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Music 101- 04

Listening Journal

25 April 2015

Entry #1

Date: 24 April 2015

Composer: Johann Sebastian Bach

Title: *Suite No. 1 in G major, BWV 1007*

Movements: *Prelude, Allemande, Courante, Sarabande, Menuet, Gigue*

Instruments: Solo Cello

Performers: Yo Yo Ma performed this recording. According to allmusic.com, Bach likely had cellists Bernard Christian Linigke and Christian Ferdinand Abel in mind when composing this because of the talent required to play it.

The form of this piece is an abstract interpretation of a Baroque suite. This Baroque suite originates from the dance styles of the Middle Ages; however, this suite is not intended for dance because of its unpredictable nature. According to costanzabach.stanford.edu a traditional baroque suite is comprised of four parts: *Allemande, Courante, Sarabande, and Gigue*. The *Allemande* traditionally has a 4/4 time signature with a calm, easy to follow melody. In contrast, the *Courante* is a fast pace French dance with cheerful tones. The *Sarabande* has a slower tempo intended for the Spanish dance. Finally, the *Gigue*, is a lively English dance in triple time. In this suite, Bach added an improvisatory *Prelude* in the beginning to set the tone and a fast pace *Menuet* between the *Sarabande* and *Gigue*. Bach broke away from the standard Baroque structure, enabling him to create one of the most well known solo Cello works to date.

The *Prelude* for this suite opens with a distinctive pulse like rhythm, which sounds vaguely familiar. The rhythm complimented a seamless harmony with several voices present. The finally where the different voices combine to form a triad gave me chills. After the memorizing opener, understandably, the piece slowed to a slightly boring structure. This part seemed to flow nicely but lacked the elegance of the *Prelude*; I was fairly unimpressed. After a brief pause, the *Courante* opened with the same pulsing rhythm that intrigued me in the *Prelude*. The melody was lighthearted and carefree, yet energetic. At this point, I definitely could identify the dance like melody due to the simplistic rhythm structure. Bach would briefly add complexity then take it away, forcing me to stay attentive. Several minutes passed using this theme then the movement ended. Right as I began to loose interest, the same three voices that formed the triad at the end of the *Prelude* returned to start off the *Menuet*. A gentile carefree mood continued for the rest of the movement. In contrast, the *Gigue* had a strange fast pace tempo that made the harmony so complex that I couldn’t follow it. It probably was connected to the harmony in one of the previous movements, but I could not identify how.

Most of my initial impressions held true after the second listen. However, I was able to understand the *Prelude* to a greater extent, which allowed me to see its influence in the remaining movements. I was able to focus more on the symmetrical structure of the harmonies rater than the tone or mood Bach was trying to convey. My initial perception of the final movement changed due to this. I thought the *Gigue* rhythm was hard to follow at first but I soon realized that I was looking for structure rather than enjoying the playful happy feeling Bach intended to end the piece with. By not over thinking it, I left with a happy and cheery mood instead feeling frustrated.

This work actually changed my entire conception of the cello as a solo instrument. In the past, the violin has always invoked the most emotion out of all the instruments from me. The *Prelude* specifically was one of the most beautiful pieces of music I have ever heard. Bach builds up the three separate voices through contrasting scales then releases the tension with a combined chord that gives me chills every time. These three voices occur throughout the entire piece giving each movement a sense of connectedness. I never had realized how emotional the cello could be when a talented musician performs the right piece.

This work is a fantastic representation of the entire Baroque period. First, it uses dance styles from several countries ranging back to the middle ages. This and the other five suites give a great exposition of the different styles of music around the world at this time. In addition to the world music culture this work captured, it also defined a new era for the cello as a solo instrument. Previously the cello was mainly used for accompaniment. Bach was able to write such a complex masterful harmony that it changed many composers mind about the role of the cello altogether. Secondly, this suite has an abstract interpretation of the familiar Baroque suite structure. Bach was a musical innovator who used elements of the past while incorporating concepts never heard before. Because of this, he was able to capture an entire era of music with a single instrument.

Entry #2

Date: 24 April 2015

Composer: Béla Bartók

Title: *Concerto for Orchestra, Sz. 116, BB 127*

Movements: *Introduzione. Andante non troppo, Giuoco delle coppie. Allegretto scherzando, Elegia. Andante non troppo, Intermezzo interrotto. Allegretto, Finale. Pesante - Presto*

Instruments: Large Orchestra

Performers: Chicago Symphony Orchestra, George Solti conductor

This work is comprised of five movements arranged in arch form according to allmusic.com. In arch form, the first relates to the fifth movement, the second relates to the fourth movement, and the third serves as the keystone to tie everything together. The arch form is strictly adhered to in this piece.

The piece opens with an andante tempo and heavy bass. This sets an ominous mood which gets broken by the flute soon after. The strings come in several minutes later creating an uneasy dissonance. Later the brass enters which further increases the tension and excitement. The trombone seems to carry the melody first as the rest of the orchestra softens. The second movement is distinct because of the snare drum. The snare gradually introduces pairs of instruments in an accelerando tempo building up to a brass harmony. This harmony seems like it will return later in the fourth movement. The snare concludes the movement with a rhythmic slow beat similar to the beginning. So far, the piece is fairly organized but often too thick to distinguish specific parts. However, several meters were given to each instrument briefly teasing each of their melodies. The third movement, the keystone, has a beginning closely related to the first movement. This again sets a dark ominous mood reinforced by several solos teased earlier. The fourth movement begins with a surprisingly lighthearted melody, using only percussion instruments. This actually is a nice change of pace from the melancholy mood so far. The final movement and the most exciting begins with the violins as the centerpiece. The other instrument parts then switch off each increasing the tempo when introduced. Several climaxes occur in this movement before the triumphant brass conclusion.

My initial perceptions changed somewhat after a second listen. I was still unable to connect movements two and four, but the relation between movements one and five became clearer. The final movement actually had a much faster tempo than the first; it sounded extremely similar though because the rhythm was slowed. This added complexity while maintaining the original melody. I also was able to better appreciate the third movement because of its contrast to the rest of the Concerto. Rather than building up to a climax in the middle of the work as I expected, this movement gave me time for reflection on the previous two. Because of this reflection time, I could recognize elements repeated in the next two movements.

During the first listen, I was sure I strongly disliked this piece. I struggled to stay attentive to what was going on. However, the second listen was much more rewarding. I still didn’t like the piece, but I was able to appreciate its musical prowess. This style is not typically my favorite, so paying close attention felt like a chore. Modern era music is often difficult to grasp at times especially when specific forms I am not accustomed to are used.

I carefully selected this work because of the composer and the time in his life this work was written. According to allmusic.com, Béla Bartók had been recently diagnosed with leukemia when the music director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra approached him with a project. Bartók likely composed this thinking it would be his final work so much thought and deliberation went into it. Bartók was a trained pianist so he had a deep appreciation for classical style. This allowed him to experiment with rhythm while maintaining good form. Concerto for Orchestra represents the Modern period because of its irregular rhythm structure and heavy percussion involvement. Bartók was truly in innovator for this period.

Entry #3

Date: 25 April 2015

Composer: Derek Vincent Smith

Title: *Finally Moving*

Instruments: Digital Sampling

Performers: Pretty Lights Band

My initial impression of this piece when I heard it several years ago was not favorable. I couldn’t discern a melody and there were no words. After several more listens, I came to appreciate this song and it eventually sparked my interest in the entire electronic genre. Because the sample is mostly digital, the rhythm, melody, and tempo can be manipulated to an extremely precise degree. This allows the artist total control over the end product.

I chose this work because it was the stepping-stone for Derek Vincent Smith to commit to his Pretty Lights live band full time. The Pretty Lights live band was the first successful electronic music group to implement live instruments in their shows while digitally sampling and live mixing. Instead of a DJ or an electronic producer performance, Pretty Lights performed electronic music with live instruments. This paved the way for other artists, such as Griz and his saxophone, to incorporate live music into their sets. *Finally Movin*g proved that instruments could be used in collaboration with live mixing to provide an entertaining concert experience while still maintaining authenticity.