

Psychoanalysis and music

The relationship between **psychoanalysis and music** is as old as the history of psychoanalysis itself. Psychoanalysts have examined musical phenomena, and the relationship has been reciprocal, as also musicologists have applied psychoanalysis to their work. Music therapy, too, has utilized psychoanalytic theories.

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History

Sigmund Freud discussed shortly some musical phenomena in his book *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), but he was more interested in other arts, especially literature and the visual arts.

Freud's attitude toward music was ambivalent. He described himself as being "ganz unmusikalisch" (totally unmusical).^[1] Despite his much-protested resistance, he could enjoy certain operas such as *Don Giovanni* and *The Marriage of Figaro* and he used musical metaphors in the context of theory and therapy.

Freud seemed to feel uneasy without a guide from the more rational part. To be emotionally moved by something without knowing what was moving him or why, was an intrinsically anxious experience.^[2] The operas he listened were "conversational" and "narrative" forms of music, which is theorized, provided him with some kind of "cognitive control" over the emotional impact of the musical sounds. Cheshire argued that maybe he was jealous and feared the potential therapeutic power of music as a rival to psychoanalysis.^[3]

It was up to other early psychoanalysts than Freud to initiate a serious psychoanalytic study of musical phenomena. First of them was the musicologist and critic Max Graf (1873–1958) who presented his views in the "Wednesday meetings" in 1905–1912. Among other pioneers was Desiderius (Dezső) Mosonyi (1888–1945) who published his writings in Hungarian and in German.

The early views of music were reductive and romantic: the composer expresses him- or herself directly in a musical composition;^[4] the reception of music is regressive.^[5]



The musicologist Max Graf, a pioneer of psychoanalytic study of music.

After 1950, psychoanalytical musicology started to flourish. Within a few years several studies were published by the French André Michel (1951), Ernst Kris (1952), Anton Ehrenzweig (1953), Theodor Reik (1953), and others.

Theodor Reik (1888–1969) was one of Freud's earliest students. Reik took up the theme of the "haunting melody" in Freud's Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis (1915–1917) to demonstrate, by contrast to Freud, that musical structure can represent feelings.^[6] In Reik's view, melody can convey emotion far better than words.

Reik showed that music is the voice of the "unknown itself" that may become compulsive in its attempt to convey a secret message.^[7] Reik speculated that the reason unconscious material sometimes emerges as a melody rather than as mere thoughts may be that melody better indicates moods and unknown feelings.^[8] He did demonstrate that songs on the mind could be effectively interacted with in a psychotherapeutic fashion

in a way that helped resolve repressed conflict.^[9]

The flow of studies and articles from the latter part of the twentieth century was summarised in the two-volume essay collection *Psychoanalytic Explorations in Music* (1990–1993).

Modes of approach

From a methodological point of view, there are several approaches visible in the psychoanalytical study of music and psychoanalytically inspired musicology:^[10]

1. Introspective studies examine one's musically induced experiences and their relations to the unconscious processes.
2. Biographical studies examine musicians' and composers' (auto)biographies and descriptions of musical experiences.
3. Psychoanalyses of musical patients are discussed.
4. Musical experiences are explained with theories of early personal development.
5. The elements of opera (including the hall, staging, plot, the human voice) have been examined.
6. Study of film music.
7. Analyses of musical compositions, without reference to the personality of the composer.
8. In music therapy, how to lift repressions and work them through.
9. In cultural studies, the beliefs, conceptions, and habits related to music can be analyzed to reveal unconscious meanings and thought patterns.

Future: psychoanalysis, neuroscience and music

Recent developments in cognitive neuroscience of music have led to a new way of looking at music and emotion. Neurologist Oliver Sacks states that music occupies more areas of the brain than language does, and that humans are primarily a musical species.^[11]

Elaborating on this idea, psychoanalyst Gilbert Rose argues that our responsiveness to music begins with the nonverbal emotional rapport of the earliest infant–parent interplay.^[12] Reaching back even further, since the fetus has an active auditory system 3–4 months before birth, the rhythm of the mother's womb and the sound of her heartbeat could be the start of our responsiveness to music.^[13] Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio states that when an organism interacts with an object, nonverbal neural images map the organism, the object and the interaction between them.^[14] As psychoanalysis gives verbal insight of non-verbal emotional involvement, and recent neurosciences found that music is able to contact this non-verbal emotions, music is stated to help the unison of thinking and feeling.^[15]

The influence of psychoanalysis on music

Although psychoanalysis has had some influence on literature and cinema since the early 20th century, it is more difficult to discern whether musical compositions have been actually inspired or influenced by psychoanalysis.

One candidate has been put up by Erik W. Tawaststjerna: in his biography of Jean Sibelius, he repeatedly emphasizes the psychological and even psychoanalytical dimensions of Sibelius's Fourth Symphony (1911). According to Tawaststjerna, the Symphony reflects the psychoanalytical and introspective era when Freud and Henri Bergson stressed the meaning of the unconscious.^[16] Even Sibelius himself called his composition "a psychological symphony".^[17] His brother, the psychiatrist Christian Sibelius (1869–1922), was one of the first scholars to discuss psychoanalysis in Finland. According to Tawaststjerna, the Fourth Symphony is "one of the most remarkable documents of the psychoanalytical era."^[18]

See also

- Music psychology

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This page was last edited on 7 August 2019, at 06:41 (UTC).

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