MEANING IN MUSICAL QUOTATIONS

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In Leonard Bernstein's lectures on musical universals, he attempted to equate various musical features to linguistic features. This included trying to create syntactic categories in music, such as adjectives, verbs, and nouns. Bernstein suggested that nouns would be whole musical phrases, but this was hardly a satisfactory equation. What exactly does a musical phrase reference in the real world? One does not hear a two bar melody and think, “Chair.” However, Bernstein may have been more successful if he had drawn a line between nouns and musical quotations instead.

Musical quotations can certainly be said to directly reference other music. Assuming that this other music brings with it certain associations for a listener, say a time, place, person, event, or feeling, direct meaning will also be referenced by quotations. In this sense, a musical quotation is, in fact, equivalent to a noun, or at least a linguistic quotation. Bicknell (2001) makes a deductive argument that musical quotations work just as linguistic quotations do, even going so far as to describe how quotation marks can be created musically. Kruse (2011:58-59) goes even further by suggesting that music cannot be “formally self-contained.” That is to say, meaning in music is always referential because it is interlocked with the human experience. Kruse argues, for instance, that “the universal human experience of tension and resolution informs the harmonic rules of tonal music.” But perhaps it will suffice to argue simply that musical quotations, at least, can be referential in a way similar to nouns.

The general effect of musical quotations has been summed up in a number of ways. Beirens (2007:38), in describing Michael Nyman's use of quoted material, states that “this is ultimately music about music.” Tarnawska-Kaczorowska (1998:77-79) argues that quotations

necessitate a multilayered approach to interpreting a piece of music, as if a conversation between the two works in questions is occurring, while Stewart-MacDonald (2006:11) suggests that a musical quotation is used for the same purpose as a quotation in speech: it “ridicules people, places and situations.” Indeed, the idea that humor is the main effect of quotations is a reoccurring theme in the literature.

Composers, such as Hans Werner Henze, saw the use of quotations as an “evocation of 'continuity' with tradition, which allows materials to appear in a 'new light and acquire new connotations'” (Downes 2004:200). Of course, one can simply compose music in a style that is reminiscent of a tradition and create a similar effect, but the “new connotations” would be lost with this strategy. Musical quotations allow one to do something more than just declare one's musical background. As Holger Peterson (2010:316) says of George Crumb's music, the re-contextualization of pieces from their normal "ritual performance" provides extra layer of depth to a piece.

It has been suggested that the word “quotation” is not really sufficiently descriptive, though. Burkholder (quoted in Allis 2011:318) supplements quotation with “modeling (sic), paraphrasing, stylistic allusion, cumulative setting, and collage.” Others prefer to simply split up quotation into categories, such as “parole quotations,” which utilize “an individual utterance,” and “langue quotations,” which evoke the style of a body of work or possibly a single composer (Tarnawska-Kaczorowska 1998:76). The issue is that quotations can be more or less evidence in a piece of a music. They may stand in stark contrast to their surroundings or appear to be a natural part of their surroundings. They may come in the form of a chord progression which is detailed differently than in the source material, or a melody which is rhythmically altered. Perhaps a melodic quotation only maintains the contour of the original but changes all the

intervals. Even modern day mash-ups have been described as quotations (Brøvig-Hanssen and Harkins 2012:91). Which of these are quotations and which are not? Do they all serve the same function? The fact that so many points of demarcation exist presupposes that they do not serve the same functions. Though the majority of this paper deals with more or less literal quotations, related phenomena is also touched upon.

Literal quotations, those that match their source material almost exactly, can function much like nouns do in language. They reference events, places, times, and concepts. They can also reference people, in the form of tribute or mockery. One apparent issue with the ability to create reference through musical quotations is the role of the interpreter in understanding the intention of the composer. In speech settings, there can be an even exchange between interlocutors so that the interpretation of a reference can be verified as right or wrong. This is often not possible in music, where communication is mostly one directional. Composers can, of course, be questioned, but their own intentions may be vague and welcoming to various interpretations. Experimental studies aimed at determining whether quotations can have consistent meanings for listeners have not been performed, which would go a long way toward better understanding this gap between reference in language and music.

Events are said to be referenced in the works of Regamey, Lutoslawski, and Crumb (Tarnawska-Kaczorowska 1998:77/80; Holger Petersen 2010:312). Interestingly, all three events are war-related. Regamey quotes Handel in his quintet, apparently as “a symbol of values that rise above the conditions of war time” (Tarnawska-Kaczorowska 1998:77), though it is not clear how Handel encompasses this idea. Presumably, Regamey, a Polish composer, created his piece during the martial law crisis of the early 1980s and used Handel's music as a symbol of something that was above war, though Tarnawska-Kaczorowska never explains the

interpretation. She does however go on to describe a quotation of Lutoslawski's “Funeral March” in a Heinin piece. The piece was dedicated to Lutoslawski, another Polish composer, shortly after martial law was imposed. The “Funeral March” itself was dedicated to Bartók “after the Hungarian uprising” in 1956 (Tarnawska-Kaczorowska 1998:80). The quotation carries reference by way of the matching dedications from foreign composers to those who have recently experienced upheaval in their home countries. A listener who knows the Lutoslawski piece, its dedication, and the context of the events in Poland, would potentially obtain these semantic senses when hearing the quotation. Whether this would be effective is questionable, of course, but one can say that this reference was made for at least the scholar writing on it.

Locations can also be evoked through musical quotations, as in the Ives' piece “West London.” Here, Ives quotes from the hymn “Fountain” in order to evoke the imagery of London as he imagined this tune being played there (Burkholder 1985:20-24). It is not clear why this particular piece would be played in London or whether anyone besides Ives would expect it to be. Here one finds a separate issue with creating reference with musical quotations: the intentions of the composer may be very clear yet not apparent at all to listeners. Ives was fond of quotations, though, and also made references that would be easily interpreted even without full knowledge of exactly which piece has been quoted. In “Washington's Birthday,” Ives uses quotations from dance tunes to conjure images of a barn dance (Burkholder 1985:18). Listeners who find themselves at a lose as to the exact sources of these tunes would still likely recognize them as music for dancing. Similarly, if a Viennese waltz were heard, it is likely that many people would associate the sound with a ball of some sort even if they are not able to point out that the piece is by Strauss.

Locations referenced with musical quotations may also be large and general, such as

Bax's evocation of England through his quotations of Elgar in his first string quartet. It has been argued that Bax was concerned with developing a national identity for his home country and so tying his work together with that of his predecessor facilitated this goal (Allis 2011:348). In this case, the quotations of Elgar may be understood to simply reference England, or perhaps also English identity, just as the word *wolf* references a four-legged mammal as well as a dangerous animal.

Composers sometimes explicitly claim that their quotations are meant to reference particular time periods, as in the “Pavana Lachrymae” section of Crumb's “Black Angels,” which quotes from Schubert's “Death and the Maiden.” Crumb marks the score, asking for the sound of “ancient music,” and even the title itself suggests John Dowland's famous “Lachrimae Pavane” from the late 16th century (Holger Petersen 2010:312). The presumption, this time on Crumb's part, is that Schubert's sound would signify “ancient times” for his listeners. As with Ives' dance tunes, it is possible that listeners would not know the actual reference but, perhaps, be able to recognize the phrase as being in a style from the Romantic era. Other listeners might know the quoted material well enough to pinpoint the exact source, potentially providing more connotations, or semantic senses, to these listeners. This difference in reception is not much different from how lexical items work in language. The word *crawfish*, for instance, might be recognized by Louisiana natives as a shellfish, but it may also conjure images of outdoors crawfish boils in the summer, or the smell of crawfish that one sometimes picks up while randomly walking down the street, or perhaps it might even conjure up ideas about how one makes a living. For someone who understands the word but comes from New York, for example, the meaning might stop at “shellfish.” This latter person may not even have an image of what a crawfish looks like. In this way, imperfect knowledge of a musical quotation is reminiscent of

how one understands lexical items.

Similarly, Górecki makes use of "spiritual" quotations in "Old Polish Music," namely, the 14th century organum "Benedicamus Domino" and a 16th century cantus firmus. Tarnawska-Kaczorowska (1998:77) suggests that this source material represents “asceticism, sternness, [and] sobriety.” It seems likely that it would evoke ideas of antiquity as well, given that organums have a fairly distinct yet clearly out-of-style sound. Yet again, the title provided even points to the idea that the quotations are meant to represent something “old.” Tarnawska-Kaczorowska's interpretation is not to be discounted, though, as there is no necessary limit to what a particular quotation can make reference to, just as there is no limit in lexical items.

“Asceticism, sternness, [and] sobriety” are not the only conceptual items able to referenced with musical quotations. Henze was known to use Mahler's music as a model for his own (Downes 2004:191-193), but also employed some direct quotations, such as in his opera “The Bassarids.” Here, the composer himself explains that he used phrases from Mahler's fifth symphony as “landmarks” and “associations,” which Downes (2004:199) interprets as following a “trajectory … from death through premature hope, to the joy of life in a redeeming love.” Downes (2004:183) bases his interpretation on Henze's own acknowledgment Mahler's music is emblematic of “grief for things that have been lost” but also “messages for the future of mankind.” Interestingly, Henze's contemporaries in the Darmstadt school saw Mahler's music as a joke, reactionary even, until well after WWII (Downes 2004:182). The result is likely that Henze and at least some of his listeners would understand his quotations in a much different light. This would not be so much like the difference between a listener who is more or less familiar with a specific quote, as mentioned above, but would potentially yield a completely different reading altogether. Henze used these quotes to suggest a particular sort of sentimentality

while his contemporaries would understand them as trite. The two are effectively speaking different dialects of the same language. One could draw a comparison here between a lexical item such as *fag*, which has drastically different meanings when said in the United States or England. Both groups understand the lexical item, or the musical quotation, and may even be aware of the various possible meanings, but will still interpret it within their own system of semantics.

Henze's quotations of Mahler may also be understood simply as tribute or homages to the composer. This is, in fact, a common interpretation for musical quotations. Tarnawska-Kaczorowska (1998:80) even argues that there are two reasons composers use quotations: to mock or to pay tribute. This can be found in Takemitsu's quotations of Debussy's "Prélude à l'après-midi d'une faune" in his "Orion and Pleiades" (Tarnawska-Kaczorowska 1998:80-81) and Nyman's quotations of the main theme of Mozart's “Sinfonia Concertante” in the soundtrack for “Drowning by Numbers” (Beirens 2007:27/29). These quotations are explained as nothing more than attempts to honor the historical predecessors of the modern composers and connect their music with the classical tradition.

Bax, in particular, marks quotations of Elgar in his first string quartet, which was also dedicated to Elgar, with “nobilmente” (Allis 2011:336), suggesting his reverence for the composer and the intention of the quotations. Indeed, Bax had explicitly stated that Elgar was “the leader of English music and one of the most sincere artists of our day in any medium” (Allis 2011:308). It would not be difficult to image that the use of such quotations would also, for Bax, inject the extra-musical qualities that he believed Elgar to have into the quartet. He had also described his predecessor as composing “fragments of wistful, heart-melting melody” and being “breath from the West Country” (Allis 2011:308). In this way, one can deduce that these

references make up the semantic extension of quotations of Elgar, at least for Bax. One is still left with uncertainty about whether this intention reaches listeners, however.

Bax's use of Elgar's music may have a rather large extension of meaning. It has been argued that Bax was commenting on musical structure itself when quoting Elgar (Allis 2011:307-308). This again harkens back to Beirens' (2007:38) claim that quotations in Nyman's music ultimately represent “music about music.” Bax was concerned with his own use of repetition and how it fit within the English musical tradition. The presumption is that, by placing Elgar's structures in a different context, he can maintain a connection to the musical tradition of his country without following its structural proclivities. Perhaps more importantly, this is an example of the most obvious reference that music can make: reference to other music. Being able to reference Elgar's Violin Concerto by saying, “Elgar's Violin Concerto,” is really not much different than using a musical quotation to do the same. Both can be considered nouns in this case. This only ceases to be reference similar to that of linguistic semantics if one disregards Kruse's (2011:58-59) argument that music cannot possibly be formally self-contained. Only in a world where music is not a person, place, or thing, but rather some abstract non-thing, can reference to it be viewed as different from the way nouns reference objects.

Tarnawska-Kaczorowska's (1998:80) other claim for why composers use quotations, to mock, can be found in many interpretations. Debussy mocks Wagner by putting the Tristan motif in “Golliwog's Cakewalk” from his “Children's Corner” (Tarnawska-Kaczorowska 1998:80), a piece meant to evoke child-like imagery, and Nyman's first string quartet contrasts early tonal material from John Bull with the modernist atonality of Schoenberg in order to create a sense of irony (Beirens 2007:33). Hummel even creates inside jokes through his quotations of Bach's “Goldberg Variations” in one of his own quartets (Stewart-MacDonald 2006:12). Because Bach's

music had only recently gained some popularity in Vienna, and even then was used mostly for pedagogical reasons (Stewart-MacDonald 2006:9), Hummel likely suspected few listeners to catch the quotations (Stewart-MacDonald 2006:13). One can imagine a small number of musicians in the audience for the piece, who had no doubt played these Bach pieces themselves repeatedly, chuckling at their injection into Hummel's work.

Humor itself is rather an offshoot of the mockery that musical quotations can create. Indeed, it has been argued that modern day mash-ups, which layer two disparate recordings together into one new work, are exclusively about creating jokes by combining “contextual incongruity,” meaning pieces that are not expected to go together contextually, with “musical congruity,” meaning the pieces fit together musically (Brøvig-Hanssen and Harkins 2012). Hence, a work such as “Smells Like Teen Booty,” which combines Nirvana's “Smells Like Teen Spirit” with Destiny's Child's “Bootylicious,” is humorous, and simultaneously mocking in the eyes of former Nirvana drummer Dave Grohl (Serazio 2008:83). Whether mash-ups can truly be considered to be the same as musical quotations, as described above, is still debatable, but the point is that humor can be referenced through “quotations” in a mash-up, just as through quotations in Hummel's piece.

There are, indeed, other musical techniques that are similar to quotations, such as allusions and modeling Allusions, which are reminiscent of particular musical phrases to some degree (i.e. melodic contour), can be found in the work of Henze (Downes 2004) and Crumb (Holger Petersen 2010). In Bax's work one finds allusions as well as modeling (Allis 2011), which is generally described as following the structure of another piece. Ives also made regular use of modeling techniques (Burkholder 1985). One issue with equating musical quotations to nouns in language is that they are not so easily delineated. At what point is a quotation simply an

allusion, or an allusion a case of modeling? Is a mash-up simply the use of an extended quotation or something else entirely? In language, one can separate a word by providing it in isolation to a speaker. This can be done with musical quotations as well, but when a melody is quoted, for instance, it necessarily overlaps with other features. It must be played over some sort of harmonic progression or a rhythm. This resembles phonological rules in language to some degree, but these rarely affect the entire structure of a word. In most cases, a phonological rule will simply modify the boundaries of a word. This problem of defining precisely what musical quotes are places the comparison to language on shaky ground, though it does not necessarily rule out that they are the musical correlates of nouns.

What is also clear from the literature is that the roles of intention and interpretation in music must be better understood to draw the comparison between musical quotations and nouns. The intentions of a composer who utilizes this technique are not necessarily clear, even to that composer, as music is commonly viewed as an art. Likewise, many interpretations are possible depending on the background, or lack thereof, of the listener. It is not likely that all listeners will share the same associations with a particular piece of quoted material. However, that does not mean that it is not possible for many listeners to have the same associations. It is possible that successful references through musical quotations only occur when a composer and a listener share the same musical language, so to speak. That is to say, one's musical background, and even cultural background, may represent the musical language they speak and, hence, the quotations that are meaningful to them. The literature on the subject seems to be purely philosophical at this point in time, however. More experimental approaches to the subject would potentially yield some interesting results.

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