

MUS 735

Discussion - Hitchcock, Chapter 13

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Is there a line to be drawn between what constitutes “noise” as opposed to “music”? Is this a case of “One man’s trash is another man’s treasure”? Post at least three examples to illustrate your position.

I know that music, and all art really, is tremendously subjective, personal, and individual. A piece of music that I find charming and endearing might come across as bland or boring to someone else, and that is one of the great qualities of music. A piece of music can say ten different things to ten different people.

Gann references Glenn Branca’s 10th Symphony, describing it as atonal, containing a rock momentum, and featuring internal canonic devices. I listened to Branca’s 10th Symphony, the last movement (The Horror) in particular. This is another point where I will need to rely on the insight of everyone else in the class, because I can’t make any sense of this. It is 14 minutes of feedback and while the “chord qualities” change, it doesn’t change the feel of the piece for me. The drummer largely plays on the toms, occasionally exploring the crash, ride, and china cymbals. To me, this is absolutely just noise, but I would really enjoy hearing the opinions of those who can decipher it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ELqfuNTJQI4>

I had started to resign myself to the idea that the music of this chapter and genre was all going to be difficult to listen to, particularly when I read that Rhys Chatham wasn’t going to be outdone by Branca’s symphonies, and wrote a number of works for 100 electric guitars, the first of which was entitled *An Angel Moves Too Fast To See*. I decided to make this my next listening example, as that was something I’ve never heard of before. I was pleasantly surprised by what I discovered! In this 5-movement work, Chatham does write for 100 electric guitars, electric bass, and drum set. Chatham wrote the guitar parts as minimalist-like, repetitive riffs that could be played at any tempo, over and over again, and this is apparent in the movements. You can hear what almost sounds like a musical drone throughout, particularly in movements 1 and 4. On top of this, it sounds like Chatham composed a more melodic guitar part. The piece has a very minimalistic feel to it, and I actually found myself enjoying movements 3 and 5.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dUKF_K3vNeE

After reading the information about Diamanda Galas, I was intrigued. Gann mentions that Galas is a very talented vocalist, having a usable vocal range of three and a half octaves, and that she could have been a gifted operatic singer. Upon reading this, and having just heard the Chatham piece, I was expecting some sort of tonal, minimalist vocal work.

Galas started out singing in Europe, but quickly started composing and performing her own works, which all tended toward a very dark musical theater style. When the AIDS crisis started in the USA, killing her brother, she focused the remainder of her works to that topic, becoming even more pointed and even darker in her writing and performing. I decided to listen to one of her later works, *Schrei X*. To be honest, I couldn't listen to most of it, as it was just too disturbing. When performing this live, Galas will do so in complete darkness, and much of the performance consists of screaming, cackling, growling, chanting, reading text (I believe from the bible), and sometimes singing.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBZrO_9_CQ4&list=OLAK5uy_mjTZR7cA4qVd52Ow_aW-IBx2wI901ZS84&index=2

After having read this chapter and listening to the composers mentioned, my opinion changed slightly. I approached the chapter thinking that all of the examples would be atonal or just "noise." For me, tonality is what separates music from noise. Of the three composers I mentioned above, I consider Chatham's work to be music, whereas the other two are not. Again, I would welcome a discussion on this, as I imagine there will be some who disagree.

In regard to the paragraph on neo-Romantic composers on p. 389: Is rewarding neo-Romantic composers a bad thing? What does the appreciation of this type of music say about the listener? Post two examples of music you believe successfully incorporate neo-Romantic style with other 20th century techniques and discuss how it is accomplished.

While there may be some variance in the answer to the first question here, I imagine most of us will answer in the affirmative. With some exception, I found much of the music that preceded the neo-Romantic composers to be difficult to listen to. Most of it made me uncomfortable, tense, and I found myself listening with the hope that some sort of musical resolution would occur. While it is difficult to speak to how the average listener felt in the 90's, given that we have a different perspective, I have to imagine the American public longed for that same resolution and tonality.

I began by listening to George Tsontakis' *String Quartet No. 4, Beneath Thy Tenderness of Heart: Part One, Introduction - Chorale and Meditations*. The opening c minor chord made my shoulders drop, and I could feel a sense of familiarity and comfort, even though I had never

heard the piece. I suspect this is how the average listener felt upon hearing this piece. As I listened further, I noticed Tsontakis' use of minimalism in small doses throughout, as well as dissonance to the point of sounding atonal.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wz4CPcm9LX8>

My feeling that the general public was looking for something more tonal was supported further by listening to Michael Daugherty's *Metropolis Symphony*. This entire work is fantastic! Daugherty pays homage to Superman, with whom he has had a lifetime obsession, over five movements. Movement One, *Lex*, is tense, dark, and mysterious. Movement Two, *Krypton*, is majestic and grand, but still very dark. Movement Three, *WXYZPTLK*, is much more playful than the first movements, but still interspersed with moments of tension and mystery. Movement Four, *Oh Lois!*, surprised me most. I was expecting some sort of love theme, particularly after the tension in the first three movements. The final movement, *Red Cape Tango*, was probably my favorite. It is the most consonant music in the entire work, and is a really fun dance piece. I can't help feeling like the average consumer in the 1990's, having felt a strong and immediate accessibility with both of these pieces.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X7o2f1g5-X0>