

CSC 490

Question Set 1

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A set of questions based on chapter 1 of Aiello's Musical Perceptions.

1. Characterize the “absolutist” view of musical meaning.
  - Absolutists believe that meaning within a piece of music is strictly within the piece itself, with no relation to the outside world.
2. Characterize the “referentialist” view of musical meaning.
  - Referentialists believe that in addition to the intermusical meaning, a piece has meaning due to references to the outside world of concepts, emotions, and thought.
3. Which camp do you lean towards? (No fence sitting!) Pick one – absolutist or referentialist – and defend your leaning in just a sentence or two.
  - I tend to be a referentialist when it comes to musical meaning, simply because music affects me strongly and makes me think and attach emotion to songs from objects and ideas in my physical life. I can name innumerable songs that mean something to me simply because I was able to derive emotion from them because they relate to my life.
4. According to Meyer, absolute meanings and referential meanings can and do exist in one and the same piece of music. (True/False)
  - True
5. Which sort of meaning was Leonard Bernstein questioning in the “conversation” that we examined last week, absolute or referential? Explain your answer.
  - Bernstein was questioning the absolutist point of view, as he was breaking down the parts of Beethoven’s works and finding them rather mundane, seeing that they must hold some meaning that can’t be held solely within the piece they’re in.
6. Characterize the “formalist” view of musical meaning.
  - The formalist believes that meaning and emotion in music is strictly intellectual, and is solely within the individual.
7. Characterize the “expressionist” view of musical meaning.
  - The expressionist believes that meaning and emotion in music is within the music itself-the music has the capacity to evoke emotion intrinsically, and separate from the listener.
8. Stravinsky was a notorious formalist. (True/False)
  - True
9. According to Meyer, Stravinsky’s formalist (anti-expressionist) stance was misguided because he failed to appreciate that emotion might arise from within the music itself (that is, because he found relationalist view abhorrent and he erroneously equated expressionalism with relationalism.) (True/False)

- True
10. Which type of fellow do you take Bernstein's LP to be, a formalist or an expressionist?
- LP seems to be an expressionist, because he sees the meaning as being almost universal to anyone listening.
11. Meyer's work in "Emotion and Meaning in Music" is concerned mainly with:
- (a) **Those aspects of meaning which result from the understanding of and response to relationships inherent in the musical progress of a work.**
- (b) Relationships between the musical organization of a work and the extramusical world of concepts, actions, characters, and situations.
12. Meyer's work is best characterized as
- (a) **Absolute formalism**
- (b) Absolute expressionism
- (c) Referential formalism
- (d) Referential expressionism
13. The (absolute) formalists and the (absolute) expressionists are both faced with the problem of explaining the manner in which a abstract, nonreferential succession of tones becomes meaningful. Consequently, Meyer believes that these two camps should consider themselves to be allies rather than opponents. (True/False)
- True
14. According to Meyer, the psychology of music has, since its beginnings, been plagued by three errors: hedonism, atomism, and universalism.
- (a) How does Meyer define *hedonism*?
- "Hedonism is the confusion of aesthetic experience with the sensuously pleasing"
- (b) How does Meyer define *atomism*?
- "The attempt to explain and understand music as a succession of separable, discrete sounds and sound complexes is the error of atomism."
- (c) How does Meyer define *universalism*?
- "the error of universalism: the belief that the responses obtained by experiment or otherwise are universal, natural, and necessary."
15. In 50 words or less, answer the question "What is the subjective evidence for an emotional response to music?"

- The subjective evidence is simply based upon reports that music has inspired and aroused emotion in countless listeners. Music seems to be subjectively linked to people's emotions, and is able to create a response.
16. Briefly indicate *one* "difficulty" that Meyer mentions regarding the subjective evidence for an emotional response to music?"
- One difficulty that subjective evidence presents is the fact that the stimulus cannot be derived from the subjective.
17. In 50 words or less, answer the question "What is the behavioral evidence for an emotional response to music?"
- The behavioral evidence of an emotional response is the overt behavioral change that music can bring about in the listener. There may also be covert behavioral changes, though these are more difficult to analyze and interpret.
18. Briefly indicate *one* "difficulty" that Meyer mentions regarding the behavioral evidence for an emotional response to music?"
- One difficulty that behavioral evidence presents is the fact that even with overt behavioral changes, the same emotional stimulus can result in several different behavior patterns in different people.
19. In 50 words or less, answer the question "What is the physiological evidence for an emotional response to music?"
- The physiological evidence for an emotional response include recorded changes in pulse and respiration, lessening muscle fatigue, and other physical responses.
20. Briefly indicate *one* "difficulty" that Meyer mentions regarding the physiological evidence for an emotional response to music?"
- One difficulty here is the fact that the genre of music has no relation with the response, when one would expect to see a more soothing change for calming music as opposed to the more aggressive nature of metal, and such.
21. What is the "central thesis" of the psychological theory of emotions?
- "Emotion or affect is aroused when a tendency to respond is arrested or inhibited."
22. Briefly, articulate the difference in perspective between Dewey's take on emotion and MacCurdy's take on emotion.
- Dewey seemed to believe that it was conflict of tendencies in a stimulus that produced an emotional response, whereas MacCurdy believed that inhibiting the tendency created the response.

23. What *assumption* does Meyer articulate regarding how the theory of emotions relates to musical experience?

- Although what may cause the stimulation may vary greatly, the basic arousers of effect are very specific and global, so therefore they apply to music.

24. Meyer suggests that musical experience differs from nonmusical experience in three important ways. What are they?

- Firstly, musical experience has knowledge and awareness of the stimulus in question. Secondly, in music, tendencies are completed and resolved, unlike outside of musical experience. And thirdly, the tendency in music is always resolved by the same stimulus that caused it.

25. What does Meyer mean by the word “tendency” with respect to music?

- A tendency is an automatic reaction to a stimulus in music.

26. What does Meyer mean by the word “expectation” with respect to music?

- An expectation is a tendency that has reached the level of consciousness within the listener—the listener is well aware that the automatic reaction is happening.

27. Say something interesting about the relationship between the tendency/expectation phenomena and musical experience.

- Though we as listeners form tendencies with a piece and expect a certain consequent, that reaction doesn't have to come to fruition, as the consequent might not be the expected one, nor at the expected time.

28. Identify one thing that you find to be particularly interesting in the section beginning on page 26 on Conscious and Unconscious Expectations.

- I find it really interesting that when a tendency is inhibited, that the brain takes over and starts to think out the situation. A sort of “what's next” that leaves the listener on edge, waiting for resolution. I think this accounts for why I love music that finds new and creative ways to resolve chord progressions and change meter mid-phrase.

29. For this question, consider the “rest of the chapter”, from page 29 to the end. Moreover, consider a “sensible salient passage” to be a contiguous group of from 1 to 3 sentences which you find to be particularly informative and attention grabbing. Read the pages and select what you find to be the five most compelling sensible salient passages. Then, write them down!

- “Meaning is thus not a property of things. It cannot be located in the stimulus alone. The same stimulus may have many different meanings.”
- “In and of themselves, for example, the opening chords of Beethoven's Third Symphony have no particular musical stylistic tendency. They establish no

pattern of motion, arouse no tensions toward a particular fulfillment. Yet as part of the total aesthetic cultural act of attention they are meaningful.”

- “But whether our expectations are confirmed or not, a new stage of meaning is reached when the consequent becomes actualized as a concrete musical event.”
- “Whether a piece of music gives rise to affective experience or to intellectual experience depends upon the disposition and training of the listener. To some minds the disembodied feeling of affective experience is uncanny and unpleasant and a process of rationalization is undertaken in which the musical processes are objectified as conscious meaning.”
- “It is precisely because he is continually taking the attitude of the listener that the composer becomes aware and conscious of his own self, his ego, in the process of creation.”

30. In three sentences, describe your reaction to this chapter of your book.

- This first chapter, though a very dense and difficult read, really got me thinking about the concepts I take for granted within music. I had never contemplated the origin or nature of meaning in music, and I also had never questioned its power over the human body and mind. This raised more questions than it answered, at least to me, but I see that as a good thing—a chance for more exploration and contemplation on the subject.