

Instructions for Deconstructing Music

To prepare for the seminar, please explore the materials and links below, and then write a response of at least 200 words. There are some discussion questions at the end that you may use as writing prompts, but feel free to respond as you wish. Email your written response to lewesseminar@gmail.com no later than Monday, December 11. You are asked to read all the responses from seminar participants prior to the meeting on Wednesday December 13 at 3 p.m.

While this session is designed to stand on its own, I am also interested in presenting ideas in artistic expression in music which will be revisited in the January session on art and politics. I am hoping to discuss techniques and intents in musical composition during the late 18th and early 19th centuries and how these represent a significant shift in music's place in a broader society. Music composition made a remarkable change in the early 19th century and I wish to make the case that this change represented a change in society's approach to music specifically, and all art forms more generally.

To begin, I'd like you to view this 11+ minute video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vfT4xyKQOzY>

David Bruce alludes briefly to a very important development in musical composition intent with the music of Beethoven, "Beethoven was a whole new breed of artist, the lone genius, who through sheer force of will changed the world's idea of what music should be." And this is where I'd like to start the discussion.

Please listen to the first movement of the Mozart serenade, "Eine Kleine Nachtmusik." Here it is with the musical score for you to follow along: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QwMEWzMWlz4>

If you're enjoying it, by all means listen to the entire thing. But for our purposes, the first movement is enough, stopping at 5:47.

Next, please listen to the fourth movement of the Beethoven 6th Symphony. Again, here it is with the musical score:

https://www.google.com/search?rlz=1C1RUCY_enUS688US702&tbm=vid&sxsrf=AB5stBiRlr2qPmQssvAExFx1kG-uxTh5Cw:1691585880297&q=beethoven+symphony+6&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjK2IG80M-AAxWREIkFHbk9CqIQ8ccDegQIYRAD&biw=1360&bih=651&dpr=1#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:2095d798,vid:2HbBURnt9f4

The fourth movement starts at 28:14 and ends at 31:46. By Beethoven's own program notes, this movement is supposed to express a thunderstorm.

As Bruce alludes to in the first video, Beethoven dramatically stretched the structure and idea of musical composition, and this is very clearly illustrated in two things about the sixth symphony. Firstly, he added a fifth movement (a traditional symphony consists of four musical movements) and notes that these are to be played without a break between movements 3, 4, and 5. Secondly, he specifically writes programmatic notes into the score indicating what the music is supposed to represent:

Movement I: *Erwachen heiterer Empfindungen bei der Ankunft auf dem Lande* (Awakening of cheerful feelings on arrival in the countryside)

Movement II: *Szene am Bach* (Scene by the brook)

Movement III: *Lustiges Zusammensein der Landleute* (Merry gathering of country folk)

Movement IV: *Gewitter, Sturm*, (Thunder, Storm)

Movement V:

Hirtengesang. Frohe und dankbare Gefühle nach dem Sturm, (Shepherd's song. Cheerful and thankful feelings after the storm)

This use of programmatic direction foreshadows a form which came to be popular in the 19th century, known as the "tone poem." This is from the Wikipedia article "Tone Poem:" ***A symphonic poem or tone poem is a piece of orchestral music, usually in a single continuous movement, which illustrates or evokes the content of a poem, short story, novel, painting, landscape, or other (non-musical) source.***

Note how every aspect of the compositional technique in the two pieces is different, even though they were both written by composers writing in the Viennese style only a few years apart (the Mozart was composed in 1787 but not published until 1827, the Beethoven was premiered in 1808). This is due in large part to the composer's intent in writing. A serenade is a light instrumental work, typically written and performed in honor of someone or something. In the form in vogue during Mozart's time, the serenade didn't refer to anything extra-musical in particular. Instead, it was intended to be heard simply as a piece of music, written and performed to delight the listener.

Beethoven is doing something quite different. He is using the orchestra to paint a visual picture, to take the listeners into a scene and experience it in real time- similar to what one might do with an opera.

Such an idea, with regard to a symphony, would have seemed odd to Mozart. An opera and a ballet certainly would have musical ideas representative of something other than music. But a symphony, or, in the case of the example above, a serenade, was strictly a musical experience, intended to be expressive entirely of musical ideas.

I used the serenade for two reasons. Firstly, it's one of Mozart's most famous pieces and I thought it would be familiar to all of you. Secondly, it's very easy to hear the style contrasting with the Beethoven piece. Here is a later and, perhaps, more profound Mozart musical piece, the 40th symphony, written in 1788. I'd recommend you stick to the first movement, ending at 5:56

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=m Mozart+symphony+40+with+score&pc=cosp&ptag=C26A7E321233B8&conlogo=CT3210127&ru=%2fsearch%3fq%3dm Mozart%2520symphony%252040%2520with%2520score%26pc%3dcosp%26ptag%3dC26A7E321233B8%26form%3dCONBNT%26conlogo%3dCT3210127&view=detail&mmscn=vwrc&mid=3A25942218FDC6F8D9933A25942218FDC6F8D993&FORM=WRVORC>

Clearly, this piece carries a great deal more emotion than the serenade. But, if you listen carefully, you can hear a very different expressive intent in both of Mozart's pieces than that of Beethoven's. A big part of Mozart's greatness is that, while he pushes the boundaries of the Viennese "elegant" styling in his expressive technique, he never abandons it in the same way that Beethoven does, as evidenced in this piece.

I am of the opinion, which can never be proven one way or another, that, had Mozart lived longer, he likely would have experimented further with the expressive styles. His later works, particularly the 40th and 41st symphonies, the opera "Don Giovanni," and, most definitely the String Quartet number 19

demonstrate an artist reaching beyond the limitations of the style and form in which he was trained and in which he worked. But, tragically, Mozart's genius was lost when he died a young man.

But back to Bruce's description of Beethoven as "a whole new breed of artist, the lone genius, who through sheer force of will changed the world's idea of what music should be."

Most of Beethoven's work was not programmatic in the way that Symphony number 6 was, but the idea of using the symphonic form in this way was new. The same is true of his using singing soloists and a choir in his Symphony number 9. And his compositional ideas in his famous (infamous?) "Grosse Fugue" is considered so tonally and melodically complex as to remain indecipherable today. So, suffice to say that you will never get an argument among musicians if you refer to Beethoven's work as revolutionary.

For fun, here's a good performance of one of the most known "programmatic" pieces in the repertory, Rimsky-Korsakov's "Flight of the Bumblebee." https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=59QXMCsx_5E

Clearly, all of this is focused on what we might call "classical" or "art" music, as opposed to "popular" music. Today, music written in classical styling is mostly heard live in symphonic or chamber concert halls, college campuses, or, in the larger sense, in the movie theatre. Although popular styling is definitely prominent in film scores, classical technique and instrumentation is quite present- think John Williams among many others.

For our discussion, I would like to explore these ideas:

1. What are your thoughts about the musician as the "lone genius"?
2. When music is written to express things that are not specifically musical (Beethoven's writing a thunderstorm, as it were), does this change the fundamental character of the music itself?
3. Musical composition that refers to non-musical things (thunderstorms, flights of bumblebees, other sound-related referrals) make musical ideas easier to understand for the listener, certainly. Do these enhance the listener's experience or do they dilute from the innate power of musical expression?
4. Did Beethoven's referrals to non-musical ideas in the 6th symphony and later tone poems fundamentally change our understanding of music? Did art music become fundamentally programmatic? When you listen to instrumental music, what do you listen for, specifically? Pretty sounds? Technical virtuosity of the players? Emotional expression?
5. The philosopher Susanne Langer said "music is the logical symbolic expression of inner life." We'll speak more of Langer in January's session, but how does this statement apply to this month's discussion?

Please write a short essay in response to this material and send it to Lewesseminar@gmail.com by Monday, December 11. We will post it to our website and we encourage you to read all the responses in advance of our discussion on Wednesday, December 13 at 3:00.

And for fun, I'm attaching "TS Music Fundamentals III," a primer on rudimentary music theory- a quick exposition of the fundamental components of musical melody. If you have the time and interest, give it a read.

Thank you,

David White

