MUSIC, MEANING AND NARRATIVE

GLASBA, POMEN IN PRIPOVEDNOST

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to discuss the idea of music as a type of emotional narrative that triggers our emotional responses and drives our attention and expectation in a musical piece. One of the most useful features of narratives is their ability to not only represent multiple realities, but also create new ones by mobilizing and articulating new worldviews, altering power dynamics between people, and establishing new practices: in other words, their potential for creating change and transformation. Examples of this can be seen in using narratives and stories for prompting social change (Westerlund & Partti, 2018), as well as in eliciting psychological transformation in a therapeutic setting (Angus & McLeod, 2004). The implications of musical narrativity in the pedagogical work of music performers are thus discussed and the idea of narrativity as a tool in the pedagogical field is introduced.

Keywords: music listening, musical meaning, narrativity, therapy, education

Izvleček: Namen tega prispevka je razpravljati o ideji glasbe kot vrsti čustvene naracije, ki izvabi naše čustvene odzive in nas spodbudi k večji pozornosti na podlagi implicitnih pričakovanj pri poslušanju glasbenega dela. Ena izmed najuporabnejših lastnosti naracije je, poleg predstavljanja multiplih resničnosti, ustvarjanje novih z mobilizacijo in artikulacijo novih pogledov na svet, s spreminjanjem dinamike moči med ljudmi in ustvarjanjem novih praks. Drugače rečeno, najuporabnejšna lastnost naracije je potencialno ustvarjanje spremembe in transformacija. Primeri tega so vidni v uporabi pripovedi in zgodb za spodbujanje družbenih sprememb (Westerlund & Partti, 2018) kot tudi za spodbujanje psiholoških sprememb v terapevtskem okolju (Angus & McLeod, 2004). Predstavljene so tudi implikacije glasbene naracije pri pedagoškem delu.

Ključne besede: poslušanje glasbe, glasbeni pomen, pripovednost, terapija, izobraževanje

INTRODUCTION

usicians and music fans have long been fascinated by the true nature and function of music. What is its function, and why do we pay attention to it? Is it necessary for music to relate to extra-musical stories and ideas in order to be meaningful, or does it exist solely for its own sake? When people talk about their listening experiences, they frequently refer to music as if it were a story. Can music, however, tell a story? Narrativity has traditionally been associated with verbal and visual texts, and the possibility of musical narrativity is hotly debated. This paper will present a number of theories which view music as a type of narrative and that explain how this way of thinking about musical discourse might help us understand its influence on our emotional life. Furthermore, the power of musical narrativity as a therapeutic and educational tool will be discussed: a narrative, besides driving the action in a piece of art, often acts as a catalyst of psychological change in a reader (or listener) and therefore contains huge potential in pedagogical use. This particular use of narrativity will be discussed using examples from musical performance pedagogy.

MUSIC AND MEANING

The concept of musical meaning became a central theme of debate between musicologists and composers in early nineteenth-century Europe, with excerpts from Ludwig van Beethoven's works used to support opposing arguments. The debate raged on into the late nineteenth century, with Wagner's concept of Gesamtkunstwerk, in which words and music are inseparable, and Hanslick's opposing view of "pure" music (Robinson, 1997). By the end of the nineteenth century, two major schools of thought had emerged: the Wagnerian school, which continued to promote the ideas of romantic composers and idealist philosophers such as Berlioz and Schumann, believing that music can express the deepest human emotions, and Hanslick's school, which saw a musical work as an autonomous entity that could be studied objectively and is divorced from the extra-musical world. As ideas of post-romanticism emerged in the twentieth century, with the complex and rule-governed compositional techniques of serialism of Schoenberg and Webern, Hanslick's formalism became widely accepted (Robinson, 1997), especially in Anglocentric society. The dominant music analysis systems have emphasized the importance of structural hierarchy and mathematical models that pervade musical forms, and music has been viewed as being expressive only of itself and of its form (Dukić, 2019).

However, in the past 50 years, as the field of music psychology started to develop more rapidly, certain musicologists have raised the suspicion that the current widely accepted method of music analysis that concentrates exclusively on formal features of the pieces can fully explain the meaning and nature of music. Musical meaning has been interpreted in a variety of ways. According to some theories, music only has meaning in social and historical contexts (Born & Hesmondalgh, 2000). These theories tend to view music as a social construct, which we can only explain by examining the processes that relate to the contexts in which music is produced and received (Cross & Tolbert, 2008). Other musicologists, on the other hand, see music's aesthetic meaning in the elicitation and expression of emotions: Cross contends that questions such as whether the affective states elicited by music arise through empathic processes,

directly in response to objective properties of musical structures, or both, must be thoroughly investigated.

MUSIC AS A NARRATIVE

A very different concept of musical meaning is that of the semantic meaning of music that has recently come into focus in both psychological and neuroscientific research. Koelsch et al. (2004) first started to investigate the common grounds of music and language in an experiment that suggested that similar types of brain responses were elicited when words that were semantically incongruous were presented following either linguistic or musical contexts. In other words, the results indicated that musical meanings were being experienced as directly relatable to the meanings of individual words, or as being of similar type to those of language. However, subsequent results (Steinbeis & Koelsch, 2008) indicated that tension—resolution patterns in harmony motivate cognitive and neural responses that are analogous with language processing, but do not call on representations of semantic knowledge. Musical meaning is thus best conceived of as being the consequence of the patterns of tension and resolution embodied in music, and is fundamentally different from linguistic meaning.

At the end of the 20th century, the study of music and its aesthetic meaning assumed a course that attempted to integrate the emotional experience that music offers to listeners with the semantic meaning that it was presumed music carried. The idea of this merge was to give the old debate about extra-musical meaning an interdisciplinary view that it lacked before as its ideas seemed to only survive within the borders of their individual disciplines such as music theory, composition, psychology and philosophy. Maus (1988), Robinson and Hatten (2012), Hatten (1994; 2018), Almén (2017) and Margulis (2017) have each proposed a different theory to explain the meaning and function of music, but all of them centred on the notion of music as a narrative form. A narrative is defined as a sequence of meaningful events that acquire the following form: setup-confrontation-resolution (Traupman, 1990). Although usually found in literary works, Maus, Robinson, Hatten and Margulis presumed the narrative form to be of central significance in understanding the function of music. Maus (1988) compared music to a type of drama: in this drama, musical surfaces are understood as discourse; successions of stories or reordered, repetitious or condensed representations of events of a story that are being "chosen" or narrated by some sort of agency. This agency is impersonal; it is akin to the invisible intelligence that guides a montage of a film, rather than to a visible and audible speaker. Robinson and Hatten (2012) have suggested, much like their predecessor Cone (1974), that a piece of music may have a sort of "musical plot" which dramatizes a psychological journey of a person. Much like in Maus'

study, this person is virtual and the music's listeners are not only invited to recognize the emotions expressed by it, but also to experience those emotions by themselves, either actually or in the imagination. Finally, a study done by Margulis (2017) suggests that listeners do indeed have a tendency to interpret music in terms of a narrative. Margulis played 90-second music excerpts (featuring low and high music contrasts) to 47 participants who were asked a series of questions, such as: "Did you imagine a story or elements of a story while listening to this music?", "Please describe the story you imagined in as much detail as possible." The questions were intended to assess their narrative engagement with music. The results showed that contrast makes listeners likelier to experience music and its associated story in a form of a narrative structure, dependent on stylistic familiarity and enjoyment. However, the most striking aspect of the results was the emergence of broad areas of consensus among the free descriptions of imagined narratives. This confirmed the music semioticians' suspicions that there must be certain music features that listeners associate with particular narrative elements (Hatten, 2004; Nattiez, 2013; Newcomb, 1992).

There is another branch of music that strongly hints at the close relationship between music and narrative, and that is music therapy. A receptive type of music therapy called Guided Imagery and Music (GIM), developed by Helen Bonny (an American violinist and a music therapist) in the 1970s, uses the connection between music pieces and the clients' personal narratives for therapeutic purposes. In GIM clients listen to a series of classical music pieces in a state of deep relaxation and as a result, develop spontaneous imagery that is presumably related to the music's temporal structure (Bonny, 1995). The types of imagery emerging vary from person to person and can include descriptions of various settings (from natural environments to human-made structures), descriptions of different characters that appear (real or imagined), developments of various physical and mental situations in which the protagonist of the story (always the client) engages, and a wide array of emotional states that the clients experience in reaction to the elicited imagery. The pieces that the clients listen to during GIM sessions are put together into programmes that have programmatic names: Caring, Relationships, Grieving, Peak experience, etc. A GIM therapist selects a programme that they think is most appropriate for their client before the session begins and together, they explore the imagery that emerges as a reaction to music. An interpersonal consistency in the types of imagery of different pieces was observed in the GIM process (Bruscia, 2005). Thus GIM strongly suggests a relationship between music and narrative, providing great grounds for exploring this symbiosis.

Finally, we can see how music and narrative have been closely linked and intertwined for many centuries: narrativity in music has been studied from different angles, ranging from the compositional (programme music), musicological, psychological and finally therapeutic perspective. It would now be useful to consider how narrativity affects our own perception of ourselves and

how it might prompt change and transformation, which is an essential part of any learning process.

NARRATIVITY AS A CATALYST OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CHANGE

Narrative researchers have recognized that stories and narratives not only represent multiple realities, but also create new ones "by mobilizing and articulating new understandings of the world, by altering power relations between people, and by constituting new practices" (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2015). As a result, telling stories is not only "a fundamental tool in the building of identities" (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2015) for both individuals and organizations, but it can also point the way forward for change on both an individual and societal level. A life-story study of an activist music teacher and first-generation professional Newar musician in Nepal who used stories to encourage change in his own community could serve as an example of this function of narration (Westerlund & Partti, 2018). This musician travelled throughout his community's villages showing pictures of women and girls playing instruments after visiting several countries in Europe and China; he believed that by telling stories about how females, like males, studied and performed music in other countries, he could change the tradition of his own community, which denied women access to music-making. This musician fought for an alternative future for his community's music and dance education through stories, pictures, and his own pioneering educational work.

However, the power of stories stems in part from their ability to be flexible and generative in terms of our "selves". Narrative therapy is one example of how narratives are purposefully and tactically used to effect positive change (Angus & McLeod, 2004). During the recovery process, the patient is asked to retell (relate, or possibly reimagine) their own future life-story. This recovery process can be aided not only by describing the illness, but also by exploring what mental health, and thus a better future, means to the patient. The process is based on the belief that determining goals and strivings for oneself is one way for the "healthy self" to express its mental health (McAdams, 2008). This type of dialogical exercise is used not only to encourage patients to consider and describe their future through goals and strivings, but also to give the individual an idea of what they may require for recovery. This implies that attempting to imagine and retell one's future may in fact alter that future.

Importantly, when we tell stories, we add different expressions, subtle distinctions, and small anomalies; we leave out details we believe are insignificant and issues we would much rather forget; and we suppress competing voices and even opposing dogma (Faber, 2002). According to Faber, this is how we tell the story of change (Westerlund, 2020).

As we have seen, narrative has a subtle, yet powerful way of initiating change and transformation in people's lives. It is my intention now to consider how narratives may help music performance teachers in facilitating positive changes and growth in their pupils and their musical learning. Although narrativity can be a great tool for teaching not only music performance but also composition and music theory, the focus of this section will be on the ways narrative and similar non-musical content such as metaphor and musical image can affect both technical and musical problems.

While technique may appear at first glance to be the most tangible aspect of learning music, it appears to be a matter of degree: while the emphasis is on relatively unambiguous, physical instruction, it extends to imaginative use of language, evocative of the right attitude required to play the right technique. It then shifts to references to the interpersonal and the abstractly aesthetic. This is where the use of narrative and metaphor collide and oftentimes overlap: if a teacher uses a narrative to describe a certain passage in music or a certain musical technique, they will inevitably be using metaphor as a means of communication with the student. It is for this reason that I will be referring to both narrative and metaphor as I explain their effect in musical education. Many master musicians around the world are aware of these aspects and have often found innovative ways of communicating to specific students what they consider to be important mechanisms for expression. It is not uncommon to find specific mention of a teacher's expertise in creative use of metaphor or narrative in biographies or anecdotes (Schippers, 2006).

Gouzouasis and Ryu (2015), music pedagogues, studied how young children learn piano and what was the role of narrative in their learning process. They see the foundation of lifelong learning and piano playing as more than just connecting finger movement to dots on the page. Learning to play the piano is much more than just pushing white piano keys, curving little fingers to form "correct" hand positions, and naming notes for a young child. It is a far more meaningful experience than learning piano techniques and sitting quietly while listening to the teacher. While Parker Palmer (2007) is not a music educator, his quote, "Good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher", speaks to how we must move beyond technique-bound strategies in piano teaching as well as traditional notions of piano pedagogy.

What a piano teacher considers to be meaningful in terms of music learning, Gouzouasis and Ryu argue, may be overshadowed by something "other" than what we typically consider to be music learning – the "extra musical" learning (i.e. knowledge gained through sharing stories, questions, conversations, emotions, and aesthetic experiences) that occurs at a young child's piano

lesson. We may not be aware of this as music teachers because we do not consider the overall experience of learning piano as an unfolding story.

Stories are how we explain, how we teach, how we entertain ourselves, and how we often do all three at once. They are the juncture where facts and feelings meet. And for those reasons, they are central to civilization – in fact, civilization takes form in our minds as a series of narratives. (Fulford, 1999)

Narratives and metaphors are not solely used in music education of the youngest, however: there are numerous accounts of their usefulness in advanced music performance education. Musicians frequently rehearse their programme for months, during which time they work to achieve reliable technical quality (i.e. pitch and rhythm accuracy), while also adding expressive qualities to the music, heard as variations from uniformity in elements such as loudness and timing. In this tradition, expressive performance instruction frequently includes exhaustive use of imagery and metaphors as teachers seek to make students aware of the emotional content of a musical piece, or even to feel certain emotions while performing. Tait (1992) proposed connecting musical knowledge to students' personal experiences through a teaching vocabulary that includes imagery, metaphors, and analogies in a review of music instructional strategies. In fact, such an approach is frequently promoted as more effective than direct verbal strategies that focus on the physical sound properties of performance in eliciting musical expression from students (Woody, 2002).

Paul Haack, a music pedagogue, advises music teachers (1982, pp. 214):

Simply put, music is modeled on, and expressive of, the human condition So rather than just saying "louder," or "crescendo here," or "make the ninety-five decibel light go on" à la paint-by-numbers, it may be more instructive and likely to produce musical results to elaborate with something more in the realm of human experience or imagination: Try projecting, expanding your sound as though you were evolving into a tower of strength, growing into a giant weightlifter ... now raise that weight ... gradually.

Thus, music is considered communication in the sense that listeners generally find "meaning" in it by emotionally responding to the expressive qualities they hear. A composer's inspiration, the resulting written score, a performer's expressive interpretation of it, the resulting sounded music, and a listener's perception and emotional response are all sequential components of the musical communication process (Gabrielsson & Juslin, 1996; Kendall & Carterette, 1990). The role of narrative and mental imagery is crucial in this process, as they incite a musician's expressive interpretation and consequently communicate musical ideas to the audience via discernible acoustic sound properties.

Successful use of narrative, then, moves in the direction of resolvable "cognitive dissonance," as advocated by Neighbour (1992) and as Harsdörffer described: "That which we cannot name we can find and describe by coupling

it with that which is similar; and our mind gains pleasure when, through this process, it grasps what it could previously not understand." (Spitzer, 2004) It also strikes a chord with educational theories and ideas that gained traction in the second half of the twentieth century, such as Piaget's "accommodation", which forces the mind to develop or modify existing ideas in order to deal with new realities, and Bruner's (1960) concept of intuition, which is defined as "the intellectual technique of arriving at plausible but tentative formulations without going through the analytical steps..." Metaphor and narrative thus aid a process in which "learning is facilitated by the teacher by creating 'cognitive dissonance' in order to provide opportunities for students to restructure their cognitive maps" (Paul & Ballantine, 2002).

CONCLUSION

In the end we can see that it is in our nature to link musical content with extramusical stories, images and ideas. It is for this reason that musicians and non-musicians alike will always search for a musical meaning; something hidden and unsaid that lies in the core of every musical piece. Our natural aptitude for storytelling is thus inevitably linked to musical meaning, and both might serve as the driving force for aesthetic expression in music. However, the true power of narrativity in music lies not only in its ability to prompt the right emotional cues in a performer in order to help them express and communicate their vision of the piece to the audience, but in its ability to mobilize and articulate new understanding of the musical piece, by altering the way in which the performer sees the power relations between pieces' components, and by constituting new practices and ways of thinking about the musical piece. It is in this gap between the old ways of thinking about the piece and the new narrative perspectives of the piece that the potential for creativity and novel aesthetic expression lies, creating an opportunity for a performer to find their own way of telling the musical narrative.

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Namen tega prispevka je razpravljati o ideji glasbe kot vrste čustvene pripovedi, ki sproži naše čustvene odzive ter poganja našo pozornost in pričakovanja do glasbenega dela. Stevilne teorije so doslej podpirale idejo, da so glasbeni pomen in čustva predmet zunajglasbene denotacije: nekatere od njih vidijo glasbo kot družbeni konstrukt, druge pa implicirajo koncept semantičnega pomena glasbe. Teorije naracije, ki obkrožajo glasbo, se osredotočajo na idejo o glasbenem delu kot vrsti pripovedi, ki zajema napetosti in resolucije, ki so gonilne sile aktivacije čustev. Poleg tega je glasbena narativnost uporabljena kot terapevtsko orodje pri vođenih podobah in glasbenih sejah in tako pokaže globoko povezanost s čustvenim svetom ljudi. Ena najuporabnejših lastnosti glasbenih naracij je njihova zmožnost ne le predstavljanja več realnosti, ampak tudi ustvarjanja novih pogledov na svet, spreminjanja dinamike moči med ljudmi in vzpostavljanja novih praks: z drugimi besedami, njihov potencial za ustvarjanje. spremembe in preobrazbe. Primere tega je mogoče videti v uporabi pripovedi in zgodb za spodbujanje družbenih sprememb, pa tudi v izvabljanju psihološke transformacije v terapevtskem okolju. V pričujočem prispevku razpravljamo o implikacijah glasbene narativnosti v pedagoškem delu in predstavimo idejo o narativnosti kot orodju na pedagoškem področju: najprej kot sredstvu za mobilizacijo in artikulacijo novih spoznanj sveta glasbene vzgoje, drugič pa kot orodju za reševanje tehničnih in glasbenih problemov. Na koncu so narejene primerjave med uporabo metafore in narativnosti v glasbeni vzgoji ter obravnavani načini možne uporabe.