

New York Philharmonic Archives



YOUNG PEOPLE'S CONCERT No. 2
1962-63

"WHAT IS A MELODY?"

Tape Date: November 3rd 1962

Air Date: December 21st 1962

PART I

1. "...and if he then adds a few more (plays notes with voice over) we've got MENDELSSOHN'S "Wedding March"

L.B. Finishes phrase one on piano;
Orchestra does phrase two (Manuscript)

2. "...there are themes that are much more tuneful than those.
Only think of TSCHAIKOVSKY'S Sixth Symphony :

Play from manuscript.

3. "...first, there is a short idea, or phrase:"

Play phrase one of Tschaikovsky

"...phrase is repeated, but with some small variation:"

Play phrase two of Tschaikovsky

"...tune takes off in a flight of inspiration:"

Play phrase three of Tschaikovsky.

4. "There are so many examples...take our good old stand-by, BEETHOVEN'S Fifth.
On your mark:

Play from manuscript. (Voice over: "Get set; Go")

Or, do you know that haunting melody in the CESAR FRANCK Symphony? Same thing. First, a phrase:

Play from manuscript (with voice over) - observe pauses

Or MOZART's Haffner Symphony. Ready:

Play from manuscript (voice over) - observe pauses

5. "...and I'm sure you'll be surprised to find that you do understand it very well" :

WAGNER: Tristan Prelude - Play to middle of 5th bar after No. 3

MORE



PART I continued

6. "...climbing higher and higher, in a frenzy:"

TRISTAN: 4 bars before No. 7 to dbt. of Letter C, fermata - all strings minus celli

"...screaming out that first 4 note motive, over and over:"

1 bar before No. 7 to dbt. of 3rd bar. Hns 1 and 3, Celli only

"...singing the second 4-note motive again and again:"

No. 7 - 2 bars - Trpts and trbs. only

"...and I'll bet you hear it all, every note:"

fermata
4 bars before No. 7 to dbt. of C,/(Ob., E.H., Cl. fermata on 2nd 8th)

ALL OF THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLES ARE FROM: MOZART - SYMPHONY NO. 40, Mvt. I

7. "...while one part of the Orchestra is playing with that motive":

Bars 73-76, clarinet and bassoon

"the strings are playing the same motive, only stretched out in long notes":

Bars 72 - 76, vln. 1, vla., vlc., cb.

"so that together, it makes this wonderful sound":

Bars 72 - 87 - TUTTI

8. "...The same is true of this seemingly unmelodic section":

Bar 115, with upbs., to bar 118, 2nd beat

"but the theme is right there, only down in the bass instruments":

Same: bsn., low strings only

"while on top there is exciting counterpoint going on, as in a Bach fugue":

Same: violins only

"...how different that same passage will sound to you":

Same: Tutti

MORE

PART I continued

FOLLOWING EXAMPLES ARE FROM: MOZART, SYMPHONY no. 40, Mvt. I

9. "...the little motive is being developed on top, over stationary notes on the bottom":

Letter D to bar 166, dbt. - omit cls. and strgs. (at end)

"But in the middle, two clarinets are having their say about that motive" :

Same: clarinets only

"Listen to the whole sandwich now, top, bottom and clarinet filling:"

Same: tutti (omit strgs. at end)

10. "It's all melody - every moment":

MOZART: Symphony No. 40, Mvt. I - full performance

PART II

11. "...after all you have learned about melody today."

HINDEMITH: Concert Music for Strings and Brass, from "Sehrbreit" to end.

12. "...magnificent outpouring of melody that it really is!"

BRAHMS: Symphony No. 4, Final Mvt, - full performance



JB

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC YOUNG PEOPLE'S CONCERTS #2

6TH SEASON

1962-1963

WITH

LEONARD BERNSTEIN

"WHAT IS A MELODY?"

Tape Date: Saturday, November 3, 1962
12:00 Noon to 1:00 p.m.

Air Date: Friday, December 21, 1962
7:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Origination: VTR Remote from Philharmonic Hall
Lincoln Center, New York City

PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY: Roger Englander

WRITTEN BY: Leonard Bernstein

ASSISTANT TO THE PRODUCER: Mary Rodgers

PRODUCTION ASSISTANT: Elizabeth (Candy) Finkler

THE REPRODUCTION OF ANY PORTION OF THIS SCRIPT

IS PROHIBITED



1

OPENING

FILM (WITH SOUND EFFECTS ON TRACK)

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

(ON CUE)

From Philharmonic Hall in Lincoln Center,
home of the world's greatest musical
events, the Shell Oil Company brings you
the New York Philharmonic YOUNG PEOPLE'S
CONCERTS under the musical direction of
Leonard Bernstein.

CUT TO LIVE (ORCHESTRA TUNING)

(BERNSTEIN ENTERS) (ON CUE)

And here is Mr. Bernstein.

(APPLAUSE)



BERNSTEIN

My dear young friends: On our last program we devoted so much time to introducing our new Philharmonic Hall to you, and to introducing you to the new science of acoustics, that we didn't get to talk very much about music. So this time we're going to make up for it, and concern ourselves with the real meat and potatoes of music -- the main course: melody. Most people, when they think of music: think of melody right away, to some people it's almost the same thing -- melody: music. That's the whole meal. And they're right, in a way, even though there are also such things in music as rhythm and harmony and counterpoint and orchestration; but melody is the main course, because what is music anyway but sounds that change and move along in time? And that's practically a definition of melody, too: different notes that move along in time, one after the other.

(TO PIANO)

(MORE)



3

BERNSTEIN (CONT'D)

Well, if that's true, then it's almost impossible to write music that doesn't have melody in it. I mean, if a melody is simply one note coming after another, how can a composer avoid writing melodies all the time? He writes one note,

(PLAY C)

then he writes another,

(PLAY B)

and he's already got a tiny two-note melody.

(PLAY 2 NOTES)

That's a melody -- sort of. If he adds a third note

(PLAY F#)

it begins to sound a little more melodic, and if he then adds a few more

(PLAY) (V.O.)

well, we've got Mendelssohn's Wedding March.

(CONTINUE TO PLAY WITH HARMONY)

(ORK JOINS IN)

(MORE)



BERNSTEIN (CONT'D)

You see? Simple. Where there's music, there has to be melody. You can't have one without the other.

Then why do so many people complain about music that has no melody? Some people say they don't like Bach fugues, because they don't find melody in them. And others say the same thing about Wagner operas, and others about modern music, and others about jazz. What do you suppose they mean when they say "no melody"? What are they talking about? Isn't any string of notes a melody? Well, I think the answer is in the fact that melody can be a lot of different things: it can be a tune, or a theme, or a motive, or a long melodic line, or a bass line, or an inner voice -- all those things: and the minute we understand the differences among all those kinds of melody, then I think we'll be able to understand the whole problem.

(MORE)



BERNSTEIN (CONT'D)

You see, people usually think of a melody as a tune, something you go out whistling, that's easy to remember, that "sticks in your mind." Now a tune is usually complete in itself -- that is, it ~~seems~~ to have a beginning, middle and end, and leaves you feeling satisfied -- in other words, it's a song, like God Save the Queen, or Gershwin's Summertime, or Schubert's Serenade.

But in symphonic music, which is what we're mostly concerned with here, tunes aren't exactly in order, because being complete in themselves, tunes don't cry out for further development. And, as you'll remember from our former programs, development is the main thing in symphonic music -- the growing and changing of a melodic seed into a whole symphonic tree. So that seed mustn't be a complete tune, but rather a melody that leaves something still to be said, to be developed -- what is called a theme.

(MORE)



BERNSTEIN (CONT'D)

Well, that's already a disadvantage to those people who are always expecting music to have full-blown tunes, and so they'll naturally find these incomplete themes less melodic. I suppose, then, that they should complain about the famous opening 4-note theme of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony:

(PLAY)

which is hardly melodic at all.

Or about this theme from his 7th Symphony:

(PLAY)

which is all one note. But both of those themes are kinds of melodies, you must remember, even though they're not tunes.

(TO ORK)

Of course, there are themes that are much more tuneful than those.

Only think of Chaikovsky's Sixth Symphony:

(ORK)

(MORE)



BERNSTEIN (CONT'D)

Why that's practically a whole tune
in itself.

Now what is it about that big, tuneful
theme that makes it so attractive and
beloved -- besides the fact that
Chaikovsky was a melodic genius?

The answer is repetition -- either
exact repetition, or slightly altered
repetition, within the theme itself.

It's that repetition that makes the
melody stick in your mind; and it's
the melodies that stick in your mind
that are likely to please you the most.

For instance, let's just see how
Chaikovsky went about building up that
lovely theme by simply repeating his
ideas in a certain arranged order --
what I like to call the 1-2-3 method.

The fascinating thing is that so many
famous themes are formed by exactly
this method; and so I think you ought
to know about it.

(MORE)



BERNSTEIN (CONT'D)

Here's how it works: first, there is a short idea, or phrase;

(PLAY)

2nd, the same phrase is repeated, but with some small variation;

(PLAY)

(CHAI 6th ILL) and 3rd, the tune takes off in a flight of inspiration.

(PLAY)

It's like a 3-stage rocket, or like the count-down in a race: on your mark, get set, go! Or in target practice: ready, aim, fire! Or in a movie studio: lights, camera, action! It's always the same, 1, 2, and 3! There are so many examples of this melodic technique I almost don't know where to begin.

But take, for example, our good old stand-by, Beethoven's Fifth. On your mark;

(ORK)

get set;

(ORK)

go!

(ORK)

(MORE)



BERNSTEIN (CONT'D)

Or, do you know that haunting tune in
the Cesar Franck Symphony? Same thing.
First, a phrase;

(ORK)

then repeat with a slight change, a
rising intensity;

(ORK)

then the take-off.

(ORK)

Or Mozart's Haffner Symphony: ready,

(ORK)

aim,

(ORK)

fire!

(ORK)

The slow movement of Rimsky-Korsakoff's
Scheherazade.

(ORK) (V.O.)

A phrase: same phrase, altered:
conclusion.

And so on. There are millions of them,
examples of this 1-2-3 design; and don't
forget that the heart of the matter is
repetition: 2 is always a repeat of 1.

(MORE)



BERNSTEIN (CONT'D)

Now that we know a few of the secrets that make music sound melodic, let's start looking for some of the reasons why people find certain kinds of music unmelodic.

We've already discovered that what appeals to people most as melody is a fully spun-out tune, and that when they get instead an incomplete tune, or a theme, they begin to have trouble.

So you can imagine that when they hear music made out of melodies that are even shorter than themes, they have even more trouble. For example, to return to that famous 4-note opening of Beethoven's Fifth:

(PLAY)

-- That's so short it's not really even a theme, but what is called a motive.

(MORE)



BERNSTEIN (CONT'D)

Now a motive can be as little as 2 notes, or 3 or 4, -- a bare melodic seed -- the raw material out of which longer melodic lines are made. You remember I said that certain people find Wagner's operas unmelodic? This is why: because Wagner usually constructed his huge operas out of tiny little motives, instead of writing regular tunes such as the Italian opera composers used. But how wrong they are to say that Wagner doesn't write melody! He writes nothing but melody, only it's made out of motives. Let me show you how.

(MORE)



BERNSTEIN (CONT'D)

You've all heard the prelude to his great opera Tristan & Isolde, I'm sure. It begins with a 4-note motive.

(PLAY)

Now immediately comes another motive, also of 4 notes.

(PLAY)

Now the exciting thing is the way Wagner puts these two motives together: he makes the second motive begin smack on the end of the first one, so that the last note of one and the first note of the other are joined, locking the two motives securely together. Like this:

(PLAY)

Now he adds some marvelous harmony underneath, and this is what you get, as the beginning of Tristan:

(PLAY)

Now that's already much more than a motive, or even of two motives -- it has become what is called a phrase, just as a series of words in a language is called a phrase.

(MORE)



BERNSTEIN (CONT'D)

And Wagner, by using this method of joining motives together and making phrases out of them, and then sentences out of the phrases, and paragraphs out of the sentences, finally turns out a whole story, a prelude to Tristan that is a miracle of continuous melody that seems to have no end, even though there isn't a tune anywhere in it! Do you begin to see what I mean by understanding melody in a different way? If you think you don't, just listen to a couple of minutes of this famous prelude now, and I'm sure you'll be surprised to find that you do understand it very well.



14

TELOP

WAGNER PRELUDE FROM "TRISTAN AND ISOLDE"
(ORCHESTRA)
(APPROX 4:30)

(APPLAUSE)



BERNSTEIN

Well, that's a lot of melody for a composer who is supposed to be unmelodic. We have seen how his melody grows, starting with a motive, then growing to a phrase, then to sentences. And it's not an unusual method of making melody, at all; I've even done it myself, in a more modest way. How many of you know the music of West Side Story? Well, what I like most about that music is how much of it grows out of a simple motive at the beginning of the score -- do you remember it?

(PLAY)

That's the gang call of The Jets -- you hear them whistling it all through the show to call each other. Well, all it is is 3 notes :

(PLAY)

but by juggling them around,

(PLAY)

and changing their order,

(PLAY)

all kinds of new melodies suddenly come to life.

(MORE)



BERNSTEIN (CONT'D)

For instance, in this order

(PLAY)

the 3 notes give us:

(PLAY AND SING MARIA).

And the same three notes, put into a jumping jazz rhythm, turn out to be a song named "Cool"

(PLAY AND SING).

And there are many other ways in which this 3-note motive was used, but I don't want to take time to plug my own music.

I just want you to see how common it is for melody to grow out of motives; everybody does it, even me.

So you see, little motives are as much a part of melody as anything else. But now comes an even more serious problem -- counterpoint. That's what mostly gets in people's way when they are trying to hear a melody. They are always complaining about "those dry, difficult Bach Fugues! How can I hear the melody when there is so many things going on at once?"

(MORE)



BERNSTEIN (CONT'D)

Well, your answer to that is: "Just open your ears and listen." You see, people normally expect a melody to be on top of the music, with an accompaniment underneath, like a Chopin Nocturne

(PLAY)

But why does it have to be on top? The melody can be on the bottom, or in the middle as well, as in any Bach fugue; but that doesn't make it any the less melodic. It may be a little harder, to have to look for the melody, instead of having it served to you on a silver platter, but think how much greater the satisfaction is when you find it! Now here's the start of a Bach fugue -- a very short theme, but perfectly melodic.

(PLAY)

Now it gets developed, as new voices join in the discussion, stating the same theme while other voices go on to other melodic statements at the same time.

(PLAY)

(MORE)



BERNSTEIN (CONT'D)

You see how the main subject keeps turning up in different voices -- way down in the bass, or up on top, or in the middle? While the other voices go on singing other melodies. So it's certainly not an absence of melody, not by a long shot; in fact, it's an overabundance of melody: the whole fugue is one long outpouring of melody, just like the Tristan Prelude; only you have to know how to listen for the melody, and where to find it. So don't let anyone scare you with that terrible word counterpoint. Counterpoint doesn't erase melody; on the contrary, it multiplies it.

So it all adds up to what I said in the beginning: melody can be many kinds of things, and you mustn't expect it to be always the same thing -- namely, just a tune. It can be a short theme, or even a shorter motive; or it can appear in company with other themes, as in counterpoint, on top, or at the bottom, or in the middle.

(MORE)



BERNSTEIN (CONT'D)

But it's always melody, no matter how involved it gets in symphonic development.

Now that's a lot of hard stuff we've been discussing so far; and so to make it clearer, we're going to play you a whole movement from a Mozart Symphony, the 1st movement of his great G-Minor Symphony, which will illustrate everything we've been talking about.

I'm sure you all know the beautiful, famous theme that opens this movement -- a perfect example of the 1-2-3 method we learned about before: first, a phrase:

(PLAY)

second, repeat the same phrase, slightly altered;

(PLAY)

and, third, the take-off.

(PLAY)

Now certainly nobody will quarrel with that as being unmelodic; it has such a beautiful shape, and arch.

(SING)

(MORE)



BERNSTEIN (CONT'D)

But in the course of the movement, as the theme is being developed, there are places that might be called unmelodic, or less melodic. But you're ready now to understand that even those places are melodic, as much as the opening theme is -- if you just listen to them correctly. For instance, you'll notice that the very first two notes of the main theme

(PLAY)

form a little motive by themselves, a motive that is used all through the movement. Do you remember how the theme ended just now?

(PLAY)

That's the same motive

(PLAY)

as the one at the beginning,

(PLAY)

only it's rising

(PLAY)

instead of descending.

(PLAY)

(MORE)



21

BERNSTEIN (CONT'D)

Then later, while one part of the
orchestra is playing with that motive

(ORK - BARS 73-76, CL & BN)

the strings are playing the same motive,
only stretched out in long notes:

(ORK - BARS 72-76, VLN I, VLA, VC, CB)

so that together, it makes this
wonderful sound.

(ORK - TUTTI, BARS 72-80)

(MORE)



BERNSTEIN (CONT'D)

And that's all made out of those first little 2 notes! So you see, it's all pure melody, even the development parts. The same is true of this seemingly unmelodic section:

(ORK - BAR 115, WITH UPBEATS, TO BAR 118, 2ND BEAT)

Some people would say that passage lacks melody; but the theme is right there, only down in the bass instruments:

(ORK - SAME: BN, LOW STR. ONLY)
while on top there is exciting counterpoint going on, as in a Bach fugue.

(ORK - SAME, VLNS ONLY)

You just have to learn to listen for melody in the depths of music, not only on top. And if you do, how different that same passage will sound to you!

(ORK - SAME: TUTTI)

What's even harder is to hear melody that's neither on top nor at the bottom, but in the middle, sandwiched in.

(MORE)



BERNSTEIN (CONT'D)

Here's one place you should be on the lookout for, where again the little motive is being developed on top, over stationary notes on the bottom:

(ORK - D, OMIT CLS, & STR., TO 166,
DBT)

But in the middle, two clarinets are having their say about that motive:

(ORK - D TO 166, CLS. ALONE)

And they're so sweet and tender that it would be a shame if you missed them.

Listen to the whole sandwich now, top, bottom, and peanut butter:

(ORK - D TO 166, TUTTI, EXCEPT STR.)

Well, I think you're ready now to hear this great movement by Mozart, and to listen to it as melody, all of it, from start to finish, not just the themes themselves, but the development of the themes and motives as well, in all their counterpoint. It's all melody -- every moment.



24

TELOP

MOZART SYMPHONY #40, IN G MINOR
FIRST MOVEMENT

(ORCHESTRA)

(APPROX. 6:00)

(APPLAUSE)

24-A

COMMERCIAL

(6:00)



24-B

STATION IDENTIFICATION



BERNSTEIN (CONT'D)

Well, so far we've discussed a few of the reasons why some people find certain music unmelodic -- like melodies going against each other, as they do in counterpoint, or a melody singing away down in the bass, not easily recognized, or buried in the middle of a sandwich; or a melody constructed out of tiny motives.

But the really important reason -- and I guess this is what I've been coming to all this time -- is the question of what our ears expect -- in other words, taste. And that, in turn, is based on what our ears are used to hearing.

For instance, we've seen today how important repetition is in making a melody easy to latch on to.

We're used to that technique -- it's the technique used by popular songwriters: they drum their phrases into your head.

(SING MACK THE KNIFE)

(MORE)



BERNSTEIN (CONT'D)

OK -- so what happens when we hear melodies that don't repeat at all, that just weave on and on, always new?

Well, it's true that we usually like them less -- at first. But that doesn't mean they're any less melodic; in fact, the farther away you get from that kind of repetition, the harder the melodies get to latch on to, but also the nobler and more beautiful they can become. Some of the really greatest melodies ever written are of this kind, non-repeating longlines; but they're not necessarily the ones people go around whistling in the streets.

I remember so well the day my piano teacher brought me a new piece to study, Bach's Italian Concerto, when I was 14 years old; and when I began to read the second movement, with its long, noble, ornamental melody line, I simply couldn't understand it.

(MORE)



BERNSTEIN (CONT'D)

It just seemed to wander around, with no place to go. Do you know it? It goes like this:

(PLAY)

(V.O.) And so it goes weaving on, spinning out that long golden thread, never once repeating itself for almost five minutes. I find that melody one of the glories of all music, now today; but I sure didn't think so when I was 14.

Why did it seem to me so wandering and aimless? Because every phrase is new and different, instead of repeating previous phrases; and I was still young enough to think that every melody had to be a tune, because that's what my brief musical experience had taught my ears to expect.

In exactly the same way that our tastes change with growing up, and hearing all kinds of music, so people's tastes change from one period of history to another.

(MORE)



BERNSTEIN (CONT'D)

The melodies people loved in Beethoven's time would have shocked and started the people of Bach's time, 100 years earlier, and I'm equally sure that some of today's modern music, which people complain about as ugly and unmelodic, will be perfectly lovely, charming every-day stuff to the people of tomorrow. Let us play you a perfect example -- another long, non-repeating melodic line by the great modern German composer Paul Hindemith.

Hindemith wrote this melody over 30 years ago, in a piece called Concert Music for Strings and Brass; and I suppose there are still people who will call this unmelodic, even after 30 years. But I consider it one of the most moving and beautifully shaped melodies, not only of modern music, but of all music; and I have a feeling that you'll agree with me, after all you've learned about melody today.

Let's see.



29

TELOP

HINDEMITH CONCERT MUSIC FOR STRINGS AND
BRASS

(ORCHESTRA)

(APPROX. 4:00)

(APPLAUSE)



BERNSTEIN (CONT'D)

Now that is a melodic line, four minutes of beautiful curves, arches, peaks and valleys. And if there are any of you who did not like it, who found it unmelodic, awkward, or graceless, let me comfort you by saying that those were just the words used 80 years ago about another German composer named Brahms.

Now these days, when we think of melody, we almost immediately think of Brahms; but there was a time when people complained bitterly about his music as totally lacking in melody. And so, to wind up our program on melody, and to show you how careful you have to be in judging melody, we are going to play for you the last movement of Brahms 4th Symphony -- an extraordinary movement for many reasons, but chiefly for the reason that its main theme isn't a melody at all.

(MORE)



BERNSTEIN (CONT'D)

It's nothing but a scale of six notes

(PLAY)

plus two notes to finish it off; 8 notes
in all, one to a bar.

(PLAY WITH HARMONY)

And out of those 8 bars comes a series
of 30 variations, each one exactly 8 bars
long, and each one containing those same
8 simple notes, always in the same key.

That's the whole movement. Now that
doesn't sound very promising in terms of
melody, does it? And yet, what Brahms
gives us in this movement is a work of
such glowing, fiery melodic invention
as to leave us gasping. How does he do
it? By inventing new melodies in
counterpoint to that main theme, by a
brilliant use of motives -- but I'm sure
you'll hear all that without my telling
you.

(MORE)



BERNSTEIN (CONT'D)

You're ready now to listen to this so-called unmelodic work of Brahms, and hear it for the magnificent outpouring of melody that it really is. And if you're still wondering what a melody is, just listen to this Brahms movement, and you'll have the answer: melody is exactly what a great composer wants it to be.



33

TELOP

BRAHMS

SYMPHONY NO. 4 IN E MINOR
FINALE

(ORCHESTRA)

(APPROX. 10.00)

(APPLAUSE)



ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

From Philharmonic Hall in Lincoln
Center -- another NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
YOUNG PEOPLE'S CONCERT under the musical
direction of Leonard Bernstein has been
presented by the Shell Oil Company.

This concert -- "What is a Melody?" --
featured the music of Wagner, Mozart,
Hindemith, and Brahms. The next concert
in the YOUNG PEOPLE'S series will be
presented in four weeks on Monday,
January 14th, at which time
Mr. Bernstein will present a concert
featuring Young Performers.

The preceding program was prerecorded
and was produced and directed by
Roger Englander.