

Music 314: Final Exam Take-Home Essays

Rachael Carlson

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Essay 1

1a. Explain the concept of Postmodernism, as it contrasts with Modernism, and reflects changes in attitudes about the relationship between the past and the present. Detail some of the characteristic techniques of postmodern composition, giving specific examples from the repertoire.

Postmodernism is marked by the “building on the music of the past without irony.”¹ This is considerably different than Modernism’s rejection of the past. Another way of looking at Postmodernism is to see that it rejects and questions large narratives in favor of many small narratives. These large narratives are generally the those of the establishment. Postmodernism seems to attempt to give voice to those who did not have voices in Modernism. For instance, equal importance may be given to the performer as it is to the audience. The musical characteristics that were explored in the class which are indicative of Postmodernism are quotation, collage, polystylism, intertextuality, pastiche, etc.

A great contrasting example could be Mahler’s Symphony No. 2 in C Minor and Berio’s *Sinfonia* III. In this symphony, Mahler attempts to build a world with a grand unified vision. In *Sinfonia* Berio constructs many small worlds through the use of quotation. *Sinfonia* also plays on the role of the audience. If the audience understands the quotations then they will be within the inner sanctum of listeners. If the listener does not understand the quotation he or she will be unable to understand the composition. This is certainly a different mentality toward the audience than that taken during modernism in which the composer’s used compositional techniques which could easily be understand because they were techniques used throughout Western Art Music’s history.

1. Dr. Timothy Sterner Miller, “Class 24: Postmodernism,” Lecture, Music 314, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI, March 27, 2017.

One of my personal favorite techniques used in Postmodernism is Pastiche, which is a playing on the expectations of music from the past. Many of the examples given in the *Grove* and elsewhere give examples which we might consider neo-classicism, such as Prokofiev's Classical Symphony and Stravinsky's *Pulcinella*. These, however, are examples of neo-classicism. The composers are recalling certain stylistic elements of a composition. In Schnittke's Concerto Grosso No. 1, the composer sets up the expectation that it is going to be a neo-classical composition but then seems to parody the form and content of the that which the audience is expecting.

Essay 2

2a. Referring to specific composers and works, discuss ways that different aspects of identity (race, gender, sexuality, etc.) have impacted the composition and reception of music in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

As noted above, Postmodernism gives voice to many narratives. Once these narratives are given voice, they are able to have conversations with one another. There are several excellent examples of individuals different ways in which identity is involved with the composition and reception of music in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Composers such as Lewis, Temple, and Du Yun all provide interesting, thought-provoking voices in their music.

George Lewis, in an essay in *Black Music Research Journal*, spoke of two different voices of improvisation in Western Art Music, Eurological and Afrological.² The primary thought behind these two different voices of improvisation is that one derives from European forms of improvisation dating to 150 years prior to 1996 and the other derives from a strong tradition of improvisation in Africa. Lewis draws upon both of these voices with his composition *Voyager* which utilizes an improvisatory computer program which improvises with the performer.

In an blog article Alex Temple notes that she doesn't "think of my work as specifically female, [however] I *do* think of it as specifically genderqueer."³ In her composition, *Behind the Wallpaper*, she notes that it is music of and about being an outsider. She states, about this composition, that she "wanted to create something that my fellow trans and/or genderqueer poeple in particular could listen to and say 'yes, I know what that's

2. George E. Lewis, "Improvised Music after 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives," *Black Music Research Journal* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 91–122.

3. Alex Temple, "I'm a Trans Composer. What the Hell Does That Mean?," *Alex Temple*, July 26, 2013, accessed May 17, 2017, <http://www.alextemplemusic.com/2013/07/trans/>.

like,' or maybe even 'you mean I'm not the only who's experienced that?'"⁴

I think that Du Yun's *Angel's Bone* is an incredibly wonderful example for our identity can change how music is composed. In a genre of music such as Opera which contains such hits as *Don Giovanni*, it is refreshing to hear about an opera which deals with real world issues and does not glorify womanizing white men.

References

Lewis, George E. "Improvised Music after 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives." *Black Music Research Journal* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 91–122.

Miller, Dr. Timothy Sterner. "Class 24: Postmodernism." Lecture, Music 314, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI, March 27, 2017.

Temple, Alex. "I'm a Trans Composer. What the Hell Does That Mean?" *Alex Temple*, July 26, 2013. Accessed May 17, 2017. <http://www.alextemplemusic.com/2013/07/trans/>.

4. Temple, "I'm a Trans Composer. What the Hell Does That Mean?"