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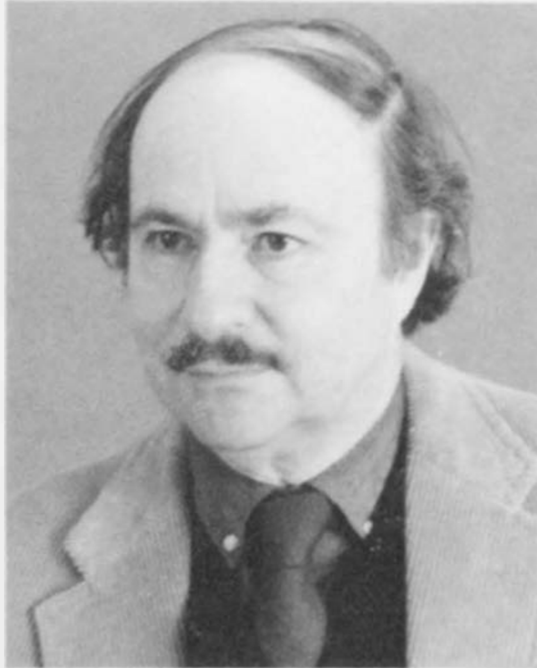

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Hearing the Emotions

Peter Kivy

What I like to call musical emotivists believe that when, under normal circumstances, musical critics, theorists or ordinary listeners call a piece of music (say) "sad," it is because it makes us sad when we listen to it. According to what I call the musical cognitivist, music possesses emotive qualities that the listener recognizes there. In other words, we hear emotions in the music, we do not feel them in ourselves. These are the qualities we are talking about when we call the music "happy" or "sad," "angry" or "melancholy," and the like.

The first question that must occur to anyone reading these words is *How* can music possibly "possess" emotions? *How* can musical sounds be happy or melancholy or angry? People can be happy or melancholy or angry; and perhaps some of the higher primates can as well—maybe even dogs and dolphins. But that is because they are sentient beings. For emotions are conscious states; and it seems, therefore, as absurd to impute emotions to music as to claim that a musical composition could believe that today is Wednesday or doubt that the cat is on the mat.

Many authors, including myself, have offered explanations of how music might really possess emotions as perceived qualities.[1] There is not, as yet, much agreement on the question among those of the cognitivist persuasion. Nor is there an emerging consensus that cognitivism is correct and emotivism mistaken. There are still those who defend the view that music is sad in virtue of arousing sadness, angry in virtue of arousing anger, and so forth. What we do have, however, is a very visible group of philosophers, of varying opinions, who, although they do not agree upon how music possesses emotive qualities, do agree that it does possess them, and that cognitivism in some form, not emotivism, provides the proper understanding of expressiveness in music. I count myself as one of this group.

I have had my say on the question of how music embodies emotive qualities. My own view has its difficulties, as do the other contenders. And, I dare say, more work should, and undoubtedly will be done on the question. But given that there is now a substantial group of philosophers who do at least agree that cognitivism of one kind or another is correct, it is time, I think, to forge ahead and, on the assumption that cognitivism is the correct analysis of musical expressiveness, see what sense we can make of the listening experience, on the assumption of its truth. That is what I propose to undertake here.

To begin with, it will be desirable to know just what emotions music can possess as perceptual qualities, and, if possible, why just those and not others. For it ought to be obvious that music alone cannot possess just any emotive quality at all. It hardly requires an argument to convince that, for example, a piece of music can be mournful, but not neurotically mournful over the death of a canary; fearful, but not paranoiacally fearful of being kidnapped by gypsies. What this suggests is that music can possess general, but not specific emotions, and in part that is true. However, that cannot be the whole truth. For, on the other hand, music can be joyful, but not, I think, prideful, and here both emotions are "general," as I have not said anything with regard to pride like "that specific feeling of pride one feels at the success of one's child," rather than "that specific feeling of pride one feels after fixing a dripping faucet." It is not because pride is an emotion more specific than joy that music can be expressive of the latter and not the former. What we can I think say is that those emotions music is able to be expressive of it can be expressive of only in their general form. But what *are* the emotions that, in their general form, music can be expressive of?

To answer this question, let us look, for a moment, at what are called the "objectless" emotions. In a seminal article on the subject, Julius Moravcsik has made an important distinction between what he calls "Platonic Attitudes," such as pride, or respect, and those emotions which I call (for obvious reasons) the "garden variety" emotions," such as anger, joy, grief, and the like.[2] The former require objects. One cannot, for example, wake up in the morning with an objectless, "free floating" feeling of pride or admiration, which then fastens upon some object or other in the course of the day. Rather,

> These feelings develop only as a result of our understanding presenting various objects in certain ways. Without feelings we could not admire or be proud. But without interpretations of the entities that we encounter, these feelings could not develop and have objects. These feelings develop and become directed towards objects as our understanding develops and yields interpretations of what we encounter in experience.[3]

The Platonic attitudes are, then, non-contingently attached to their objects: they cannot exist without objects, and the objects in part "define" the attitudes. On the other hand, the garden variety emotions, fear, grief, joy, and the like, although they do not normally occur in the absence of objects, can do at times, like my middle-of-the-night anxiety, in which case they promptly take objects (except in what I suspect are pathological cases).

A recent writer on the musical emotions, Daniel A. Putman, has quite perspicaciously observed that the line between those "emotions" (broadly speaking) that can, and those that cannot be predicated of pure musical works is rather precisely drawn by Moravcsik's distinction between what he calls the Platonic Attitudes and what I

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call the garden variety emotions. And his explanation of why is, I immodestly assert, equally perspicacious—immodestly because he makes use in it of my own account in *The Corded Shell*, with which he expresses substantial agreement. Putman's point is

> that those same emotions that *require* objects in non-musical contexts are those which pure instrumental music cannot express. On the other hand, those emotions which are *capable* of being experienced non-musically without objects such as states of sadness or joy are those which are also the foundation of musical expression.[4]

And his explanation, which I would like to spin out and amplify somewhat with some suggestions of my own is, briefly, "that the contour of instrumental music, with its broad yet recognizable strokes, 'fits' the contour of those broad emotions in life which, as feeling-states of the organism, can be independent of particular situations and can be transferred to a variety of diverse objects."[5] Let us see if we can understand this in terms of some nuts-and-bolts analysis.

I argued in *The Corded Shell* "that music is expressive in virtue of its resemblance to expressive human utterance and behavior."[6] The idea was that there are identifiable behavioral and linguistic routines and gestures generally associated with the garden variety emotions such as grief, anger, joy, and the others, and that because we are evolutionarily hard-wired to read ambiguous patterns as animate, whenever possible—the seeing-faces-in-clouds phenomenon—we tend to "read" music emotively, where it gives us the opportunity to "read" it as animate.

Now it is apparent that if this account is correct, the kinds of emotions music is ordinarily said to be expressive of—namely, the garden variety emotions—are just the kinds we would expect to be there; and that the kinds it seems clear that music cannot be expressive of, the Platonic Attitudes, are just the kinds we would expect could not be embodied in musical compositions. For the Platonic Attitudes are "intellectual" emotions, if you will, so there are no standard bodily manifestations of them. Pride is expressed by your wearing your medals, displaying your golf trophies on the mantelpiece, making your friends listen to you play the Barcarole from *Tales of Hoffmann* on the saxophone: in unnumbered, and perhaps an infinite number of ways. But as there is no way for music to be perceived as being expressive of pride, in any obvious, standard way, analogous to some standard mode of human behavior, that emotion is excluded from music's expressive repertoire.

Of course this is not to say that there are not unnumbered, perhaps infinite "intellectual" ways of expressing the garden variety emotions as well. I can express my anger by throwing away my medals, locking my trophies in the closet, getting a new saxophone teacher. But the point is that the garden variety emotions do, as the Platonic Attitudes

do not, have standard behavioral responses too. That is why we are able to ascribe them to the lower animals: we can "read" them in the visages and behavior of dogs and cats, where we cannot read pride or arrogance or respect without feeling that we are overly anthropomorphizing our pets.

Thus, it appears to me that the satisfactory way in which Moravcsik's distinction between what he calls the Platonic Attitudes and what I call the garden variety emotions separates the emotions music can, from those that it cannot be expressive of, lends some support, anyway, to the gestural and linguistic account presented in *The Corded Shell* of how music comes to be expressive of the garden variety emotions in the first place. But, as I have said, one needn't share my view of how music is expressive of these emotions, just my belief that it is expressive of them in the sense of their being recognized in the music, not aroused by it, to follow and, I hope, accept the rest of my argument in this essay. We have some idea, in any case, of just what emotions music can be expressive of: they are not the Platonic Attitudes but the garden variety emotions, fear, joy, anxiety, sadness, and the like, in their non-specific form. We must ask now what the role, exactly, is that they play in the pure musical experience, when they are present.

Let me begin with a rather simple example: the opening measures of a movement from a trio sonata, once attributed to Bach, but now thought perhaps to be by his student Goldberg. It is the beginning of a three-voiced double fugue; and the principal structural feature, to be exploited in the working out is a contrast between two themes of musically opposite character: the one in large note values, chromatic, and descending, the other in small note values, diatonic, and ascending in contrary motion. This is the description of the proceedings one musician might give to another; and it would be perfectly adequate to them. We could understand pretty much all of the most obvious aesthetic features of this movement in these terms.

But there are many people who are quite able to appreciate this composition, and who are unacquainted with even these elementary musical terms. How might I explain the workings of this fugue to them? Perhaps I would suggest that they observe the contrast between the tranquil, languid theme that seems to move slowly, and the vigorous, more lively theme that goes along with it, and explain that it is that contrast between the languid tune, and the vigorous one that is being exploited here.

And there is, of course, a third description I might give of the proceedings to the musical layman. I might urge that he or she observe the slightly melancholy theme that the composer combines with the more sprightly, upbeat and happy one, going on to suggest that the musical structure of the piece is built upon, plays with these two emotively contrasted themes.

We have, then, two themes, each of which can be described in (at least) three different, but related ways, calling attention to various different, though, of course, related qualities. One of our themes is in whole notes, chromatic, and descending. It is tranquil; and it is a bit on the melancholy side. It is all of these things. Likewise, our other theme is in smaller note values, diatonic, ascending. It is vigorous; and it is sprightfully happy. It is all of these things. To appropriate an example of Charles Hartshorne's, from his intriguing and unduly neglected book, *The Philosophy and Psychology of Sensation*, canary yellow is (of course) yellow; and it is bright; and it is cheerful; and the cheerfulness, no less than the other qualities, belongs to that color, as do the melancholy and happiness belong to those themes: "the emotional tonality is a part or aspect of the color or sound quality...."[7]

A further point I want to draw attention to is that the emotive qualities of these themes, in the given musical context, belong necessarily to them. That is to say, the composer could not have chosen as one of his fugue subjects that descending chromatic theme in whole notes without getting, along with it, that slightly melancholy quality, any more than an interior decorator can choose canary yellow for a room without at the same time choosing a cheerful color: it comes with the territory. But—and this is a crucial point—this does not mean that the composer was the least bit interested in that melancholy quality, or that it plays any significant aesthetic role in his composition. Indeed, I think that in this case it does not. In this particular composition the composer, it appears to me, wanted to work out the fugal implications, the fugal permutations and combinations of a chromatic descending theme in whole notes against an ascending diatonic theme in contrary motion, with a more lively configuration, for contrast; and he wanted to do that within the modest proportions, and congenial domestic atmosphere of the trio sonata (rather than, for example, the more demanding and imposing dimensions of the organ fugue). The ascription of these goals seems all that is necessary to understand and to fully appreciate the aesthetic character of this small, but well brought off composition.

Thus, if you were to ask me what aesthetic role that melancholy quality plays in the fugue, I would reply "None at all." If you were to ask me why, then, it is present, my answer would be that it came merely as a necessary concomitant of what is aesthetically operative, namely, the descending chromatic theme in whole notes. And if, finally, you were to press me for a method by which to tell when an expressive property is aesthetically operative in a work of pure instrumental music, I could but reply that there is no hard and fast rule, no formula. One does it case by case. And in the case at hand the expressive qualities do not force themselves upon us as either particularly prominent, or in any need of "interpretation." I can tell you the "story" of this fugue without mentioning its expressive properties,

and you will not feel the lack in the least. It is a "story" about a descending chromatic theme in whole notes, and its countersubject in contrary motion. That is all. The "melancholy" and "happiness" are simply the fuzz on the peach (although helpful, perhaps, as I indicated before, in pointing out features to the layman).

But this does not get us out of the woods. The challenge thrown up to the cognitivist that he explain the role of expressive properties in music cannot be met by replying that they have none at all. For although it certainly is true that sometimes they don't, it seems a palpable fact of musical experience that sometimes the expressive properties of musical works are so prominent, so demanding of our attention as to absolutely require an accounting. And were such properties extraneous to the works in which they are so prominently displayed, those works would have to be counted artistic failures for carrying such ostentatiously excessive baggage. Surely it would be too high a ransom to pay, for rescuing a theory, to have to admit that the instrumental compositions of Schumann, Schubert and Brahms are *all* of them failed musical works, along with a large body of the classical literature, up to and including Beethoven. We are obliged, therefore, to see what the cognitivist can make of expressive properties in music where they *importantly* occur.

By way of example, let us take a look at a very familiar (and wonderful) work in the concert repertoire, the First Symphony of Brahms, which will, I think, help to give us an idea of how the cognitivist can explain the aesthetic role of expressive properties, when they have one in a musical composition. I might have picked any movement of this work to illustrate my point. But perhaps the most memorable—and, indeed, one of the peaks of instrumental music, both for the layman and the expert—is the introduction and allegro that comprise the finale. And let me begin by quoting some of what that great Brahms enthusiast, Eduard Hanslick, had to say about the symphony, and this movement in particular, in his review of the work's Viennese premiere (1876). Hanslick writes:

> In the first movement, the listener is held by fervent emotional expression, by Faustian conflicts, and by a contrapuntal art as rich as it is severe. The Andante softens this mood with a long-drawn-out, noble song, which experiences surprising interruptions in the course of the movement.... The fourth movement begins most significantly with an Adagio in C minor; from darkening clouds the song of the woodland horn rises clear and sweet above the tremelo of the violins. All hearts tremble with the fiddles in anticipation. The entrance of the Allegro with its simple, beautiful theme, reminiscent of the "Ode to Joy" in the Ninth Symphony, is overpowering as it rises onward and upward right to the end.[8]

When the reader recalls that Hanslick is famous, even infamous for his view that expressive properties play no essential role in music, even, at least as I read him, that music is completely unable to be expressive of the garden variety emotions, the force with which the expressive properties of Brahms's First Symphony must impress themselves upon the listener is amply attested to by this exercise of Hanslick's in emotive music criticism. Here is the purist, in spite of himself, practically swept away by the expressiveness of Brahms's work, "contrapuntal art as rich as it is severe" to the contrary notwithstanding. Such expressive properties surely must have a musical function, or we have, here, musical anatomy as superfluous as the vermiform appendix and as prominent as an elephant's probboscis. What can that function be?

The answer, it seems to me, is surprisingly simple. The function of an expressive property in a work of pure instrumental music is no different from the function of any other *musical* property of such a work—the chromaticism (say) of that fugue subject in the trio sonata. For an expressive property *is* a *musical* property—as Hartshorne says, "the emotional tonality is a part or aspect of the...sound quality..."; and its function is to be musically exploited, musically developed, musically played with, musically built with and built upon, along with the rest of the musical qualities it may be in company with. That is all; and that is enough. But it is not enough, of course, merely to announce this in strong language as an article of faith. So let me try to make good this claim by looking, as I said I would, at the finale of Brahms's First Symphony, which will serve as an illustrative example.

Hanslick, as we saw, describes the symphony as a kind of expressive parade, with mood following mood; and this is perhaps the most common way of describing the standard concert repertoire to the layman, the stock in trade of the program annotator. Of course we *could* describe the very same sections of the music that Hanslick describes here emotively, in purely musical terms: the technical terms of music theory and analysis. Or we might, also, describe them in phenomenological terms other than emotive ones. These are the same choices we faced in describing the themes in the fugue discussed previously, and, indeed, the same ones we face describing any other music in the modern Western tradition (although some music may fail to have expressive properties).

So, for example, Hanslick describes the opening Adagio of the Brahms finale as initially characterized by "darkening clouds"; and as it does not appear that Hanslick thinks Brahms's music is giving a weather report, I think we can take this as a metaphor for a dark emotive tone. My own description would be anxiety (the pizzicato passages) tinged with melancholy (the opening bars), or something like that.

Hanslick continues, "from the darkening clouds the song of the

woodland horn rises clear and sweet...." Again, I do not think Hanslick wants himself to be taken here as suggesting we attribute representational or programmatic features to the music; so we must, as before, understand this as a mood or emotion metaphor. It is the feeling tone of the "woodland horn" that is being alluded to: the cheerful but somewhat contemplative, perhaps even slightly reverential mood that the music possesses; the kind of mood, one supposes, that natural surroundings might arouse in a nineteenth-century Romantic with somewhat pantheistic sympathies.

The section which follows this one hard by is passed over by Hanslick in his description, but it is eminently worthy of notice. In contrast to the famous horn solo, we now have a rather somber and serious mood introduced by the trombones, those most somber and funereal of instruments.

That the solemnity is on the religious, "churchy" side will be suggested to everyone by the hymn-like rhythm and distinctly plagal harmonies. For those who know the musical association of trombones with the archaic and religious, this mood will be even more vividly apparent. (Is it too far off the wall to suggest that Brahms is contrasting two "religious" moods here: the lighthearted, optimistic mood of secular, pantheistic nature worship with the more pessimistic and dark emotions that go with the Lutheran faith?)

The horn theme returns, is musically developed with increasing pace and urgency; and finally, as Hanslick so aptly puts it, "All hearts tremble with the fiddles in anticipation" of the wonderful Allegro theme, with its mood of steadfast confidence and joy, so well known that it is hardly necessary to quote it here.

Now I said we might describe these emotionally charged sections in pure musical terms, or in phenomenological terms that avoid emotive predicates; and so we might. There is the chromaticism of the opening, the diatonic harmony of the second section, with the characteristic "horn fifths," the modal, plagal harmony of the passage for trombones, and so on. Or if you prefer a non-technical description of the musical surface, in non-expressive terms, the first section is agitated and muddy, the second tranquil and clear, the third rather in between, dark but not muddy, calm and stately, without the agitation of the opening phrases. Nor, of course, do these bare bones descriptions even begin to exhaust the possibilities.

But here the hard-nosed "purist" might well object that since there are these other, alternative ways of describing the music, there is absolutely no reason to describe it emotively. Indeed, what grounds have I for doing so, since I have already admitted that, in describing the fugue by Bach (or Goldberg or whomever), there was no need to: that everything musically significant about the movement could be said in music-theoretical terms?

The answer to the purist must be that in the case of the fugue, the

description in music-theoretical terms does exhaust the musically significant features, whereas in the case of the Brahms symphony it does not. It of course does not follow that because two descriptions of something are possible, one of them must be superfluous. But how do I know that the emotive description is not superfluous for a complete accounting of the Brahms? Well simply because the expressive properties are just too prominent to disregard. Brahms has put neon signs around them, hung them with bells: they are as conspicuous as the spots on a Dalmation. And were I to offer an interpretation of this work only in theoretical terms, or even offer both a theoretical accounting and a phenomenological one that avoided emotive predicates, I would leave the listener in quite justifiable puzzlement. Why this intensely melancholy section? Why that bright happy one? Why expressive properties at all, in such obvious intensity? It can't be an accident. How can the musical analyst leave such questions unaddressed and still claim to have given an adequate account of Brahms's First Symphony?

Here, however, the purist's opposite number, the wild-eyed emotivist, will jump into the fray with an equally unwelcome suggestion. Yes, of course, the emotive properties of this symphony absolutely demand recognition and explanation; and it is clear what the explanation must be: either that these properties are there to move us or that they are there to tell us something — to tell us about emotions or about emotion-filled happenings in "life." The former claim—that the expressive properties of music are dispositional properties cashed out in terms of the power to move us emotionally—I have previously dealt with.[9] The latter claim must be faced up to now. But what is there about it that carries conviction?

I suppose the argument might go something like this. When we explain what is happening in the musical work in purely music-theoretical terms, there is, of course, no need to reach outside of the music for any part of our explanation. The terms are technical, apply only to music, and serve to render understandable the workings of pure musical structure. But where emotive terms become necessary to describe what is happening in the music, they demand at the same time an extra-musical accounting. We need not appeal to "life" to explain why such-and-such a harmonic progression is the way of getting from the development to the recapitulation, but we do to explain why such-and-such a deeply melancholy progression was chosen to get from one intensely joyful section to another. Why melancholy? Surely a purely musical explanation is not possible. What we need, since these are primarily names for the conscious states of human beings, is an explanation that brings in the lives and emotions of human beings. This sequence from joy to sorrow to joy must be intended to tell us something about human joy and sorrow; or, perhaps, it represents an emotive "happening"; or it tells an emotive

story. In any event, it is "about" the emotions predicated of it in some way or other.

Now perhaps there are better arguments than this one for the "aboutness" view of musical expression. And my lack of ingenuity in thinking of any may, I dare say, be laid to my obvious aversion to such views which, so far as I can see, deny the very premise of this paper: that there is pure, non-referential music, and a pure musical experience of it. But however that may be, the argument before us is not a convincing one. For there is no more reason to infer that sad music must be about sadness than to infer that quiet music must be about quietness, tranquil music about tranquility, or turbulent music about turbulence. *All* of the "phenomenological" descriptions we give of music use terms that have reference to "life" as well as to music: this is not just a characteristic of the sub-class of emotive descriptions. So anyone who wishes to argue that because "sad" has a reference not only to music but, far more basically, to conscious human states, sad music must be about sadness, will have to argue, as well, that because "tranquil" and "quiet" and "turbulent" have reference not only to music but, far more basically, to natural phenomena and human behavior, tranquil and quiet and turbulent music must be about those things: about tranquil days, quiet nights, turbulent lives. But surely that is absurd. Because music *can* be sad and joyful, tranquil and quiet, it can represent, or be about sadness and joy, tranquility and quietude; but it *is* so only in certain circumstances. Those circumstances we will get to at the conclusion. For now we need only observe that music alone is about nothing at all; and the inference from its sadness or joy, tranquility or turbulence to its "aboutness" a false one. A fugue may be chromatic, and tranquil, and melancholy; but it is no more, on that account, about melancholy than about tranquility; and no more about tranquility than about chromaticism.

But perhaps one wants to say that music is about itself, and hence a chromatic fugue is, indeed, about chromaticism. Perhaps one wants to say, further, that a musical composition is just about all of its qualities. So as the fugue is not only chromatic but tranquil and melancholy, it is about tranquility and melancholy as well. And so the defender of the "aboutness" view of musical expression seems to have his desired conclusion: the music is about the emotions.

However, he indeed only *seems* to have his conclusion. Actually, it is but a Pyrrhic victory. For in gaining the right, in this way, to say that sad music is about sadness, the emotivist has paid the extravagant price of giving up any claim to the extra-musical reference of "sad" which was, to start with, the whole point of the exercise. The emotivist demands an explanation that reaches beyond the pure musical parameters because, he claims, we can find no reason for the placement or sequence of expressive properties within the confines of music alone. But in adopting the reflexive mode of "about," he com-

mits himself to just such an internal explanation and that only. He has acquiesced in the view I am defending—that the expressive properties of music are purely musical properties, to be understood in a purely musical way.

Now there may be theoretical advantages, a theoretical point in saying "The fugue is about chromaticism" rather than "The fugue is chromatic," "The fugue is about tranquility" rather than "The fugue is tranquil," "The fugue is about sadness" rather than "The fugue is sad," assuming that these are all special cases of "The fugue is about itself." And these two different ways of talking about the same thing do make a difference: a difference in the "logical" status of music, or in its "metaphysical" status. What they do not make any difference at all in is its "content," if you mean by its "content" anything beyond the music itself.

So we are again arrived at the conclusion that the expressive properties of music alone are purely musical properties, understandable in purely musical terms. And why shouldn't they be? No one, as I have argued, seems compelled to seek an explanation from the "outside" for the phenomenological properties of music that are not the expressive ones. That a composer should want to combine a calm fugue subject with a vigorous countersubject seems easily understandable on purely aesthetic grounds, on grounds at least of musical contrast if nothing more interesting than that. Why then need we seek any further for an explanation of why a composer wishes to combine a joyous subject with an anguished countersubject? Music alone is a quasi-syntactic structure of musical properties, some of which are describable in phenomenological terms. That among the phenomenological properties are expressive ones makes this quasi-syntactic structure more interesting to human beings, but not semantic in any but an adulatory sense of "meaningful" that is unhappily misleading.

There are musical structures stuffed with expressive properties, like Brahms's First Symphony, and musical structures where such properties are absent or irrelevant. In the case of the Brahms, we must seek musical understanding not in extra-musical interpretations of the expressive properties but in seeing the work as a structure of musical properties, among which are expressive ones. And there is no magic formula, no philosopher's stone for doing so. Indeed, it is not a philosopher's job to do it, or tell others how it is done.

But there is no mystery about it either. Some expressive properties serve to highlight musical structure, as color might be used by the painter to emphasize contour or mass. Other expressive properties serve as structural properties in their own right. And an expressive property, in a work of pure instrumental music, no more needs extra-musical accounting for, as I have said, than does any other phenomenological property of the music. Of course, a composition may possess expressive properties for which there seem to be no real musical

functions—properties which obtrude, but seem to lack for a musical reason. However, these are cases not of musical meaning but of musical failure. We all know such musical works. They are the ones we describe as "overblown," or "puffed up," or "emotionally insincere." These metaphors suggest, of course, emotional "content" which the composer has been unable to deal with successfully, like a poet whose verses are not up to his subject. In that sense they are dangerous and misleading metaphors. For there is no content at all, and the failure is a purely musical one. Grand musical gestures, whether expressive, or of some other kind, demand grand musical powers. An ambitiously expressive theme demands a superior mind for its working out, as does an ambitiously chromatic one, or even an ambitiously long one. And the opening theme of Brahms's First Symphony, in all of its overpowering emotive intensity, could no more be dealt with satisfactorily by (say) August Klughart (a worthy but minor contemporary) than could the chromatic subject of the *Musical Offering* be worked out to a really satisfactory conclusion by Telemann. But whereas Telemann's failure would quite naturally be seen as a musical failure, pure and simple, the failure to deal with expressive properties tends to be seen as a failure to deal with content. This is a mistake. The latter is a musical failure too, and nothing more.

Needless to say, it is no accident that expressive properties abound in musical works of the Romantic period. That of course requires an explanation, and has one. Certainly, many Romantic composers thought they were "saying things" about emotions, or about themselves when they wrote expressive music; and that is no doubt one of the reasons they did so, since they also thought it was important to "say things" in music about emotions and about themselves. But we needn't share their views or use their views to interpret their music. This was neither the first time nor the last that great art has been created under the aegis of false, or even absurd theories. The important point is that those who wrote pure instrumental music in the nineteenth century were also serving another mistress: the Muse of pure musical structure, who sponsors expressive properties as well. If Brahms may have thought that he was "saying things" about emotions, or about himself in writing the First Symphony (and I have no idea whether he did or not) what he *did* do was write one of the most successful pieces of pure instrumental music in the repertoire. Whatever else he may have thought that he had done, possible or impossible, *that* he did.

I have not, to be sure, lost sight of a point I made in passing, earlier, that because music can possess expressive properties, it is susceptible of extra-musical interpretations that rely upon them. And I would like to revert to that point in concluding this paper.

One way of thinking about logical systems is simply as sets of rules for manipulating physical marks on paper. On this way of thinking,

we are not to imagine the "horseshoe" as meaning "therefore," or the "wedge" as "or." Indeed, we are not to think of these logical connectives as *meaning* anything at all. Rather, we are to represent them to ourselves merely as "objects" that the rules tell us we can put together with certain other "objects" in certain permissible ways, and not others. When we think of a logical system in this way, it is an "uninterpreted" logical system.

Of course we can, for various reasons, put an interpretation on a system if its logical structure is amenable. That is what we are doing when we say that the horseshoe means "therefore" and the wedge "or." In that case the system is no longer an uninterpreted system but an interpreted one.

Now it seems to me that an illuminating way of looking at pure instrumental music is as an uninterpreted structure. But like an uninterpreted logical system, it can be interpreted in ways that the nature of its structure permits. Because a piece of music can be calm and then agitated, it can be interpreted as representing, perhaps, a calm and then agitated life, or a tranquil and then stormy seascape. And because a piece of music can be melancholy and then joyful, it can be interpreted as representing a melancholy and then joyful human experience, or a melancholy followed by a joyful event. The obvious question to ask, of course, is *when*, under what conditions we are entitled to interpret a musical structure? And the natural answer is: when the composer licenses it.

Beethoven, for example, invites us—no, demands us—to interpret the quiet ending of the *Coriolanus* overture as representing the death of Coriolanus, or at least as having reference to some event in his life appropriate to the music simply by giving that title to the work. Suppose it had had no title at all, but merely an opus number? Beethoven, being the kind of composer he was, produced, in the *Coriolanus* overture, an aesthetically perfect piece of instrumental music that can be appreciated on its own terms. And the unusual, quiet ending, being a return of the opening, is perfectly justified as a rounding out of the pure musical design. But the title, and Beethoven's well known intentions in writing the work, along with considerations of pure musical design, give the close a more complete and satisfying explanation than a purely musical explanation would do. In any case, the point is that because music has the phenomenal properties it does, it is amenable to various kinds of extra-musical interpretations appropriate to them, as the horseshoe is amenable to the interpretation "therefore" because of its pure logical properties. The *Coriolanus* overture is to Brahms's First Symphony as applied to pure mathematics.

At this point, I imagine, someone might suggest that if any piece of "pure" instrumental music *can* be interpreted, which I freely admit, there does not seem to be any compelling reason why it *shouldn't* be, if a listener finds that that facilitates his or her enjoyment of the work.

What is wrong with hearing heroes and shipwrecks in Beethoven's Fifth if you are clever enough to do so? Indeed, shouldn't we applaud your cleverness?

Many answers might be given to this question (and have been). But it seems to me that the most readily apparent one is that to put an interpretation on a piece of music alone is to close oneself off from one of the most satisfying and engrossing experiences that the arts have to offer us. I dare say that there are many people who cannot enjoy pure instrumental music without making up stories, without interpreting it, which, of course, is to say that they cannot enjoy pure instrumental music at all, since what they enjoy is not the work of pure music but another work, a work of interpreted music, which they have produced in collaboration with the composer. Perhaps pure instrumental music is caviar to the general. I guess I really think that it is. But if that conclusion comes across as being intolerably elitist, let me add, in amelioration, that caviar, after all, is an *acquired* taste.

Notes

[1] For my own views on this regard, see *The Corded Shell: Reflections on Musical Expression* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

[2] Julius Moravcsik, "Understanding and the Emotions," *Dialectica*, XXXVI (1982).

[3] Ibid., pp. 11-12.

[4] Daniel A. Putman, "Why Instrumental Music Has No Shame," *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, XXVII (1987), p. 57.

[5] Ibid., p. 59.

[6] *The Corded Shell*, p. 56.

[7] Charles Hartshorne, *The Philosophy and Psychology of Sensation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934), pp. 176-177.

[8] Eduard Hanslick, *Music Criticism 1846-99*, trans. and ed. Henry Pleasants (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1950), p. 126.

[9] See my "How Music Moves," *What Is Music?: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Music*, ed. Philip Alperson (New York: Haven Publications, 1988).