

Introduction: The Ingredients of a Masterpiece

By Daniel N. Thompson

In the sciences, research receives its justification and its support—despite all the lip service to ‘pure’ knowledge—from the exploitable discoveries or patents to which it may lead. In the humanities, research receives its justification—despite all the lip service to the advancement of learning—from its applicability to teaching. [172]

—Robert Scholes

Introduction

Perhaps because I practice the discipline of ethnomusicology, I believe that the study of music can justifiably include the study of any aspect of musical behavior, including the study of the teaching of music as well as the study of the teaching *about* music.¹ With this in mind, some time ago I had the idea that it would be an interesting departure for *Current Musicology* to examine the teaching of music survey courses, with particular attention paid to “masterpieces” courses—of the type that constitutes the music component of Columbia’s undergraduate Core Curriculum (particularly because the teaching of the Core survey course is the endeavor most commonly shared among the music department’s professors and graduate-student instructors).

I wanted views from outside Columbia—indeed, from outside the research university setting—as well, so I solicited articles from scholar-administrators at a conservatory and at a liberal arts college. I am therefore pleased to present, in this special section of *Current Musicology* #65, the viewpoints of Peter Rojcewicz, from The Juilliard School in Manhattan, and of Sean Williams, from The Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington. Annalisa Swig Poirel, an early music scholar here at Columbia, provides a look at the issue from within the research university itself; my own contribution makes mention of some of the unspoken, and too often unexamined, musical “givens” that contribute to the production, dissemination, and consumption of the Masterpieces of Western Music.

Rojcewicz argues—not surprisingly, for a conservatory scholar, teacher, and administrator—that to more fully understand the music we are studying, there should be more emphasis on the actual *doing* of music. Williams is an ethnomusicologist and committed teacher and dean at a liberal arts

college; at her school, teaching is a team endeavor, and the teaching team's approach contextualizes music in such a way that their students also study the history, literature, contemporary sociopolitical issues, and even the language of a culture in order to better understand its music. Poirel outlines the ideals—as published in official documents during the course of the past several decades—that have motivated the teaching of Columbia's Core music survey course, and discusses whether those ideals have been (and can be) met.

As for myself, what follows is an overview of some of the parameters that usually circumscribe Masterpieces of Western Music, in which I suggest that perhaps the most effective and meaningful way to teach the course is to introduce a series of oppositions between those aspects or components that are usually (or even exclusively) constitutive of "pieces" of Western music and those aspects or components that do *not* generally make an appearance. This short list of parameters is neither exhaustive nor comprehensive; there are a number of contextual areas that I have not listed for reasons of space. Neither does this cursory listing of attributes and components constitute a systematic, intensive evaluation of any of the musics mentioned. It is simply a list, whose informal, ad hoc nature complements, I hope, the conversational tone that can be found throughout this special section that has been devoted to the discussion of the teaching of music survey courses.

In what follows I will point out that most decisions that have been made about what constitutes a Masterpiece comprise a number of other decisions that are made (usually) subconsciously. These are the cultural "givens," which too often remain unquestioned. (A generous number of quotations have been interspersed throughout most of the following sections, although whether the effect should prove to be modernist medley or postmodernist pastiche is—of course—for the reader to decide.)²

Masterpieces of Western Music

In the centuries when artistic skills were watched over by guilds of workmen, a masterpiece was nothing more than a graduation piece, a work that marked the student's advance from apprenticeship to master status. . . . But all the successors of Beethoven who aspired to his position of authority—Brahms and Bruckner and Wagner and Mahler and Tchaikovsky—quite consciously imbued their music with the 'masterpiece' tone. [Fisk: 324–25]

—Virgil Thomson

To see literature as properly historical, in Hegel's view, would be to give some privilege to texts that were oppositional or negative in their relation to the prevailing values of their times—which, need I say it, are precisely those texts

most often omitted from lists of Great Books and courses in Western Civ.
[116]

—Robert Scholes

The Story of Western Music is a good tale. Over time, of course, the tale is told differently—new things are added and old information is altered or deleted. For instance, on the evening that I am writing these words, I have pulled a few texts from the upper reaches of my bookshelves. I have the “Third American Edition, revised, April 1947” of Alfred Einstein’s *A Short History of Music*. Einstein posits five ages of music, indicated by the section titles of the book: “Primitive Music” (which receives slightly more than two pages of attention), “The Ancient Civilizations” (which receives a total of seven pages), “The Middle Ages,” “The ‘Renaissance’” (which includes coverage of Bach and Handel), and “Modern Times” (in which the final composer who receives any significant discussion is Chopin, and the final composer mentioned in the book is Janáček).

Nearby on my bookshelves is Walter Wiora’s *The Four Ages of Music* (1965). Wiora’s four ages are “Prehistoric and Early Period,” “Music in the High Civilizations of Antiquity and the Orient,” “The Third Age” (constituted by “The Special Position of Western Music”), and finally “The Age of Techniques and of Global Industrial Culture.” Wiora has included a relatively large number of notational examples, which includes representations of music from all over the world (e.g., Indian, Islamic, Lapp, “pygmy,” and Persian musics, among many others), in the back of the book. All of the examples are in Western notation but include no indications of pitch difference relative to equal temperament.

Another example of an older telling of the Story of Western Music (although most of these writers clearly thought they were telling *The Story of Music*) is that which is provided by Curt Sachs in *Our Musical Heritage* (1948, 1955). Sachs’s book has 22 chapters; chapters 8 through 22 are all entitled “The Age of —.” Some of Sachs’s fifteen ages are very short—chapter 19: “The Age of Mendelssohn, Schumann, Berlioz, 1828–1854” covers an “age” that has a span of only 26 years—and none of the ages overlap. (Today we might dispute the relative importance of some of Sachs’s organizing ideas: chapter 14, for instance, is entitled “The Age of Carissimi, 1630–1670.”) All three of these books are built around Masterpieces of Western Music and the Makers of Masterpieces, and exemplify the nondialectical approach of the cultural insider, who presumes the superiority of his own “cultural starting point” and who presupposes that this starting point is the standard against which all other musics must be judged.

So, what makes a Masterpiece? This topic is not, of course, contemplated solely by musicologists. In a recent book titled *The Rise and Fall of*

English, Scholes (1998: 114) has indicated that we cannot understand the West without also understanding the East (or non-West). Certainly the same is true when the topic is music. And just as we need to cover some of the basics of a few non-Western musical approaches in order to better understand what makes Western music Western, we should provide examples of Western cultivated music that are *not* Masterpieces so that students might better understand what a Masterpiece is.

To at least partially answer the question "What makes a Masterpiece?" it will probably be helpful to take a look at several of the constituent aspects of Western cultivated music that are usually never explicitly articulated in most survey classrooms (or even in conventional Western musicology courses) and to then supply examples of analogous or corresponding components of those pieces that are *not* Masterpieces of Western Music. A *partial* list of these aspects or components could include:

1. The Instruments of Western Music
2. The Tuning and Temperament of Western Music
3. The Notation of Western Music
4. The Function of Western Music
5. The Underlying Aesthetic of Western Music
6. The Experiencing of Western Music
7. The Hearing of Western Music
8. The Listening of Western Music
9. The Performing of Western Music
10. The Composing of Western Music
11. The Elements of Western Music
12. The Realization of Western Music

Again, it is noteworthy that the manner in which Masterpieces of Western Music exemplify most of the above parameters is almost never explicitly articulated in survey classrooms. Only the last two items listed (*Elements* and *Realization* of the elements) are *not* presupposed. All the rest of the above topics are usually assumed: the unexamined assumptions upon which the Masterpieces are conceived and executed.³ Two other important topics should also be mentioned:

1. Teaching Western Music
2. Teaching *about* Western Music

The Instruments of Western Music

Hierarchical structure and struggles for hegemony also play a role among the instruments and instrument families. . . . A large number of instruments are

taught . . . and these have long included piano and organ, the modern bowed strings, the woodwinds and trumpet, French horn, and trombone. More recently, tuba, percussion, and saxophone have been added. A few other instruments are taught but do not constitute a major in most music schools. Most prominent of these is the guitar, which is taught as 'classical guitar,' with styles of folk and popular music not included. Other instruments—such as viols or harpsichord for early European music and certain non-Western instruments—may be taught but for little credit and no major, while yet another group, including mandolin and banjo, is not represented. [1995: 64–65]

—Bruno Nettl

Masterpieces of Western Music are *bowed, blown, or struck*—not plucked.

One of the greatest peculiarities of the Western cultivated tradition is the almost complete lack of music for plucked strings. Neither the lute-type instruments nor those from the zither family make an appearance. The standard orchestra has no place for lutes, mandolins, or guitars. It might be argued that one reason for their absence is that the tone doesn't sustain as it does with bowed strings or with wind instruments. But the same characteristic is true of the piano. The massing of orchestral forces may have something to do with it—but then why the almost complete absence of the plucked strings from chamber music? This is doubly peculiar because the world is *full* of plucked-string instruments.

It also goes without saying that the instruments that generally perform the Masterpieces of Western Music are not electronic and are not amplified. In fact, most of the instruments reached their current design at least 200 years ago.⁴ Which instruments do we hear, and why? Which instruments are *not* represented (i.e., which instruments have not been *canonized*)? It would probably be beneficial to understand the social conditions under which some instruments have been selected for the orchestra while others have not. Several scholars and writers have noted the hierarchy that constitutes, and is constituted by, the organological structuralization of the symphony orchestra.

There is . . . a distinct hierarchy, with the string players accorded the highest status (white-collar, one might say), the brass and percussion having on the other hand a distinct blue-collar image, being generally regarded as jolly fellows, not oversensitive, and given to the consumption of large quantities of beer. The leader, or concertmaster, is always a violinist, a relic perhaps of the days when the leader of the first violins gave the beat and generally controlled the performance . . . showing the continuing force of the tradition. [1998: 69]

—Christopher Small

After Western instruments have been introduced and shown how they work within the Western cultivated tradition, it might prove beneficial to show how they have been used in very different ways outside this tradition (e.g., the use of the violin in Arabic music, or the clarinet in klezmer). Other insights might be yielded by briefly comparing the standard instruments of Western cultivated music with other instruments that produce sound in similar ways (e.g., the violin with the *erhu*, or the classical guitar with the *pipa*).

It might also be useful to categorize the instruments of the symphony orchestra in nonconventional ways. One could start by using the Sachs-Hornbostel system, but then use various non-Western schemes for both Western symphonic as well as other instruments. Another way to categorize instruments is to examine the personality traits of the instrumentalists who play them. For instance, Small's contention (see above) of string players' social status and "conservatism" has also been supported by psychological studies of instrumentalists' personalities (see, for example, Kemp 1996: 149). Finally, it may be important to note that the instruments' canonical stature is largely dependent upon the stature of the composers who wrote for them.

Edward T. Cone says, 'If you play a violin, you can play in a string quartet or symphony orchestra, but not in a jazz band and certainly not in a marching band. Among woodwinds, therefore, flute, and oboe, which are primarily symphonic instruments, are "better" than the clarinet, which can be symphonic, jazz, or band. Among brasses, the French horn ranks highest because it hasn't customarily been used in jazz. Among percussionists, tympani is high for the same reason.' And (except for the bassoon) the lower the notes an instrument is designed to produce, in general the lower its class. . . . [T]o hear 'My boy's taking lessons on the viola da gamba' is to receive a powerful signal of class, the kind attaching to antiquarianism and museum, gallery, or 'educational' work. [22-23]

—Paul Fussell

The Tuning and Temperament of Western Music

Forty years after the death of Mersenne, in 1688, the first organ was tuned in accordance with his formula for Equal Temperament . . . thus setting the Western stage for nearly three hundred years of music's 'golden age,' the classroom for the complete divorcement of the science of music from music theory, the concert hall for the benevolent fraud of equally-tempered modulation, the radios of x million American homes for a . . . siege by the industrialized harmony-armies of mediocrity, and else we know not what. [Sullivan: 61]

—Harry Partch

A further curiosity of our sensitivity to changes in pitch, is how it is underused in musical sound. Western music, in particular, is based upon scales that use pitch changes that are at least twenty times bigger than the smallest changes that we could perceive. [225]

—John D. Barrow

It is quite evident that there is no further revolution possible in the harmonic sphere, none, at any rate, so long as we confine ourselves to the tempered scale and normal division by half tones. [Fisk: 350]

—Aaron Copland

Masterpieces of Western Music are *tempered equally and tuned standardly*.

Western cultivated music is built upon the interval of the semitone. This can be contrasted with other cultures, some of which have smaller intervals between adjacent tones of a “scale,” and some of which have larger intervals. There are non-Western cultures in which musical quartertones (i.e., tones that differ by approximately 50 cents) are commonly employed; in India there are scales in which tones may differ by as little as less than one half of a quartertone; in Thailand there exists the equidistant seven-pitch system (whereby the distance between any two adjacent pitches is approximately 171 cents).

Equal temperament, although still hegemonic, has faced a growing challenge here in the West during the course of the past several years. This challenge has come on two fronts: computer music and non-Western music, and recorded examples can be profitably played during class time. Equal temperament may also be compared to Partch’s 43-tone octave, the 53-tone octave, and Pythagorean and just intonations.⁵

So far as is known, a 53-note scale was first proposed in the seventeenth century by Nicolas Mercator, Danish mathematician and astronomer, who . . . found it mentioned in the writings of a Chinese theorist, King-Fang, of the second century B.C. . . . [A] 53-note scale would give far purer harmonics than the present scale, and we can imagine future ages finding it worthy of adoption, in spite of all its added complexities—especially if mechanical devices replace human fingers in the performance of music. [189–90]

—James Jeans

The electronic medium is also adding an unbelievable variety of new timbres to our musical score, but most important of all, it has freed music from the tempered system, which has prevented music from keeping pace with the other arts and with science. [Weiss and Taruskin: 520]

—Edgard Varèse

Finally, the fact that tuning is standardized today in the West can be contrasted with cultures where tuning, chord voicings of plucked-string instruments, and ranges of the human voice are not standardized.

The Notation of Western Music

[T]he cultural productions of a society are inextricably tied to the technology . . . that produces them. . . . From this point of view, the history of European art music would not be understandable without knowing something of the history of the technology that produced it. Here I'm referring specifically to the development of the concert grand piano, wind and string instruments as well as the whole notational system and the evolution of counterpoint, harmony practice and use of rhythmic structures. In terms of contemporary music, technological innovation of the last several decades has centered around programmable synthesizers, computers with their companion software, as well as MIDI and sampling systems, to mention a few. [Struble: x]

—Philip Glass

The written code tends to present the complex set of practices in the form of more simplified rules. [167]

—Jack Goody

Masterpieces of Western Music are *notated*.

Cultivated music is notated on a five-line staff (or compound thereof) that has its origins in vocal music—of necessity making it an abstract code. As with any code, there are possibilities and limits in such a system. Tablatures—which are “iconic”—contain a different set of limits and possibilities. (Notwithstanding its limitations, the Western notation code has been remarkably flexible given the fact that it is not much more than various combinations of dots and circles positioned on a grid of horizontal and vertical lines.)

Because the Masterpieces of Western Music are overwhelmingly notated in what has come to be called “standard notation,” it might be profitable to examine some examples of the following: composed music that is not notated, music that is improvised, music that uses nonstandard notations (e.g., specific to a piece) or notations that are specific to individual instruments (e.g., tablatures), as well as notations that are non-Western.⁶ Furthermore, we might note the differences between compositions that are *conceived in terms of* Western notation and those that are committed to notation only after their composition; between those that are composed (and recorded) with notation and those composed without notation (and never committed to it); and between oral performances that involve im-

provised music and performances that depend upon notation for their execution.

Introduce the alphabet to a culture and you change its cognitive habits, its social relations, its notions of community, history and religion. Introduce the printing press with movable type, and you do the same. Introduce speed-of-light transmission of images and you make a cultural revolution. [157]

—Neil Postman

I expect that soon there will hardly be any young composer not using a computer and (as yet) undeveloped software for composing music. . . . As our tools change, the language of music will change with it. I fully expect that music written with paper and pencil and the language that goes with it will soon become a thing of the past. [Struble: xi]

—Philip Glass

Notation can be contrasted with other, non-notational technologies that have the same essential function of information storage and retrieval (i.e., digital or analogic electronic technologies). It might be profitable to speculate about the different social relations that are produced by notation—in contradistinction to those produced by electronic recording (which could also include a discussion of the effects of sound amplification, inexpensive digital audio consumer technology, and an overview of the use of computers and other electronics in serious contemporary composition).

It is probably also important to point out to students that prescriptive notation is a set of instructions—not unlike a recipe for baking a cake, in the words of Christopher Small (1998)—and, as such, contains probably the same extreme paucity of information about the sonic event as does a recipe about the food to which it refers. Robert Lucky, who has been executive director of research at Bell Laboratories, supports this contention. He has stated that there is anywhere from 1,000 to 10,000 times more information in speech (or in music) than in their notated representations (1989: 240–41).

Finally, it is interesting to note that, depending on whose interests are being challenged or threatened, notation is either disparaged or approved. For instance, I have known musicians who believe that anyone who *cannot* read notation is not really a musician. But there are others who feel that if you *must depend* on notation to make music, you're not a real musician.

The Function of Western Music

New Age music can deepen and regularize the breath, improve digestion, lower blood pressure, and balance the two hemispheres of the brain. . . .

Brain-wave measurements through electroencephalography (EEG) and biofeedback equipment have shown that . . . New Age music can induce an effortless alpha state (8 to 12 cycles per second) with potential for deeper relaxation, going into the theta state (4 to 7 cycles per second). Electrical conductivity (GSR) tests on the surface of the skin show similar effects, consistent with the specific physiological coordinates of relaxation. It is this healing power that has brought New Age music into common use in both hospitals and executive boardrooms. [Birosik: xx-xxi]

—Steven Halpern

While in Western music, certain kinds of musical themes may suggest images or feelings, the astounding fact is that in traditional African music, the rhythms themselves are a specific text. . . . During my first day practicing [drums] with Gideon, I was following him well until he suddenly performed a rather complicated series of rhythms and then went back to the basic rhythm he was showing me. A few minutes later a man who had passed at that moment returned with two bottles of beer. [75]

—John Miller Chernoff

Music psychotherapist Warren Brodsky . . . wrote in the Music Therapy journal that, due to the 'controlled and directed manipulation of the electronic media,' music surfaced 'to assist the entire population [of Israel] in developing more adaptive coping methods [during the 1991 Persian Gulf War], which included instilling feelings of national unity and establishing support systems.' [230]

—Joseph Lanza

I decided that [the Indian concept of the function of music—to sober and quiet the mind, thus rendering it susceptible to divine influences] was the proper purpose of music. [T]he Renaissance idea of self-expressive art was therefore heretical. [Duckworth: 87]

—John Cage

Masterpieces of Western Music are *nonfunctional*.

One of the prevailing tenets of Western cultivated music is that, at least since the late Baroque, many of the greatest works are non-utilitarian (i.e., they have no function other than the pleasure they provide to those who perform and listen). They are supposedly appreciated best as discrete aesthetic *products*—independent of any contextual considerations. This is not

music to dance to or march to or even, strangely enough, receive therapeutic gain from. The idea that aesthetic appreciation is *disinterested* is easily deconstructed, of course, but this supposed (or ideal) non-use is perhaps the most essential “ingredient” of a masterpiece.

Functional music may be *elected* or *imposed*. The uses of functional music are numerous. Two of the most predominant uses of music are 1) as an identity marker and 2) for reasons of physical and psychological health. For example, elected music may be used to help to cohere a group identity, whether that identity is based on ethnicity, socioeconomic class, nationality, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, or other markers. In the realm of health, elective functional music includes music used with athletics, relaxation, and other forms of recreation as well as with various types of psychological (and even physical) therapy. There are other utilitarian musics, of course: music to tell stories (ballads), music to put youngsters to sleep (lullabies), music to work by, music to court by, music to worship by, and music with which to sexually seduce—in fact, the uses are almost innumerable, and almost any good ethnography of a music-using community (what would a *non*-music-using community be like?) will provide a great amount of information about elective functional music.

There also exists imposed functional music. This is music that is used in conjunction with psychotherapy, political propaganda, or the rhetoric of commerce for the purpose of modifying the behavior of a targeted individual or populace. Imposed functional music is not usually coerced (in an absolute sense) upon listeners; rather, hearing it is simply a consequence of the target’s election of some other activity. This sort of imposed functional music includes Muzak (and other “elevator music”), advertising jingles, visual media soundtracks, and music that is used to emphasize athletics/sports matches, political rallies, and other public events.

Perhaps the closest that the Masterpieces of Western Music approach utility are those pieces that are supposedly “programmatic,” but it is obvious that even programmatic Western music cannot functionally communicate the kinds of specific information that language can. Furthermore, although many of the Masterpieces are programmatic, many of the other (greatest?) Masterpieces of Western Music are considered to be “absolute” music (which is entirely different from, for instance, the aesthetics that inform East Asian cultivated music).

Another important function of music is its ability to alter consciousness. McClellan (1988: 162) uses the terms *trance state* and *meditative state* to describe two different types of non-ordinary consciousness that are typically part of some religious/spiritual practices, and he notes that there are two distinctly different types of music that are used to attain these states of

consciousness. (Rouget [1985: 7 ff.] uses the terms *trance* and *ecstasy* to describe these two states.) In very general terms, the attainment of *trance* is usually assisted by loud, highly repetitive musics (often performed primarily by drums), while the attainment of *ecstasy* uses musical means that are almost entirely different (e.g., the type of nonpulsed, nonmetric music historically played by Zen adepts in Japan).

Finally, “designer music,” produced to enhance specific psychological states—which is a very old idea that can be found all over the world (as well as in the ancient Western world)—is now being redeveloped in the contemporary West (Lanza: 231).

Music is entering into medicine. Music sets up a certain vibration which unquestionably results in a physical reaction. Eventually the proper vibration for every person will be found and utilized. I like to think of music as an emotional science. [Fisk: 337]

—George Gershwin

When Pandit Pran Nath sings, people are transformed. I never have such a deep experience listening to music as when I hear him sing. It made me realize that's what it was all about as far as I was concerned, and that anything else was beside the point. [Smith and Smith: 269]

—La Monte Young

The Underlying Aesthetic of Western Music

Nothing will stay the same for long. Surprise will follow surprise, with sudden changes and contrasts. . . . All this keeps the hearers in a constant state of arousal. . . . The ability to play the game of arousing, frustrating or teasing, and finally satisfying the listener's expectation is a major element of the skills of composers in the Western concert tradition. [1998: 121–22, 123]

—Christopher Small

Masterpieces of Western Music are *dramatic*.

One thing that it seems is seldom mentioned in music survey courses is the underlying presupposition of the aesthetic value of tension-and-release. Unlike plainchant or contemporary “ambient” music or traditional shakuhachi (or *many* other musics), most Western cultivated music is dramatic. Ever since the advent of tonality during the late Renaissance, and until the experimental and minimalist works of the twentieth century, Western cultivated music has presupposed the value of tension-and-release.

However, the sonic “busyness” of Western music (i.e., the fact that it actively arouses the consciousness of most listeners by means of a series of often extremely clever manipulations of various auditory parameters) is a function not only of tonality: In response to those who say the techniques of tonal harmony have been exhausted, Small writes that “those who have abandoned tonal harmony often have not abandoned the aim of arousal and relaxation that tonal harmony has served for four hundred years; they have simply changed their techniques of achieving it” (1998: 127). This seems to be true for modernists such as panserialists, for instance, who hold (usually entirely unexamined) aesthetics favorable to the constant arousal and relaxation of the listener. Storm and stress, interspersed with periods of musical placidity, informs the musicking of much of the twentieth century’s post-tonal modernist music.

Struggle and conflict are the engines that drive the symphonic drama. . . . But perhaps even more important questions concern the narrative style itself: why what is represented should so persistently be stories of opposition, struggle and overcoming or at least containment, why the drama should always end with such finality. [1998: 168]

—Christopher Small

Process composers, on the other hand, usually seem to have aims that are entirely different from those exemplified by tension-and-release (which, I submit, is why process music is far more radical than high modernism, and which is undoubtedly why the negative reaction of so many members of the Western art music establishment to minimalism was so vociferous). Process music is nondialectical in its changes, and this nondialecticism is related to the question that Small raises above. It is also notable that the presupposed value of tension-and-release is never questioned in any analysis that focuses solely on notation, which usually only answers the *what* and *how* questions. (However, this is the *type* of question—i.e., *why*—that is central to the investigative, context-heavy approach favored by ethnomusicologists.)

The tension-and-release aesthetic is present in the overwhelming majority of Western music, and it repeatedly “grabs” our consciousness.⁷ How does this compare with the aesthetics that inform music for trance or meditation? How does it compare with the aesthetics that inform and are exemplified by performances of raga, in which “tension” and release is provided through means other than functional harmony? How are our physiological responses to tension-and-release musics and meditative musics different? How do these different musics affect our sense of time?

Our uneasiness and our frantic scrambling are caused by our distorted sense of time, which seems to be continually running out. Western culture reinforces this misconception of time as a limited commodity. . . . Chant music, on the other hand, evokes a different relationship to time, one in which time, while precious, isn't scarce. [1]

—David Steindl-Rast

I went to a Catholic college, where my principal teacher was Rembert Weakland, now Archbishop of Milwaukee. He was an expert on Ambrosian chant and a very good organist. So my early music-theory lessons were infused with his 'chant consciousness' . . . and that still comes out in my present work. [Smith and Smith: 157]

—Daniel Lentz

I myself am a static composer because I believe in the invisible and in the beyond; I believe in eternity. [Duckworth: 68]

—Olivier Messiaen

The Experiencing of Western Music

Masterpieces of Western Music are generally experienced "spectatively."

In contemporary Western society at large as well as in music survey courses, we generally sit and listen to the Masterpieces. We listen passively or actively (although one of the objectives of music survey courses is to teach people to at least begin to listen actively). We do not perform them. In fact, part of what makes them *Masterpieces* seems to be the fact that they have been designed for a cadre of specialists who have mastered not only sensitivity of interpretation but, in addition, the athleticism of technique, and this athletic element ("virtuosity") ensures that the division of labor—performers and listeners—will be maintained. We spectate. We audit.

[Listeners at a successful Irish seisiún] are not an audience, for 'audience' implies a passive formality, and most of these listeners will do something before the night is out: they will sing themselves, or play or dance or tell a yarn or 'recitation', or keep time to the music by a rhythmic rattle of loose change in their trouser-pockets. . . . This is not an audience, but a gathering which invents its programme as it goes along, navigating through the night by dint of many pilots. [136]

—Ciaran Carson

Although one of the big, unspoken assumptions is that Western cultivated music is to be *listened to* by people in music "appreciation" courses but performed by specialists, a not insubstantial amount of this music can nonetheless be performed by novices.⁸ It is revealing, however, that proba-

bly almost none of the pieces that have a high degree of performance accessibility (e.g., many pieces by composers listed in note 8) are considered to be Masterpieces.

The Hearing of Western Music

A typical sequencing program for restaurants complemented the daily eating ritual. The breakfast hours (7:00–9:00 A.M.) offered cheery sunrise melodies and caffeinated rhythms. From 9:00 A.M. to noon, background filler whetted appetites until the official lunch diet of light classical and spicier strains was served. After more filler beginning at 2:00 P.M., cocktail tunes came on at 5:00 P.M. to mix with piano and such exotic condiments as vibraphone. The discreet and quietly classical dinner hours from 6:00 to 9:00 P.M. provided sustenance in anticipation of the evening dance protocol, which permitted increased volume and tempo the closer midnight encroached. [42]

—Joseph Lanza

Much of the music I discuss could be characterized as drifting or simply existing in stasis rather than developing in any dramatic fashion. Structure emerges slowly, minimally or apparently not at all, encouraging states of reverie and receptivity in the listener. [xi]

—David Toop

Masterpieces of Western Music are (preferably) heard *actively*.

Western cultivated music—as taught in survey courses—is always foregrounded; it should not be “background” music. Since these sonic objects are valued primarily for aesthetic reasons, this foregrounding is probably to be expected.⁹ Thus, the preferred hearing of Western cultivated music differs significantly from, for instance, the conditions under which Javanese *klenengan*, Irish *seisiúin*, or contemporary “ambient” music are typically heard.

Music that is *not* foregrounded as a work of art is “backgrounded,” or even omnipresent. The emphasis on “foreground” (instead of background) music is understandable to some degree, but we should probably also teach students what is *not* meant to be musically noticed. In the research university, foregrounding an aesthetic object is preliminary to the act of analysis . . .

The Listening of Western Music

In right-handed individuals, linguistic abilities are almost entirely controlled by the left hemisphere of the brain, whereas musical sensitivities are largely

governed by the right hemisphere. . . . Musical training presumably enhances the potential for analysis of musical structure by means whose provenance lies within the brain's left hemisphere. [206]

—John D. Barrow

It appears that today's music education courses change music listening from a right-brain activity into a left-brain one. [73]

—Thomas R. Blakeslee

Syntactical listening might desensitize the ear, as syntax in [some psychologists'] view, is a non-acoustic world. [129]

—Anthony Kemp

Masterpieces of Western Music are (preferably) listened to *analytically*.

Merely paying attention (i.e., listening actively) to the Masterpieces is not the ideal listening strategy. The listening of Western music is preferably syntactic-analytic. Disinterested appreciation is what we teach.

Nonsyntactic (or “holistic”) types of listening (e.g., affective, associative, “sensual,” meditative) are not generally encouraged in music survey courses. The various ways in which auditors listen has sometimes been rendered as a series of oppositions: analytic/holistic, cognitive/associative, analytic/affective, and syntactic/nonsyntactic, among others (Kemp 1996: 132). It may be important to note, however, that some musics repay syntactic listening to a greater degree than do others. In other words, it is apparent that most of the Masterpieces repay precisely the sort of listening that is encouraged in music survey courses. This is perfectly logical, of course, but it is probably worth mentioning that the act of bringing to bear the syntactic-analytic listening strategy that is taught in survey courses (as well as in conservatories, graduate music programs at universities, and almost all the rest of the institutions that engage in formal music instruction in the West) on music that is not particularly syntactic will yield disappointing results. (In this regard, it is probably significant that some New Age music writers refer to much conventional Western cultivated and pop music as “foreground music,” while many composers and musicians involved with conventional Western music often refer to meditative or nonsyntactic music as “background music.”)

Music that is constructed nonsyntactically does not easily lend itself to a linear/temporal analysis of its sonic structure. These “open” musics—which is Toop’s (1995) term, although I’m using it somewhat differently—are not easily theorized or systematized. (“Open music” should not be confused with “open form”—à la Earle Brown—although many open-form

pieces do not easily lend themselves to theorization or syntactic analysis, either.)

Although analysis of its sonic structure may yield information of limited intellectual interest, nonsyntactic music is very often utilitarian; it is sometimes used as an aid to facilitate trance, meditation, massage, or reverie. It is also the music that is often used during music therapy sessions. Again, we might note the fact that music that easily lends itself to syntactic-analytic listening is privileged *a priori* for inclusion in music survey texts (and certainly for analysis by musicologists and theorists). To be sure, the music survey classroom is neither a massage parlor nor a Zen retreat, but without articulating the fact that there are legitimate nonsyntactic listening strategies, we lose an opportunity to contextualize, through comparison and contrast, the listening practices recommended for the Masterpieces.

The Performing of Western Music

Not before Bach but before improvising, which doesn't have the nervous quality at all of a pre-recital . . . [e]verything starts feeling warm. Not secure warm, just a trust in the process. I trust that if I sit at the piano I'll hear something to play. Yet I'm never sure it's going to be again, tomorrow, that way. [Strickland: 31]

—Keith Jarrett

I've played a lot in bars, and for me that's a much more real situation than the artificial realm of the standard concert with the people sitting out there, the piano onstage, the artist backstage nervously waiting for the lights to go down. [Strickland: 112]

—Terry Riley

Masterpieces of Western Music are performed *formally*, and with no premium placed on spontaneity.

This means that there is no place for improvisation, the corollary of which is that Masterpieces of Western Music are essentially unornamented. A performer of a Masterpiece must perform the pitches and the rhythms that are notated. A minor amount of latitude is allowed for the interpretation of tempo, dynamics, and accelerandi and decelerandi. There is almost no freedom allowed to the interpretation of rhythm, and—except for the execution of vibrato—absolutely no freedom to deviate from the pitch indicated by the notation.

It might be noted that this lack of freedom extends to the concerto cadenza: the fact that the freedom of the performer to “improvise” has been

relegated to a well-ordered space at the end of the first movement of the typical concerto only supports my point. And even granting the fact that a few select Masterpieces make room for music that has not been approved (i.e., notated) ahead of time: When was the last time most concertgoers heard a performer execute an original cadenza? (This lack of freedom to express what has not been approved beforehand extends even to the performers' garb: in contradistinction to performers of many other musics, those who perform Masterpieces of Western Music are usually dressed conservatively and, if they're part of an ensemble, in a similar manner.)

The fact that the "correct" way to perform a piece is written down in a text helps to create the "nervousness" to which Jarrett and Riley (above) as well as many other performers of Western cultivated music have referred. In addition, a significant proportion of the audience may know what is indicated in the score—hence the fact that many will know if the performer deviates from the written commandments. (I suspect that the breath-holding fascination we sometimes feel when listening to a performer execute a virtuosic passage is probably not unlike the thrill some people feel when they watch the trapeze artists or the lion tamers at a circus: *Will s/he pull it off?!*)

What are some of the activities and components that constitute a performance of a Masterpiece of Western music? A short list would include: The use of music stands, notated scores, a lack of improvisation, no amplification, and performances that take place in "listening rooms" (i.e., auditoriums), which are often very different from those venues in which it was originally conceived that the pieces would be performed. If is a large ensemble, there is a conductor; if longer works are performed, they are often divided into movements. There is an order to the pieces, determined ahead of time, and printed in a concert program. The audience is silent, and focuses (or pretends to focus) its attention on the performance, showing its approval with applause (which is allowed only at the end of the performance of a piece). Finally, unlike some other musics that have existed both inside and outside the West, Masterpieces are not tied to a particular time or place. They may be performed at almost any time, almost anywhere (which can be contrasted with, for instance, the eight watches of the day to which the performance of certain ragas have been assigned by Indian music-theoretical treatises from the Middle Ages, or the music assigned to the eight canonical hours of the Catholic church).

We might note that in many respects there are more aesthetic similarities between, say, *bel canto* opera and heavy metal than there are between either of them and, for instance, Irish *sean-nós* singing, in which the performer—with his eyes closed, sitting in a corner of an ordinary room, voice unamplified—does not try to draw attention to himself as a personal-

ity. (In fact, it seems that the entire aesthetic framework of *sean-nós* expresses values diametrically opposed to those of contemporary Western music—whether cultivated Western or Country & Western.) This “just start singing” aesthetic practice is similar to, for instance, the playing of Iranian classical instrumental music done on a *dastgah*—a collection of modes—in the traditional manner (in one’s home, for friends).

During discussion of musical theater production, we might note the differences between Beijing opera—with its acrobatics, nasal vocalization, and masks—and Western opera; or the differences between conventional Western opera and the austere, “minimalistic,” and (to Western ears) slow-moving *noh* of Japan. We could also mention that there is no Western equivalent for the Japanese *bunraku* (puppet theater) or the Javanese *wayang kulit* (shadow-puppet theater). Finally, Masterpieces are performed by musical-instrument specialists.

The Composing of Western Music

Why should music be ‘original’? . . . The duty of the composer is to find the not just. It does not matter if this word has been said a thousand times before as long as it is the right thing to say at that moment. If it is not the right thing to say, however unheard of it may be, it is of no artistic value. Music which is unoriginal is so, not simply because it has been said before, but because the composer has not taken the trouble to make sure that this was the right thing to say at the right moment. [189–90]

—Ralph Vaughan Williams

This perpetual quest for novelty is, in my opinion, very dangerous. [Duckworth: 64]

—Olivier Messiaen

Masterpieces of Western Music are *composed*—usually in solitude and with a premium placed on originality.

Masterpieces are not improvised—unlike the performance of Arabic *taqāsim*, Indian *alapana*, Iranian *āvāz*, or many blues solos—and they are not arrived at through the musical “jamming” of a group of musicians. Originality is prized (one might almost say “fetishized”). There is a value placed on new and different arrangements of sounds, in a belief that this constitutes both artistic originality and cultural progress. Other musics (e.g., many Asian musics) have, on the other hand, an aesthetic that sees the constant quest for originality to be a hindrance and unwelcome distraction from the task at hand. In addition, composers who are a part of the Western cultivated tradition generally write for *instruments* rather

than for specific *musicians*. The Masterpieces of Western Music have been composed—very often, at least—for performers who are, or will be, unknown to the composer. How does this affect the composing process?

Every man and woman has a certain pitch of voice, but then the voice-producer says, 'No, this is alto', 'soprano', 'tenor', 'baritone', or bass'. . . . There are as many voices as there are souls; they cannot be classified. . . . Besides this, the composer has probably never heard the voice of that particular singer and has written only for a certain pitch. [48]

—Hazrat Inayat Khan

Finally, it might be of interest to ask what sort of personality is drawn to music composition. Why have so many of the composers whom we have canonized (or whose works we have canonized) exhibited signs of mental illness—and in many cases, are clinically determined to have been seriously ill?¹⁰ And does it have anything to do with this culture's elevation of originality and musical progress?

[A]n extensive study . . . examined the biographies of 291 world-famous figures renowned for their creativity in an attempt to determine the incidence of psychic abnormalities, disorders, and illnesses amongst them. . . . [R]esults showed that 31 percent of composers, compared with 38 percent of painters, and 46 percent of writers suffered from serious forms of mental ill-health. [208]

—Anthony Kemp

You read about artists and you worship them in museums, but you don't want them living around the house. [Sheff: 135]

—John Lennon

We want Bach, but Bach himself is not invited to dinner. [59]

—Morton Feldman

* * *

The particular aspects of each of the ten preceding parameters (Instruments to Composition) that shall be employed and exhibited during the production, dissemination, and consumption of a Masterpiece are usually presupposed. These aspects are seldom problematized, or even explicitly mentioned. Most conventional musicological research is dedicated to descriptions of the Elements of Western Music, with that segment of Realization of the Elements that is labeled “performance practice” receiving most of the rest of scholarly inquiry.

The Elements of Western Music

[I]n the course of thinking about [musical discourse], I once again—after many years' hiatus—took up interest in Indian talas, the Arabic durub, the 'tempi' of Balinese gamelans (especially the accelerating gangsar and rangkep), and studied newer recordings of African music, that of the Watusi people in particular [which] . . . furnished me with many ideas. [Fisk: 378–79]

—Elliott Carter

Remember the music of Java at the Universal Exhibition in 1889, which contained every nuance, even the ones we no longer have names for. There tonic and dominant had become empty shadows of use only to stupid children. [Fisk: 199]

—Claude Debussy

The day when Claude Debussy heard Javanese music performed at the Paris Exposition of 1889 seems particularly symbolic. From that point—in my view the beginning of the musical twentieth century—accelerating communications and cultural confrontations became a focal point of musical expression. . . . Sound was used to find meaning in changing circumstances, rather than imposed as a familiar model on a barely recognizable world. [xii]

—David Toop

Masterpieces of Western Music are *pitched* in multiples of semitones; *metered* in multiples of two or three; *rhythmicized* through reference to a steady pulse; *harmonized* triadically; *textured* (usually) homophonically or polyphonically; *timbred* non-nasally; and are *moded* tonally.

“Elements” is an area rich for investigation. To examine and compare the acoustic components of music such as pitch/mode, pulse/meter, rhythm, harmony, texture, timbre, dynamics, and articulation as they appear in Western Masterpieces and in Non-Western Non-Masterpieces can be a useful teaching tool.

Pitch/Mode. The pitches of a Masterpiece played on a recently tuned piano are multiples of 100 cents, and the mode is nearly always major or minor. After introducing Ellis's cents system, students have an acoustical framework within which to place the equally tempered, 200-cents-to-the-whole-step system of Western piano music. By providing examples of non-Western and/or non-cultivated musics that are not equally tempered (or heptatonic), but which can still be described in terms of cents, the instructor will once again be providing the sort of necessary contradistinct examples that help to make possible a fuller understanding.

For instance, one might mention the fact that in Indian music the *thaat* contains seven *swaras* ("basic" tones) but 22 *shrutis* (microtones), and that the distance from *Sa* to *Re* (roughly analogous to *Do* to *Re*, in the Western scheme) could *theoretically* be any one of four very specific intervals, ranging from 22 cents (less than half a quartertone) to 204 cents (which is a bit more than a whole tone).¹¹ Indian music provides a well-known example of differently tempered music, but there are in fact numerous instances of musics whose melodic and harmonic structure is built on intervals other than those delineated by twelve equally tempered semitones per octave. For instance, Baganda *akadinda* music (from Uganda) offers an example in which the octave is divided into five almost equal intervals, while Thai music (as noted above) employs an equidistant seven-tone octave.

An instructor might also mention that pitch and scales are not always uniform—not even *within* cultures (e.g., in Japan the mode system of *gagaku* is different from that used by the *koto*) or even within individual ensembles. Javanese gamelan, for example, requires two sets of instruments—one tuned to the five-toned *sléndro* tonality and one to the seven-toned *pélog*. In the Javanese case, no two gamelan are tuned exactly alike because of the Javanese aesthetic preference for pitch variability. Another Indonesian example of elective nonstandardized pitch can be found in Balinese music, in which gamelan instruments are tuned in pairs—one tuned slightly higher than the other, which gives the music its shimmering, "trembling" sound, due to the harmonic beats that can be heard. The fact that listeners *desire* that instruments within an ensemble produce pitches that are pitched a few cents differently from each other contrasts sharply with the Western predilection for no difference in pitch between instruments that play from the same notated instructions. Finally, Masterpieces of Western Music are usually composed in one of two modes; Iran's modal system, to take just one contradistinct example, is arranged into a series of twelve *dastgah*.

Finally, in discussions of the composition of vocal music, we can compare and contrast the European tradition of vocal music to the Chinese, noting the fact that Chinese languages are "tonal" or pitch-inflected, with most words having a number of meanings (as many as five or six different meanings, in many cases, depending upon whether the pitch changes, in what direction it changes, and how it is stressed).

Pulse/Meter. The meter of a Masterpiece is *simple*. Masterpieces of Western Music generally group the pulse into segments of three, four, or six beats, and, with the exception of three-beat meters, are almost never metered by odd numbers. In India, on the other hand, the *talas* are constructed of additive beats. Talas may be as long as over 100 beats (al-

though most of the common ones have anywhere from 6 to 16 beats per cycle).

Harmony/Texture. The harmony of a Masterpiece is *triadic* and *functional*. “Functional” harmony is undoubtedly the West’s great contribution to the music of the world. The texture of a Masterpiece is generally *homophonic* or *polyphonic*.

Timbre. The timbre of a Masterpiece is generally *non-nasal* and is almost always an expression of some combination of the same twelve to fifteen instruments. The double reeds, of course, have a relatively nasal timbre, but oboes and bassoons are often used for the express artistic purpose of contrast to the less nasal strings, clarinets, flutes, and horns. It might be productive to ask why the West has favored instrumental timbres that “blend” together. Why has an “open throat” vocal sound been favored over a nasal sound? (A comparison could be shown between cultivated Western vocal production and, for instance, traditional, cultivated East Asian.) Why is the *bel canto* vocal style still taught at conservatories and schools of music, when there is no longer any need (i.e., there exists today electronic amplification that will allow the use of “natural voice” in performances of music—cultivated and otherwise)? Western vocal aesthetics and production can also be compared and contrasted with, say, those of Mongolian *hoomi* (*khöömiy* or *khöömij*) “overtone singing”—performed by non-Western musicians from Mongolia, Tibet, and other points East (as well as by Westerners such as David Hykes and the Harmonic Choir)—in which each vocalist simultaneously sings a sustained fundamental tone and several harmonic overtones. (There are, in fact, a number of different types of “harmonic singing” or “throat singing,” as it is also called.)

The great pity in the world of sound today is that people are going far away from what is called the natural voice. . . . First a hall was made for one hundred persons, then for five hundred, and then for five thousand. A man must shout to make five thousand people hear him, in order to have a success, and that success is one of the ticket office. But the magical charm lies in the natural voice. [48]

—Hazrat Inayat Khan

[T]he operatic, bel canto voice just irritates my ear, similar to the way that scratching on the blackboard might irritate yours. . . . [T]o assume that one will write for that type of voice in our time seems to me absurd [because] . . . for a start the microphone was invented. [Smith and Smith: 223–24]

—Steve Reich

Tempo. Tempo is a topic that may not receive any attention in survey courses, but it might be noted that the tempo of a Masterpiece is generally *steady*, and between 60 and 120 beats per minute. In general, changes in tempo occur at distinct section breaks (in fact, tempo changes are one of the primary means of delineating movement from one section to another within the piece). If there are changes, they generally take place without gradual *accelerandi* or *decelerandi*. Finally, Masterpieces of Western Music are probably never slower than 40 beats per minute (in contradistinction to the pulse rate of Korean *sijo*, which is 30 to 35 bpm).

Duration. This is another topic that seems to be assumed—yet it should nonetheless be explicitly pointed out: Masterpieces do not usually exceed an hour in duration (i.e., they are usually not less than 5 or 6 minutes, and, with the exception of a number of musical theater works—which themselves almost never exceed 3 or 4 hours—not more than 45 minutes to an hour in duration). This can be compared with, for instance, Tibetan *Lhamo* (opera), a performance of which usually fills 7 or 8 hours but which can also last several days.

The Realization of Western Music

Masterpieces of Western Music are *realized* through fealty (more or less) to a *notated score*.

Unlike electronic/computer music and most contemporary popular musics, Masterpieces of Western Music require notation-reading musicians to interpret/realize them. One of the first problems an instructor of the Masterpieces of Western Music course encounters (or should encounter) is that of performance practice: Which recording of, for instance, Beethoven's Fifth Symphony shall we play in class and assign to our students' listening list? And it is interesting to note that throughout the public discussions that have been conducted by members of the educated general public over "the canon," this particular issue has not really received any attention. (It has *not*, presumably, because musicologists are the only people who care about these issues, and we are the ones who choose the particular recordings—or *realizations*—that the students will hear, which is probably also why the *issue* of performance practice, although it has been the subject of periodic, and sometimes heated, debate within conventional musicology, seems to receive almost no explicit attention in undergraduate survey courses: more often than not the students will simply be compelled to hear the recorded versions preferred by the instructor.)

This question of performance practice proceeds directly from—in fact, is *caused* by—the fact that the overwhelming majority of this music is notated such that it may be recreated by performers. But there are issues of realization other than those encompassed by conventional meanings of

performance practice. To take a famous example: Varèse's *Poème électronique* is "realized" in my classroom through two sets of wall-mounted speakers of middling quality. Yet the piece was designed (i.e., composed) to be *performed* through hundreds of loudspeakers in the very particularly circumscribed space of the Philips Radio Pavilion at the Brussels World's Fair in 1958 and it was designed to be *heard* while auditors moved about within the Pavilion. Thus, even with "tape" or other electronic or computer music, realization of a "piece" of music presents issues for discussion.¹²

There isn't much more that can be said here about the classroom selections of realizations of the Masterpieces of Western Music. Which recordings we choose to play in class depends upon numerous factors (perhaps not least the aesthetic sensibility of the instructor), but to teach the course in a "properly historical" manner (as Scholes says in reference to Hegel), we should probably play at least two or three different recordings of the "same" piece, to help make our students aware, at least, of performance practice as well as other issues implied by *realization*.

Teaching Western Music (Discursive/Experiential)

As an intellectual, I believe that nothing can be allowed to be off limits to the most rigorous analysis. As soon as you place any response or assumption beyond analysis, or allow any subject, even one that has to do with religious faith, to be immune to critical intelligence, you allow it to become a taboo around which all sorts of fears and prejudices eventually stick and breed. But I also respect faith. And I understand in my bones the limits of analytical language and the ways it can resist, if not betray, the multilayered concreteness of experience. [110–11]

—Michael Brenson

The educational system destroys this natural ability [to think nonverbally] by gradually changing the [student's] thinking to verbal thinking in all areas. . . . Though today's educational system is terribly unbalanced toward the verbal-analytical approach, it is important that we don't sell that approach short. . . . The real emergence of man started only a few thousand years ago when he started augmenting his intuition with written language. Man's highest achievements are a result of using the power of both halves of the brain together. [74]

—Thomas R. Blakeslee

At its root all language has the character of metaphor, because no matter what it intends to be about it remains language, and remains absolutely unlike whatever it is about. [123]

—James P. Carse

Masterpieces of Western Music are taught *verbally*.

“Speeching” about music has been an ethnomusicological (and other musicological) issue for a long time. The problem isn’t only musicological: I suspect that any scholarly endeavor is “about words” *before* it is about the academic subjects ostensibly being studied. A further problem is that any investigator who relies exclusively on textual sources for primary data cannot ever “enter into the mystery” of the phenomenon studied (which is precisely the point of academic detachment, although the substitution of academic jargon for direct musical knowledge gained through the experience of “going native” has both a downside and an upside). In other words, unless our musicologist or anthropologist *is* actively participating as well as observing, it seems likely that there will remain an enormous area of knowledge unavailable to him or her.

Indeed the intention of the intellectual may cease to be guided by notions of objectivity, that an accurate interpretation is possible and desirable . . . and become more one in which immersion into the experience of the culture is sought. In short some intellectuals may seek to ‘go native’. [140]

—Mike Featherstone

In [some] forms of creative expression investigation may take an entirely intellectual and metaphysical path, but in music, because of the very nature of the art, it must also take a physical path. [xv]

—Harry Partch

The hegemony of linguistic/textual intelligence has begun to be challenged. Gardner (1983), in a well-known formulation, has posited the theory that there are several types of intelligence, among which is musical intelligence—others include linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, and the “personal intelligences”—and that music training should be offered in our schools because it is necessary for a “fully human,” well-rounded education.¹³

[I]t is claimed that Carl Orff would not admit a boy into the Vienna Boys’ Choir if he had already learnt to read and write—believing, one supposes, that the opportunity to make the musical-processing side of the brain dominate the language-processing side would then have been lost. [195]

—John D. Barrow

Writing restructures consciousness. [77]

—Walter J. Ong

Teaching about Western Music (Prescriptive/Descriptive)

Hermeneutics' new hermits feel no obligation to face the music; they feast, at their Madeleine and tea parties, on familiar fallacies (deriving a 'should' from an 'is' or 'was,' trafficking in unexplicated supervenients) and anthropomorphic metaphors (category mistakes). They inhabit a universe in which statements and their negations coexist with equal validity and authority, where merely the quiet request for a cognitively coherent reference to the specifics of a particular work results in one being branded a 'formalist'; I wear that brand gladly. [39]

—Milton Babbitt

[I]t is argued that one central feature of postmodernism can be related to the changing function of the role of intellectuals. . . . The role shifts from confident educator, who possesses confidence in his judgment of taste and the need to mould society in terms of it, to that of commentator, who represents and decodes the minutiae of cultural objects and traditions without judging them or hierarchizing them. [140]

—Mike Featherstone

Masterpieces of Western Music are generally “taught about” *prescriptively*.

How, then, shall we teach? It seems to me that there are three attitudes that one may take toward teaching about the Masterpieces: One can (attempt to) *describe* phenomena without approval or disapproval (“This music exhibits X”). One can describe *with* approval and enthusiasm (“This music exhibits X, which I think is very effective”). One can *prescribe* (“This music exhibits X, which is why you should respect and appreciate it”).

Admittedly, these three approaches are abstract simplifications of a very complex issue. First of all, the act of prescription (i.e., the selection of the Masterpieces to be surveyed) underlies whatever other attitude one may take toward teaching. Furthermore, there are always elements of prescription in any supposedly antiseptic description, and there usually seem to be elements of “pure” description in any prescription. Nonetheless, it might be helpful to problematize the issue for students, to point out that the humanistic enterprise attempts to describe what it has already prescribed, whereas the social science project *generally attempts* to nonprescriptively describe.

Which teaching attitude shall we employ: evangelical or scientific? And if we choose the first, how much should we proselytize? In an attempt to

answer this question, I recently asked my Masterpieces of Western Music class if they found it more effective if I maintained a certain detachment when describing the works of the Western canon, or if they found it more effective for me to be overtly enthusiastic about the works, to be, in essence, an evangelist for the works. Those who responded were unanimous: they all wanted enthusiasm. ("Should I gush?" I asked. "Gushing's good!" one woman in the back row called out.) The students preferred enthusiastic over neutral description of the music that I had already prescribed.

In music survey courses, Masterpieces are not "taught" but "taught to be appreciated."

Coda

Traditions remain undisturbed when we say: let us improve ourselves; let us become better pianists, teachers, conductors, better composers. They remain undisturbed when we say: let us increase the knowledge and appreciation of 'good' music. . . . The quality of vitality that makes any culture significant involves something else, the presence of which constantly undermines tradition. . . . In large measure it is compounded of investigation, investigation, investigation. . . . A phalanx of good pianists, good teachers, good composers, and 'good' music no more creates a spirit of investigation and a vital age in music than good grades in school create a spirit of investigation and a body of thinking citizens. [xv]

—Harry Partch

So, what is this animal that is performed formally, experienced spectatively, listened to analytically, heard actively, produced "acoustically," tempered equally, tuned "standardly," and is pitched in multiples of semitones, metered in multiples of two or three, rhythmicized by addition and division of time units marked by a steady pulse, harmonized triadically, textured homophonically or polyphonically, timbred non-nasally, moded "majorly" or "minorly," and is notated and nonfunctional, is dramatic, is interpreted by reading a score, and is composed in solitude, with a premium placed upon originality?

Yet this beast is not, in the aggregate, so very different from many other musics of the world. In fact, the Western cultivated tradition has much in common with many other traditions. After all, Masterpieces of Western Music do not showcase improvisation; neither does the Japanese cultivated tradition. Masterpieces of Western Music are notated; so are the Chinese classics. The Western cultivated tradition usually employs vocal syllables in

the training of its musicians; so does the Indian tradition. The Western tradition uses a steady pulse; so does much African music. Many of the Masterpieces of Western Music are programmatic; many East Asian works “describe” landscapes, events, and other extramusical states—and on and on.

* * *

[F]or Hegel the idea of studying the West without the East would be ludicrous. [114]

—Robert Scholes

Many music survey courses take a Great Works approach, but I wonder if enough time is spent explaining exactly *why* the works we usually teach *about* are Great, or how it is, exactly, that they are Masterpieces. How can students understand this music’s Greatness if we don’t introduce them also to music that is Not Great?

Once again, there is nothing exhaustive about my list of musical parameters, nor is there anything comprehensive about this paper’s informal mention of other musics. The selected examples of parameters and musics are listed merely to provide a few examples in support of the thesis that students can better understand what Masterpieces of Western Music *are* if we regularly (even if briefly) discuss Non-Masterpieces and Non-Western Music.

I think it is therefore important to regularly play recorded examples of what we are *not* supposed to be studying. I am not suggesting that more time should be spent on Indian raga than on Mozart during the class time of a course entitled “Masterpieces of Western Music”; nonetheless, devoting a few minutes of each (or at least *most*) class session(s) to the playing of recorded examples of contrasting musics—and briefly discussing them—will invariably help the students to situate Masterpieces of Western Music within a broader, more “global” context, and to understand the course’s ostensible subject matter better than if they were not provided with such contrasting examples.

Finally, I hope it is clear that I do not mean to in any way imply that the approaches to “musicking” (see Small 1998) exhibited by those who create Non-Western Non-Masterpieces are universally superior to those of the Western cultivated tradition: they are not, and to believe such would merely replicate yet again the old hierarchical-aesthetic mindset that has often stifled investigations of music. In fact, there is a great deal that I love about the Western cultivated tradition (after all, I have been actively involved as a performer since I was ten years old and have for the past twelve

years taught courses that survey the Western cultivated tradition). It is precisely because I value this music that I think it should be taught in the most effective manner possible, which includes showing more precisely what the Masterpieces of Western Music *are* through aesthetically non-judgmental comparisons with what they are not.

Notes

* I am grateful to Joyce Tsai for critiquing an earlier version of this essay.

1. A number of texts address the topic of the teaching *of*, as well as *about*, Western cultivated music. See, for example, Finnegan 1989 and Kingsbury 1988 for ethnographic descriptions of the teaching of music in selected communities; see Nettl 1995 for a “composite look” at the teaching both *of* music as well as *about* music at a state university music school located in “Heartland, U.S.A.”; for a critical look at a generic performance of Western symphonic music, see Small 1998; for an extended critique of Western art music (including its pedagogical methods), see Small 1977.

2. With two exceptions, all of the epigraphic statements have been made by nonmusicologists: either composers or scholars and writers outside the discipline. (This has been a conscious decision: quoting within the pages of a musicology journal statements about music that have been made by nonmusicologists is perhaps vaguely analogous to my thesis that by providing occasional examples of musics that fall outside a survey course’s ostensible subject matter we might be able to more effectively teach our students about the prescribed works.) Furthermore, although it is not usually the case that reference information is included with an epigraph, I have decided in the case of this paper to include in brackets at the end of each italicized statement the minimum necessary reference information—usually just a page number. Finally, in keeping with the “generalist tone” of this special section of *Current Musicology* #65, it may also be noted that—again, with two exceptions—there are no citations of articles from scholarly journals.

3. In an earlier issue of this journal, Jonathan Stock (1998: 40–68) examines the differences between the way historical musicologists write scholarly articles—whose readership has both a more circumscribed knowledge base as well as a more homogenous aesthetic ideology than does the readership of ethnomusicology journals—and the approach used by ethnomusicologists (who cannot presume that their readers share a common aesthetic sensibility).

4. Probably the last “permanent” instrument to have been added to the standard symphony orchestra is the trumpet. The keyed prototype (invented by Anton Weidinger) of the modern, valved trumpet was first presented to the public on 28 March 1800 (i.e., almost exactly 200 years ago), when it premiered the Haydn Trumpet Concerto. The valve itself was added ca. 1815.

5. In regard to the Partch epigraph, it is interesting to note that Chu Tsai-yü published a method of equal temperament in 1584. Since Mersenne published his work on equal temperament in 1636, it is not inconceivable that the theoretical

tempered scale was introduced to Europe from China at some point during that fifty-year period (although in China it remained strictly theoretical, and was not put into widespread use until its reintroduction by the West).

6. During the past half-century a number of pieces have been created that use either notation other than conventional Western notation or Western notation that has to some degree been modified or is used in unconventional ways. A few examples include *Valid for Life* (Beth Anderson), *Quartet for Any Number of Wind or String Instruments* (Robert Ashley), *25 Pages* (Earle Brown), *Calder Piece* (Earle Brown), *Lirio* (Harold Budd), *Solo for Voice 43* (John Cage), *The Great Learning* (Cornelius Cardew), *Dragoon* (David Cope), *Rounds* (Alvin Curran), *30's* (Jon Gibson), *visible musics* (William Hellerman), *Doodling* (Tom Johnson), *Proposition IV (Squid)* (Alison Knowles), *King Speech Song* (Daniel Lentz), *North American Eclipse* (Daniel Lentz), *The Bells of Bellagio* (Otto Luening), *Bell Set No. 1* (Michael Nyman), *Sonority A vs. Sonority B* (Charlemagne Palestine), *Piece for Guitars No. 1* (Michael Parsons), *Rhythm Studies I & II* (Michael Parsons), *In C* (Terry Riley), *Night Speech* (Nicolas Roussakis), *Les Moutons de Panurge* (Frederic Rzewski), *Signalling* (Eric Salzman), *Minimusic* (R. Murray Schafer), *Beast* (James Tenney), *A Rose Is a Rose Is a Round* (James Tenney), *Little Pieces for Quartetone Piano* (Tui St. George Tucker), and *The Infinite Square* (Aurelio de la Vega), among very many others. (Several of these pieces can be found in Johnson 1981.) In addition, a number of textbooks and monographs contain modified or unconventional notation. For one example among many, see Cope's *Techniques of the Contemporary Composer*—particularly the chapter entitled "New Notations" (Cope 1997: 150–67).

7. Among the composers/musicians who have been active in the West, a short list of those who have created music that is *not* informed primarily by the tension-and-release aesthetic would include: Patrick Ball, John Cage, Don Campbell, Sri Chinmoy, Alvin Curran, Brian Eno, Morton Feldman, Philip Glass, Steven Halpern, Lou Harrison, Paul Horn, Kitaro, Alvin Lucier, Ingram Marshall, R. Carlos Nakai, Pran Nath, Michael Oldfield, David Parsons, Arvo Pärt, Steve Reich, Terry Riley, G. S. Sachdev, Ryuichi Sakamoto, Somei Satoh, Klaus Schulze, Alan Stivell, Morton Subotnick, David Sylvian, Tangerine Dream, John Tavener, Isao Tomita, Vangelis, Andreas Vollenweider, George Winston, Paul Winter, and La Monte Young, among *very* many others.

8. A number of contemporary composers have written music that can be performed by people who do not, for instance, read notation (or who read it only very minimally). For example, Robert Ashley, Earle Brown, John Cage, Alvin Curran, Philip Glass, Alvin Lucier, Otto Luening, Meredith Monk, Pauline Oliveros, Steve Reich, Terry Riley, Frederic Rzewski, R. Murray Schafer, James Tenney, and Christian Wolff are just a few of the more well-known composers who have written pieces that have a high degree of performance accessibility.

9. McLuhan noted this foregrounding aspect when he said that "the sloughed-off environment becomes a work of art"—to which one, by definition, pays attention—and that the "new" is part of the "invisible environment" (see Thompson 2000: 10).

10. Jamison lists as appendix B "Writers, Artists, and Composers with Probable Cyclothymia, Major Depression, or Manic-Depressive Illness" (1993: 267). Her list of composers includes, among others, Berlioz, Bruckner, Dowland, Elgar, Gesualdo, Glinka, Handel, Holst, Ives, Lassus, Mahler, Mussorgsky, Rachmaninoff, Rossini, Schumann, Scriabin, Tchaikovsky, Warlock, and Wolf (1993: 269). Kemp cites a study that identified Berg, Berlioz, Bruckner, Elgar, Falla, Gounod, Martinů, Moussorgsky, Puccini, Rachmaninov, Reger, Satie, Schumann, Scriabin, Tchaikovsky, and Wagner as suffering severe psychopathology. "Amongst those whose symptoms were less severe but still marked were Chopin, Grieg, Mahler, Mendelssohn, Rimsky-Korsakov, Rossini, Schoenberg, Sibelius, Stravinsky, and Wolf" (Kemp: 1996: 208).

11. None of the preceding includes mention of any of the cosmological considerations: for instance, that each of the seven *swaras* that appear in an Indian octave has been associated with a specific color, planet, and age of a man's life, or that older Indian music-theoretical works often assign ragas to the time of day as well as to the various seasons of the Indian year when it is, or was, most appropriate to perform them.

12. See Thompson 2001 for more on "listening practice"; see Treib 1996 for a superb commentary on the *Poème électronique*, the Philips Pavilion, Varèse, and Le Corbusier.

13. The topic of "multiple intelligences" has been gathering steam: on Friday, 26 October 2001 a conference entitled "Innovative Methods of Teaching in Higher Education: Engaging Multiple Intelligences" was held at New Jersey City University. Gardner was the featured speaker, and there were advertised to be 30 papers and demonstrations on the topic.

The topic of nonverbal intelligence is also related to one of the primary goals of a number of Eastern spiritual paths: the silencing of verbal thought. The techniques and disciplines that have been developed in India, China, and Japan (i.e., yoga, Taoism, and Zen, among others) to accomplish this "are the polar opposite of verbal Western intellectualism"; furthermore, "one of the greatest barriers in teaching highly verbal people how to use their right brain is that they cannot believe that they have a nonverbal consciousness" (Blakeslee: 72).

Some of [these] techniques . . . could be used to give students a taste of pure right-brain consciousness. If the Oriental approach was applied to classes in art, dance, music, and sports, it would provide an excellent antidote for the overdose of verbal thinking in the schools today. . . . By the end of high school the verbal content is often so great that music and art theory courses almost resemble physics courses. Instead of learning to "think musically" or "think visually," the students memorize verbal rules to pass verbal tests. (Blakeslee: 73)

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