

ART & ENTERTAINMENT

M. Zur

Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance, Jerusalem, Israel

This topic grew out of my deep conviction that today boundaries between art & entertainment are blurred and as a result of that we composers are hard hit by indiscriminate budget allocation where money designated for the arts finds itself channeled to entertainment, and by concert & orchestra managers who wish to gain audience by presenting programs which include light music.

I believe that each one of us is probably aware of the danger of mixing these categories. The more complex our music seems, the more we see some of our composer-friends defecting to the entertainment fields. It hurts.

Before addressing my main points I want to stress that I am not attempting a value judgment either on art or on entertainment. In both categories there is an array of quality work and failure, good & bad pieces.

This paper discusses entertainment as a category in order to separate it from serious artistic music. I am not relating negatively to a measure of entertaining quality in a serious piece, which is in my opinion only a plus. I will attempt to present guidelines and establish criteria on which to base the two different categories.

I believe that even the layman will acknowledge that art is more demanding of the listener and that entertainment is usually simpler to comprehend. I want to ask why it is so and use the answers to guide the heads of our cultural institutions to clearer distinctions, so that if they wish to contribute to one category or another, criteria will guide them. This is obviously a discussion of aesthetics, but its fruits are far from being academic, at least for us.

So, I rest my arguments on basically two points:

a) Artistic music is more contrapuntal than light music and b) art relies on self reference whereas light music does not.

Artistic music is more contrapuntal than light music.

By more contrapuntal I mean not only counterpoint between pitches, but among all parameters of the piece: harmony-melody, rhythm - articulation, register - texture etc. and all the possible combinations of such a rich palette of vocabulary including counterpoint between structural levels (Schenkerianly speaking).

This principle stands in a sharp contrast to the principles that guide most pieces of entertainment. Those rely mainly on melody and its harmonization (usually, cliché type progressions and counterpoint).

The second principle is "self reference".

This means that the code of the musical language of an artistic piece lies within itself and is not dependent on external elements, such as lyrics and lavish production. Even when a serious piece uses external elements (such as in opera or *lied*, or even a sound track to a movie) it is first and foremost based on abstract self-references within the musical fabric: themes, motives, voice-leading and contrapuntal interplay among all parameters.

0080

Let me state that I believe that artistic music is more spiritual than entertainment because of the questions it asks and the high level of ambiguity established through the “total counterpoint” of all parameters that it exhibits, and because it is based on self reference.

To sum up, I would like to suggest a simple measure of judgment that will aid in the selection of the two different categories.

The term I use is ABOUTNESS.

When we hear a serious piece we ask ourselves ”What is it about ?”, trying to read the map of the piece as it unfolds while relating to its abstract musical components and their contrapuntal interchange.

Light music does not pose that question at all. So, if there is a question of “aboutness”, the piece belongs on the concert stage. If not... it belongs on the entertainment stage. Well, that last statement is indeed a personal one. I admit that personally it strongly disturbs me to mix the two categories on the same program. I have heard enough of those concerts to know that for me they just don't belong together. I will not exclude the possibility that for others such a mixture (Brahms, Berg, Rock, Jazz, folk, tunes from movies, even rap) may be tolerated. I personally think that if we don't explain the criteria and help to form a guidelines for separating clear categories, our future audience indeed will expect such a mix in their concerts with indifference to the different requirements for listening. That indifference is what bothers me. The judgmental ear (the little that there is) will disappear.

That is the reason that I requested that this subject be raised in this forum, in order that we may exchange ideas & opinions to enable us to speak up when it hurts.