sup>

"The notion that the expression of a piece of music is to be gauged by the emotions aroused in the listeners has become difficult to maintain ... the affect of sadness is not a result of music but a quality we use to describe it. Many eighteenth-century writers thought differently, and they introduced the term expression to account for the power of music to sway the passions."<sup>78</sup>

At this point we must be careful not to overstate the point. That music does not inherently, or necessarily, express the composer's own feelings, is not to say that it cannot be used as an attempt to express a composer's feelings. Whether through stimulating direct (but limited) physical affects, acting as an icon or metaphor, or by representing an emotional concept with a musical symbol, a composer can refer to his or her own feelings **if** that is what is intended.

If the meaning of symbols depends on the issuer's intentions and culturally accepted ways of using such symbols, the same is true for the symbols in music. Even if the symbols, are not interdependent as they are in a language, or if they are mixed with other forms of expression and other kinds of communicative signs, the meaning of a musical symbol cannot exceed the intentions of the composer, nor the limits of a culture's expectations of that symbol.

In the following quote, Walker gathers substantial support for the possibility of listeners attributing emotional and conceptual content to music.

"The theme is quite clear. The writers previously quoted [Davies(1978), Hanslick(1957), Meyer(1956), Wollheim(1968), Schopenhauer, Pratt(1968)] display a remarkable uniformity of viewpoint, and it can clearly be deduced from this particular body of knowledge that music does not have intrinsic meaning concerning moods, or attitudes of mind, but that it is perfectly possible for the listener to attribute such meanings to musical sounds."<sup>79</sup>

It is clear that music can incite and communicate emotions. Sometimes the emotional content of a piece of music is intended, particularly when we refer to it as a form of communication , and sometimes the emotional content is imagined by the listener who is expecting to hear

some such content. Sometimes the emotion felt by the listener is also felt by the composer, and sometimes not. In spite of all this the emotional content of music does not effect the linguistic status of music. Insofar as music is, or can be, a language at all, it can be a language which often, but not necessarily communicates emotions.

The emotional content of music still cannot take us beyond our conclusion so far, that music is a set of practices which may include denotative symbols as in language, but does not necessarily do so. Furthermore, the use of icons and indices, and similar signs, as well as non-language symbols in music, particularly as they reflect a variety of emotional content, shows that even when music is using symbols in a manner similar to that of language, it is also doing much more.

### ***Music as a Language About Itself***

There is one recent development in the attempt to define music as a language by describing it as a system of symbols. This theory says that music is a system of interdependent symbols which refer to themselves. These symbols are truly denotative because they refer specifically to parts of the same piece of music and to other music.

"...music is a sensuously appealing, self-contained tonal language characterized by abstract motion, events, and dynamic process. These abstract qualities may trigger (in a listener who is so inclined) certain kinds of affect - which may even resemble at times the affect experienced by the composer and/or performer. But this affect is extrinsic to the real sense of continuity of the music. The intrinsic meaning of music is communicated in its own language: the language of tone."<sup>80</sup>

If music is a language at all, this is how it would need to be described. The language would not be just another way of pronouncing or encoding English, Swahili, or Inuktituk. It would be a system of symbols which exist in the sounds of the music itself and which depend on each other and the sounds themselves. Even if we dispense with the idea that music is purely a language, and wonder instead if music is a practice of sound making which includes a language, or languages, this is what the language must be like.

If music is purely a language, all of its effects must be attributed to the symbols within it. If music is a larger practice which might include denotative symbols, as is argued here, it could still have intended and unintended emotional effects, and other kinds of signs, but the symbols of the musical language must represent something in a publicly accepted way. The participants in that specific musical culture must be able to hear and agree on exactly what the music is representing, and must be able to do so through the musical sounds themselves, rather than through program notes, and explanations.

One subject which Harold Fiske sees music to denote in a publicly recognizable way, is the subject of music itself:

"Music is a metalanguage ... The metalanguage is a language of syntax; it defines the surface structure rules setting the range for potential interelement and interpattern relationships. Unlike natural language which divides into an object language... and a metalanguage... music is limited to syntactical descriptors -- that is, the initial recognition of a relevant and appropriate ... tonal-rhythmic structure and the relationship of that structure to other structures."<sup>81</sup>

"Unlike speech (where truth-value of rational propositions extends beyond the syntactical descriptor level, and is measured by the extent to which statements asserting a proposition are warranted on the basis of coherence with some other set of beliefs) music is limited to musical statements about other musical statements with extensions limited to coherent inter-composition and inter-stylistic comparisons."<sup>82</sup>

The word "metalanguage" comes from descriptions of normal languages where it is recognized that while most words are denotative ("rigid designators" in Green's<sup>83</sup> verbiage), languages also include words which are not actually denotative themselves but contribute to the structure and organization of the sentence.<sup>84</sup> Words like "all", "and", "also", and "but", contribute to the sense of a sentence only through helping show the organization of other words. They denote nothing themselves. Such words are called "metalinguistic" because they contribute to the architecture of the language without directly adding denotative content. Fiske is making the case that the symbols of musical language function like metalinguistic words, and that these are the only words of the musical language.

To react appropriately to Fiske's claim we must remember two things. First, although language is a construction set for symbols, and a system for presenting symbols, not every word in a language is itself a symbol. Specifically, non-denotative words such as metalinguistic words are not symbols in any sense. Therefore, claiming that musical idioms act like metalinguistic words, while an interesting observation, does not show either that music is a language, nor even that it has symbols. Second, metalinguistic words are defined as such because they are parasitic on other words for their meaning and for their appropriate use, and vice versa. It makes no sense whatever to have a meta-anything without a lower level anything on which the meta-anything is inherently and absolutely dependent.

In reaction to theories such as Fiske's, Roy Wagner makes a poignant observation:

"... a symbol that stands for itself, is not so much an impossibility as an inanity -- who cares? Such a construct is interesting, and relevant to anyone's concern only insofar as it touches upon -- converts, inverts, reverts, subverts, perverts -- and as it relates to, conventional points of reference."<sup>85</sup>

In order for a self-referential system of symbols -- the closest we can manage to a purely "meta-" language -- to have any significance at all, it must have points of reference outside of itself. In fact, it must include the world of the speaker and the listener to have any referential effect at all. Edward Lippman (after Leonard Meyer) as well as Fiske, suggest that such an external reference is related to the setting up of, and denying or fulfilling of audience expectations about the structure of a piece of music:

"Meyer<sup>86</sup> claims that embodied meaning is a product of expectation; it is what a musical pattern indicates and points to, not in a referential, extramusical sense, but in an other-musical-event sense. That is, a given musical event suggests and even prepares us for (leads us to expect) a 'more or less definite consequent musical event' (p35) assuming that we have an understanding of both the style of the given pattern and its tonal-rhythmic context."<sup>87</sup>

"... musical meaning is neither embodied in the sound object or in realized patterns. Rather, meaning is a response embodied in the process of pattern construction and, particularly, pattern comparison (decision-making) activity."<sup>88</sup>

It is an important observation that a majority of musical signs are concerned with a forecasting and echoing of the music itself, and include reference to other examples of music.

For example, a return to the theme after a long exposition is a statement of form only because the return relates to the original. M. Kagel's Ludwig Van is a more extreme example where the entire content of the piece are quotes from various Beethoven pieces. While the piece is about Beethoven, this is only evident if one recognizes the fragments within. Many such musical signs are indeed symbols which refer to their objects in the usual sense. However, many of these signs act as icons, leading us to hear musical expectations through the comparison patterns of sounds, not through symbols and concepts, but through the actual presentation of the comparison sound. Furthermore, many of our expectations of music are not intended by the composer, as symbols and icons need to be, but are a function of our experience of what kinds of events follow which other events in a given style of music.

If our expectations of music in general are consistent enough that we can consider them a "rule" for the presentation of music in a given style, then the recognition of the rule, and the assumption of what will happen next, is an indexical communication. That is to say that, if we perceive the events of music to follow "naturally" (even though we know they are in fact composed) then the indication of an expected event, such as the traditional resolution of some sort of dissonance, might be regarded as a index because the perceived effect is that of cause and effect, or at least one event which naturally follows another.

Clearly we can see that music itself is one of the objects to which the signs of music can be used to refer, along with emotions and other things, but there is no evidence that all possible styles of music *must* (necessarily) include an interdependent system of self-referential symbols to be recognized as a member of the set of sonic events we categorize as music. Perhaps some musical cultures do include such a system -- a language -- but this is not a defining aspect of music, nor is it the only kind of sign used in music.

There is one other important difference between language symbols, and those indicating musical expectations. Misusing language symbols, as well as those meta-language words, is usually considered a mis-communication. Failing to follow the expected patterns in music is

part of the expectation, and part of what makes it interesting. The symbols indicating musical structure do not need to be absolutely consistent to have their intended effect. This is not to say that music is a language where lying is allowed, because misleading the listener cannot be considered "lying" in a form of communication where that is the norm.

Since there are an unlimited number of possible, or potential, styles of music, it is impossible to make claims that apply to all of them except insofar as they apply to what we include in our conceptual category of music. Self-reference through symbols, icons, and indices, is an interesting and important part of many styles of music but this is not one of the aspects of sound that we use to distinguish music from non-music. Even if we could show that all known music contains self-referential systems of interdependent symbols, it still does not make sense to say that music in general is simply such a system of symbols, or even that music in general, necessarily contains such a system. This is merely one of the many things, and one of the several ways that music can communicate meaning.

"Yet logic does not imply that music and language are the same; only that they have certain similarities. Above all, the relationships that can be created within a musical style, like those that arise in language, seem to be spontaneous products of a mind in tune with its material of thought and capable of an inexhaustible number of fresh associations and transformations within an established idiom...But the new meanings produced by structural innovation in music - like the meanings of musical configurations in general - are in principal intrinsic to the art, however much they resemble those found in language, and even though they are sometimes derived from language."<sup>89</sup>

So far we have looked at three clear descriptions of how language has meaning, and determined that this is not primarily the kind of meaning in music. However it should be mentioned that there are many other ways of attributing meaning to language and music. One fairly popular theory of meaning in language has come to be termed "deconstructionism". This has been described by Jacques Derrida<sup>90</sup>, Michel Foucault<sup>91</sup>, and Stanley Fish<sup>92</sup>, among others. Deconstructionism holds that symbols do not by themselves have any meaning, but that the meaning is an interpretive decision of the observer of the symbols.

Deconstructionism is criticized by many including Paul Crowther<sup>93</sup>, and rightly so. There are two serious flaws with this approach to describing meaning. First, if we are talking about "meaning" as the content of communication, we cannot ignore that "communication" implies that there is a sender as well as a receiver. Therefore we cannot even imagine this type of meaning without assuming that there is some sort of intention for some sort of specific content on the part of the originator of the message. We can, perhaps, ignore the mistakes, metaphors, and personality of the issuer of a message, but we can never (by definition) consider something as a message, without considering that it had one or more originators intending that the message be communicated. However we try, it is impossible to escape the idea of intention in meaning, if meaning is considered to be the content of communication. If we do not consider meaning as the content of a message, then we have collapsed our two different uses of meaning (i.e. content and significance) into only one kind of meaning, that of significance, and in so doing we have nullified the possibility of communication and language altogether.

While this is no minor flaw to the deconstructionist view of meaning, it is not the only flaw. While deconstructionists correctly point out that meaning is interpreted by the observer, and that it is possible for different observers to interpret some messages differently, it cannot be the case that this is the only aspect of "meaning". When people interpret messages, they do so as part of a culture in which they recognize that symbols have common uses, and are being used according to a common use. Interpretation is part of meaning, but this does not escape the facts of intention, grammar, syntax, concept, and eventually reference.

Perhaps one might argue that deconstructionism is appropriate for finding meaning in music even if it is not appropriate for finding meaning in verbal language. Without taking either side of this debate, it must be pointed out that this line of thinking already assumes that music is not language, in that its meaning is not associated with communication as with language.

There are yet other systems for describing meaning in music, such as that put forth by Nattiez<sup>94</sup> of the French semiology tradition. However, once one starts looking for different explanations of meaning in music and meaning in language, one is already operating on the assumption that they are not the same thing, and this is sufficient for our purposes here.

To conclude this chapter, let us summarize the findings. First the word "meaning" has several uses. Music obviously conforms to the broadest use of "meaning" -- that of significance -- but in order to call music a type of language, we looked at whether or not music had the same kind of meaning as the symbols which make up language -- namely that it is intentionally used to refer to things. While the non-symbol signs in music do not necessarily communicate meaning the same way that language does, it is clear that music can contain symbols which do behave in the same way as other symbols, and are intentionally used to refer to specific objects. While it is possible that some styles of music could have symbols which are organized into a language-like syntax, most styles of music have few or no denotative signs which could be considered part of a language.

Whether or not a given musical style includes a system of symbols -- a language -- there is always the possibility of other kinds of signs. Furthermore, the immediacy and visceral sensuality of music is different than that of language. There is no evidence that music does not, in general, nor in specific instances, include language and language-like behavior, but this is not a universal truth about all of what we include in the category of music.

Music does, however, often communicate meaning. It uses symbols, systematically and independently, as well as icons and indices, and possibly other yet to be classified types of signs, to communicate ideas and images about itself, to communicate as well as to instigate emotions and other kinds of physical reactions, and to represent other specific objects and abstract ideas in our world. Whether or not music can be considered a language in the specific sense of a system of symbols, or even to include such a language among other



things, music must certainly be considered one of the ways in which human beings communicate, and therefore might be called a language in a broader metaphoric sense.

"This meaning is only by exception intentionally symbolic or referential; essentially it is a special kind of meaning, as we well convey in our conviction that music is meaningful, that it makes sense, although also, in fact, it really means nothing."<sup>95</sup>

Although this quote overstates the non-linguistic nature of music, by not to considering that some music is more symbolic and referential than average, it does highlight the duality between our sense that music has meaning, and our logical observation that it doesn't always.

The following chapter will propose a theory which explains why it is important to recognize the subtle differences between music and language mentioned above. We shall see that music and language are used for much different communicational objectives, and that is why they are used to express different kinds of meaning, and have different ways of conveying such meanings. It will be shown that it is these differences between languages and the arts, including music, that make both forms of communication important pursuits for all members of any culture.

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**Notes:**

<sup>41</sup> Kramer, Lawrence. *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800 - 1900*, 1990. P.1.

<sup>42</sup> Alston, William P. *Philosophy of Language*, 1964. PP.10,11.

<sup>43</sup> op. cit., P.11.

<sup>44</sup> Tyler, Stephen A. *The Said And The Unsaid: Mind Meaning and Culture*, 1978. P.168.

<sup>45</sup> Alston, William P. *Philosophy of Language*, 1964. PP.12,13.

<sup>46</sup> Langer, Susanne K. *Philosophy In A New Key (3rd ed.)*, 1957. PP.60, 61.

<sup>47</sup> Tyler, Stephen A. *The Said And The Unsaid: Mind Meaning and Culture*, 1978. P.179.

<sup>48</sup> Alston, William P. *Philosophy of Language*, 1964. PP.23,24.

<sup>49</sup> Green, Georgia M. *Some Remarks on How Words Mean*, 1983. P.7.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

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- 51 op. cit., P.13.
- 52 Quoted by: op. cit., P.14.  
Reference to: Hilary Putnam. "Is Semantics Possible?" Reprinted in *MIND, Language and Reality*;  
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- 53 op. cit., P.14.
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Reference to: Dell Hymes, "Models of the interaction of language and social life" In J.J.Gumperz and  
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- 55 Ibid.
- 56 Green, Georgia M. *Some Remarks on How Words Mean*, 1983. P.5, (original emphasis).
- 57 Tyler, Stephen A. *The Said And The Unsaid: Mind Meaning and Culture*, 1978. P.175.
- 58 Kripke, Saul. "Naming and Necessity" in D.Davidson and G.Harman (eds.), *Semantics of Natural  
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- 59 Green, Georgia M. *Some Remarks on How Words Mean*, 1983. PP.4, 5.
- 60 Tyler, Stephen A. *The Said And The Unsaid: Mind Meaning and Culture*, 1978. PP.165, 166.
- 61 op. cit., P.383
- 62 Langer, Susanne K. *Philosophy In A New Key (3rd ed.)*, 1957. Introduction.
- 63 Lippman, Edward A. *A Humanistic Philosophy of Music*, 1977.
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- 67 op. cit., P.171.
- 68 op. cit., P.204.
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- 72 op.cit., P.218.
- 73 (originally from Adam Smith "Essays on Philosophical Subjects" London 1795. P.164.
- 74 Barry, Kevin. *Music, Language, and the Sign* , 1987. P.109.

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- 75 Neubauer, John .*The Emancipation of Music From Language*, 1986.P.149.
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- 79 Walker, Robert. *Music Education tradition and Innovation*, 1984. P.18.
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- 85 Wagner, Roy Symbols That Stand for Themselves,1986. P.6.
- 86 Meyer, Leonard B. *Emotion and Meaning in Music*. Chicago: TheUniversity of Chicago Press, 1956.
- 87 Fiske, Harold E. *Music and Mind*, 1990. P.9,10.
- 88 op. cit., P. 85.
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- 95 op. cit., P.160 [conclusion].

## **Chapter 4**

### **The Social Context of Music and Language**

As we compare the symbol and sign content of music and that of language, it becomes clear that even if we can't consider all music a language, or languages, in the specific sense of a "system of symbols," we must still consider music a form of communication because of its regular usage of communicative signs which can be said to have some kind of intended meaning. Once we recognize that all communication is not as specific and as organized as are our languages, it becomes easier to discuss the purpose and function of music as a not-primarily-linguistic, and not-usually-linguistic, communicative act.

One of the obstacles to recognizing the different communicative purposes and methods of music and language is that our artistic (including musical) and linguistic pursuits are so often combined. The inherent limitations and advantages of various types of signs encourages us, as experienced and effective communicators, to use a great variety of communicative strategies. For example, poets use metaphor, a kind of icon, to extend the communication beyond the symbols which make up language. Composers may add text or theatrical gesture to their music to add more specificity than is otherwise possible. Thus, speech, and other linguistic media clearly use, at least occasionally, some of the sensuousness that has been reserved for music and other art forms; and further, music can and does draw heavily on our skills as symbol users, and may sometimes behave as if it were actually a language. That we use them in combination does not, however, imply they are the same anymore than a wiener and a hot-dog bun can be considered to have the same taste or texture.

In this chapter, we will first look at some of the significant differences between music and language use, before looking at how both contribute differently to human communication. Only when we can see that sensual and symbolic elements work together, though in different

proportions, in both music and language use, will we begin to appreciate how complex and full is our almost uniquely human heritage of communication.

Finally, we will look at how art, language, and signs of all types are constituent of, rather than ingredient to, culture. Recognizing the interconnectedness of the notions of self, society, culture, art, and language, will show not only that music and language work together, but that they work together **BECAUSE** of their different roles, not in spite of them. Looking at the different social and cultural roles that music and language play in all human societies will not only help music educators better understand what they are teaching, but also why it is so important to teach it.

The next and final chapter will look at how this analysis of the different, yet interdependent, social functions of music and language must influence curriculum choices and teaching methods in the music classroom.

### *Communicating with Music and Language*

Music can easily be said to contain a great number of communicative signs. It can be used to signal, express, inspire, recite, represent, reminisce, or simply create a new experience. It uses an organized system of interdependent symbols as is the case with language only rarely, but it can certainly be called a form of communication. Since language is one of the most ubiquitous, and most highly organized, forms of communication, language is a paradigm for what we mean by communication. As a paradigm for communication, "language" is sometimes substituted for the expression "form of communication". This is the broadest possible use of the term "language", but is inaccurate in that it ignores many of the defining aspects of what we normally call language -- primarily, **how** language communicates (with an interdependent system symbols). Referring to all forms of communication as "languages" is an apt metaphor but a misleading description if taken literally. Many references to music as

a language are of this type: they are merely claiming that music communicates, not that it is necessarily always a system of interconnected symbols.

While it must be conceded that some music does use symbols in a very organized way, there are still some differences between the symbols in music and those of language. Written language, for example, strives to use identical, or nearly identical shapes, or series of shapes, to represent the same meaning each time it is written. Spoken language also attempts to do this. While different spoken languages have different emphases on various acoustical properties of sound, such as rhythm, pitch contour, timbre, loudness, etc., any one language is assumed to use all of these elements roughly consistently when identical meaning is desired. For example, in English the phonemes of a word always follow in the same order, and the same speaker is likely to use the same tone of voice, when intending the same emotional connotations. Of course, a certain degree of consistency is vital for the recognition of any symbol, but this seems to be less of a priority in music -- even in the styles of music which put a very high importance on symbols such as Wagnerian opera. Musical symbols, even within the same piece of music, might sometimes depend only on pitch contour, only on instrumentation, or only chord progressions, while never demanding consistent use of all three simultaneously. Occasionally all the acoustic elements being applied by the composer are brought into collusion for the presentation of a particularly important symbol, but this is not universally the case as it usually is with spoken language.

This inconsistent presentation of symbols in music is sometimes so obvious that it is tempting to claim that each style of music, each composer, or even each individual piece of music, has its own unique language. But of course, private invented languages make no sense. How can there be a "commonly used system of symbols" which isn't commonly used. If each style of music, or composer uses signs and symbols differently, this is ample reason to suspect that the way in which the signs are being used, is not really a language at all. It is

more likely that the communicative power of such music is not presented by symbols at all, but by some other kind of sign. The following quote by Robert Walker highlights this fact.

"There would be little point in inventing your own verbal language because there would be no one to communicate with except yourself. In any case, inventing an entirely unique and esoteric verbal language could only be an act of extreme mental isolation signifying a conscious desire to deny to language the very purpose of its existence: to facilitate communication between humans. With music this does not seem to apply, judging by recent developments in Western music. ...there appears to be no convincing evidence, even within a specific musical culture, of the necessity for a common musical grammar whereby such elements as melody, harmony, and rhythm must conform to some basic structural principles, as is the case with words and groups of words that make up language structure."<sup>96</sup>

Another difference between linguistic and musical symbols is that most composers and performers deliberately vary repetitious passages to a much greater extent than the same people vary their pronunciation or spelling of certain words. Furthermore, music often tries to present several different symbols simultaneously, or might intentionally present a symbol ambiguously so that it can be interpreted in a variety of ways. Of course this can happen, to a much lesser degree in spoken or written language, but this is an example of "artistic license". Normally, one expects the referents of any symbols, especially those in language, to be clear. The consistent and linear, one-symbol-at-a-time way in which language is usually used clearly speaks of a very different set of communicative priorities than the complexity, plurality, and inconsistency of many multi-performer musical forms.

Different levels of consistency in presentation, how ever quantifiable, are merely symptomatic of a deeper difference between music and language. They have different kinds of meaning (in the significance sense). Language is significant because it is used to intentionally represent specific concepts, categories, and images. It is dependent on some degree of common experience and rule following for success. Whereas the only universally significant aspect of music is that it involves the experience of intentionally organized sound. This is not to be confused with sounds resulting from the organization of other

cultural artifacts such as symbols or machines. It is the sounds themselves which must be considered in a visceral, sensual way before they can be considered music.

The argument in the above paragraph is simple and convenient and has probably been ventured and forgotten many times before. The problem with it is that language use is often also concerned with the sensuality of the sounds, or images, presented. Furthermore, we have already established that music can act as a system of symbols. So what's the difference? The point is that it is the **use** of language which includes aesthetic considerations, not the system of symbols itself. Also, although music may contain a systematic use of symbols, it also may not and still be every bit as much a piece of music.

Poetry is often cited as an example of how language can be completely concerned with the sensation of sound, and with metaphor and other non-symbol signs. But poetry is an ART. Like all arts, poetry exists in media, i.e. it is made of something (in this case language), but like all art it is more than its medium. A statue made of glass is more than a window, a symphony is more than sounds made on instruments, and poetry is much more than just language. It is through the structure and organization of the medium that art presents its communicating signs. In the case of poetry, the images and concepts indigenous to the language are organized in such a way as to go beyond the normal limits of inartistic language use. It is the artistic concern for the vitality of the images, and musical concern for the sensation of sound (especially in the case of concrete poetry) which allows the use of the language to become an art, but this is inherent in the process not the medium. It is like a collage: the images chosen are individually important, but do not determine the end result. It is in how the whole work fits together, and in how the images relate to each other, that there is some kind of art.

"Oratory alone ... is a type of music, for it attends to the properties of duration, rhythm, tone color, and volume, and indeed to repetition and form as well. The same is obviously true of various types of poetry, but not the everyday language of communication."<sup>97</sup>



This description of poetry is quite significant. Most intelligent and successful language use is at least a little bit poetic or "artistic". Again, this is not an indigenous property of symbol systems, but a natural tendency for the users of symbol systems. Human beings, having a predisposition for trying to communicate, use all forms of communication that are available. Language use includes artistic and musical considerations to aid its primary communicative goal of presenting denotative referents, while musical compositions will make use of known symbols, including text and language, in an attempt to add detail to the experience it is presenting.

There can be two different ways of looking at this. Either art and language are similar communicative acts using two different mixes of the same ingredients (communicative signs), or we can look at art and language as two different types of activities which are usually undertaken at the same time. In the former case linguistic communication primarily uses a system of symbols, but also uses metaphor and attention to concrete sounds, and page lay-out, etc. Meanwhile, musical communication primarily stimulates the senses directly and uses symbols as well. In this case there is little to distinguish between musical performance and language use but the different proportions of symbols, icons, and indices found in each. In the latter case, when we consider that art and language are two different types of activities that we often perform together, there is a much clearer boundary between music and language. If art (including music) is a way of presenting experiences for others to share, and language is a set of related symbols, and rules for using them, which are together used for referring to common experiences, then we have two clearly different activities that go well together. Effective language use involves some consideration about the contextual experiences of the reader or listener such as how the page looks, what one's voice sounds like, rhythm, shape and other artistic concepts. At the same time, interesting art pieces include some symbols so that the artist has more effect on the public's inner experiences, as well as the external and sensual.

The problem with both of these ways of comparing music and language, is the tendency to compare apples with oranges. Usually when we talk about language, we refer to the system of symbols itself. This is not art. It is the **use** of language which is often artistic, or musical. However, when we consider music we usually are referring to the practice of making music, or specific examples of it. Since there is no single system of signs which we can point to and say "that is music" we have nothing to easily compare directly to the system of symbols which is language. The act of communicating with language, clearly overlaps, at least occasionally, with the act of musical communication, but the substance of each is different. Language is an interrelated set of symbols, and music is a way of experiencing sound. Perhaps this is analogous to exercise and game-playing: they have different objectives, and are often done together, but they need not be combined.

While recognizing that music often uses symbols, and may occasionally even act in a linguistic way, and at the same time, effective speech has many musical considerations, and can even become used as music in some special cases, for the purposes of this present argument we will contrast and compare these two different elements of communication as if they were used independently of each other. This will allow us to look more clearly at the effect of each.

One clue as to the nature of the different social functions of music and language, as hinted at above, is that there is a "distinction between language and speech."<sup>98</sup> Language being the system of symbols we use, and speech being but one method of their use. This is not a possible distinction in music. In language, the system of symbol creation exists in a society. The meaning of language depends on a successful use of language through speech or writing, or some other codification. The successful use of language depends on the "audience" already being aware and familiar with most of the words used.

Music is not a system of symbols with predetermined meanings already out there to be used when desired. While there are rules and common expectations, they are broken or ignored

frequently without any serious detriment to the result. Music cannot exist apart from its presentation either virtually (as a score or imagined sound), or in reality. The sound **IS** the meaning, not a representation of it. A composer organizes sounds to be heard, which may carry a large amount of symbolic information, but the meaning is in the audience's combined experience of the performance of the sounds, the sounds themselves, and the images evoked by the symbols. This is a different quality of experience than the experience of symbols alone.

"So it is with Coleridge: 'The delight in richness and sweetness of sound, even to a faulty excess'; the sense of musical delight.'"<sup>99</sup>

Now this difference in the subjective quality of the experience of music and the experience of language is not trivial. The symbols which comprise language are public and thus limited to shared experiences, and shared interpretations of those experiences. Using a symbol in the expected way is how we refer to specific categorical objects which represent in the speaker's mind some particular subset of experiences. We then assume the listener will understand the utterance as some kind of similar visceral or vicarious experience. Perhaps not everyone in a culture shares in a direct experience of every concept, and those that do, do not have identical experiences equated with a concept, but there is still, and **must** be, an assumption of common use of the public symbols. Furthermore, that common use is a referral to some kind of assumed-to-be-commonly-held experience. Thus language is a very efficient and accurate way of referring to ideas and images we all know, and connections between such ideas. But language also has a way of filtering out those experiences which are unique because there can be no concepts with which to refer to them. There is no possibility of a common usage of an original symbol.

In chapter 3 we recognized that context, and thus expectation, are important elements for the interpretation of symbols. Now we can see that this is fundamental to, rather than merely descriptive of, how symbols are used.

While it is the discursive symbols of language that let us quantify, qualify, describe and even remember our experiences, there are aspects of our subjective experience which are not shared enough to become public symbols. These private experiences are impossible to speak about, and to remember, except perhaps as a fleeting gestalt "feeling" of a moment, but nevertheless they exist:

"Whatever there is in experience that will not take the impress - directly or indirectly - of discursive form, is not discursively communicable or, in the strictest sense, logically thinkable. It is unspeakable, ineffable; according to practically all serious philosophical theories today, it is unknowable.

"Yet there is a great deal of experience that is knowable, not only as immediate, formless, meaningless impact, but as one aspect of the intricate web of life, yet defies discursive formulation, and therefore verbal expression: that is what we sometimes call the subjective aspect of experience, the direct feeling of it - what it is like to be walking and moving ... [etc.]" <sup>100</sup>

"Whatever resists projection into the discursive form of language, is indeed, hard to hold in conception, and perhaps impossible to communicate, in the proper and strict sense of the word 'communicate.'" <sup>101</sup>

It is accepted by most philosophers that concepts and symbols are the materials of conscious thought. That is, it is the symbols and concepts directly which we remember and manipulate when we think. However, this kind of discursive thought is not the only state of mind that a person may wish to remember or communicate.

"... it is now being recognized that our minds are actively structuring our experiences in all sorts of complex ways which often never become named symbols." <sup>102</sup>

These direct feelings which "resist the discursive form of language" and "never become named symbols" are indeed difficult to communicate, but they are not impossible. Feelings of both the emotional and sensory variety can be better communicated and remembered when they are interpreted in terms of the symbols available including language, but this can leave out some unique aspects of the feeling or observation. If one limits communication to the use of symbols as in language, then unique experiences are probably impossible to communicate, or nearly so. However, humans use many other kinds of signs to communicate, especially in not-strictly-denotative forms such as art.

Art, including music, is not limited to making propositions and using symbols in the expected way, although it could if it had enough symbols that were organized into a language. For example Japanese Kabuki music has specific signals which might mean "The Emperor is dead." or "This man is lying." This, however, is uncommon. Music can and does more often dwell in the realms of mind beyond the denotative and discursive form of language, and can give focus to such feelings which are not always describable, communicable, or even thinkable using only symbols. Such fleeting focus can provide the moment it takes to extract discursive information from the aural sensation, or it can act to share publicly aspects of the sensation in a non-verbal (and thus non-linguistic) manner. Once a sensation is somehow shared, even in the abstract manner of much music, it is possible for a culture to develop new concepts to fit.

" ... music is unlike speech: music is nondenotative and, while grammatical within the bounds of accepted musical practice, music does not consist of articles, verbs, pronouns, [etc.] ... While it might be possible to develop a communication system consisting of musical tones and patterns used as signals representing specific objects or actions, it appears impossible to develop an object-level musical communication system."<sup>103</sup>

"The primary purpose of speech perception is to derive propositional content from perceived sentences. But, unlike speech, musical percepts or 'images' hold inherent interest as tonal-rhythmic timbral shapes or patterns."<sup>104</sup>

From these quotes by Fiske it is clear that the communicative purpose of language is different from that of music. The first quote overstates the argument a bit, as music can occasionally make propositions if it contains enough discrete symbols, but the point is that this is unusual, and not an expected feature of all music. Language is a more effective and less ambiguous form of communication when the message is about already shared experiences and is a specific denotative statement. Of course language is capable of many acts beyond just denotative statements, but all are parasitic on there being some intended truth content. On the other hand, art forms including music can be a way of sharing an experience itself: the hunter dances the death of the bear; a musician muses on a particular melancholy feeling; or a

painter creates a never before seen perspective. These are not truth statements, nor even parasitic upon included truth statements -- these are a form of presentation for experiences about which the audience, the critics, and the artist will make truth statements. When the statements are made they will be in the form of language. The music, however, is rarely a language itself.

"Concepts always and forever yield knowledge about. They never yield knowledge of. Works of art yield knowledge of ." <sup>105</sup>

Again, works of art can include concepts and symbols, but are not limited to such. The main purpose of art, and a distinguishing feature that helps us recognize what is art, is that art presents something other than just symbols -- some more tangible experience. That "a picture is worth a thousand words" is ample recognition that we expect art to present what is difficult to identify with language. If "music is sound that has, in some manner, intentionally been given some culturally defined artistic significance," as mentioned in chapter 1, then artistic significance seems to be appointed by a culture to sonic experiences which have some relevance to that culture. If there were no specific relevance of the acoustic properties of the sound itself to a particular culture, it is unlikely an English speaker would recognize the event as music. If it had meaning, it would be a sign of some sort, but still not music. If it had no communicative property at all, it would just be perceived as noise.

### *Art and Language as Constituent Elements of Culture*

One of the similarities between music and language is that they are both dependent on cultural expectations for meaning. Most would recognize that language, music, and other art forms, are tied up in the very identity of each particular culture. Often we recognize that the geographical boundaries of a "culture" are roughly coincident with those of a language, and various styles of art. For example, Javanese music and the Javanese language are both heard primarily on the island of Java. Often these geographical boundaries are our main criteria for determining what is a culture. Race is not a determinant of culture, but religion and other

belief systems are dependent on common forms of expression, and thus often also follow similar boundaries. This is not to say that language barriers always lead to extreme cultural differences, but certainly where there are language barriers there usually can be observed at least variations in prevalent artistic styles and tastes.

Another interesting thing to note is that even within a culture, particularly one that includes a lot of people, there are many local variations of culture. Each local group will tend to have similar linguistic idioms within it, though these may be different from elsewhere in the larger culture. Similarly, different emphases, or even completely different styles of art, particularly music will flourish in each of these "microcultures". In the modern world where mass communication ties together people of disparate geographical locations, the effect is similar, but boundaries are drawn differently. In our huge "western" culture, subcultures complete with their own local dialects and art forms, are identified with racial backgrounds, age-groups, economic class, occupation, and practically any other easily recognizable difference between people. Thus people that speak together, dance together, be together, and experience the same sort of life seem to naturally develop their own version of culture.

The differentiation of people into separate cultures is no accident or weird sociological phenomena. As we shall see, this is an inevitable property of all groups of humans, and of the systems they use to communicate. Sociologists including Roy Wagner, and Clifford Geertz, have shown that culture does not just accidentally contain common images (including sounds) between its people, but that "culture" is fundamentally, those same common images. These arguments are very complex, but are referred to here because they shed significant light on how languages, and the arts, though mutually interdependent, have significantly different functions in a culture. Of course this thesis cannot give sufficient space to fully illuminate such carefully laid arguments, but the reader is referred to the original sources (in the bibliography) for a complete explanation of what is culture.

The first thing we must understand about culture is that it is a fundamental property of how human beings communicate and think. Language and thought depend on public symbols being used in a roughly consistent way, as discussed in chapter 3. These symbols in turn reflect that a community has common experiences, feelings, and thoughts, which they believe to be of significance, and desire to communicate. Conversely, there can be no "public" and no "community" without something to share in the first place. Thus the images, and symbols, experiences, and feelings that a group of people have in common are neither a product of the culture, nor the foundation on which culture is built, they are the substance of the culture itself. That is, "culture" must be seen as a set of commonly held ideas, images, experiences, symbols, etc.

"... the core of culture is not a haphazard assemblage of customs, ideas, objects, institutions, words and the like, but a coherent flow of images and analogies, that cannot be communicated directly from mind to mind, but only elicited, adumbrated, depicted. It is constituted not of the signs of conventional reference, nor of the individual's private percepts of 'things in this world', but within a reversible dialectic that moves between these limits." <sup>106</sup>

"... cultures are commonly understood as systems of signs which bind people into a cognitive community with a shared view of the world. This is unity not of functional integration, but of communication, a semiology." <sup>107</sup>

"The concept of culture I espouse... is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning." <sup>108</sup>

These three descriptions of culture by Diane Austin-Broos, Roy Wagner, and Clifford Geertz, are not identical, but all share in the idea that a cognitive community (i.e., a culture) must share experiences as well as communicate concepts. In chapter 3 we recognized that concepts are the rules for use of words, but the rules of use also include that most words are used to represent something of which there is common knowledge in the community. In other words, the behavioral explanation of meaning must include the ideational, because the behaviors in question are behaviors of thought. The images and experiences shared by a culture, though



not experienced identically by all members of the culture, are part of the rules for use of most words. It is the sharing and communicating which constitutes the fabric of culture.

When we take into account that conscious thought depends on public language, and language use in turn depends on shared experiences, and on there being a public with whom to develop common uses of symbols, then it becomes clear that the tendency for humans to congregate into distinct cultures is not coincidental with, but identical to our natural tendency to develop language and thought. Neither is possible without the other.

"The application of this revised view of human evolution leads to the hypothesis that cultural resources are ingredient, not accessory, to human thought."<sup>109</sup>

"... a fully specified, adaptively sufficient definition of regnant neural processes in terms of intrinsic parameters being impossible, the human brain is thoroughly dependent upon cultural resources for its very operation; those resources are, consequently, not adjuncts to, but constituents of, mental activity. In fact, thinking as an overt, public act, involving the purposeful manipulation of objective materials, is probably fundamental to human beings; and thinking as a covert, private act, and without recourse to such materials, a derived, though not entirely unuseful, capability. As the observation of how schoolchildren learn to calculate shows, adding numbers in your head is actually a more sophisticated mental accomplishment than adding them with a paper and pencil ... Reading aloud is a more elementary achievement than reading to oneself, the later having only arisen, as a matter of fact, in the middle ages.(Ryle, the Concept of Mind, p.27)"<sup>110</sup>

Having established the importance of society, and the inevitability of culture within a species destined to attempt communication, we can now look at the roles of two important types of communication within society and a culture. Language plays the obvious role of codifying thought by classifying abstract and tangible things into thinkable and communicable categories. This codification allows for the precise and efficient communication which in turn allows for the community to remain a community both in a practical and in a semiological sense. Furthermore, the development of such thought categories (concepts) allows for further observations and thoughts to be made by individuals within the community.

Few linguists or epistemologists would argue with this description so far, but there is something missing. How are common experiences shared so that they can develop into

language? How were the first symbols introduced to make a language? How are new symbols added to an existing language? It is not enough to say that we use existing language to explain new ideas which extend our language, because sometimes whole new things are added to our experiences which existing language is completely unprepared and unable to deal with. Even if we can piece existing words together to make a suitable description of a new artifact or experience, we must (logically) first establish that there is some common experience and identify it. The following quotes of Wagner, Geertz, and Langer concur.

"... meaning is constituted through metaphor, the metaphor, in the utter absence of shared assumptions or associations, is built upon shared sensations - the dew upon the grass, the redness of pandabus fruit, and so forth - in a kind of 'dumb barter' of semiological tokens."<sup>111</sup>

"... in man neither regnant fields nor mental sets can be formed with sufficient precision in the absence of guidance from symbolic models of emotion. In order to make up our minds we must know how we feel about things; and in order to know how we feel about things we need the public images of sentiment that only ritual, myth, and art can provide."<sup>112</sup>

"Then an extension of language will gradually follow the wordless insight, and discursive expression will supersede the pristine symbol. This, I think, is the normal advance of human thought and language in that whole realm of knowledge where discourse is possible at all. But the symbolic presentation of subjective reality for contemplation is not only tentatively beyond the reach of language ... it is impossible in the essential frame of language."<sup>113</sup>

Thus the ability to share experiences, or to ensure that there are some common experiences, is not just a luxury for those who don't find language enough, it is a necessity which allows the development of language. This is the role that the arts, including music, can play in testing our modes of perceptions and presenting experiences which we can all examine at once. Our common environment also provides common experiences, but it is the performance frame that allows us to recognize that the experience is a common one. Furthermore, it is not adequate to say that art and ritual were once important for the development of language, but that now we speak and write, it is no longer as important. This is incorrect because we are constantly reinventing language. Not only are we continually developing new words and idioms, but we also constantly rediscover some sort of truth in the old ones. Language depends on common experience which must constantly be reaffirmed through the use of the

language, but also through other means with which we can test the accuracy and performance of our languages. To do this we look at mutually experienced events within each culture such as rituals, art performances, and art objects. Such art objects and performances can also form the basis for recognizing that there are new kinds of common experiences, and help to identify what they are.

Recognizing a new experience which is not merely a variation of the familiar, is the necessary step before we can criticize (in terms of our local values) and analyze (according our frames of perception). Only then can we start reaching for new names with which to refer to the newly recognized common experience. Take, for example, a hypothetical tribe of pre-historic migratory hunters who are just developing a language. These might have individually each seen a new kind of animal. Each tells stories about the animal to the others, until they all recognize that there is at least one new kind of beast in the forest. Perhaps it's the same one, but each of the hunters has recognized a different characteristic of it. It is a beast with a nose like a snake, ears like a mouse, feet like a hippo, and teeth like a wild boar. Yet none of these things really describes it. Finally, either the whole tribe goes out searching for it all at once (a kind of performance event) or one of the hunters performs a dance depicting the animal's moves and its sounds. Quickly, other hunters join in with their versions of the dance. Before long the new creature can be recognized as more than a mixture of other animals, because the elephant is not at all like a snake, a hippo, a mouse, or a boar.

"What is needed for a concept to exist is, first, something that is manifested more than once. A singular instance of something is not a concept... The second thing that is needed for a concept to exist is some sort of sign, or symbol, or name, or indicator of the common feature being noticed. When you are listening to a piece of music by Beethoven, no such linguistic or conventional device need be part of the experience whatsoever. No words or any other symbols need be present for you to be immersed in the ongoing experience. However, if you choose to call attention to some common feature of the sounds by giving it a name...you are now dealing with a concept in two aspects ... " 114

The above quote by Bennett Reimer brings to light another important point. Not only does language depend on communal experience, such as in artistic performances, for a guarantee that we experience something from the same point of view, but conversely art depends on language for its own definition and conception. Since our conscious thoughts are limited by our available concepts, no experience, no matter how carefully contrived or presented, can be recognized or remembered until it is analyzed according to our existing conceptual framework. One of the reasons that people like to talk about the language of music, is that there is a significant amount of English, Russian, or Persian language devoted solely to describing and classifying music. Without this language about music it would be impossible to consciously notice the specific things which happen within music. Thus we see that the experience of art, including the sonic arts we call music, and the symbols of language are mutually dependent for their very existence.

Jared Diamond recognizes the intimate connection between language and other cultural pursuits. Language is essential for conscious experience and thought. Without it a culture disappears. With no way of symbolizing the experiences which are unique and native to a particular group of people, not only the speech but the experiences themselves are soon lost.

"... Much less attention has been paid to the disappearance of languages themselves and to their essential role in the survival of those indigenous cultures. Each language is the vehicle for a unique way of thinking, a unique literature, and a unique view of the world."<sup>115</sup>

A picture is worth a thousand words; yet a word can also be seen as worth a thousand pictures. Each concept is a generalization of many perceived and imagined images. If one takes the empiricist view that "All ideas are copies or transmutations of sense impressions"<sup>116</sup> then art is the basis of many of those impressions. That is not to say that art is the basis for all common experiences shared by a culture. Certainly other aspects of mutual environment contribute, such as geographic location, climate, common work experiences, and any events at which many people were present. However, art does contribute greatly to a people's common experience, and particularly to the recognition of a common perspective. Whenever

one tries to perform an experience for the express purpose of sharing it with a public, or to manufacture a new experience for the public, that is art. It is the public nature of art which makes it so important for the development of culture and language. Perhaps everyone in the local tribe has killed a dear, or danced to a ghetto blaster, but it is only when these events are performed in public for the first time that a community can recognize the common experience and use available language to invent new names for the new aspects of the experience.

"... the central connection between art and collective life does not lie on such an instrumental plane, it lies on a semiotic one. Matisse's color jottings (the word is his own) and the Yoruba's line arrangements do not, save glancingly, celebrate social structure or forward useful doctrines. They materialize a way of experiencing, bring a particular cast of mind out into the world of objects, where men can look at it."<sup>117</sup>

Thus we can see that language and art, although dependent on each other, and often used in combination, are two very different ways of communicating. One is a way of categorizing and analyzing the world in concise thinkable and shareable quanta. The other is a way of sharing what cannot be completely analyzed, often in an attempt to find new ways of quantizing and conceptualizing the subject experience. Both are experienced, but are experienced differently. Both are shared, but differently. Both are public, and depend on public expectation for context and meaning, but both communicate different content with emphasis on different kinds of communicative signs.

It is the interface and interchange between sense and concept, and between art and language that is what we can identify as culture. However, confusing the two will lead to a poor understanding of how our complex system of culture and communication can evolve and improve in our constantly changing world.

### *The Cultural Context of Music*

"Davies (1978)<sup>118</sup> states that 'music does not really satisfy the requirements that would completely justify its being called a 'language' ... music seems to

have something in common with simple forms of sensory experience like warmth, taste, or the smell of jacket-baked potatoes.' "119

" ... humans -- either as sensors or receivers -- interrelate (rather than merely collect and catalog) sound patterns in complex combinations. Some of these combinations occur in the form of natural languages; some are used to formulate musical systems; others hold different roles."120

If our identification of what is and is not music has to do with its cultural context, then it is clear that this context, regardless of the specific culture, has to do with publicly presenting sounds for the experience of that culture. Presumably the sound has some sort of significance for that culture. But if it didn't before, its public presentation is itself a significant act for that culture. Of course, different kinds of sounds and presentations are recognized and preferred by different cultures. However, the intentionally shared experience of sound is fundamental to the concept of "sound-art" -- what we call music. If the sound is incidental to another type of experience, like the sounds of feet on the ground, then we might classify the experience differently: perhaps as a dance. If the sound is merely representative of a concept, that is to say if the sound is commonly used to represent the same concept, then it is being used as a signal or symbol, and may be part of a language. Only if the sound itself is the important element to the audience is the event musical.

Of course music has many different functions within various societies besides broadening our base of acoustic experience. Music can accompany other art forms, and rituals, and even frequently acts as an icon representing particular subcultures within a larger whole. For example, teenagers listen to music their parents don't like in order to help them associate with their peers, and to differentiate themselves from their parent's generation. This is no surprise. This is just another example of art functioning to create a common experience to support a possible common culture complete with colourful and unique language and costumes.

Music is also often used for political and religious indoctrination. Small wonder. Once music has helped to create a feeling of common culture within a group, it is particularly easy for the

leaders of the group to start using jargon to create new ways of saying things, and to use "US and THEM" propaganda against non-members of that particular sub-culture. In fact most of the instrumental uses of music involve either acknowledging common culture by repeating known sound icons (as in MUZAK), reinforcing a common culture through group participation in some kind of event (such as popular dancing), supporting common culture by assisting the presentation of other linguistic or artistic media (such as musical poetry, or the accompaniment to a dance performance), or expanding common culture by creating new acoustic experiences for which the language of analysis is not fully developed (as with post-modern "concert" music). All of these are still dependent on music being an acoustic experience within the context of a particular culture with a specific set of expectations about what sounds, and what kind of presentation, is considered significant.

It is an interesting fact, that because music is concerned with sounds undifferentiated and unconceptualized until after their performance and interpretation, that musical scores are not lists of concepts, as are written languages. Musical scores, in all cultures observed by this writer, are usually lists of instructions to the performer. It is hoped that by following the instructions, the experience can be recreated. Another kind of score does exist. This is the "listener's score". Such an artifact is never a substitute for the experience of the sound, but is a guide to the conceptualization of the experience.

Now we finally have a clearer idea of what music does and does not communicate, and why musical communication is vital to, in fact constituent of, every culture. Furthermore, we can see that culture is what allows us to develop and use language and thought. We can see that music and language, although both are forms of communication, have different sociological purposes, as well as different content and different means of communicating content. Clearly, to consider music a language is to lessen its importance, and to confuse its function.

In the next, and final, chapter we shall look at how the nature of music, and its function in society, lead to certain specific educational goals. We will look at what these goals are, how they are determined, and some ways of achieving them.

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## **Chapter 5**

### **Considerations for Music Education**

Recognizing the non-linguistic, yet possibly communicative nature of music, and understanding the important role music plays in presenting common aural images to a society as part of its development or redevelopment of culture, is not just an academic luxury for music educators. Understanding what music is, and how it communicates, has serious implications for how music must be taught.

As we look at the ramifications of understanding what music is, we will see that many successful, and some counter-productive practices are currently used in music classrooms. For example, if music is treated as a language, educators merely need to decode enough examples that students can learn the symbols of the language. Clearly this alone cannot enable students to fully experience the sensual nature of music. This paper is not so much a proposal for new teaching techniques as a presentation of some important ideas that educators must consider when developing or choosing teaching strategies for the music classroom.

Recognizing that music includes both symbols and non-symbol signs will make some educational methods important and others inappropriate for teaching music. Understanding the need for music to be commonly heard, will not only effect how music is presented in a classroom, but also what styles of music might be presented. Further, understanding the role that music and other arts play in defining culture makes several goals for music education inescapable.

This chapter will look at several important goals for music education which are derivative of the foregoing analysis of the nature of music. Understanding these may explain how and why several teaching practices are used successfully to teach music. Before we look at specific

suggestions for the teaching practice, though, it is logical to look at what are appropriate goals for a music program.

### *The Goals of Music Education*

Music is taught for many practical and political reasons. Actually, it is often relegated to unimportance and under-funding because of the insistence of music educators on relying on such instrumental reasons, rather than intrinsic reasons, for music education. In a mandatory and liberal education system, there must (morally) be reasons to teach music for its own sake before there is reason to devote much time and many resources to it.

If music and the other arts, as is herein claimed, are an integral part of our recognition of every culture, and its aural images play an important part in our continual reinvention of language and thought, then we already have at hand more than adequate justification for the inclusion of music within any serious educational system. R. S. Peters<sup>121</sup>, P. H. Hirst<sup>122</sup> and others, make strong arguments that the goal of education, as opposed to socialization, is to help students develop forms of thinking and communication. Without encouraging the development of thought, how could we say we are educating at all? The problem is that we often do not teach music in a way that obviously encourages thought, and we do not always set our goals in line with achieving the objectives of the educational systems we work within.

Few would argue that the goal of a public school music education is to train professional musicians, though many music teachers act as though this is the case in lieu of other substantial goals. However, other goals are available. For example, if we take seriously the goal of preparing students to become active and thinking participants in their own culture(s) and thus participants in specific forms of thought and communication (a corollary of the stated goal of a liberal education above), then we will not only find little trouble justifying strong music programs within a liberal education system, but can easily accommodate many

of the student outcomes that music teachers instinctively feel are important, including encouraging performance skills.

Even if we insist on clinging to the practical uses of music education, for those number crunching bureaucrats among us, it is not hard to argue that "thinking participants in a culture" may easily become better communicators because they have more concepts to use and more ways to share experiences. As better communicators they will more easily also become "contributing members of society" in a more practical way.

Many common music educational practices can be supported by these educational objectives while some are not. Either way, it is preferable to have logical grounds for one's curricular choices than relying on a mixture of gut feelings, tradition, and marginal empirical evidence. To meet this larger goal of preparing students to be "thinking participants in a culture", there are several more immediate objectives which must be met. The following six objectives are not exhaustive, but are necessary and sufficient to prepare students to become active thinking participants in a culture as amateur and professional performers or as consumers of music. In fact, it would be hard to imagine a student who had substantial understanding in all of these object areas and still did not feel like a participant in his or her culture.

**1) Students should be familiar with the trademark sounds of the local culture, or cultures.**

Trademark sounds, sometimes called soundmarks<sup>123</sup>, are an integral part of the set of experiences which define a culture. These can include the sounds of machines used by a culture (such as locomotives, semi-trailers, sail boats, computers, and musical instruments), the sounds of animals with which a culture is familiar (livestock, birds, common predators, etc.), and even the sounds of the weather and natural geographical features in close proximity (such as waterfalls, waves, tides, winds, rain, forest fires, etc.). They are the basis of onomatopoeia and metaphor in the arts which use language (poetry, song, theater etc.), and they are the frame of reference from which icons and indices are formed in music. Music

exists, in part, to share the experience of these sounds. Music education must address these sounds, not only for the better understanding of music, but also for the understanding of the culture itself.

Many of these important sounds are musical instruments themselves, but "being familiar" with them in this sense does not mean equating a name with a faded photograph, it means knowing the sound of the instruments, knowing what kinds of sound-patterns they are usually used to make and what other aspects of the environment are often associated with them. For instance an oboe is often associated with a duck or pastoral scenes, electric guitars with rebellion, power, or youthful energy, bassoons with clowns, and French horns with romance or heroes.

What sounds are important to a culture define how members of that culture hear all sounds. We all need to know what to expect of a sound, because hearing is a learned activity. Our resolution of music into individual sounds is dependent on previous experience of those sounds. In other words, learning about the music of a culture must include learning how that culture perceives sound, which in turn is intimately related to what sounds they hear and listen to. The following quote by Wagner makes the case for hearing language, but listening to music works the same way.

"Consider what happens when we speak. Often it seems to me that members of a highly literate civilization like our own imagine spaces between the words they use when they talk, rather like those that appear between words on the printed page. (Indeed they seem to imagine the words themselves, as well as their punctuation.) In fact, what we produce in speech is a kind of blurred mumbly music, and one has to learn how to resolve this orchestration into conventional forms and units if one is to make sense of it, much as a trained musician [and the trained audience] learns to resolve a roar of sensuous tonality into notes, chords, harmony, melodic line, and structural form. It does not really matter what the conventions themselves are like... what matters insofar as communication is concerned, is whether the speaker ... and the listener make the same resolutions."<sup>124</sup>

**2) Students should understand the practice of music making within their own culture.**

Of course not every student needs to become an accomplished performer, but certainly one's ability to recognize the intended experience presented by a performer will be facilitated by having some experience of performing. In other words, having performed a little, will help students better understand what is being communicated by performers in general. Furthermore, the performance venues and rituals are themselves part of the experience of a culture which must be shared. For instance, who can fully understand an improvised Jazz solo without hearing someone improvise live. Recordings have the same sounds, but cannot improvise and have none of the sense of immediacy and risk which contribute substantially to the excitement of an improvisation. In fact an excellent live solo can make a lousy recording and vice versa, because the presentation is an important part of the experience.

Performance oriented music programs often stress this important aspect of musical education. However, when a whole new kind of performance and praxis replace the existing culture (such as the ubiquitous "band tour" or a class of thirty recorder players), this goal is not met. A school-music culture which is unrelated to the world outside of the institutions which foster it can provide a temporary sense of belonging and participation to students, but many of the skills and experiences learned become immediately obsolete upon graduation. Care must be taken to teach students how, where, and why real musicians perform, or at the very least, to compare school-culture with broader reality.

**3) Students should be able to recognize important symbols and language-like idioms in local musical styles.**

"The set of conventions by which certain sounds or groups of sounds are understood to 'stand for' certain culturally recognized experiences and things, and by which these sounds are ordered and transformed to articulate meaningful expression - this commonly held body of 'agreements' which we call 'language' - is always part of the collective aspect of culture."<sup>125</sup>

Since the music of some cultures includes many symbols, and even language-like systems of symbols, students must be taught the particular representative significance of these sounds in

order to fully experience the music. For example, leading notes and dominant seventh chords are recognized by those who are familiar with Western music as familiar and commonly occurring sounds that have a definite meaning: that of cadence. Knowing what creates that effect will not only aid future composers and performers, but will allow listeners to detect more subtle uses of the same sounds, such as in deceptive cadences. Understanding the symbol, allows the listener to more easily recognize the composer's intentions, or intended ruses. More specific symbols, like themes representing specific characters in opera and movie music, are even more important to be recognized in order to get the intended experience.

Of course it is clearly impossible to teach the "rules of use" for all of the symbols in all styles of music, or even in classical Western music, but if some important ones are covered, students can learn to look for them in a manner analogous to the way they figure out words they don't know from the context. Along with recognizing symbols, students should learn when they are applicable. For example, minor keys are sad in much of European music, but African and Afro-American musical styles use blues scales for happy and sad songs.

"This is not to say that music is a communication that cannot reach those outside the environment that nurtures it, but rather that this [the need to learn musical symbols] is an important factor that has tended to be ignored on the assumption that the language of music, rather than the practice of music is a universal phenomenon."<sup>126</sup>

#### **4) Students should recognize the values that local cultures look for in their music.**

Closely related to what a culture learns to hear is the matter of how they value sounds and the ways in which sounds might be organized. For example some cultures pride themselves primarily on melodic embellishment, while maintaining simple harmonies to avoid obscuring the complex melody, while other cultures may have very sophisticated harmonic structures, but appreciate much simpler melodic forms. That music, in general, cannot be defined in terms of specific values is not to say that music does not conform to specific cultural expectations and values. Some musical values are purely acoustic in nature, but others have to do with larger social issues such as "beauty" and "balance". Music uses sounds which are

in some way important to a culture. Therefore it is important for musicians and listeners alike to recognize what is important. Furthermore musicians and listeners must recognize the same things as important.

"Almost every aspect of art and design activity, including art and design education, is an epitomization of social or cultural values."<sup>127</sup>

Whether beauty, spirituality, mimesis, narrative, emotional content, conformity, non-conformity, or whatever is musically valuable to a particular culture or subculture, participants (listeners and performers) must be aware of what is valued in order to appropriately experience the music, and then interpret it through the lens of language.

**5) Students should learn the language we use to speak ABOUT music so that interesting sensations can possibly become codified in language and thus experienced, shared and remembered.**

The language of art criticism is the interface between the shared experiences of the arts, and new shared concepts which can develop from art (as proposed in Chapter 4). Students must acquire the tools for what life-long learning is possible from music listening by learning as much of this language as possible. Knowing the concepts we use to describe musical events will help students better experience those same events in a way more similar to the rest of society. These concepts are also the fertile ground for any new ideas which may develop from the new experiences of the music. A culture which views music as the expression of emotion, for example, may observe new refinements of various emotions in music if they have adequate means for describing what they hear. Professional critics may lead and incite discussion about new musical experiences, but it is the ability of the public (including the musicians themselves) to participate in this discussion which allows new ideas to precipitate from the raw acoustic experience of music. By the "language of art criticism" it is not meant that there is some unique jargon only for the discussion of art, though there is some of that as well. Really this language includes knowledge of the symbols used, knowledge of soundmarks, knowledge of current and past musical practice, and awareness of local values. Of course, it may include technical jargon, historical trends, and the political and social



context of the music and musicians as well. This is why "Music appreciation" classes include large doses of music history, politics, and sociology.

**6) Students should understand as many of these things as possible about other cultures, as well as their own, so that they can understand and relate to the different perspectives of others.**

If "culture" is a set of common experiences upon which we base our thoughts and communication (as explained in the preceding chapter), then better understanding foreign cultures will lead to better world-wide communication and tolerance. Learning the words of the foreign language is not enough -- we must also try to understand foreign values and experiences, in short cultures, before we are even capable of learning the foreign concepts the words are used to represent. Not only does understanding foreign culture help us communicate with natives of other cultures, but it helps us see how others view our own culture. For example, Indian music places a lot of emphasis on melodic embellishment and rhythmic complexity, and thus people from that culture often find our music seemingly repetitious. Javanese music values subtlety very highly, thus much of our music can sound harsh and "obvious" to them. Yet neither of these cultures are used to listening to the harmonic complexity and the timbral variety which Western musicians value and use.

In better understanding other cultures we also can become more aware of the choices we have unconsciously made in defining our own values. Seeing what is not part of our culture gives us more choices about where our culture could go, and what can be done. For example, since Debussy and Satie saw Javanese gamelan music at the Paris world exposition, the Indonesian values of understatement and patience have increasingly become part of the Western aesthetic. Simultaneously, Javanese musical styles have evolved more dynamic, harmonic, and orchestrational variety as their musicians have become more aware of our music. In both of these cases this was a conscious choice by musicians to adopt something they found interesting about a foreign culture which they took the time to understand as well as they could. In both cases other aspects of culture have followed suit.

It is important at this point to recognize that these six objectives are not lofty academic goals. They are the practical and achievable results of any form of successful music education. These first five outcomes can easily be achieved by a group of people who live near each other, regularly perform and/or listen to music together, and who at least occasionally talk about it, such as in any small village in Bali. Such a group knows what their soundmarks are and readily recognizes them. They know what each other value and what a performance looks like. Usually such a group actually perform together, at least occasionally, as part of some ritual. Nearly all technologically primitive groups of people do this until they are fractured by the introduction of job specialization, and modern transportation. However, in our global village it is still possible to achieve movement toward these important objectives if we make a concerted effort to share our musical experiences and talk about them. Perhaps when we are surrounded by different cultures and subcultures there is far more to learn, but there is also far more to be gained from learning it

There is, however, one difference between our modern world and a low-tech village. In our global village we must go beyond participation in a single culture, to also at least recognizing the validity and differences of other cultures. We no longer need to share communication with only our geographical neighbors, but must regularly attempt to communicate with people with widely different experiences, values and expectations. To do this successfully we must know something about other cultures, or at least about culture in general, and be ready to share some common experiences, and experience new styles of art and music. Effective communication goes beyond knowing the words of a foreign language. The foreign culture, including its art practices, must be understood and experienced enough that the concepts to which the words refer have some experience behind them.

The above six objectives are supportable by a clear understanding of what music is and what it is not. Many educators, however, will be looking for more practical ideas about what they should actually do in the classroom. The following short section is not an exhaustive list of

good teaching practices, but does show some examples of how to achieve the listed six objectives, while keeping in mind the nature and function of music within a culture.

### *Reaching the Goals of Music Education*

To reach the goal of having our students familiar with, and ready to participate in, their own musical culture, as well as to instill adequate tools for students to acquire the experience of other cultures, we do not need to drop everything we are now doing and invent a whole new music education system. Sufficient understanding on the part of music teachers and curriculum designers can continue to use many common classroom activities to better effect. If music teachers can keep their educational objectives as clearly in mind as they do their persistent crises of the next concert or festival, finding activities which foster the above objectives should not be too difficult.

One of the main obstructions to the achievement of the first outcome (becoming aware of a culture's sound heritage) is not from how music is taught, for these things should not even need to be taught at all. It is that more and more people of all ages, in our noisy industrial society with constant Muzak, TV, and other background noises, are becoming completely desensitized to sound altogether. People don't just have trouble listening to music intelligently, people are getting more and more used to not really **listening** to anything at all, as opposed to merely hearing things. Before the experience of sound within music can be a meaningful part of someone's life, that person must first learn to experience sound.

Playing examples of music, live or recorded, has always been part of a successful music program. Many teachers today, though, complain of how difficult it is to get students to listen to the examples. Small wonder! Many of today's students don't really listen to what their parents or teachers say, and they don't listen to the environment around them very effectively either. For many students, their only intense listening activity is for the cues in their favorite computer game to tell them which monster is about to appear around the corner. Today's

world has desensitized to sound each successive generation more than the last. Before music can ever mean anything educators (including parents) must begin the job of developing, in each student, a vivid awareness of the sound environment.

In the 1970's Murray Schafer, was aware of this problem and published many short books to help teachers develop aural awareness programs. These are compiled in the single volume entitled *The Thinking Ear* <sup>128</sup>. Since that time the problem has probably gotten worse. Whether one opts to use the "modernist" approaches espoused by Schafer, or can think of a more conservative, or even a more methodical and scientific approach, music educators at all levels must continue to encourage students to use their ears, and to think about what they hear.

Our ears are always open, so our mind is used to filter out unwanted sound. Our modern world is overful with sounds, but we must not let our minds shut out too much. There is also much useful information and beauty in the sounds around, including in our music.

When students can actively think about sounds, and can describe and remember details about what they hear, then the experience of music can itself be vivid, exciting, and stimulating. Whereas, if music is mistaken for a language it becomes just another format for transmitting symbols. Once students are really listening, then teachers must present something really worth listening to. Some scratchy old record which brings memories back to the teacher, is not enough for the students who haven't yet had the memories -- don't be fooled by the tears in their eyes. Nor is it enough to hear live performances of simplified-for-kids "pap". When students are really listening, they must hear, in the best fidelity or live performance available, real music that exemplifies the values of the local culture. For North Americans, this might include exposure to the best of Classical, Romantic, Renaissance, Modern, Post-Modern, Rock, Blues, Dixieland, Jazz and other musical styles.

What students already listen to can be analyzed and compared with what other people, including the teacher, listen to. Each person cannot suddenly appreciate new music simply because the teacher says so. The total experience of each person, being a set of connections and relations between specific experiences in his or her life, must gradually be broadened to include important values, and important examples of those values. As the student's experience grows the new experiences are then related to what the student already knows. Finding relevance for the student is, of course, an important part of getting their attention, but if they are really listening, almost anything well composed and well-performed has values which can be related to, or at least compared to, what the students already know. It is in the comparisons between the new and the familiar, by the teacher and especially by the student, where learning takes place.

Students who can fully experience the sounds in music, can easily learn to recognize common symbols and icons within it, such as leading notes and bird-calls respectively. Of course the full experience of music includes the recognition of these and possibly other communicative signs, so they must be taught along with the music. However, any symbols and icons will be empty until the listener is able to listen actively and intelligently, and knows what values should be listened for.

An important part of developing active listening skills is learning the language about music. Students must develop a vocabulary which allows them to describe sounds in general and the sounds of music in particular. When one has the concepts to perceive minute differences between sounds, then one can remember, analyze, observe, communicate, and even produce interesting sounds that much more effectively. It is this ability to specifically and accurately experience sound which allows a community to invent, or reinvent, new sound-metaphors, and eventually even new concepts. Tied up in the language a culture uses to describe its music are also the values of the culture. A culture which puts a lot of emphasis on dynamics, for example, has a lot of words to describe it. If emotions are important then there are going

to be theories of how emotion is carried by sound. Learning these values is an important part, not just of learning how to describe music (i.e. how to listen to it), but also of what to listen for in the music. Conversely, experiencing the music is a good way of experiencing the values of the culture and thus learning more about the culture.

"It is not only in the formation and realization of societal attitudes, values and beliefs that imagery plays a significant role but also in their transmission from one generation to the next."<sup>129</sup>

Often listening programs are forgotten due to the perceived time-pressures of a performance schedule. However, listening does not have to be divorced from performance. In fact the best performers, at all levels, are acutely aware of the sounds they produce. It should be noted that a conductor can achieve what appears to be the same results with a school performance group either by having the students focus on instructions for what to do, or by focusing the students on what they should sound like. While the "action-approach" (i.e. what to do) often achieves an immediate result more quickly, the "product-approach" (i.e. what to sound like) involves more useful and more transferable learning. A student who learns what he or she is trying to sound like not only needs fewer instructions in the long run, but also has a much better understanding of what is being done, and what are the aural values of the culture. Eventually, such a student needs fewer and fewer instructions altogether.

If our goal is active and informed listening we can go even beyond the "product approach" where we are concerned with students mimicking the teacher's interpretation. For example, if "Make a bigger sound..." is better than "Blow harder!" then, "What do you think this should sound like?" is even better. The Socratic method is accepted by teachers in every other subject, so why not music? The extreme example of asking students to make choices in music is guided student composition. Many music educators today are recognizing that composition is a musical activity which involves even more musical thought and listening than performance, while at the same time, requires fewer manual skills. However, even if a teacher is not comfortable with a full fledged composition program, asking more questions,

comparing different ways of doing things, and encouraging student choices of interpretation can lead to more student thinking, and more involved student listening.

Performance programs do the important socialization job of building the child's self-esteem and confidence. However, keeping the child interested by regurgitating insipid popular music does not meet the teacher's responsibility to mediate the transmission of cultural values. As mentioned above, the new must be reconciled with, not replaced by, the familiar. Teachers must always remember that they are setting the example for the students not vice versa. Keeping the students engaged does not mean caving in to the students' immature desires, but should involve arousing newer and more mature desires along with developing aesthetic values, and aesthetic understanding.

Whether performing, composing, or listening, a teacher must keep in mind the development of vocabulary and concepts which help students better experience the sounds. Participation in the performance rituals of culture, particularly in a creative manner, opens up new worlds for the student, but they are again immediately lost, if there is no framework for understanding them.

"Invention changes things, and convention resolves those changes into a recognizable world."<sup>130</sup>

Music, as we have demonstrated, is an essential ingredient to our participation in a culture, and therefore also of our ability to use language and thought. However we cannot mistake the fact that music is a universal phenomenon of all cultures, with the idea that all people will find some idealized enlightenment in the same music. In late 20th century Canada we have a society which is a mixture of hundreds of cultures. Of course there are elements of a common "Canadian" culture -- such as the value of tolerating other cultures -- but we must also recognize that immigrants and native born Canadians alike share some similar and many very different experiences. We cannot ignore our students' cultural backgrounds if we wish them to gain more than a superficial understanding of what music is. This is more than maintaining

a polite facade for ethnic minorities, but is essential for the inclusion of our diverse Canadian population in any kind of meaningful understanding of musical practice.

In other words, we can no longer afford to teach music as if there were a single universal culture, like the religious leader of an isolated tribe teaches metaphysical beliefs. We must teach music as universal phenomenon with different local specifics. Students who have developed aural awareness can be shown the different aural and aesthetic values of specific musical traditions, without the teacher needing to make the claim that any one set of values is better or more important than the others. Of course, the teacher still needs to show the students how to evaluate music according to the specific values of one culture or another, but this should be done, as much as possible, in a way which does not trivialize or minimize the importance of established values native to cultures other than the teachers own familiar background. This does not mean that music teachers should feel pressured into teaching every possible musical style at once, but rather that comparisons and trends should be pointed out when possible, and that the teaching of Western culture should be done in the manner of teaching "A music" as opposed to the teaching of "the music".

Teachers also must be wary of the over-liberal tendency to encourage and accept, at face value, all student attitudes toward different kinds of music. This kind of relativism where anything can be considered a kind of music is the opposite of music education -- no one then learns anything about any specific culture. Rather teachers should allow for differences of opinion as long as they are supported by the values of some established culture or other. Furthermore, the culture to which the values belong should be identified and understood in relation to their cultural context. For example, heavy metal guitars do not usually demonstrate the classical ideal of beauty, but they are a soundmark in the western world representing youth and energy in a way that older traditions cannot. Furthermore, the greater amplification and the variety of timbres allowed by the F/X box can be seen as a direct extension of the ideals of Romantic symphony composers such as Beethoven. Even when



listening to heavy metal there are still standards of good and bad playing, good and bad compositions, and good and bad performances. The values must be understood regardless of the style.

### *Conclusion*

We have looked at what we normally mean by "music" and "language" in common speech, and have discovered that they are not the same, although they frequently use each other for added emphasis and clarity. Music does have communicative value in that it frequently uses signs which can refer to specific things. However, music is different from language in that it is not limited to highly organized systems of symbols, and in that the sounds are the constituents of music, whereas they are only the conveyors of language symbols.

While music has "meaning" it is not always, nor necessarily, in the linguistic sense of "intended referent". Of course music which does include symbols, does have intended referents, but this is not the only "meaning" of music. Music also has meaning in the sense of "perceived significance". The sounds of music are significant for the role they play in contributing to a culture's common experience, and this is true regardless of the symbol or other sign content.

We have also seen that the difference between music and language is not trivial because it is the difference between them that allows them different supporting roles in the development, reinvention, and transmission of culture. Whereas the arts, including music, express a way of experiencing the environment, and contribute to the common experiences which are culture, language concretizes the experience into rememberable, thinkable, and communicable forms so that a culture can be aware of the common experiences. Both exist due to interplay with the other.

Music education cannot be justified in education as a language because it is not a language, but the arts must be a part of education because they are essential to the survival of the very

culture of common experiences which allows language to exist. This is in addition to all the social and practical uses of music which we commonly use to justify music education such as promoting teamwork and self-esteem, and providing entertainment for assemblies. Music is not a language, but music education along with education in the other arts is as important as language skills because both are rooted in the other and both are essential elements in the intelligent and aware participation in any culture.

If we take seriously the goal of preparing students to be active participants in culture and society, we must teach students more than musical skills: we must teach musical understanding. Becoming aurally aware, learning the acoustic values of one's culture, and learning how different styles of music are constituent elements of different cultures, will help students understand the world they live in, and prepare them for a life of interaction with other cultures within and outside of Canada.

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