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The Philosophy and Psychology of Music Perception

A Discussion of the Communicative Power of Music and its relationship with the Written Word

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The Philosophy and Psychology of Music Perception:

A Discussion of the Communicative Power of Music and its relationship with the Written Word

Music as a language is something that has been explored extensively for many years by music philosophers, psychologists and historians. The aim of this study is to identify and investigate the different ways in which music has been viewed as a language, and also the relationship music as performance has with written text. I will look closely at the conflicting views of Deryck Cook, whose book *The Language of Music* gives us a detailed insight into his belief that music as an articulate form is a language of feeling, and Susanne Langer, who claims in *Feeling and Form* that to be a language its elements must be words with fixed references, making up a vocabulary, and since, she believes, this is not the case with music, it cannot be a language.

This study will also delve into the problems of the methods in the practice of musical analysis. Although on the surface it might seem unusual to include the discussion of musical analysis in a study which will enjoy dealing with the mysterious ability of music to take over the whole of one's consciousness and transport the listener to a whole different world of thought, analysis of music often brings music and the written word i.e. discursive language, within very close proximity of one another. This has been a problem to some musicians, such as Hans Keller, who believed the written word was totally unnecessary in explaining something already as precise as music. He therefore came up with his own

version of the practice of pointing out the underlying construction of a piece of music: 'Functional Analysis', a way of analysing music using music alone. Dahlhaus, when writing on Beethoven's opera *Fidelio* comments that the music, in parts of the opera, serves a function that the libretto cannot – since its language is “incomparably more powerful than that of the text[1] - for putting an important political slant on the drama. Opera is of course another example of words and music coming together – but this time one is not used to 'explain' the other, but to work *with* the other to create an effect. Rather than getting into the task of describing and exploring the aesthetics of opera and song, I will be more concerned with exploring the concept Dahlhaus points out – the idea of comparing the expressive and communicative abilities of music and words as separate entities, and whether one helps the other – i.e. whether music is more expressively effective if it is presented with words or a premeditated meaning attached, than if it is not. Discussion of this must include the use of music in films, or as accompaniments to stories. But the question of music having more meaning, or being more articulate when combined with a programme or preconceived idea is not only confined to the discussion of film and programme music. In these cases the music is obviously there to carry out a particular function in combination with the story or the words, but it may be interesting to look at a more subtle example of where a programme may or may not affect the meaning of the music – in the music, particularly of Beethoven – which could further enlighten us as to music's power as a language.

Music as a language

Whether music can technically be seen to be a 'language', I have found, depends really on

1 Carl Dahlhaus, *Ludwig van Beethoven: Approaches to his Music,* trans. Mary Whittall, Oxford: Clarendon 1991, p.128

what one takes this word to actually mean. This is slightly more complicated than it sounds. For example, a language is usually associated with spoken or written words and since music obviously does not contain words it cannot perhaps be called a language. However, if we take the term 'language' in the broader sense of the word – as communicator of ideas, or meaning, or expression, then literary language – or discursive language, as Langer calls it – is merely one *type* of language. Similarly, if, as Cooke argues, music contains specific mechanisms of expression capable of significant emotional effect, then it too could surely be seen as another type of language – even if it is simply the language of emotions.

Langer is very specific in her book, *Feeling and Form*, with the way she is interpreting the meaning of the words 'language' and 'words'. Langer claims that music is not a language because it does not have words: 'independent associative symbols with a reference fixed by convention', concluding, '...it is not a language, because it has no vocabulary.'[2] But is this really the case? I am inclined to point out here that that is one thing music surely does have. The argument is not dealing with whether musical language is *the same* as literary language, but whether it possesses enough characteristics of what a 'language' needs in order to be defined as one. Western tonal music i.e. music in a key, in the widest sense of the word, whether written by Gesualdo in 1580 or Prokofiev in 1940, holds a number of very specific characteristics which can be understood as “independent, associative symbols” with a fixed reference. That the reference may be purely emotional does not stop it from being a symbol with a specific association. Langer, in her argument that music is “not a language of feeling”[3], fails to branch out into a more general sense of the meaning of the word 'language' – confining her case to a very literal definition of what written words are. She appears to argue her case from one perspective – from the perspective that speech

2   Susanne Langer, *Feeling and Form,* Routledge & Kegan Paul limited, (1953), p.31
3   Ibid

and the written word are the definition of 'language', making it virtually impossible then to argue the equally valid point that music is a kind of language. Deryck Cooke, on the other hand, in the following passage from his book *The Language of Music*, addresses the comparison of linguistic features of music and speech, by looking at the very origin of language on a primitive level:

'The most feasible theory of the origin of language is that it began as inarticulate, purely emotional cries of pleasure and pain; and some of these utterances still survive in the two languages – speech and music – which have grown out of them. A groan of 'Ah!' uttered by a character in an opera on a two-note phrase of definite pitch is hardly different from a groan of 'Ah!' uttered by a character in a play at an indefinite pitch; the effect is equally emotive in both cases'[4]

Cooke describes words as 'sounds which possess associations with objects, ideas and feelings'[5] The important word here is the word 'sounds', which is perhaps more immediately associated with music than with speech. His description of notes – here the equivalent in music to words in literature – is as 'sounds which have clear but not rationally intelligible associations, rather inherent associations, with the basic emotions of mankind.'[6] What is most important here for arguing that music is a type of language, is that both these 'sounds' are derived from the expressive intentions of 'inarticulate cries of the primitive man' – one in literature and one in music. Cooke takes us right back to the beginning of expressive communication, simply to try and investigate the relationship between speech and the origin of words as language, and music-making.

It is true enough that a word arouses an emotional response at the same time as an

4 Deryck Cooke, *The Language of Music,* Oxford University Press, 1959, p.26
5 Ibid
6 Ibid

understanding of its meaning (provided the language has been learnt) whereas a note, having no meaning in itself without being in the context of a piece of music, only arouses an emotional response. Cooke uses the opening of the overture from Wagner's *Rienzi* as an example of a single note having the ability to awaken emotional responses. The long held note in the trumpet holds no intellectual associations, as it is not a word, but it evokes the emotions of awe and wonder, and an expectancy of heroic events to come.[7] Cooke goes on in his book to attempt to decipher an impressive number of examples of precise expressive meaning in music. In the same way sentences in literature evoke different emotions, so do certain intervals, and combinations of pitches and rhythms in music. The major third – in western music evokes pleasure and being 'at one with nature'.[8] The minor sixth, dissonant due to its semitonal relationship to the dominant, when exposed unresolved against the minor triad engenders an acutely painful feeling of dissatisfaction and anguish.[9] I could go on listing the examples for the sake of argument and interest, as Cooke does in his book, but my purpose here is simply to put side by side the quite different thoughts of Langer and of Cooke, and investigate their motives for the discussion of whether or not music can be called a type of language.

Langer is arguing from the point of view, as mentioned earlier, that the term 'language' has a fixed literal meaning – which it surely does – but her understanding of the word is different from that of Cooke's. Langer states that 'only' as an articulate form is [music] found to fit anything; and since there is no meaning assigned to any of its parts, it lacks one of the basic characteristics of language – fixed association, and therewith a single, unequivocal reference.[10] Her understanding of language having a vocabulary of "fixed association" is perfectly valid for the developed language of speech today, but in claiming that this is not the case in music, she is talking from different viewpoints about the two –

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7 Deryck Cooke, *The Language of Music,* Oxford University Press, 1959 p.27
8 Ibid p.51
9 Ibid p.69
10 Susanne Langer *Feeling and Form*, Routledge &Kegan Paul, 1953 p.31

i.e. she has not taken into account, as Cooke has, where language actually began. In her book *Philosophy in a New Key,* she does look back at the origin of music, claiming that in its beginning form it was probably not an art, but 'organized sounds...used for rhythmatization of work and ritual, for nervous excitation, and perhaps for magical purposes. In this period the elementary materials of music became established tonal forms which finally reached a stage of articulation that made them, quite spontaneously, instinct with meaning'.[11] It is true that music cannot explicitly define words – but neither can words explicitly define the meaning of any music. Furthermore, it is impossible to describe music in words, since music is so infinitely more precise and articulate in its expression, reaching notions and in expressing feelings that words could never come close to addressing.
Both a single note and a single word awaken in the hearer, an emotional response.
Although they are totally different concepts where one cannot satisfyingly explain the other, both originated from man's attempt to communicate and both are successful, which makes them both a type of language of man.

Functional Analysis – the ability of music to substitute words in musical analysis

It may seem inappropriate to discuss such an unmusical practice as conceptual analysis in this study of music's expressive and communicative abilities. However, I believe Hans Keller's case for the futility of words in the analysis of a piece of music is hugely relevant. Keller's 'functional analysis' takes a piece of music apart, in terms of its different themes, and then explains how the seemingly contrasting themes, relate to one another by presenting them conspicuously side by side. In other words, functional analysis points out, using music alone, the hidden unity of a work which makes a listener apprehend it

11 Susanne Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key,* Harvard University Press, 1967 p.246

unconsciously as 'an integral and consistent whole'[12] The point of functional analysis is that it brings out the background elements of a piece of music that we might not hear on first listening. The term 'background elements' here means the unity of the contrasting themes in a piece. The reason Keller sees no reason for words here, is that he believes it is simply unnecessary and unhelpful, since everything one needs to understand the structure of a the piece, is there in the music. The term 'functional', according to the Oxford English Dictionary, means 'constructed with regard only to its function', and functional analysis according to Keller 'draws attention to its exclusive preoccupation with the function of music as well as of the analytic method itself.'[13] Keller believes that words in general, but particularly technical terms are the 'thorn' in the flesh of musical analysis.[14] He claims there is hardly a single technical term which can consistently mean one thing, the reason being, that terms are static, while music is dynamic. Keller, in his article "The Home-Coming of Musical Analysis", uses the term 'second subject' as a very effective example of this. In the recapitulation of Mozart's String Quartet in D minor, the second subject melodically falls under the influence of the first subject, and of the tonic key. This causes it to sound as if it has moved away from itself, from its exposition, towards the first subject, causing the main melodic contrast to be between recapitulation and the exposition rather than between the first and second subjects. The result of this, Keller claims, is that 'second subject' is no longer a justifiable term for this theme, and if one attempted a close verbal description of this quartet movement one would have to 'change [one's] very terms in midstream – where the second subject ceases to be the second subject'.[15] This is an interesting point which highlights the question of what the intentions of musical analysis actually are.

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12 Deryck Cooke, "In Defence of Functional Analysis", in *The Musical Times,* vol.100, No.1399. (Sep.,1959) p458

13 Hans Keller, in a corresponding letter, taken from *Music Analysis,* Vol.1, No.2 (1982) p.227

14 Hans Keller, "The Home-Coming of Musical Analysis", in *The Musical Times,* Vol.99, No.1390 (Dec., 1958) p.657

15 Ibid

Musical Analysis exists in order to enhance the listeners understanding of a piece of music. Keller argues that any analysis which fails to investigate the essence of the emotional understanding of the music turns into replacement of musical understanding with 'an intellectual game which may actually dull the listener's musical perceptivity'.[16] He concluded here that ultimately, only music about music can explain music (so far as music needs explanation). In this article he goes on to question what, in music, does need explaining verbally, or by the written word. It cannot be the unity of themes, he argues, which it so often is in conceptual analysis, since we as listeners can surely hear that for ourselves which is clearly the intention of the composer. Instead, Keller endeavours to point out, in his functional analysis, the unity of contrasts, and how contrasting themes, and whole movements, hang together. The unity of contrasts make up what he calls the background of the music, since if it were in the foreground there would not be much of a contrast left, leaving little unity, and more monotony in the music. He claims that backgrounds are not usually recognised, but instead 'instinctively experienced where there is musical understanding: if we don't feel that theme B 'belongs' to theme A, we cannot really be said to understand the piece in which the two form fundamental contrasts'.[17] Benjamin Britten, on hearing Keller's functional analysis of his second String Quartet decided it was the only type of musical analysis he was interested in as it confined itself to the composer's own pre-compositional thought, partly conscious and partly unconscious. He claimed that from listening to the functional analysis of his quartet , he had learnt a lot about himself as a composer.[18] Often conceptual or verbal analysis using technical terms and involving the intellectual inspection of intervallic relationships makes assumptions as to what the intentions of the composer were. Laurence Dreyfus, in his book *Bach and the*

16 Hans Keller, “The Home-Coming of Musical Analysis”, in *The Musical Times,* Vol.99, No.1390 (Dec., 1958) p.657
17 Ibid
18 Hans Keller, from the introduction in “functional Analysis of Mozart's G minor Quintet”, in *Music Analysis,* vol.4, No.1/2, Special Issue: King's College London Music Analysis Conference 1984. (Mar-Jul., 1985) p.73

Patterns and Invention, after reading Schenker's analysis of Bach's C minor Fugue, questions whether it can 'be reconciled with a sense of how one imagines that Bach composed and thought about the piece'.[19] Indeed, Schenker's belief in the will of the tones and the laws of life almost takes the responsibility of the outcome of the piece completely away from Bach himself. It would be difficult to find a better authority for the success of functional analysis in bringing out pre-compositional thoughts than the composer himself.

Pre-compositional thought is something which Dreyfus claims ought to be the business of the analyst to want to discover. Although this is, in the case of analysis, usually to do with the structural and thematic intentions of the composer, it is of course also a favourite topic of discussion in almost every other field of musical study, from philosophy to performance. What the composer intended the music to 'be about' is often discussed. When discussing music's relationship with written language and literal meaning it is imperative to look t the effects programme has on a piece of music, and also discuss the different attitudes towards it.

The Power of Programme

When discussing the powers of expression in music and words/programme, and whether one help the other in terms of communication, one example for me springs to mind. I am always surprised when on Christmas Day in the UK Raymond Briggs' *The Snowman*, shown every year, without fail, reduces me to tears. It is always at the same moment in the film. Very near the end, the violins are alone holding a suspended high note, a flattened 6th above the tonic, which then drops down a semitone to the dominant whereupon the piano

19 Laurence Dreyfus, *Bach and the Pattern of Invention,* Harvard University Press, (1996) p.171

accompaniment enters with the main theme of Blake's *We're Walking in the Air*. Simultaneous to this extraordinarily touching moment we see the young boy protagonist of the story, standing utterly devastated beside the remains of his melted snowman. At the point in the music where the theme returns and the dissonant note is resolved to the dominant, the boy drops to his knees, crestfallen. Why is this so moving? I am very sure that if I were simply reading the story or looking at the pictures without the music playing, I would not feel significantly emotionally moved at this point. It is after all simply a children's story concerning something as unbelievable as a snowman coming to life and befriending its creator – yet I do feel moved when it is accompanied by the music. On hearing the music alone – without the drawings, I still feel emotionally moved at this point to an extent. The question I am hoping to deal with is whether this emotional reaction is caused by the music or whether it is wholly dependant on the knowledge of the underlying programme, or story. Since I am moved when listening to the music alone, but not by looking at the story or pictures alone, I will try and distinguish what is in the music that causes it to have this effect, by describing this passage.

In the bars prior to the moment I mentioned above, the strings play moderately quick repeated notes as an accompaniment to a cheerful woodwind melody in the major mode. This comes to an abrupt halt with the repetitive string accompaniment stopping mid-phrase and the cheerful mood being interrupted by a quiet, tremolo flattened 6th note played in a high register by the violins. The repetitive motif attempts to return in the other strings, but this time more quietly, in pizzicato as if affected by the flattened 6th before, but it is only interrupted again by the same high note in the violins, this time not tremolo, but with full tone. The note is repeated twice more, emphasised by a turn – all the other instruments in the orchestra are tacit – and then a final *tenuto* on the flattened 6th before it falls quietly to the dominant as if in a moment of hopeless realisation. At this point the statement of the opening introduction, heard in the piano, begins again.

One often experiences that the shivers down one's spine when listening to a piece of music, occur at moments when the music fulfils one's expectations – For example when a long-awaited resolution occurs. The tension created in Blake's music by the flattened 6th in combination with the sparse texture and high register perhaps makes the resolution that follows all the more harrowing. As Cooke pointed out in his book – the interval of a minor 6th, which is essentially what Blake is using here, is associated with the emotion of anguish when it falls to the 5th degree.[20] Blake certainly exploits this interval here, presumably to express as much anguish as possible. An important detail to note here, is the fact that Blake was commissioned this music to write for a specific reason: to enhance a pre-existing story, so the music was not written out of any emotional impulse he might have felt, but as a project with a practical purpose. Rather than diminishing its validity as a model of expressive writing, I think it does quite the opposite, presenting it as an excellent example of music being used as an expressive language – where its articulate forms and techniques of communicating specific feelings are being applied effectively.

Although there are many examples of musicians in history writing music to order and to please their benefactors, in the modern world of commercial score-writing, composers are often expected to write specifically in order to manipulate the emotions of their audience. And this bring me to the crux of the matter – Blake, despite being a master craftsman, is obviously not a musical genius like Beethoven, for example – his music does not momentarily change the listener's perspective, or give any inner truth about the world, or take us into any new emotional territory that we have never experienced before – Yet the mechanisms of their musical language are the same. They both have an emotional effect on the listener. The difference is, that Blake has simply *recognised* these mechanisms i.e. he

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20 Deryck Cooke, *The Language of Music,* Oxford University Press, 1959 p.69

has learnt the language of music, and has applied it with great accuracy and precision in such a way that can be understood by the masses and connoisseurs alike.

This connection between the trivial and purely functional programme music by Blake and the deeply subversive writing of late Beethoven may seem on the surface quite ridiculous. However, as we have seen, the important common element is the final result – a moving experience for the listener. This not only illustrates the effectiveness of musical language for getting a result i.e. convincingly awakening an emotional response in the listener, but also perhaps suggests that there is in fact less difference than one might presume between the 'trivial' and the 'inspirational' in music. By trivial here I am less referring to Blake's composition than to the context in which it was written. Perhaps even by being able to compare these two proves the power and complexity of musical language and that it works on many different levels. These different levels of musical communication can also be seen within one piece of music; not just between quite different works (i.e. Blake and any music by Beethoven). We can see this in the late works by Beethoven – particularly in the last Quartets. It can be argued that Beethoven was a composer who was the first of his age to be conscious of his music's direct expressive and communicative capabilities – or rather Beethoven was one of the very first composers to fully understand the powers of communication music has, and then to use those powers to express and address extremely detailed issues that were close to his heart. A specific example of Beethoven juxtaposing the seemingly banal with the profound can be seen in the final movement of his last String Quartet opus 135. Beethoven writes “Muss es Sein? Es Muss sein!” above two motifs before the start of the last movement. It is not known exactly why Beethoven wrote this question “Must it be? It must be!” or what he is referring to. There have been suggestions claiming it was in response to an amateur musician's reluctance to pay when borrowing a set of Beethoven's Quartet parts, or that it was the dilemma Beethoven found himself in

when faced with the prospect of giving his gruff house-keeper a pay rise.[21] The music which follows directly is a slow introduction, marked *Grave.* The "Muss es Sein" motif is heard in a sinister low register in the cello and viola parts, responded to by the violins, whose grating high diminished chords three bars later, already sound so dramatic that, along with the title, it is not easy to distinguish here between jest and a profound comment. The second theme of this movement makes it even more difficult. Its first four bars are characteristic enough of a Beethovenian tune, but its answering four bar phrase is startlingly banal, being made up almost only of repeated quarter note Es and F sharps, which furthermore decrease in dynamic:

This juxtaposition of the banal and the sincere can be recognised with relation to other movements of the quartet also. As Basil Lam points out, the first four bars of this second theme in the finale can be likened in melodic structure to the opening theme of the previous *lento* movement. This movement's simple theme was described by Beethoven as a 'song of repose or peace'[22] which could not be more different, with its legato line and slow tempo, from the staccato disjointed banality of the second theme of the finale. The fact that their

21 Rey M Longyear, "Beethoven and Romantic Irony" In *Musical Quarterly* Vol.56 no.4 (Oct. 1970)

22 Basil Lam, *Beethoven String Quartets 2,* BBC (1957) p.69

melodic lines are similar could be seen as another example of the banal being combined with the sublime.

This idea brings me to the question I set about asking when discussing Blake's *The Snowman.* Does a programme, or pre-conceived idea, whether it is in words, pictures, or imagination, help the music to be more expressive or give it more meaning? If music is simply an 'unconsummated symbol'[23] as Langer proposes, then surely rather than mean anything it merely represents an emotion, so a programme would be an addition to this which may distract us from what the music itself is attempting to portray. In her book, *Philosophy in a New Key*, Langer supports this view that music with a programme attached 'produces less perfect musical expression than purely thematic thinking, for it is not single-minded; not everything relevant is contained in the music; and there is nothing *in the work* to force the composer's helpful fancies on the listener.'[24] I wonder if Langer is including in her term 'helpful fancies' the type of programme that stems from a composer's direct experiences? She does not appear, in this chapter of her book, to discuss this type of programme: the *Heiliger Dankgesang* third movement from Beethoven's String Quartet Opus 132 for example. In my opinion, this is one of the greatest most expressive pieces of music ever written. Beethoven has given this the title: 'Song of thanksgiving offered to the Divinity by a convalescent, in the Lydian mode'. This type of programme is not a story or poem set from words to music literally, but is a programme none the less. Beethoven finished composing his opus 132 String Quartet in May 1825. His work had been interrupted by a serious bout of influenza, during which his doctor had warned him severely to look after himself.[25] Beethoven came close to death during his illness, and as a result of his recovery wrote the *Heiliger Dankgesang* – the slow movement of the Quartet.

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23 Susanne Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key,* Harvard University Press (1967) p.241
24 Ibid p.242
25 Martin Cooper, *Beethoven: The Last Decade 1817-1827* Oxford University Press (1970) p.358-359

Beethoven's giving the movement this title automatically gives it a definite programme which we cannot ignore when playing or listening to the music. The deeply personal nature of the music in this movement is detectable in its Lydian mode hymn-like chorales in a very slow tempo giving us a feeling of serenity and calm. For me, I think the point that Beethoven proves through his writing in these Quartets is that it does not matter whether we know his programme or not. By writing about illness and recovery at the top of the *Heiliger Dankgesang* he is asking us to contemplate these issues; Likewise by writing "Muss es Sein? Es Muss Sein!" at the top of the Finale of opus 135 Beethoven is inviting us to ask – 'what does this mean?' And he gives us all the answers we could possibly want, through the music. We can take the banal element of the music at face-value, and find the second theme I mentioned quaint and amusing – especially at its return pizzicato in the coda. This reading would be perfectly adequate, but then we might hear the music differently on a second hearing, and question the jest on the surface, causing us to look again and wonder once more what the "Muss es Sein?" can mean – thus find the banality of the second theme spooky and ironic. This would be an adequate reading of the music too.

So does this bring me any closer to the answer of whether 'programme' or a discursive given meaning helps the music to be more expressive or 'say more' to the listener? This last example seems to prove that it does not always make a difference. Or that it, in fact, helps a listener to decide what the music means for themselves, which perhaps demands even more of musical language. Langer states that 'A programme is a crutch' and if a listener of a performer chooses a programme of some sort for themselves when listening to, or performing music, then they are 'not unmusical, but merely not musical enough to think in purely musical terms'.[26] I find this particular view problematic, and do not fully comprehend what she can mean. Firstly, in my experience having a programme to a piece

26 Susanne Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key,* Harvard University Press (1967) p.242

of music I am performing often gives more meaning to work with and so more expression to communicate through the music (even if I have myself invented a programme). We have seen how powerful a communicator of expressions music can be, so whatever we choose it to be about, the meaning will always end up being expressed musically. No meaning of any programme can be expressed explicitly or literally as music does not have the means to do that. It cannot possibly *mean* its programme, so in that sense Langer is right. However, it is not acceptable to hail somebody as not being 'musical enough' and having a lesser understanding of a piece simply by giving it a programme. Because you cannot differentiate between different levels of understanding between people – (an un-knowledgeable person may in fact have a deep life-changing experience after hearing a Beethoven quartet, where a musician who has performed them all, all their life may have a great intellectual grasp but remain unmoved) you cannot then say that someone using a programme has less musical understanding than someone who does not. By definition then, no understanding can be any deeper than another one: because we simply cannot know. Langer is right that it cannot possibly mean its programme – music cannot communicate the programme literally, but that is not to say that programmes are not useful in creating a moment. To have an idea of what you want to communicate is, in my view, a pre-requisite for playing music meaningfully.

Schoenberg's great *Verklaerte Nacht* ('Transfigured Night') string sextet is an excellent example of a great and hugely expressive piece of music having 'an elaborate programme...[which it] follows as [it] might a libretto'.[27] Richard Dehmel's poem depicted lovers walking through a forest at night, the woman walks with increasing gravity as she knows she must tell her lover that she is carrying another's child. Half way through the poem she eventually tells him and he reassures her he loves her regardless as long as she

27 Susanne Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key,* Harvard University Press (1967) p.241

loves him, and that the child will be theirs. It is possible to pick out at various points in the piece the different expressions that the poem presents. When performing the music however, the music inevitably speaks for itself. The only point which is arguably recognisable as being related to an exact place in the poem is the D major chord which arrives out of extreme tonal uncertainty letting the first cello 'speak' its words of comfort. The following bars are a good example of where the literal details of the programme are neither here nor there for a successful interpretation of the piece. The first violin responds to the cello tune with a beautiful repetitive rising sequence.

In practice, it is possible to present this passage with the violinist playing very much 'with' the cellist, the motifs of each line expressed as being in agreement with each other. This may work and be completely convincing. The performers may then consult the poem and see that in fact the girl's reaction to her lover's acceptance of her burden is one of breathless disbelief. They may then choose to play this passage differently. Each understanding of the passage is as musically valid as the other. Both may be equally convincing and show equal musical understanding. The fact that Schoenberg's music speaks on many more levels than the programme itself shows that it has certainly not been made less expressive by the fact it has a specific programme – it merely proves that musical language ends up being able to speak for itself.

I have found that studying the different elements of musical communication and its capabilities has opened my eyes and ears to things which I might not have otherwise noticed. Keller's functional analysis of music, for example, presents a coherent means of communicating the structural and thematic make up of a piece if music without using any words at all. Comparing the views and findings of Cooke and Langer on the more technical matter whether music may or may not be referred to as a type of language has drawn me to

the conclusion that we must investigate exactly what music is capable of expressing before we can start to reach an answer. In my view, music is on a completely different communicative level to literature or speech – Both, however, are articulate and specific in their communication of emotions and feelings at least, and so both may be called languages of their own kind.

This then brings us to the investigation of music's ability to 'speak'. Here, the comparison of Blake's *The Snowman* and Beethoven's late string quartets seems ridiculous as their functions and concerns are worlds apart – yet we cannot deny that the elements within them both which affect us emotionally as listeners, is the music. This highlights music's ability to communicate on a trivial and sublime level – which Beethoven also shows us in the complexity of his multi-layered rhetoric. In term of programme, I can conclude that through my own musical experiences and from studying great programmatic music such as Schoenberg's *Verklaerte Nacht* that the addition of a programme to music in no way undermines its capabilities of expression. Furthermore, the adding of a programme to any given work can only enhance a musical understanding if it enriches the performers experience. I have found Langer particularly useful for introducing me to a purely philosophical world of music, where its practice is obviously not often experienced.

As Keller states in his essay *Towards a Musical Theory*:

'There was one philosopher who was sufficiently musical to philosophise about music, whereupon he elected to philosophise about it in it. His name was Beethoven, and there are still people who resent that he had it both ways.'[28]

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28 Hans Keller, "Towards a Musical Theory", in *Essays on Music*, Cambridge University Press, (1994) p.121

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