

Emotional Storms, Passion and Melancholy when Symphonic Music is Legitimated as an Emotional Resource

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The 2020 Netflix series “Unorthodox” depicts how the young Esther Shapiro flees from an unhappy marriage and a strictly regulated life in an Orthodox Jewish community in Williamsburg (Brooklyn, New York). Dealing with challenges during her escape to Berlin, Esther draws strength from the emotional power of classical music. In one scene she is moved to tears while listening to a rehearsal of Antonio Dvorak’s “Serenade for Strings”. The scene takes place at the music conservatory, which also is the most important place for the development of her new identity. In the end of the series Esther is applying herself to the school as a scholarship holder by performing Franz Schubert’s “An die Musik” for the jury. In the first episode, the viewer has already seen Esther’s grandmother crying as she listens to the piece because it brings back memories of close relatives who died in the Holocaust. By performing “An die Musik” Esther’s personal liberation process is emphasized, but also her effort to deal with a historical legacy. But to convince the jury, she is also required to perform a traditional Jewish song. And this performance even more convincingly articulates the relationship between a longing for freedom, authenticity, and identity, and music’s potential to serve as an emotional force.

The relationship between classical music and strong expressions of emotion, as depicted in “Unorthodox,” differs from the usual characterization of conventional audience behavior at classical music performance as well-disciplined and emotionally restrained. Christopher Small (1998, 26), for example, calls attention to the norms surrounding listening practices in modern concert halls whereby “the audience is fixed in the seats” and encouraged “to keep still and quiet.” The fact that musicologists have long focused on formal and structural details, thereby idealizing a moderate and introspective attitude toward listening, has also been cited as a reason why even in the early twenty-first century research on music and emotions remains a relatively unexplored area (Juslin and Sloboda 2001). The idea that listening ideals are stable over time has also been problematized, with critics pointing out how norms of aesthetic value have been relaxed as a consequence of cultural changes during the latter half of the twentieth century (Fornäs 1995; Ziehe 2004). However, even the idea of a destabilization of normative values has recently been challenged. For example, it has been shown that ideas and conceptions about music and emotion that were first articulated in ancient times are still being reproduced today (Cook and Dibben 2012; Kramarz 2019). It has also been suggested that “a concert-goer in the early twenty-first century might share some of the ideals of a concert-goer in, say 1870,” and that “those ideals may—or may not—differ sharply from those of the fellow MP3 listener in the subway” (Thorau and Ziemer 2018, 16). Previous research also shows that

value hierarchies associated with classical music are challenged when it is used as material for creative and playful meme-making on social media (Hyltén-Cavallius 2021). A shift in the meaning of classical music is also identified in a study of contemporary cinema, but at the same time this does not necessarily cause critics and audiences to “reject the notion of the musical work or devalue the high-art status and emancipatory potential traditionally ascribed to classical music” (Pontara 2021, 4).

Against the backdrop of how the meaning and value of classical music is simultaneously described as stable and mutable, this article aims to investigate what conceptions and ideals about emotional qualities are articulated in the marketing of symphony orchestras’ concert productions. The purpose of the article is to apply a discourse-analytic approach to investigating how symphonic music is constructed and legitimated as an emotional resource, and how concert hall audiences are positioned in relation to ideas about the emotional qualities of music. This is done by investigating how emotions are emphasized in presentations of concerts included in the concert offerings of two leading orchestras, the London Symphony Orchestra (LSO) and the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra (GSO). The material analyzed is taken from the orchestras’ websites and consists primarily of texts downloaded from the 2018-2019 season. In addition, a number of images have been included because they illustrate feelings or emotional responses in relation to one of the texts selected for analysis.

The discourse-analytic approach adopted by the study involves a focus on linguistic utterances or, in other words, on how feelings and emotional reactions are characterized in texts and images, as well as on the narratives that these utterances create. The patterns that emerge from the analysis are then situated in relation to historically and collectively created discourses, for the purpose of identifying both shifts and stability in conceptions of the emotional qualities of classical music (Foucault 1970/1981). Another characteristic of this theoretical perspective is that it regards discourse and power as intimately conjoined, based on a view of power as something productive, that is, as something that is exercised and operates through actions, rather than being something that can be allocated or rescinded (Foucault 2004). Such an approach to power also makes it possible to focus on how different conceptions and ideas about classical music and emotions are in competition with each other, as well as what potential tensions and conflicts of interest this leads to. This interest in discursive conflict is further grounded in a view of power as relational, which means being able to highlight the subject positions that are constructed in relation to prescribed listener ideals and emotional responses (Foucault 1982).

The micro-level effects and consequences of power are, in Foucault’s way of thinking, intertwined with societal conditions, and to highlight the relation between micro- and macro-perspectives in the analysis of concert descriptions, the concept of “biopower” will be included in the theoretical framework (Foucault 2004). According to Jeffery T. Nealon (2008, 46), the term “biopower” refers to “a very efficient mode of power that infuses each individual at a nearly ubiquitous number

of actual and virtual sites, rather than working primarily on specific bodies at particular sites of training.” “Biopower” can accordingly be understood as a form of discipline; however, rather than focusing on the regulation of bodies and embodiment, or on “man-as-a-body,” it is interested in lifestyle patterns, or “man-as-living-being” (Foucault 2004, 242). Biopower can further be understood as a central instrument of governance in a neo-liberal economic system, where “lifestyle purchasing is the primary economic driver” (Nealon 2018, 11f). And since lifestyle adapted offers according to Nealon have become the dominant principle for cultural production, attention will also be given to the emotional qualities that are used as selling points and what subject positions the listener are offered by that. It must also, however, be kept in mind that this can take different forms depending on the character of the informational material. And the investigation is therefore also directed at identifying linguistic variations in the texts selected for analysis, as well as how the different types of presentational material address the audience in different ways.

Already during the stage of collecting material it became clear that feelings were especially frequently mentioned as an indicator of quality in the concert presentation, and thus the article’s focus is to a large degree empirically generated. In addition to audience address and linguistic style, the analysis has focused on identifying the linguistic elements out of which the concert presentations are composed, in terms of how they appear in both the texts and the selected images. In the close reading of the texts, special attention has been given to identifying frequently occurring words and phrases, as well as what narratives are established in connection to descriptions of the music as an emotional resource. The images that were selected have in turn been analyzed based on the semiotic resources that are present and how these are organized (Machin and Mayr 2012). This means that the analysis starts from an understanding of cultural meaning as constructed by both linguistic and symbolic representations, as well as how these are combined (Hall 2013).

The investigation and analysis of how symphonic concerts are legitimized on the basis of their emotional qualities is also related to how classical music is depicted in other types of textual materials and how the audience is positioned in relation to it. In this context, program notes are considered to be an especially relevant text genre, not least when considering the role that this phenomenon played in the growth of public concert culture. The introduction of program notes in mid-nineteenth-century Britain is said to have reflected an ambition to explain “how instrumental music ‘worked’ (in simple formalist terms) and what audiences should listen for,” that is, in order to educate and foster audiences in line with a formalist aesthetic and attentive listening ideal (Bashford 2018, 187f). It has also been shown that in the latter half of the nineteenth century the concept of program notes spread to other parts of Europe and North America, thereby contributing to the canonization of symphonic music (Lanzendörfer 2018; Bashford 2018). Another text genre that has influenced conceptions of classical music is music criticism, which like program notes was established in parallel with the development of public music culture during the

nineteenth century (Reese Willén 2016). From a comparative historical perspective, the way in which norms of aesthetic value are articulated in review texts has also been shown to vary over time (Widestedt 2001).

Studies of program notes and music criticism from the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries have also highlighted how the formalist aesthetic ideal that contributed to the symphony format being accorded the status of “the most prestigious of all instrumental genres” was also eventually challenged (Bonds 2006, 1). For instance, it has been shown how program notes during the latter half of the nineteenth century took the form of a “guided perception for the conception of music listening”; that is, they were comparable to the travel guidebooks that targeted middle-class readers and which were increasingly prevalent in Great Britain from the middle of the nineteenth century. This type of program notes was characterized by a focus on directing the listener attention to affective aspects of the music (Thorau 2018, 208). An important figure in this process was musicologist and conductor Hermann Kretzschmar, who is said to have described music by attributing characteristics to it, thereby contributing an “impetus for a deeper engagement with extramusical associations and with the conceptual subjects of a composition” (Fuchs 2019, 5). Apart from influencing how music was described in program notes, Kretzschmar’s ideas also affected the orientation of music criticism in the early twentieth century (Edström 1993). Moreover, it has been shown that Kretzschmar’s thinking served as a foundation for the work of cataloguing music for silent-cinema and using music to reinforce the narrative events in the films (Fuchs 2019).

According to Kristina Widestedt (2001), who has investigated how music was constructed as an object of knowledge by music critics between 1795 and the late 1990s, a gradual privatization of musical experience has occurred, beginning in 1885. During the late 1990s it also became increasingly common for music to be constructed as a commercial object, and the audience was positioned as participating in “challenging the traditional aesthetic discourse” (Widestedt 2001, 88). Musical experience as on the one hand a private concern, and on the other hand a commercial phenomenon, is also stressed in the material for the present article. Alongside that, however, historically shaped conceptions of classical music are also given a large amount of space. How this is done, and in what ways they are combined with each other, are treated in the following section.

Constructing Music as an Emotional Resource

A common rhetorical device in the presentations of LSO’s and GSO’s concert programs is to emphasize the range of feelings in the music and the extremes of feeling that a piece harbors. This occurs, for example, in the presentation of Hector Berlioz’s Symphony Op. 16, “Harold in Italy,” which was part of LSO’s offerings for the 2018-2019 concert season:

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The concert closes with Berlioz's dreamlike *Harold in Italy*. Melancholy and pensive, the symphony brings the viola to the forefront to convey restlessness, wanderlust and the artist's ceaseless search for inspiration.

As the example shows, the symphony is described as at once dreamlike, melancholy and thoughtful, at the same time as—with reference to the viola solo that is central to the piece—it is said to “convey restlessness” and “wanderlust.” In other words, the piece is characterized as containing both introspective moods and what could be called exploratory investigation connected to emotional frustration. By stressing the symphony's ability to “convey” specific character traits, the description makes reference to a conception of music's representational nature that is in line with a mimetic tradition of thought, specifically the idea that meaning and significance are transmitted through “imitation or transformation of an external reality” (Cook and Dibben 2012, 2). More frequently, however, the emotional qualities stressed in the concert descriptions relate to aesthetic ideals developed from the late eighteenth century and which rather were based on an explicit assumption that the music's meaning was “dissociated from ‘extra musical’ functions and programs” (Dahlhaus 1989a, 5). Like in the above example this is often done by emphasizing emotional features of a piece by attributing characteristics to it such as “melancholy” and “pensive” in a way that is recognizable from aesthetic terminology. According to Frank Sibley (1995, 313), such terminology often has a representational character, in that “many words have come to be aesthetic terms by some kind of metaphorical transference.” The characterization of a piece's emotional qualities with the help of aesthetic terms occurs frequently in the material and is also identified in LSO's presentation of Bruckner's Sixth Symphony:

Its contrasting moods, and overarching theme moving from darkness to light, can be haunting one moment and ecstatic the next, culminating in one of the most enigmatic symphonic conclusions of the 19th century.

As we can see, in this presentation contrasting moods are emphasized by relating aesthetic representations such as “haunting,” “ecstatic,” and “enigmatic” to audibly discernable characteristics by stressing “its contrasting moods, and overarching theme moving from darkness to light.” Sibley (1995, 313) also points out that this is a common narrative device, as “aesthetic terms always ultimately apply because of, and aesthetic qualities always ultimately depend upon, the presence of features which are visible, audible.” A similar characterization of music's emotional features occurs in the presentation of French Composer Betsy Jolas's piece “A Little Summer Suite,” in which audibly identifiable features such as “contrasting rhythms and melodic lines” are placed in relation to metaphorical attributions such as “a jaunty pallet of sounds” and aesthetic characteristics such as a “breezy, playful feel”:

Alongside pieces by Rameau and Poulenc, this concert sees the LSO's first performance of Betsy Jolas' *A Little Summer Suite*, a commission by Sir Simon Rattle. The piece plays contrasting rhythms and melodic lines

against each other, using a jaunty pallet of sounds to create a breezy, playful feel. A true burst of summer to warm this late-winter concert.

In this example, a different terminology stands in the foreground, namely that of compositional technique or music theory and that can be associated with a formalist aesthetic ideal (Cook and Dibben 2012). With that in mind, the description of music as an emotional resource in this particular example can of course connect to the conception of music as an independent aesthetic object, an idea that “evolved gradually along with the development of a repertoire of tonal instrumental music in Europe, mainly from the early eighteenth century onwards” (Grey 2014, 55). And moreover, on a “belief that instrumental music could be a fine and respectable art in service to nothing but itself” (Goehr 1992, 147). Drawing on a formalist ideal does not, however, mean that music’s emotional power was denied, but rather that the independent aesthetic value of a piece of music was viewed as more important than its significance as a generator of strong feelings in relation to a listener. According to Mark Evan Bonds (1997, 392), this meant that the focus “shifted from music’s effect to music’s essence, or more specifically, to the ideal realm reflected in that music.” In the words of music critic Eduard Hanslick, “beauty is and remains beauty even if no feelings are aroused and even if it be neither perceived nor thought” (Hanslick 1986, 3). The difference between beauty and feelings that follows from Hanslick’s reasoning has the effect of creating a distinction between good feelings, in the sense of spiritual perceptions of music, and bad feelings, in the sense of sensual or physical musical feelings (Widestedt 2001). Working with both structural and aesthetic musical concepts, as in the description of Betsy Jolas’s piece, or for that matter in the above description of Bruckner’s sixth symphony, can be understood as an attempt to overcome the distinction between the spiritual and the physical, and between music as an aesthetic object and as a generator of emotion. A similar balancing act appears to take place in the presentation of GSO’s concert program *Virtuost med Sara Ott* [Virtuosic with Sara Ott], which consists of Franz Liszt’s Piano Concerto No. 2 and Dmitri Shostakovich’s Symphony No. 15:

The bold and uncompromising pianist Alice Sara Ott meets the symphony in Liszt’s emotional piano concerto [...] In the second piano concerto he parodied Prussian military music (ludicrously pompous marches), titillated the bourgeoisie with undisguisedly sentimental and emotional melodies (as genuine as they are eager to please) and treated the circus audience to a piano part so virtuosic that all the keys together weren’t up to the task. [...] Tellingly enough, some of Liszt’s aesthetic spirit can also be found in Shostakovich’s music, especially in the fifteenth symphony which, with its quotations from Rossini and Bartók, pokes fun at itself in all seriousness. But it also contains profoundly emotional sections in muted shades from individual string instruments to powerful brass.

Considering how the piece is described as originally having “titillated the bourgeoisie with undisguisedly sentimental and emotional melodies,” one could understand the characterization of feelings in the description of Liszt’s Piano Concerto as downplaying the value of the piece precisely because it generated feelings in a specific

group of listeners. Furthermore, the fact that sentimentality is not presented solely as a positive trait can be understood in relation to the emphasis on virtuosity. This is because even if virtuosity can be understood as the enactment of technical brilliance, and thus as signifying high-quality instrumental technique, the connection between emotionality and virtuosity naturally also challenges conceptions of the independent value of music. As the compositional ideal of virtuosity grew stronger during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, it was increasingly perceived as a phenomenon of popular culture. This led in turn to “a general shift from a position that tended to regard virtuosity as a component of genius to one that vilified it as superficial and self-serving” (Deaville 2014, 279). The description of Shostakovitch’s Fifteenth Symphony admittedly uses a different rhetorical strategy to legitimize the emotional qualities of music, but here too it involves maintaining a balance between music’s function as a resource for strong feelings and its independent artistic qualities. Like in the description of “A Little Summer Suite” above, this is done by combining aesthetic terms with references to audibly identifiable parameters such as instrumentation and frequency ranges (Sibley 1995). What sticks out somewhat in the description of Shostakovitch’s Symphony No. 15 is the phrase “muted shades,” which is not an entirely obvious vocabulary in a contemporary musical context, but reinforces the idea that music is constructed as “an aesthetically refined and sophisticated object” (Pontara 2007, 156). Such an extraordinary use of language in combination with an emphasis on structural parameters such as melody, rhythm, timbre, and orchestration also occurs in GSO’s description of Bruckner’s Eighth Symphony. But, anchored within a romantic conception on music this presentation also highlights the spiritual dimensions of music with attributions such as “hypnotic rhythms,” “otherworldly passages,” “reverent melodies” and “serene states of mind”:

If you want to experience a great romantic symphony, there is no better choice than Bruckner’s Eighth Symphony – a tremendous orchestral work that spreads out in time and space with hypnotic rhythms and mighty sounds.

Many view the eighth symphony as one of Bruckner’s finest. In this gigantic orchestral construction, he pushes the limits of the orchestra, suggestively allowing crescendo after crescendo to build up with enormous power. There is also an ardent sincerity here that reflects his deep Catholic faith, echoing for instance in otherworldly passages for harp and reverent melodies that create serene states of mind. Once you have been drawn into Bruckner’s unique world, you’ll never want to leave it. There, time stands still.

Like in the earlier presentation of Bruckner’s Sixth Symphony, there is a lack here of explicit references to feelings or expected emotional responses in the listener. Instead, the work’s emotional potential is highlighted by stressing the evocative structure of the music and its “ardent sincerity.” Considering the poetic rhetoric that is used, and drawing on Dahlhaus (1989b, 34), the description can be understood in terms of the idea of music as an autonomous work of art, and of how “‘poetic’ instrumental music that abandons clearly defined subjects, characters, and

emotions” strives “to become a language capable of portending the ‘infinite.’” However, rather than invoking the music’s independent qualities in relation to a formalist aesthetic ideal, the description of Bruckner’s Symphony No. 6 stresses the metaphysical qualities of the piece, and thus it can be traced back to a romantic musical ideal instead (Dahlhaus 1989b; Goehr 1992; Bonds 1997). And just like in the descriptions that draw on a formalist ideal, this is largely done through the use of aesthetic terminology (Sibley 1995).

Based on the examples analyzed so far, it is apparent that the emotional qualities of the music are linked to a mimetic idea tradition, a formalist aesthetic ideal, and a romantic conception of music. It has also been pointed out how aesthetic terminology occurs as a rhetorical device in all three cases. Apart from underpinning various historically formed ideals, the aesthetic terminology also appears to help create a bridge between them, thereby creating a surface from which an individualized understanding of music can take shape (Wiedstedt 2001; Nealon 2018).

Passion as an Emotional Quality

An emotional quality that appears especially frequently in the presentations in GSO’s and LSO’s concert programs is *passion*. One example of this is when Tchaikovsky’s Symphony No. 6, also known as the “Pathétique,” which is part of GSO’s program, is described as “the very essence of passion and sentiment, with feelings as bare as a naked soul.” Another example is when Schumann’s Violin Concerto, the main piece at GSO’s concert *Schumann’s Fateful Works*, is described as “one of the great concertos” with reference to its “intensity and passion, at the same time as a brooding sense of sorrow and disquiet underlies even the calm sections and the seemingly playful passages.” The presentation of Shostakovich’s First Concerto for Piano, Trumpet and String Orchestra, performed by piano soloist Daniil Trifonov together with LSO, also highlights passion as a musical characteristic:

Burning passion and cool introspection meet head-on in this concert, bringing Daniil Trifonov’s Artist Portrait series to a close.

When, in this example, “burning passion” is contrasted with “cool introspection,” it is done with the help of a metaphorical aesthetic terminology, and with what in earlier sections has been described as an extraordinary use of language (Sibley 1995; Pontara 2007). The same metaphorical terminology can also be found in the description of Schumann’s violin concerto, even if this is done by emphasizing “a brooding sense of sorrow and disquiet,” that is, by making reference to a conception of musical representativity connected with the idea of mimesis (Cook and Dibben 2012). However, the fact that passion is held up as a musical characteristic in several of the presentations can also be related to how erotic allusions become increasingly frequent in musical contexts around 1885 (Widestedt 2001). Another aesthetic characteristic that is closely related to passion occurs in several program descriptions

where the music is described as moving toward an emotional peak, often expressed in terms of a climax. This occurs, for example, in another description of Shostakovich's First Concerto for Piano, Trumpet and String Orchestra:

With his Concerto No 1, Shostakovich upends the traditions of the Concerto form, creating a piece that bites with wit and humour. Lurching from the pithy sarcasm of the solo trumpet to the opulence of a waltz-like theme, the piece charges through disparate moods with wicked abandon, building towards a manic, carnivalesque climax.

A similar rhetorical strategy is found in LSO's description of Nielsen's Symphony No. 4, which emphasizes the strong emotions and violent energy connected with the music in the following way:

Nielsen's turbulent Symphony No 4 echoes the violence and ferocity of World War I. Opening with a furious blast of energy, chaos and a sense of instability reign for much of the piece, brought to a menacing climax by two warring percussion. But hopeful and atmospheric moments reoccur throughout the piece, embodying what Nielsen called "the elemental will to live," or "the inextinguishable."

In this example, the emotional peaks are highlighted in a way that alludes to music's eternal values and ability to evoke transcendental experiences in the listener, and the statement can therefore be traced back to a romantic aesthetic ideal (Dahlhaus 1989a; Goehr 1992; Bonds 1997; 2006). However, by emphasizing how the music rushes toward "a manic, carnivalesque climax" or "a menacing climax," as in the two previous examples, the statement can of course be pointing out that a peak experience of a more physical sort is meant. This statement can moreover be understood as making an erotic allusion in line with expressions used by critics in the end of the nineteenth century. According to Widestedt (2001), such allusions are to be understood in relation to how music experiences at that point of time was made to an increasingly private matter. An individualistic view of emotions is also articulated in the concert description, which emphasizes passionate love connected with the romantic love affair. The presentation of the event *Date Night at the Philharmonic*, arranged by GSO on Valentine's Day 2019 in connection with the concert *Sibelius's Singing Swans*, at which Sibelius's Symphony No. 5 and Aho Sieidi's "Concerto for Percussion" were performed, stresses the relation between music and audience, as well as between individuals in the audience:

In the spirit of love we offer tender surprises and antics on February 14–15. Come as you are, meet a new sweetheart or bring along family and friends. Together we can make the world a more loving place for a while. ❤️ [sic]

On Friday, February 15, we string Cupid's bow a bit tauter than usual. We invite you to take part in speed-dating before the concert, in collaboration with Single in Sweden. It is playful and inclusive, and just as much about making new acquaintances as finding love.

Given that the event presented here is scheduled for Valentine's Day and how tenderness and the possibility of finding a new romance are emphasized, the music is made into an emotional resource, something that can nurture a romantic relationship.

Characteristic for the description of the event *Date Night at the Philharmonic*, is also the prose. Unlike in many other descriptions loaded with extraordinary use of language, this one has a rather colloquial character. And by alluding to modern digital text messaging, the heart emoji in the text furthermore reinforce the casual and relaxed appearance of the message. What also characterizes this description is that the audience is addressed in a more direct way than in the previously cited examples. Instead of only hinting at a listener, or referring to him or her collectively or in terms of the pronoun "one," here the listener is addressed directly in the second person. Like with most of the concert descriptions, the text is accompanied by a picture. In GSO's program presentations these pictures usually depict a soloist or conductor associated with the concert. However, the picture for the event *Date Night at the Philharmonic* depicts a woman kissing a contrabassoon with her eyes closed:



Figure 1: Picture for the concert event: *Date Night at the Philharmonic*. Illustration: Anna Hult; published on permission of Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra

Considering the central position of the contrabassoon in the picture and how the woman giving her undivided attention to the instrument is depicted against a pink background, the picture can undoubtedly be understood as illustrating a musician's love for an instrument and/or for music. However, seeing as how the woman is holding the instrument against her body and is kissing it with her eyes closed, it is also possible to read the image as enacting an erotically charged romantic interaction between human beings. This can be compared with how subtle sexual references are said to be a common advertising strategy in mainstream media (Reichert 2003). Even if the bassoon is an instrument that lacks distinct gender coding (Scharff 2018), this interpretation is justified by how the woman, with her restrained appearance in terms of hairstyle, makeup and clothing, is depicted in accordance with a respectable middle-class ideal (Skeggs 1997), a positioning that is also central to being recognized as a musician within classical music culture (Scharff 2018; Bull 2019). The framing of the concert as a romantic event and the fact that the presentation includes a

positioning of the musician as a feminine heterosexual subject also generate an image of the occasion as a commercial product in which listeners can reflect themselves and other lifestyle choices (Nealon 2008; 2018)

Restrained versus Exuberant Listener Responses

Addressing the audience directly, as occurs in the presentation of *Date Night at the Philharmonic*, and descriptions of the strong reactions that the music's emotional qualities generate in listeners, are relatively scarce in the concert descriptions. Listeners' reactions connected with feelings that the music generates are more often characterized in implicit terms, such as when "reverent melodies" are said to generate "serene states of mind," in the presentation of Bruckner's Symphony No. 8 above. However, it also happens that the audience is more explicitly positioned in relation to the conception of music as an emotional force, as in GSO's presentation of Carl Nielsen's Second Symphony:

Carl Nielsen presents a spectrum of the entire human psyche in his second symphony, "The Four Temperaments," with vivid depictions of the choleric, the phlegmatic, the melancholic, and the sanguine. A musical journey through the hidden chambers of the soul, undertaken at your own risk.

In this statement, the act of listening is compared to "a musical journey through the hidden chambers of the soul, undertaken at your own risk," with reference to how the work represents irritability and melancholy. However, what the purported risk consists of or what may be at stake for the listener is not specified. One possible interpretation is that it stresses the importance of restraint in relation to emotional experiences, and that the mentioned risk concerns the danger that accompanies a failure to exhibit the sort of restrained and contemplative listening behavior that was the ideal in the nineteenth century (Johnsson 1995; Gay 1996; Thorau and Ziemer 2018). The concert's title "Emotional Storms" could then be understood as construing music as an emotional force capable of throwing the listener off balance. Risk-taking from the listener's perspective is also stressed in GSO's presentation of Fauré's "Requiem," which emphasizes the work's ability to profoundly move the listener:

This is a uniquely genuine and honest work that with its delicate and respectful touch has moved many listeners deeply. "My Requiem is dominated from beginning to end by a deeply human feeling of faith in eternal rest." With his impeccable sense of melodic perfection and refined sounds he created a work into which one can sink without resistance, safe and secure under the leadership of conductor Joana Carneiro.

The way in which the work's emotional qualities are highlighted in this text indicates, however, that the music's potential lies in conveying a spiritual or sublime experience, rather than evoking a powerful emotional response in the listener. Given how the composer is said to have created "a work into which one can sink without

resistance,” referring to its authenticity and Fauré’s “impeccable sense of melodic perfection,” one can argue that music is here made into an independent aesthetic object and a resource for inner contemplation (Hanslick 1986; Goehr 1992; Dahlhaus 1989a). Describing the act of listening in relation to formalist aesthetic qualities also emphasizes the music’s capacity to reflect a higher ideal, which at the same time requires the listener to “take an active role in the mental construction of that work.” (Bonds 1997, 393). This ideal, which developed during the nineteenth century, never fully took hold among the bourgeois audience, however. As Dahlhaus (1989b) points out, this was because the romantic philosophy of music, with its ideas about the autonomy of music and the goal of putting the listener into a transcendent state of mind, was in direct opposition to the musical aesthetic grounded in the Enlightenment. In bourgeois circles in the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, “music that did not reach the heart, that was not intelligible as a reflection of inner emotion, was considered meaningless noise: however astonishing the virtuosity of the performance, it left the emotions untouched” (Dahlhaus 1989b, 89). Be that as it may, a spiritual dimension of emotional experience brought about by listening to music is also highlighted in GSO’s description of Szymanowski’s First Violin Concerto, though in this case it involves transporting listeners to “new” and “enchanted worlds”:

The first piece is Szymanowski’s First Violin Concerto from 1916, in which the composer, like Debussy, seeks out colors, sounds and rhythms that transport the listener to new enchanted worlds. Music with passion and sensitivity—to be performed that way as well, which Janine Jansen is truly capable of doing!

Given how transporting the listener to new enchanted worlds is associated here with passion and sensitivity as musical qualities, it can be argued that ideals of music aesthetics connected to the idea that music can put listeners into transcendental states are in agreement with a romantic musical ideal (Dahlhaus 1989b; Bonds 1997). This also appears in the presentation of Daniel Nelson’s work “Steampunk Blizzard,” which is part of the same concert as Szymanowski’s First Violin Concerto and Tchaikovsky’s Symphony No. 6. Here, however, the anticipated emotional reaction in the listener is described in a slightly different way than with the other two works:

Daniel Nelson delivers alternating contrasts in Steampunk Blizzard, which with its machine-like rhythms and industrial feel takes us on a musical roller-coaster ride.
Perfect for Principle Conductor Santtu-Matias Rouvali.

The description of this piece builds, as we can see, on a somewhat different vocabulary than the previous examples. Rather than drawing on metaphorical aesthetic terminology, it characterizes the music through references to a more modernistic use of language, such as when its “machine-like rhythms and industrial feel” are said to characterize the music. The musical “roller-coaster” that is invoked to describe the concert program and that positions the listener as a musical fellow traveler also stands in contrast to many of the descriptions discussed previously. Like in an earlier study where the listening experience is depicted as exhilarating through

pictures of concert seats that have been lifted out of the concert hall and placed in dramatic natural settings, here the roller-coaster metaphor suggests a listening experience that is felt in the pit of the stomach (Bergman 2021). The feelings or moods associated with these experiential swings are never specified in this statement, which can be understood as stressing that it is up to the listeners themselves to define the significance and meaning of Nelson's piece. In this way the text also refers to the idea that the meaning and significance of music is open to interpretation, and that its significance is related to the needs or wishes in a given situation or context and thus is related to a logic typical of a contemporary neo-liberal consumer society (Nealon 2018).

A similar connection is made between the qualities ascribed to music and the imagined reactions of listeners in the presentation of GSO's program series *Wednesday Medium—Fill up on music in the middle of the week*. In contrast to the restrained emotional reactions that are expected in the earlier program presentations, here the audience is encouraged to live it up and indulge in the feelings that the concert experience generates:

Let your emotions spill over while listening to music such as Grieg's Piano Concerto with the phenomenal Alice Sara Ott, Shostakovich conducted by Santtu-Matias Rouvali, plenty of Mozart and the magical violinist Janine Jansen. In the concert package *Wednesday Medium* you get eight classical concerts together with introductions an hour before the start of each concert.

The image accompanying the text, a photograph of a tissue packet with GSO's logo on it lying next to a crumpled tissue, also articulates the idea of music as generating powerful emotional reactions in the audience.



Figure 2: Picture for the program series *Wednesday Medium*. Illustration: Daniel Grizelj; published on permission of Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra

It is possible to read the text and image, as well as the physical tissue packet that is available in material form in GSO's ticket office, as construing classical music as generating powerful emotional reactions in line with how musical experiences are highlighted and sometimes also idealized by musicologists in the early twenty-first century (Juslin and Sloboda 2001; Sloboda 2012). This research tradition examines, among other things, people's descriptions of strong experiences or overwhelming

emotions in relation to music listening (Gabrielsson 2012). This is furthermore often based on an idea that “questions about music and emotion are at the heart of why we listen to it” and this is “central to how music affects us” (Juslin 2019, 5). When musical experiences are described as special events characterized by powerful emotions, for instance when representing the concert experience as inducing such strong emotions that it is necessary to have a packet of tissues to hand, an idea is articulated of music’s potential effect on people that can be recognized in the ancient concept of catharsis (Karmarç 2019).

Discussion

The investigation on which this article is based has revealed how the legitimization of symphonic music as an emotional resource connects to various aesthetic ideas and conceptions of musical meaning. On the one hand, it has been pointed out that the link between music and emotions is articulated in line with a formalist aesthetic ideal through an emphasis on the independent aesthetic value of music (Dahlhaus 1989a; Goehr 1992). It has also been noted that symphonic concert presentations in which emotions are highlighted are linked to a romantic ideal through an emphasis on music’s metaphysical qualities (Dahlhaus 1989a; Goehr 1992; Bonds 1997). In addition, it has been argued that music is construed as an emotional resource in a representational sense, that is, as a carrier of emotional content in line with the idea of mimesis (Cook and Dibben 2012). The study has further aimed to make visible how audiences are positioned in relation to conceptions of music as an emotional resource. One of the listening ideals that is highly valued in the material is that of introspective listening, which was derived both from a formalist aesthetic ideal and from a romantic conception of music (Dahlhaus 1989a; Goehr 1992; Bonds 1997; Grey 2014). Another listening ideal that is idealized, in diametric opposition to the former, is for the audience to allow themselves to be shaped by the emotions that the music generates, and furthermore to manifest strong emotional experiences related to the music. This ideal is derived from the idea of catharsis (Karmarç 2019), as well as from the Enlightenment values that dominated the bourgeoisie in the early nineteenth century (Dahlhaus 1989b).

Thus, while program notes have historically been described as having the aim of either educating the audience to listen in line with a formalist aesthetic listening ideal (Bashford 2018) or guiding listeners to perceive specific emotional moods in the music (Thorau 2018; Fuchs 2019), concert descriptions in the late 2010s appear instead to convey a set of meanings and alternative meanings that listeners can choose from and adapt according to their preferences or needs. Inviting the listeners themselves to define and negotiate the meaning and significance of music as an emotional resource can be argued to be in line with the postmodernist idea of destabilized norms of cultural value (Fornäs 1995; Ziehe 2004). However, given how historically formed aesthetic ideals are simultaneously emphasized and reproduced

as possible meanings in concert presentations, the idea that earlier norms of aesthetic value are obsolete should also be challenged and problematized.

In a contemporary context, the variety of listener ideals, as well as the different conceptual starting points for legitimizing music as an emotional resource, can be understood as providing the listener with a wide range of interpretive possibilities. Indeed, the emotional roller-coaster ride that is explicitly or implicitly invoked in the concert presentations can be seen both as valorizing a playful exploration of the inner life of one's soul in line with the idea of music's individualized meaning, and as highlighting the possibility to switch between several different aesthetic ideals during one and the same concert. The same holds when striking a balance between viewing music as an aesthetic object capable of generating sublime emotional experiences in the listener and as a generator of powerful emotional experiences. The variety of listening ideals has further been found to be in line with the contemporary idea of an individualistic listener who is willing and able to navigate among alternative meanings and interpretive options and thereby to shape a private music experience (Widestedt 2001; Nealon 2018; Thorau & Ziemer 2018). The variety does in this respect agree with the individualized understanding of musical meaning that is typical of neo-liberal consumer culture (Nealon 2018). However, considering how the emotional qualities of music are consistently constructed in relation to historically shaped aesthetic ideals, with music as an autonomous art object being the most prevalent view, this also implies that the freedom of choice regarding alternative meanings and listening positions is both limited and regulated. Moreover, since the meaning alternatives emphasized in the concert descriptions disciplines a listener embodying historically constructed ideals, the freedom of choice can also be understood as a form of bio-power that regulates the audience's listening preferences in a direction that maintains important value for the symphony orchestras (Foucault 2004; Nealon 2008; 2018).

The conclusion could be drawn by this, is that the ideal variation characterizing the construction of symphonic music as an emotional recourse, as well as the manifold subject positions offered in relation to that, can be understood as governed by the symphony orchestras as a strategy for maintaining the power position as a concert institution. And that individualized meaning alternatives are emphasized in concert descriptions can furthermore be considered as a prerequisite for being able reproducing the discourse of symphonic music as an autonomous aesthetic object, a discourse necessary when striving for preserve legitimacy as a cultural institution today and in the future.

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