

Introduction

The earliest published essay in this collection was written while I was a graduate student in music history at Yale University, trying to decide whether I wanted to be a musicologist who loves philosophy or a philosopher who loves musicology. In the event I opted for the latter. The volume in your hands is one of the results, an interaction of music and philosophy.

The essays written before 1980 are all historical, and have as their sole reason for being historical curiosity. But in 1980 my career as a philosopher was drastically changed, although I did not realize it at the time, by the publication of my first book on the “philosophy of music,” *The Corded Shell*. I had embarked on the writing of it as a pleasant interlude from my usual work in “analytic” aesthetics. Instead, I ended up devoting my philosophical career, if not exclusively, at least very significantly, to the working out of an extensive musical philosophy, which is still very much in process. All the essays after 1980, therefore, even the historical ones, deal with issues that have come up in the course of that work, and which are not dealt with, or not dealt with adequately, in *The Corded Shell* and the books that came after. It is not that my interest in historical questions in the philosophy of music waned during this period: The recent historical essays attest that it did not. But the contemporary issues just seemed to take over, and this is reflected not only in the proportion of analytic to historical subjects dealt with, but in the historical subjects themselves, and the way they are treated.

Introduction

“Music and the Liberal Education” is my one attempt, ever, to write on the philosophy of education, or more specifically, what is called nowadays the philosophy of aesthetic education. The piece is the result of a very flattering invitation, tendered by Jay Bachrach and Barry Donahue, to give a public lecture before the student body and faculty of the William O. Douglas Honors College of Central Washington University in Ellensburg, Washington. The subject of music in the liberal education was chosen in an attempt to capture the interest of both students and their teachers by discussing a question that both parties might have asked, each from its own perspective: *Why am I studying this?*, *Why am I teaching this?* I was somewhat disturbed to discover, in writing this lecture, that I wasn’t sure I knew the answer to either of these questions. Perhaps someone else does, although discussions on various occasions on which this lecture was given have failed to reveal anyone in possession of the secret.

The three essays on musical Platonism, variations on a theme, began with the simple idea of suggesting not that the universal-particular relation really would work as a proper model for the work-performance one, but that the reasons usually given for rejecting it just weren’t very convincing. Perhaps I pursued it further and longer than I ought to have done. In any case, my foray into musical Platonism has received some heavy bashing in the literature. Notwithstanding that, one interesting idea that appealed to me in the beginning, and still does, is the idea that “discovery” rather than “creation” captures what composers do: I still think that point is worth developing further, and have done so in my book *Music Alone*. Certainly my Platonistic inclinations are weaker now than when these essays were published. But I wanted them to appear together, in one place, so that they could be evaluated as a whole. If someone wants to take another bash at them, I am resigned to it. Or perhaps there is someone out there who can make something more of my dabbling in Platonic metaphysics than I have done.

The two essays on performance practice are preliminary attempts to come to philosophical terms with the “histori-

Introduction

cally authentic performance" movement. Currently I am writing a book on the subject, so this can be considered very much work in progress; the pieces reprinted here represent a fairly early stage of my thinking on the subject. Much needs to be done to get from these two rather different, but not inconsistent beginnings to a fully worked out analysis. Both, at least in idea, will play some part in the final outcome.

"Opera Talk" and "How Did Mozart Do It?" are a side effect of my 1988 book, *Osmin's Rage: Philosophical Reflections on Opera, Drama and Text*. The former has nothing directly to do with the book, except that my mind was still on opera when I wrote it. It is a fanciful attempt to characterize the way operatic personages express themselves in music, and was directly inspired by an essay of Edward T. Cone's on the same subject. And although it is certainly consistent with my general views on opera, as expressed in *Osmin's Rage*, it is not implied by them.

"How Did Mozart Do It?" is quite another matter. It came out of a symposium on character delineation in Mozart's operas that I proposed and subsequently organized for a conference on Mozart at Hofstra University to commemorate the bicentennial of his death. My plan was to develop further an idea about the nature of operatic characters that I had introduced toward the close of *Osmin's Rage*, but had not had time to deal with adequately there. I also wanted, in the process, to answer some criticism of it. To my surprise, and not quite according to plan, my co-symposiasts, Wye Jamison Allanbrook, Paul Robinson, and Mary Hunter found my paper provoking enough to criticize it quite incisively, for which I am very grateful. This criticism resulted in the second part of the essay, in which I tried to answer their main points. This is an ongoing project, for I am far from satisfied that my idea is fully worked out, although I still believe that it is in essential points correct, and that a good deal of pretentious nonsense is still written about how operatic composers portray character in music. It is that nonsense my idea was meant to combat.

The pair of essays on Mozart, although one is "early" and

Introduction

the other "late," have much in common. Both deal with what I would call "curiosities" in intellectual history; neither deals with Mozart's music, in that regard, but rather with the "idea of Mozart," which, it seems to me, has replaced the "idea of Beethoven" as the dominating *musical* image of genius and creative intellect. I think this replacement of the "Beethoven idea" by the "Mozart idea," if I am right about it, must tell us something important about the difference between the way music, as a human enterprise, was viewed in the nineteenth century and the way it is viewed now. Indeed, I think it must tell us something about changing attitudes toward all the arts. I wish someone would take up this theme: It seems to me rich in possibilities for the history of ideas.

The essay on Darwin dates from my earliest attempts, while I was studying music history at Yale, to combine musical and philosophical interests. The whole thing started by sheer accident when I picked up, in a secondhand bookstore, a little volume of Herbert Spencer's literary and aesthetical essays, with his longish "The Origin and Function of Music" as the centerpiece. I soon discovered that Spencer's essay had stirred up a little hornet's nest of controversy among the "physiological aestheticians" and evolutionists of the time, including, indeed, the greatest evolutionist of all. And when I decided to take my M.A. degree in music history, I talked my advisor, the late William G. Waite, into letting me write on music and evolution for my Master's essay. "Charles Darwin on Music" came out of that research and was written to commemorate the centennial of *The Origin of Species*, which was the major intellectual event of my years at Yale.

At the time, music and evolution, and the "origin" of music in general, was a sideshow of intellectual history, and no self-respecting musicologist would have seriously considered the origin of music as a viable question. But times have changed, and I wonder if the current advances in evolutionary genetics, as well as interest in the study of a possible "deep structure" in tonal music might make such a question seem more tractable nowadays, and not mere airy speculation. In any event, I am surprised no one else has

Introduction

become interested in the evolutionary theories of music, and, in general, that evolutionary period in the history of British aesthetics.

“Mattheson as Philosopher of Art,” although a historical essay, is an instance of my concern for issues over history. For in getting clear my own views on “musical expression” in *The Corded Shell* (1980), I found the need to come to terms with my predecessors. And Mattheson, it seemed to me then (and still does) is closer to contemporary, “objectivist” views on music and the emotions, than anyone gives him credit for being. Musicologists, I think, consistently misread him on the fine points, and (perhaps for that reason) philosophers of art ignore him. He deserves better, and I hope he gets it here.

“Kant and the *Affektenlehre*” is a very recent piece of work, the result of an invitation of Ralf Meerbote to participate in a conference at the University of Rochester in 1990, commemorating the centennial of the publication of Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*. Initially reluctant, not being a Kant scholar, I soon got “hooked,” and, as in the case of Mattheson, tried to evaluate what Kant had said about music and the emotions not merely as an exercise in historical interpretation but in the light of my own work on the subject. Ultimately, I found what Kant had to say both enticingly original and forward-looking *and* a disappointing failure of nerve.

The pair of essays on Hanslick were written in close succession, the second a necessary result of the first. In the first, I assumed, but did not argue for, a particular interpretation of what Hanslick had said in his famous monograph, *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen*, about music and the emotions. On that assumption, I then revealed what I took to be a glaring and important inconsistency in his treatment of the relation between music and text. But was my assumption correct? Received opinion was against me, and so I felt impelled to argue carefully for my assumption – which I proceeded to do in the second of the essays. Alas, it didn’t do any good: Received opinion *still* seems to be against me. But I satisfied myself. And it was important that I do so, not because I was

Introduction

particularly interested in Hanslick as a historical figure in music aesthetics, but because his monograph still lies at the core of all teaching and thinking about the “philosophy of music,” where the vexed question of “music and the emotions” is being considered. Hanslick is still very much a “live” figure, to be either defended or refuted, but of necessity to come to terms with, one way or the other, by any serious worker in the field.

In completing my last book on the aesthetics of music, *Music Alone*, I became aware that I had been moving over a ten-year period, without really being aware of it, toward a version of musical *formalism*, unusual in that it countenanced in absolute music just those expressive properties – what I had begun to call the “garden variety emotions” – that from the time of Hanslick formalists are well known for dismissing. I am certainly not the only writer presently dissatisfied with traditional formalism in its rejection of emotive properties. But where others are, it appears to me, relapsing into a kind of neo-Romantic music analysis that makes what I take to be extravagant claims for musical “content,” I have tried to make room for the emotive within a doctrine still recognizably formalist, that manages to reject musical “content” and other neo-Romantic baggage. “A New Music Criticism?” is an attempt to both criticize the new neo-Romantic analysis, and make some advances in a “new criticism” of my own that treats emotive properties “syntactically.”

“The Fine Art of Repetition,” the title essay of this volume, was born as a little germ of an idea, when I happened to ask a rather well known musicologist and musical aesthetician, who had just given the familiar characterization of symphonic music as “an evolving organism,” how his account jibed with the obvious, indeed trivial, fact that symphonic expositions are frequently meant to be *repeated*, a very weird thing indeed for an “evolving organism” to do. I never got a straight answer to my question and vowed to consider the ubiquitous musical repeat seriously at some appropriate time in the future. That time arrived when I came to realize that the repeat is *not* a *trivial* fact at all about music but in-

Introduction

deed something lying very near the heart of the matter. "The Fine Art of Repetition" is the result of that realization and a fitting title, I thought, to this collection: perhaps the closest to a "definition" of music that I will ever come.

The final essay continues, essentially, where "The Fine Art of Repetition" leaves off. For when serious consideration of the musical repeat led me inexorably to decorative models of music, rather than the traditional and still overwhelmingly popular literary or organism ones, the very status of music *as* a fine art seemed ready for a skeptical look. And when one realizes that, after all, acquiring that status in the Pantheon is a fairly recent event in intellectual history, a problematic one at that, the skepticism does not seem, at least on first reflection, completely misplaced. Moreover, viewing the whole question in its historical context seems an imperative, which is the reason I cast my argument in historical terms, although my history tends to be, at times, a bit speculative and "a priori." I trust the historical facts will bear me out or, at least, not contradict me.

I cannot omit mentioning, before I close, the special circumstances under which "Is Music an Art?" was written, and the very particular personal satisfaction these circumstances and the writing gave me. It is customary for the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association to invite, each year, a small number of philosophers to write papers specially for the annual meeting. These are published, just prior to the meeting, in *The Journal of Philosophy*. It has always seemed to me a singular honor to be recognized by one's colleagues in this way. To my utter delight, Robert Sleight, on behalf of his program committee, invited me to write such a paper for the Eastern Division meeting in 1991. It is a recognition on the part of my colleagues in the profession, many of whom have a far stronger claim than I to the title of "philosopher," that is really very sweet to me. "Is Music an Art?" was my offering on that occasion.

It is a complete coincidence, but, I think, a serendipitous one, that the last essay in this volume has a title in the form of a question. This book *should* end with a question for two

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-43598-7 - The Fine Art of Repetition: Essays in the Philosophy of Music

Peter Kivy

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Introduction

reasons. First, to suggest that it is not a finished project but a project in process. Second, to suggest that a philosopher who thinks he knows the answers, and says so in print is probably committing philosophical *hubris* and philosophical suicide at the same time. Indeed, far from knowing the answers, he very likely doesn't even know the questions.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-43598-7 - The Fine Art of Repetition: Essays in the Philosophy of Music

Peter Kivy

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Prelude: Music and us

Chapter I

Music and the liberal education

Suppose I were to play to an average audience of educated men and women, recordings, respectively, of Hamlet's famous soliloquy that begins, "To be, or not to be," and the opening measures of the *Eroica*. It is my hypothesis that almost everyone in such a group would know that the first excerpt I played was from a play by William Shakespeare called *Hamlet*, and that almost no one would know that the second was the opening of Beethoven's Third Symphony. This puzzling – some might say distressing – fact is the subject of my essay.

Three questions, I imagine, will immediately come to mind. Why *should* I be puzzled, one may well ask, by the fact that most people can recognize Hamlet's famous soliloquy but not the beginning of Beethoven's Third Symphony? Why, second, should I care about this, even if it is puzzling? And, finally, why should a philosopher be talking about Shakespeare, a poet, and Beethoven, a composer? Why doesn't he mind his own business, and talk about Plato, or Kant, or the meaning of life, or whatever it is that philosophers are supposed to talk about?

The answer to the third question will, I trust, just naturally emerge as this essay progresses. But the answers to the first and second I will get to right away, for these questions and their answers will serve, really, as the introduction to my subject.

It is fair to say that *Hamlet* is one of the acknowledged masterpieces of Western literature, perhaps the most famous play