

One of the things that became apparent to me, as I recently returned to my musical studies, was that many of the books (mostly on serial music) include an analysis of works by more prominent composers, most often *Schoenberg* and *Webern*, less often *Boulez* and *Stockhausen*.

I can see this as useful when making a point about applying the techniques being discussed. It can be interesting to see how these great composers used the technique in their own work. I think this is a valid use of music analysis. It should be in the context of examples for learning, not as insight with the intent to emulate.

Understanding how a technique is applied in a composition gives the student a better understanding of its practical application. The objective is to encourage him or her to try it themselves, but using their own ideas, not someone else's.

One of the books I bought was an in-depth analysis of a single work by Pierre Boulez, *Le Marteau sans Maître*. I bought it because I mistakenly thought it was an overall presentation of Boulez's own take on serialism, as suggested by the book's title.

As I began reading this analysis, I found a couple of chapters that addressed the more general aspects of Boulez's approach. This is what I wanted to see. It was in the same context as the examples that were used in other books on serialism. The remaining chapters analyzed *Le Marteau* with the same veracity as I'm sure the *Dead Sea Scrolls* were studied, and with as much reverence.

With some trepidation, I began reading this, intent on better understanding this important work by Boulez. But as I got deeper into it, I realized this was not going to enhance my

experience when I actually listened to *Le Marteau*. In fact, it was more of a distraction.

I often follow the study score of a work as I listen to it, when both score and CD are available. With *Le Marteau*, this is not an easy thing to do. If you've tried it, you know what I mean. There's not only the complexity of the work itself but a physical limitation as you attempt turning score pages in pace with the tempo. I can't imagine trying to apply the analysis in any way, shape or form, as this piece is being played.

So, does this make me a failure? Do I not possess the musical skills to comprehend a work like *Le Marteau*? Should I stick to simpler stuff I can follow at a more sensible tempo? No, I don't think so. This particular incident caused me to really think about what the individual analyzing the composer's work was trying to accomplish. Was it to illustrate how the technique was used? Yes, most likely. Was it to enhance my listening experience of the piece? If it was, the analyzer blew it.

So, besides other composers, who's interested in how Boulez made *Le Marteau* and how he constructed it piece by piece? Most probably, no one. Who else cares? Do you have to have in-depth knowledge of automotive design and engineering to drive a car? Of course not. The same applies to analyzing the work of any composer.

To experience music, you need to hear it. For it to affect you emotionally or spiritually, you first have to listen to it, let it into your head and heart, into your soul. Let it connect with you. You would hardly have a better experience when hearing a composition just because the analysis informed you that in bars 4 thru 7, the flute part is based on the retrograde inversion, and

the clarinet and bassoon parts on the original permutation of the primary row.

If it sounds good to you and you like it, you need no more analysis than that. The analysis is for other composers or other analyzers. If I'm representative here, composers are interested in how to apply the technique without sounding too much like the composer's work being analyzed. We're not interested in emulating another composer's work in too specific a manner. It's OK to feel an affinity with another composer's music. I was greatly influenced by Stravinsky, especially in the beginning of my writing efforts. When I heard *Le Sacre du Printemps* for the first time, I was sure I found what I was looking for musically.

I can still here traces of *The Rite* in some of my work, with never an intention to emulate or embrace it. It's because *The Rite* has influenced what has become *My Song*; the music inside me; part of the musical me. No analysis could have helped achieve a better result than simply listening and falling in love with what I heard. I think that a comprehensive musical analysis, like the one of *Le Marteau*, is essentially written for other musicologists. It becomes a contest of verbosity; a hyper-technical duel of musical terms. They try to impress each other and us with their analytical skills, their cleverness in discerning the techniques among the music.

It would be hypocritical of me to say categorically that these kinds of analysis are pointless. They can be useful if you really want to understand how a particular composer applied these techniques to a specific piece of music. If you can glean from that insight how to use certain elements of a system, great! More power to you.

What I am saying is that, for me, an in-depth analysis of a particular composition is not essential to my understanding and enjoyment of the piece. Nor is it essential to becoming more adept at applying the systems analyzed to my own work. I prefer to study all aspects of a music system like serialism to gain a working knowledge of it, so I can use it as one more tool when creating my own music.

All systems have rules for usage. You have to decide how much of a rule follower you are, or how much of a rule breaker you are. You also need to establish, for your own sake, what criteria will determine following or breaking a system's rules. For me, the final arbitrator is how the piece sounds. There is no better criteria to apply when determining if a composition is ready for people to hear. You, the composer, have to make that determination. No one else can do it for you. There's no "rule-of-thumb" to apply, no litmus test. It makes it or it doesn't.

So my advice is to take analyzing music with the proverbial grain of salt. Use it to learn from, not to emulate with. Remember it's not necessary to analyze to connect with a piece of music. You can experience paralysis from analysis, as the story goes, so don't get your undies in a bunch. Listen and enjoy.

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