



CRITICAL POLITICAL THEORY AND RADICAL PRACTICE

MUSIC and CAPITALISM

Melody, Harmony and Rhythm
in the Modern World

Sabby Sagall

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Critical Political Theory and Radical Practice

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For Hilary

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Any errors of fact or judgement remain my responsibility. I have tried to write this book in as jargon-free a style as possible. But given the complex development of modern European 'art-music', it is impossible to avoid all technical terminology. I have, therefore, compiled a glossary defining such terms and have italicised them in the text.

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INTRODUCTION

‘... the effect of music is so very much more powerful and penetrating than is that of the other arts, for these speak only of the shadow, but music of the essence’. A. Schopenhauer.

Music is ‘something which has made life worth living...’

‘Without music, life would be a mistake’. Friedrich Nietzsche.

“Poets, not otherwise than philosophers, painters, sculptors and musicians, are, in one sense, the creators, and, in another, the creations, of their age.”
Percy Bysshe Shelley

Everyone loves music—if not every kind of music, then some kind or kinds. Nearly everyone in the modern world has experienced, mostly enjoyably, some public performance of some kind of music, whether it be a classical concert, an opera, a Broadway musical, or a pop concert, either live or on television or radio. Moreover, cinema is a central part of modern culture, and virtually all feature films and many, if not most, documentaries, carry a sound track with music.

Can we go further, however? Can we say that all human beings in all societies, including pre-modern and non-European communities, have created some kind of music, some specific style or form. There is no doubt that musical expression, whether public and collective or private and individual, is a universal experience. All human beings have experienced some

form of public, collective musical performance. This is true whether we are ardent music lovers or feel we can take it or leave it. Nor should we forget informal, social music—school choirs, teenage parties, weddings, music from other drivers’ car radios, buskers, ‘musak’—the list is endless.

Thirdly, I want to argue that music, in common with the other arts, does not simply happen to be a universal phenomenon. Enjoyment of music, participation in music, either as practitioner or listener, is not a contingent matter, but a necessary one. We may not feel music is particularly important to us in our daily lives. We may rarely attend a public music performance. Nevertheless, the love of and need for music exists in all of us as a universal potential feature. It is an aspect of human nature, as is the need for the other arts.

But can we go further still? Can we apply this to our earliest development? Can we conclude that music is not simply a potential, an optional add-on, a luxury in the education of middle-class children, rather like a foreign language, but an essential subject for the training of all our children? Most politicians and educators relegate music to this minor league of subjects, assuming that music is an ephemeral pleasure, not something essential to the development of all children as human beings in a social world. It is for this reason that music is always the first subject to be cut when governments trim educational budgets. Their assumption is that music may be enjoyable, uplifting even, but it is an indulgence rather than a necessity, an extra that should remain within the private preserve of the family, not a discipline that warrants demands on the public purse, especially in a period of financial retrenchment. So, let us enjoy music, they say, but let us not go overboard in our estimation of its meaning and potential role, especially in a period of pandemic and economic crisis. In an education system that has become increasingly utilitarian, we prepare children to fulfil necessary jobs in the economy so that, as adults, they can work to bolster our country’s position in the world. In such an atmosphere, music acquires a backseat, banished from the schools, or, if it features at all, it is confined to the sidelines, the Cinderella of the disciplines.

I want to argue, on the contrary, that the need for music and the ability to produce and enjoy it, is an essential element in our nature, that every human society known to our history has produced some characteristic style of musical production. Moreover, the confinement of classical musical education to the children of the elite and the middle class, and the termination of musical education or the apparent reduced ability to enjoy many kinds of ‘art-music’ on the part of many under-privileged children,

is an expression of profound deprivation, one rooted in the social system of capitalism with its alienation and its various forms of exploitation and oppression.

In the first chapter of this book, I shall develop the argument about the universality of the potential for musical expression and enjoyment, and its objective basis in the human psyche. I shall go on to argue that the historical development of music, the changes in style and the divisions within it—for example, classical, pop, jazz, etc.—again are not arbitrary as they express but also help to shape the wider social structures and processes of our society. I shall argue that the development and changes in capitalist society, in its social structure, since the decline of European feudalism contextualises the emergence of ‘modern’ art music. The rise of capitalist social relations reveals the ways human beings have used their capacity to create and enjoy music as these have developed since roughly the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth centuries. I shall be confining myself to western classical music since, sadly, there won’t be the space, nor do I have the time or the expertise to develop a wider historical analysis embracing non-European and pre-modern styles or popular musical styles—though there has been much cross-fertilisation.

I also want to argue that music, like any art, is not merely a mirror of the world, its more or less accurate reflection, but a practical intervention in it. Of course, music, like the other arts, tells us truths about the world through its impact on our emotional life. As Trotsky put it—art helps us orient ourselves in the world. But does it do more than that? Does music help to shape that world? I shall discuss this debate in Chapter 1.

Chapters 2 to 5 will attempt to analyse the development of western music from the rise of the modern, capitalist world in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries through the period of bourgeois revolution, economic growth and consolidation in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to the onset of crisis and intensifying capitalist rivalry in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. I will take each period and attempt to relate four characteristic musical styles to the social, economic and political contexts in which they arose and outside of which they cannot be understood: late Baroque, Classical, Romantic and Modernist.

Of course, each of these historical societies, and the musical styles that predominated within them, are the product of human social action. They were created by human beings interacting with each other through different various forms of cooperation and conflict. This is true whether

we are looking at the German princes and Lutheran bishops of seventeenth and eighteenth-century Germany, the mercantile bourgeoisie or the capitalist farmers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in England, France and the American colonies, or the industrial bourgeoisie of nineteenth-century Europe. For example, if the late Baroque and Classical styles of the early and late eighteenth-century express the confidence of the German Protestant church and the rising bourgeoisie of Europe, so twentieth-century Modernism expresses the crisis of the bourgeois world. In sum, this book will attempt to analyse the different styles as a means of establishing the relationship of music to its social world.

This book is aimed not at musicologists or professional musicians but at ordinary music lovers who want to know a bit more about music's social origins. Some might ask, does one need to read a book, for example, about sex in order to enhance one's enjoyment? I hope readers would agree that any work that enhances our ordinary understanding and enjoyment of a positive human activity is worth reading. My readers will judge whether or not I have been successful.

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The Necessity of Music

The universality of music is a fact we are all aware of, especially in a global world which the huge increase in low-cost travel has made increasingly familiar since the 1960s. Whether we have visited a country in Europe or North America, Latin America, Africa, Asia or Australia, we have experienced some particular musical style, whether a European or non-European classical style or music performed in a local popular or folk style. We are also increasingly aware of different local, traditional instruments. Moreover, with so many channels on our media playing music from different countries, we don't necessarily need to travel to become aware of these different styles. We can often readily identify music that is Indian, Chinese, Brazilian, Russian, Middle Eastern and so on. We have become familiar with existing traditional forms of non-European music such as the Ihu music of the Amazon Indians or the different musical styles of pre-colonial Africa, for example, the Benga music of Kenya recalling the melodies of the Kenyan eight-string Nyatiti lyre.

What about the earliest human communities? Whereas we do have knowledge of Paleolithic forms of visual art (2.5–2 million years ago up to around 10,000 in Europe and the Middle East)—for example, cave paintings—no record of prehistoric music survives since no form of musical notation had yet been created. Evidence of the existence of music in those times does exist, however, with the discovery of early instruments such as flutes made out of bone (Storr 1997, p. 1). And according to

Goodall, the oldest list of musical instruments—that is, objects made as instruments, not simply found and used as such—was discovered on a clay tablet in Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) and dated 2600 BC. One instrument mentioned is the ‘kinnor’, the hand-held harp-like instrument also known in its ancient Greek version as a lyre. A slightly younger Babylonian clay tablet, dating from 2000–1700 BC, provides basic details of how to learn and tune a four-stringed fretted lute, including instructions on which notes to play. This is the oldest surviving readable notation, though sadly none of the lutes have survived (Goodall 2013, p. 9).

What are the reasons for this universality? Does it have roots in the human psyche and body? Blacking argues that ‘many, if not all, of music’s essential processes can be found in the constitution of the human body and in patterns of interaction of bodies in society’ (Blacking 1974, pp. x–xi).

Research has shown that listening to music stimulates both emotional and physiological changes. Investigations by psychologist Roger Brown revealed the existence of widespread consensus between listeners about the emotional content of different pieces of music even when the listeners don’t recognise them or cannot identify them (Brown 1981, quoted in Storr 1997, p. 30).

However, to conclude that the emotions expressed in the music—joy, sadness, fear—are necessarily those aroused in the listener is to oversimplify. As Storr points out, Othello’s suicide is profoundly moving but it doesn’t make us suicidal, unless one were already in a suicidal state, one might add. What moves us is the way Shakespeare and Verdi make sense out of tragedy by integrating it into an artistic whole (Storr 1997, p. 30). So there isn’t a simple deterministic relationship between emotional meaning and emotional effect.

In general, we know how music arouses the majority of us who respond to it, creating an enhanced mood of awareness, interest and even excitement. Many of these changes reveal themselves physiologically and can be measured on an electro-encephalogram, for example, dilation of the eye pupil, a rise or fall of the respiratory rate, a rise in blood pressure. In addition, an electro-myograph reveals increases in electrical activity in the leg muscles while listening to music. Some people are driven to beat time with their feet or drum with their fingers, even in a concert hall. A study of tracings recorded the increase in Herbert von Karajan’s pulse-rate while conducting Beethoven’s *Leonora No. 3* overture. His pulse-rate showed the greatest increase during those passages which moved him emotionally

rather than those that required the greatest physical effort. Also noteworthy is the fact that his pulse-rate revealed much slower fluctuations when he was piloting and landing a jet aircraft (Storr 1997, pp. 25–26).

In addition, there is the apparently closer relation between hearing and emotional arousal than between seeing and arousal. In the days of silent films, a pianist was always present to sharpen the emotional impact of the various scenes—love, fear, awe. A friend of Storr's, on visiting the Grand Canyon for the first time, was surprised at his lack of response. He then realised that he had seen it on the screen many times but always with music. The sight of it in reality without music created a weaker response than seeing it in the cinema. Moreover, seeing a wounded person or animal who is silent may provoke little emotional response in someone. But if they scream, the observer will generally be strongly aroused. 'At an emotional level, there is something 'deeper' about hearing than seeing; and something about hearing other people which fosters human relationships even more than seeing them' (Storr 1997, p. 26).

The human capacity to create and enjoy music is rooted in our physiological make-up, with our musical ability located in a distinct part of the brain, separate from that which governs speech. Language is predominantly processed in the brain's left hemisphere while our capacity to scan and appreciate music occurs in the right hemisphere. However, the division of functions is not primarily that between words and music but between logic and emotion. When words arouse or give voice to emotions, as in poetry and song, the experience corresponds to activity in the right hemisphere. When conceptual thought occurs, the physical correlate is in the left hemisphere. The musician portrayed in Oliver Sacks's 'The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat' suffered from a brain lesion which meant he could not recognise the nature of objects. But his musical capacity was undamaged, so that he could only eat, dress or wash if he sang. Music became the only means by which he could relate to and organise the world around him. Indeed, the effects of music on patients suffering from neurological disorders can be astonishing.

How does music impact our repetitive physical actions? Of music's three predominant aspects—melody, harmony, rhythm,—the latter is clearly the most important factor in music's effect on our repetitive actions. The roots of rhythm lie in our physical make-up in a way that isn't so directly the case with melody or harmony (Storr 1997, p. 33).

The capacity of music to evoke similar emotional and physical responses in different people means it is able to bring individuals and

groups together. Music is a supreme unifier, despite the fact that different individuals will respond to a piece of music in different ways, for example, a musician and a listener unversed in music. For example, a dirge or funeral march will be experienced differently by different people who will nevertheless share aspects of the musical experience, seeing it within the context of the total event and sharing the emotions it arouses.

ORIGINS AND FUNCTIONS OF MUSIC

Music is also a method of communication between people. But what does it communicate? It isn't generally a representational art, providing us with images of the external world, with some notable exceptions—Beethoven's 'Pastoral' symphony, Schubert's 'Trout' quintet, Delius's 'On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring'. Nor does it offer us theories or information about the world in the way language does.

There are two approaches to the question of the significance of music: one is to examine its origins—how did it begin? How did it become so complex and varied? Is it an aspect of human nature? There is no universal agreement about this. The second question is to ask whether the different styles are related to social processes? And what has music's functions in different historical societies been?

The sounds which constitute music, generally referred to as tones, are not the same as those which emanate from nature such as the sounds of animals, the various forms of running water or trees in a breeze. Each musical tone is made up of soundwaves at a specific pitch, high or low, and the assembling of different tones that make-up a piece of music is a human creation. 'Nature's sounds, with the exception of birdsong and some other calls between animals, are irregular noises rather than the sustained notes of definable pitch which go to form music... "tones"... are separable units with constant auditory waveforms which can be repeated and reproduced' (Storr 1997, p. 3).

Moreover, science can analyse the differences between musical tones in terms of *pitch*, loudness, *timbre* or soundwaves, but it cannot convey that specific combination of tones which constitutes music. There continues to be much disagreement about the origins, purpose and meaning of music but general agreement that it bears only a distant link with the sounds and rhythms of nature. Music is, in fact, the most abstract of the arts, normally lacking any formal, concrete external references. However, given its central, universal use as a vital means of expressing human emotions

and attitudes, it is much more than a disembodied set of relationships between sounds. Music penetrates to the core of our being, it can move us emotionally like nothing else. Yet the precise nature of its links to our lives and emotions is hard to pin down.

Is music related to sounds emitted by other species, for example, bird-song? Birds emit both noises and tones in their ‘singing’, with a high proportion of tones, leading some observers to argue that their sound does constitute music. According to Charles Hartshorne, ‘bird songs resemble human music both in the sound patterns and in the behaviour setting’ (Hartshorne 1973, p. 56, in Storr 1997, p. 4). Birds sing in order to indicate a certain territory as desirable, and male birds sing more vigorously when searching for a mate and also to repel rivals. Hartshorne believes that birds sing much more than is required for communication, concluding that they sing as an expression of ‘*joie de vivre*’ (Hartshorne 1973, p. 56, in Storr 1997, p. 5). However, other analysts argue that bird singing is too physically demanding for it to be undertaken except as a means of fulfilling some necessary function.

So the issue is whether human music originated as an imitation of birdsong. Storr rejects this notion on two grounds: firstly, if human music did begin as birdsong, we should be able to point to examples of music in pre-literate communities resembling it. However, what we find instead are complex, rhythmic patterns in no way resembling avian sounds. Secondly, birdsong is complex and cannot easily be imitated. There are, of course, famous pieces of music that suggest the sound of birdsong—Liszt’s ‘*Legende No. 1, St. Francois d’Assise*’, for piano solo, suggesting the twittering of birds around St. Francis, Dvorak’s ‘*American Quartet*’ with its imitation of the scarlet tanager, ‘*Hens and Roosters*’ from Saint-Saens’ ‘*Carnival of the Animals*’, Vaughan Williams’ ‘*The Lark Ascending*’, Respighi’s ‘*The Birds*’ and the master of ‘*musical ornithology*’ Olivier Messiaen with his ‘*La Merle Noir*’—‘*The Blackbird*’.

However, these examples occur relatively late in the development of music and there is no evidence that early humans were interested in birdsong since it would have been of little relevance to their immediate practical needs.

We move up the evolutionary scale—from birds to subhuman primates—gelada monkeys who emit a wide variety of sounds of different pitches, rhythms and accents which accompany all their social interactions. The specific sound which a gelada monkey emits indicates his or her emotional state at the time, and, over the longer term, facilitates the

development of lasting bonds between individuals. If tensions arise, these can on occasion be resolved through coordinating vocal expressions. The result is, as Richman puts it: ‘a culturally agreed-upon pattern of rhythm and melody, i.e. a song, that is sung together, provides a shared form of emotion that... carries along the participants so that they experience their bodies responding emotionally in very similar ways. This is the source of the feeling of solidarity and good will that comes with choral singing...’ (Richman, Bruce, April 1987, in Storr 1997, p. 7).

Another theory of the origins of music suggests that it emerged from the babbling of infants, sounds which can sometimes be described as tones. Infant babbling seems to express both tones and incipient words. However, Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner disputes this, arguing that children’s early melodic fragments have no strong musical identity. Not until they reach a year and a half do children develop the ability to produce discrete pitches. During the following year, children often use discrete pitches—seconds, *minor* and *major* thirds—and by the age of two or two and a half start to notice and learn songs sung by others. According to Geza Revesz, babies’ lallation in their second year are shaped by songs picked up from music they have been exposed to. If so, then one can’t argue that music itself developed from infant lalling (Revesz 1953, p. 229 in Storr 1997, p. 8).

So the question whether or not music is specific to the human species, having seemed somewhat straightforward to begin with, now appears rather more complicated, with the lines of separation between humans and monkeys emerging as somewhat blurred. Perhaps the issue is incapable of definitive resolution.

In ancient Greek society, the cradle of European civilisation, music had an important place. Although advanced instrumental skills were confined to professionals, as in modern European society, the Greeks believed that playing the lyre and singing should be part of every freeman’s education. Music was widely played at domestic celebrations and feasts, and in religious rituals. Music competitions and athletic contests were held alongside each other.

Moreover, music and poetry were inseparable: Homer’s poetry, for example, was recited with lyre accompaniment. Poet and composer were often the same person: indeed, the Greek word ‘*melos*’ signified both music and poetry. It is the root of our word ‘melody’. Hence, whereas modern Western verse is mainly linguistic, consisting of words which may

or may not be set to music, the language in ancient Greek verse contained within itself a musical rhythm (Storr 1997, pp. 14–15).

However, the musical element gradually shrank, replaced by a system of accents bearing little relation to the original rhythm and which were not intoned at different pitches as music would be. In other words, poetry was now determined by linguistic patterns where verse rhythms are determined by stress rather than pitch. Musicians and poets were now separate people, and it became possible to set both prose and poetry to music in ways with which we are familiar. This also meant that music and language could be reunited when it was so desired, as, for example, in the Christian liturgy.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, revolutionary social thinker and accomplished composer, also delved into this issue. For him, in the earliest human societies, there was no distinction between speech and song: their languages were melodic rather than prosaic and were chanted rather than spoken. In other words, it was their passions rather than their practical needs which prompted their first utterances (Cranston 1983, pp. 289–290 in Storr 1997, p. 12). Moreover, according to psychoanalyst and musician Anton Ehrenzweig, ‘... speech and music have descended from a common origin in a primitive language which was neither speaking nor singing, but something of both’ (Ehrenzweig 1975, pp. 164–165, in Storr 1997, p. 16). Hence, music and language share a common precursor.

We can surmise that as song and speech moved apart, the differences in their functions became more emphasised. As society developed, so the forms of language changed, especially with the emergence of rational thought and science. Prose became more impersonal, more objective, less metaphorical and was used in conveying information and expressing ideas, whereas poetic forms of speech and music were now the means of expressing religious and other rituals.

So, debate about the origins of music is not new: it also exercised the minds of the Victorians. According to Herbert Spencer, when we use speech to express emotions, the sounds we emit span a greater tonal range and thus approximate to music. Darwin drew the opposite conclusion: he believed that music preceded speech and arose as an expression of mating calls. He observed that male animals with a vocal apparatus emit voice sounds most frequently when experiencing sexual arousal. And a sound originally used to attract a potential mate could be elaborated into speech (Spencer, London, 1857, Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, and ‘Selection

in Relation to Sex', 1871, in Gearney, Edmund, 'The Power of Sound', London, Smith, Elder, 1880, p. 119, in Storr 1997, p. 11).

Geza Revesz produced an additional theory derived from Carl Stumpf. Observing that the singing voice has greater power than the speaking voice, Revesz surmised that early humans, when needing to communicate with their fellows, found that they could do so more effectively by singing rather than speaking. He argued that emitting loud, resounding signals is pleasurable, and concluded that such calls can easily pass over into song. In other words, he attempted to derive all music from the yodel.

Now, musical sounds are indeed used by pre-literate people for distance communication. Wind instruments have also been invented for this purpose. Moreover, signalling by means of drums and horns is widespread in Africa and elsewhere. And the Mura Native Americans of the Amazon communicate across great rivers in a special musical language played on a three-holed flageolet. However, as Storr points out, communication using musical sounds does not in itself constitute music. Nor is there evidence that such signals became transformed into music. Revesz's theory fails to account for the rhythmic element in music: neither he nor Darwin nor Spencer seem able to tell us why music appealed to early humans and their descendants, why it came to play such an important role in our lives (McLaughlin 1970, p. 14, in Storr 1997, p. 12).

Deryck Cooke tried to demonstrate that there was a consensus among composers in the Western tradition as to which musical devices represent specific emotions. For example, the interval of a *major* third generally expresses joy, while the *minor* third is usually associated with grief. The augmented fourth, labelled *diabolus in musica* by medieval theorists due to its 'flawed' sound, is often used to depict demons or other horrors (Cooke 1959/1962, pp. 88–89).

Music, and the enormous variety of musical styles—'art-music', pop, jazz, folk—are created by human beings, not in the abstract but within specific contexts of culture and social relations. Every musical work, indeed every work of art, can be located within a specific aesthetic system, a system of rules and conventions, which is what the word 'style' refers to. As Leichtentritt puts it: 'Even the most revolutionary art has its conventional traits—one may go so far as to define style as a sum of conventional features—for without certain well-established conventions, no great art of any kind can exist' (Leichtentritt 1954, p. 151). Moreover, no musical work can be appreciated to the full unless the listener has a degree of

familiarity with that style. And as will become evident in subsequent chapters, no composer, no artist, can resist the power of the dominant ideas of their age.

Henry Raynor develops the argument further, that ‘...music is not written and does not exist in a vacuum. The composer, whether or not he likes to recognise the fact, lives in some relationship to his age and a community, for even the most inaccessible of ivory towers is only a negative relationship to his age and his community’ (Raynor 1972, p. 5). It is, of course, the principal theme of this book that the changing musical styles of successive historical eras, express the socio-economic and political contexts within which they were developed.

In other words, these styles are not the mechanical product of those external contexts but are shaped and influenced by them. Humans create music in order to make sense of their social environment, to enable them to cope with the challenges they face collectively and individually, and as part of the process of shaping and re-shaping their relationships and the social and natural world they inhabit. As John Blacking put it: ‘Music is a synthesis of cognitive processes which are present in culture and in the human body: the forms it takes, and the effects it has on people, are generated by the social experiences of human bodies in different cultural environments. Because music is humanly organised sound, it expresses aspects of the experience of individuals in society’ (Blacking 1974, p. 89). As Trotsky put it: ‘Art is one of the ways in which man finds his bearings in the world’ (Trotsky 1963, p. 12). Specifically, the leading composers of the different eras expressed in music the aspirations of the dominant or aspiring social classes.

Hence, the theoretical assumption underlying the analysis in this book is that there is some kind of homology or structural correspondence between society and music. For example, the competitiveness of the rising bourgeoisie in the late seventeenth and eighteenth-century Europe is perhaps mirrored in Bach’s version of ‘luxuriant *counterpoint*’, the interpenetration of harmony and *counterpoint*, where the dividing lines between melody, bass line and harmony are blurred, creating a quasi-competitive situation between treble and bass lines (see Chapter 2); or where the Classical bass line becomes the treble line’s equal partner in melodic development so that the principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, seem to liberate the bass from its role of service to the upper instruments (see Chapter 3).

In sum, the music of Bach and Handel cannot be understood in isolation from the social practice and understanding of the world of the eighteenth-century bourgeoisie. Moreover, the aesthetic theories of that age comprised ‘a complicated doctrine of emotional expression, going back to certain primitive correlations of rhythm and melodic line with the various emotions...’ (Leichtentritt 1954, p. 143). The new spirit—scientific, rationalist, philosophical—is a powerful component of music around 1720. Bach and Handel are the composers who introduced it into music with a superior artistic instinct. Naturally, no composer sat down to analyse the socio-political character and ethos of their time and consciously fit their style to these features. Art is largely unconscious, as Trotsky attested.

I am not arguing that classical music was determined by these social changes, but they did create a new framework that helped to shape the new style. Composers internalised, as we all do, the social institutions around them, albeit unconsciously. Society was not directly reflected in music but mediated through the composers’ activity.

Moreover, no Chinese Wall separates ‘art-music’ from popular music. Often, features of the former are derived from conventions in the latter. We shall see this particularly in Romantic music—Chopin, Verdi, Tchaikovsky, Dvorak—but also in Classical and Modernist music: Haydn and Beethoven used folk songs, as, of course, did composers such as Bartok who drew heavily on Hungarian peasant songs. The Classical emphasis on melody was also indebted to the folk songs and dance tunes of the ordinary people; ‘it was indeed of the same type, but a little more finished, shaped by an artist’s hand, fitted for use in a composition of larger dimensions’ (Leichtentritt 1954, p. 164).

A second, subsidiary theme running through this book, as suggested in the Introduction, is that changes in musical style not only reflect, but in turn also help to shape changes in society and social movements. ‘Art is not a mirror held up to reality but a hammer with which to shape it’. This statement has been attributed to both Brecht and Mayakovsky. Trotsky says something almost identical in ‘Literature and Revolution’ (Trotsky 1960, p. 137). And as Ernst Fischer argued, ‘art is... never merely a clinical description of reality. Its function is always... to enable the ‘I’ to identify itself with another’s life... Art is necessary in order that man should be able to recognise and change the world’. Rouget de Lisle, an officer in the French revolutionary army, composed *La Marseillaise* in 1792. He may well have heard ‘Mozart’s Piano Concerto No.

25' (1786), whose *allegro maestoso* contains a remarkably similar *theme*. Arguably, Beethoven's music did not merely reflect revolutionary Europe and North America in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but helped to create that world. The Russian writer Gorki relates how Lenin described Beethoven: 'I know of nothing better than the *Appassionata* and could listen to it every day. What astonishing, superhuman music! It always makes me proud, perhaps naively so, to think that people can work such miracles!' [Gorki, *V.I. Lenin*, 1896–1899]. Could Beethoven have helped inspire Lenin to develop his vision of a socialist world?

Later examples are the nationalisms expressed in the operas of Verdi and Wagner, and in Chopin's Romanticism: all these gave significant encouragement to the Italian, German and Polish nationalist political movements of the mid-nineteenth century. We see it, too, in Mozart's 'The Marriage of Figaro'.

Music's role as resistance and its unconscious character were also underlined by Trotsky: 'Generally speaking, art is an expression of man's need for a harmonious and complete life... his need for those major benefits of which a society of classes has deprived him. That is why a protest against reality, either conscious or unconscious, active or passive, optimistic or pessimistic, always forms part of a really creative piece of work. Every new tendency in art has begun with rebellion' (Trotsky 1950, p. 61).

In modern times, there are powerful examples drawn from popular music—jazz as the music of the American black community, the popular songs of the 1960s, expressing the revolt of the youth, or today, the music of the Palestinian people.

In 1999, Palestinian scholar Edward Said and Israeli musician Daniel Barenboim founded the West Eastern Divan Orchestra bringing together young musicians from the Middle East, including Palestine and Israel. It surely counts as an expression of cultural resistance despite its drawbacks (the Israeli musicians have to do military service) since, as an artistic union, it flies directly in the face of the ethnic exclusiveness of the Israeli state.

In Barenboim's book 'Everything is Connected: The Power of Music', there is a chapter, 'A Tale of Two Palestinians', in which he describes how the lives of two young Palestinians were transformed by music. As a music student in France, Ramzi Aburedwan 'enriched the musical life of the conservatory with Middle Eastern harmonies' (Barenboim 2009, p. 96).

He also created an association to collect money for the musical education of Palestinian children and organised a day of benefit concerts of ‘musicians for Palestine’. Saleem Abboud Ashkar complained that the only Arab literature included in his Israeli education was either Egyptian or pre-Islamic: contemporary Palestinian literature would be too politicised and would present the difficult issue of Palestinian identity (Barenboim 2009, pp. 98 and 102).

Palestinian writer Nadine Sayegh describes the recent development of music in the Palestinian territories. ‘Many of the musicians emerging in the early noughties did so as an act of resistance against the Israeli occupation... With lyrics attacking the occupiers, the occupying forces—and even the Palestinian Authority—it stirs the imagination of the audience to a possible alternative to their current station in life’ (Sayegh, online article, 2018).

Theodor Adorno’s philosophy of music also attempts to relate music to society. ‘Music’s processes, the result of human labour, are invariably always already socially anchored... they carry social meanings, though indirectly’ (Leppert 2002, p. 98). For Adorno, ‘musical truth’ is ascertained by the way composers situate themselves within musical history, firstly, how they deal with the forms and materials they inherit, secondly with the way ‘the composer reflects the existing social conditions via the formal structure of the composition... For music to be truthful, it must express in structural form the reality of social life, a reality that is obscured by the clichés inherent in the commodified art that dominates culture under late capitalism’ (Behrman 2009, p. 122). However, Adorno here neglects the extent to which the late Baroque and Classical styles evoke the aspirations of the radical bourgeoisie, their demands for freedom, their determination to sweep away the old feudal order and build a new society. Also, Adorno’s elitism leads him to over-emphasise the composer’s relationship to musical history, ignoring the impact on them of political struggles. He believed in music’s potential to uphold the strength of ‘subjectivity’—artistic and political agency—in the face of an ‘objectivity’—the existing social and musical world seeking to constrain it. But he saw virtually all twentieth-century music and the culture industry as having stifled the possibility of radical change (Abel 2020, p. 14).

A brief look, finally, at the work of French scholar Jacques Attali and American feminist musicologist Susan McClary. Attali seems to use the term ‘noise’ to describe the condition of the planet, of nature and human society: all are characterised by violence and destructiveness, of rivalry

and death. So, noise is violence, but ‘*music is a channelization of noise, a simulacrum of the sacrifice... thus a sublimation...*’ (Attali 1985, p. 26). It controls and conquers ‘noise’ by creating a harmonious order in the realm of sound. In so doing, it upholds and legitimises the social order in general. The result was the creation of hierarchy and social stability. It has thus from the outset been a key tool of the ruling class of every society (Johanning 1998, p. 2). Music seems here to be the equivalent of Hobbes’ Leviathan state, whereby social cohesion is achieved through a strong, undivided government.

Attali argues that at any moment in any society, a struggle is taking place between the ‘official’ music, which reflects the existing order and functions to channel people’s aggression into harmony with that order, and a subversive counter-music which expresses the anger of those excluded from power and struggling to determine a new form of society. Attali offers an analysis of the development of western music from its origins in ritual up to modern recording. He argues that music has gone through four cultural stages in its history.

- (a) ‘Sacrificing’ describes music’s pre-history—the period of the oral tradition (prior to 1500 CE)—before notation, when music exists in people’s memory in the form of songs and folk stories. Music is contrasted to the ‘noise’ of nature—of death, chaos and destruction. Music’s function is to preserve and transmit that cultural heritage through strengthening our collective memory. Attali calls the chapter ‘Sacrificing’ since in this era music and the rituals surrounding it sublimates the violence of nature.
- (b) ‘Representing’ refers to the era of printed music -roughly 1500–1900. For the first time, music becomes linked to a physical medium, a commodity for sale on the market. It becomes a ‘spectacle attended at specific places: concert halls... a confinement made necessary by the collection of entrance fees’ (Attali 1985, p. 32).
- (c) ‘Repetition’ appears at the end of the nineteenth century with the arrival of recording. This technology created a new ‘organisational network for the economy of music... The consumption of music is individualised... the network is no longer... an opportunity for spectators to meet and communicate, but rather a tool making the individualised stockpiling of music possible...’ (Attali 1985, p. 32).

- (d) ‘Composition’ is the final stage, beyond exchange, in which music could potentially be performed for the musician’s own enjoyment, for communing with oneself, a solitary, non-commercial act’.

Attali also claims that the changes which occur in music predict the shape of future societies. Changes in music foreshadow changes in society (Johanning 1998, p. 1). At first sight, this is putting the cart before the horse and smacks of idealist philosophy whereby ideas or cultural artefacts shape social formations. We are arguing, on the contrary, that music reflects and expresses the major social and political processes, events and structures, of the composer’s epoch. However, there are examples which validate Attali’s claim. Mozart’s operas ‘The Marriage of Figaro’ (1786) and ‘Don Giovanni’ (1787) are harbingers of the French revolution. But they also reflect the rise of bourgeois social and economic power, as does ‘The Magic Flute’ (1791).

Attali’s work analyses the relationship of music to its consumers and creators, noting the changes as determined by changes in technology. It doesn’t relate the changes in musical style to social and political changes—the relationship of late Baroque to early capitalism, of the Classical style to bourgeois political revolution, of Romantic style to the disillusion at the failure of political revolution, of Modernism to the crisis of the capitalist order. It lumps together in a single category these different styles of *tonal* and *atonal* music.

Three specific criticisms can be made of Attali’s analysis.

Firstly, is music the sublimation of ritualised human sacrifice, and more broadly, of social violence? Attali is not an anthropologist and, therefore, lacks the knowledge to adduce counter-examples such as the social solidarity both within and between various tribal communities.

Secondly, Attali claims to provide a materialist analysis of music. However, the book encompasses far too broad a historical sweep of music since the middle ages, lumping together very different periods and social formations, therefore obscuring important differences in musical style. The entire ‘modern’ period from 1500 to 1900 is subsumed within the single category of ‘repetition’ simply on the grounds of technology—the fact of printed music. He fails to differentiate between the various phases of Baroque, and the Classical, Romantic and Modernist styles.

Thirdly, Attali’s dependence on Adorno results in his failure to provide sufficient insight into the liberationist features of modern music—late Baroque as expressing the aspiration of the rising European bourgeoisie,

Classical style as the political expression of that emerging class, Romanticism as the lament over the failure of the promises of the French revolution, Modernism as expressing the crisis of capitalist society.

Attali also argues that ‘it is deceptive to conceptualise a succession of musical codes corresponding to a succession of economic and political relations... because time traverses music and music gives meaning to time’. By this, he presumably means that time is above history and society, and that music structures time outside of our economic and political relations. However, as Mark Abel argues, ‘the meaning of time, and possibly even time itself, is socially and historically constructed, and, therefore, a study of changes in the organisation of time in music is one way of tracing its history’ (Abel 2015, p. 7). We shall see how changes in rhythmic patterns, varying approaches to accents and beats, are influenced by social and historical factors.

In 1991, Susan McClary put forward a feminist critique of classical music which shocked and unsettled conservative musicologists. She refers to the musical term ‘feminine ending’—formerly used to describe a weak phrase or movement ending on an unstressed beat or weak *cadence*; a ‘masculine’ *cadence* occurs if the final chord of a section occurs on a strong beat (Harvard 1970, in McClary 1991, p. 9). The book analyses musical constructions of sexuality and the gendered aspects of traditional music theory and sonata form.

According to McClary, the rise of opera in the seventeenth century sees composers working to develop a musical ‘semiotics’ (study of signs or symbols) of gender—‘a set of conventions for constructing ‘masculinity’ or ‘femininity’ in music’ (McClary 1991, p. 7). The codes indicating gender difference in music are shaped by the prevailing attitudes of their time. But they in turn help to shape social formations insofar as individuals are partly socialised into gendered beings through their interactions with cultural discourses such as music. Music does not just passively reflect society; it also serves as a public forum within which various models of gender organisation... are... adopted...’ (McClary 1991, pp. 7–8).

Similarly, among the narrative paradigms that emerged during the history of *tonality* are gendered features such as the custom of describing the opening *theme* of a *sonata* as ‘masculine’ and the second *theme* ‘feminine’. ‘The second theme... serves as contrast to the first, energetic statement, though dependent on and determined by it. It is of a more tender nature, flexibly rather than emphatically constructed... the feminine as opposed to the preceding masculine’ (A.B. Marx [1845] in

McClary 1991, p. 13). The primary key represents ‘masculine protagonist’ ‘while satisfactory resolution... demands the containment of whatever is... structurally marked as “feminine”, whether a second theme or simply a non-tonic key area’ (McClary 1991, p. 15).

McClary’s analysis is valuable in shedding light on gendered aspects of European art music. It highlights the way traditional sexist attitudes and values informed every social and cultural institution, even the most rarefied art such as music.

An additional important consideration is that artists need a sense of community, to identify with the wider society, or at least sections of it. Their stylistic choices are not made in the abstract but flow in part from the artists’ own social needs and ideas, and their political aspirations (Locke 1986, p. 121).

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