

LINDA LANIER-KEOSAIAN
Lanier-Keosaian@juno.com

Dr. David Elliott
Final Exam: Basic Concepts in Music Education
Fall, 2002

Question 3: Contrast the aesthetic concept of a musical work with the praxial concept of a musical work.

Anyone who speaks of *aesthetics* probably has one of several things in mind: beauty and fine art, the theoretical study of beauty and fine art, or, as Monroe Beardsley terms it, the *philosophy of criticism*. As to how one is to use this latter tool, Beardsley quotes George Dickie in saying that “anything can be transformed into an aesthetic object (a source of aesthetic satisfaction) by taking a certain attitude toward it.” By maintaining *psychical distance* (Beardsley) or detachment in some form, and becoming absorbed in contemplation of an aesthetic object, one might have an *aesthetic experience*. This experience became the criteria by which one attributed value to a work of art and so was very important to those who operated as critics of the arts. They determined which works of art were valuable and worthy of the title of Art by the intensity of the aesthetic experience possible in the contemplation of them. Although written in the past tense, there is still a large following for this concept of *art as aesthetic object*.

The *aesthetic experience* is described by Beardsley as having the following effects upon one whose attention is firmly fixed on a perceptual or intentional object: a feeling of freedom from concerns about matters outside that object; notable affect that is detached from practical ends; the sense of exercising powers of discovery; and integration of the self and of its experiences.

In the 18th century, the term *aesthetics* was coined by a German philosopher, A. G. Baumgarten. He applied it to the philosophical study of beauty. The early Greeks considered that art was a *process of making changes of certain kinds in materials of a certain kind*. Aesthetics provided the theory required for uniting art, music, and poetry under the label of *aesthetic objects* that exist to be contemplated in one special way, with *aesthetic perception*. This meant maintaining a disinterested focus on the structural or aesthetic qualities of the aesthetic object. This was (is) to be done in abstraction from the object’s context of social use and production. In music, what this means is that, while a string quartet or symphony (written on paper, reproduced by performers) can be studied for its structural qualities and can, therefore, be considered an *aesthetic object*, an improvised form of music such as jazz, cannot. This is because jazz and other forms of improvisational music, such as drumming, are essentially process, not just product. Their structural qualities are a manifestation of that process, which is different each time it is done.

The *praxial concept* of a musical work says that music is, at root, a human activity, not an object. Whenever we hear a musical work, we are not just confronting a piece of music, written down, then reproduced by performers, or even an improvisation, arrangement, or recording of a piece of music, rather, we are witnessing a form of intentional human activity. This activity of making music has three dimensions: a doer or maker, the product he or she makes, and the activity whereby he or she makes the product. A fourth dimension is the context in which the doers do what they do. This approach to *musicing* and to encountering music in any of its many forms and styles as either a doer or a listener, is inclusive, not exclusive, as is the philosophy of music as aesthetic object. The

latter approach holds that the flowering of music occurred from Bach to Beethoven. This concept excludes more music than it includes. It is also a very elitist view of music, in that it considers a small body of music by dead white men to be superior to all others, principally that by the musicians of the world who create extremely complicated music simply as a part of their lives and cultures, but who do not necessarily write down the music.

Each kind of music and music-making carries with it a body of music listeners who are influenced by why, what, and how musicians do what they do. Just as musicians are *practitioners of a human practice called MUSIC that has various subpractices, subspecialties, or arts of music that go by such names as jazz, choral music, rock music, and opera*, so each of those subspecialties has an audience of listeners who are influenced by the music being made. The praxial concept considers that music is a diverse human practice, with diverse human audiences who share an understanding and appreciation of each practice.

Question No. 2

Schooling

Schooling is what a society does for itself in order to achieve certain goals, agreed upon and modified according to the beliefs and principles of each succeeding generation. The primary goals have been identified as *allocative*, concerning jobs; *custodial*, i.e. holding students until they can be absorbed by employment or supported in their unemployment; and *academic development and vocational training*.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Western expectations for schooling included primarily preparing upper class young men for proper professions and upper class young women for entering into proper society. As the old class structure broke down after World War I there came changes in both content and intent. Knowledge was seen as the key to the future, and the aim was vocational preparation for the masses. The elitist approach to education gave way to a belief that all children are equally capable of learning and graduating from secondary school.

The reality of the last half of the twentieth century, however, is that there are gaps between some schools and some communities and their ability to educate all children equally. This has shaken the confidence of the public in the whole system of education, resulting in a variety of reactions, including eliminating of the arts for schools that have failed to prepare children to excel in math and science. This force-feeding of the academics without access to the arts, with teacher and administrative incompetence mixed into the brew, has resulted in the creation of a bureaucracy of school authority which is reduced to a system of strict attendance regulations and conduct codes, all with various punishments for infringements.

Musical Practice

A *musical practice* is a multi-dimensional human phenomenon involving two interlocking forms of intentional human activity: music making and music listening. The word “practice” is used, not in the sense of rehearsing, but rather in the larger sense of a *shared human experience*. This experience revolves around a shared way of thinking, and shared traditions, and standards of effort. To quote Elliott, *musicians are practitioners of a human practice called MUSIC that has various subpractices, subspecialties, or arts of music that go by such names as jazz, choral music, rock*

music, and opera.

Each of these practices is divided into *subpractices*, e.g. in choral music, there are children's choirs, men's choirs, women's choirs, community choirs, professional choirs, etc.; in jazz, there is dixieland, be-bop, etc. Then, there is the original instrument version of standard repertory works, even including the Beethoven symphonies. The players themselves, in fact, develop careers based on virtuosity on either modern versions of instruments, or their early equivalents.

For each of the subpractices mentioned, and others, as well, there is a particular audience of listeners who avidly follow the concert schedules and make changes in their lives in order to be present for the performances of those groups or individual performers. All of this emphasizes that, as Elliott says, *music is a diverse human practice* (with a diverse human following).

Praxial

The word *praxial* was coined by Dr. Philip Alperson, Professor of Philosophy, University of Louisville, Kentucky. Alperson first used 'praxial' as a contrast to the aesthetic concept of music. The praxial concept gives an alternative way of thinking about the nature of music and music education. This alternative concept of music traces back to the earlier work of Francis Sparshott, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Toronto.

Used to describe a philosophy of music education, the term *praxial* means a way of teaching music so that students are actively involved in music-making, arranging, conducting, and active listening, first to themselves as they make music, and then to others involved in the same practice or subpractice. This approach to teaching distinguishes itself from the *aesthetic music education* approach which is a passive, rather than active approach.

Aesthetic Education, or MEAE

Music Education as Aesthetic Education is a concept put forth by a series of music education philosophers beginning with James Mursell (1893-1963). He believed that if music was to yield its educational value, its aesthetic aspects must be emphasized. He believed that the value of music lies in the capacity of musical sound patterns to re-present or objectify human feeling. Harry Broudy wrote in 1958 that music educators are interested primarily in music as a type of aesthetic experience in which we perceive objects in order to grasp their sensuous characteristics, and not to *further knowledge or useful enterprises*. Others wrote similarly, that music education ought to *bear the major load of aesthetic education in all organized general education* by developing the ability of students to perceive and respond aesthetically.

Suzanne Langer's writings have influenced several generations of philosophers in the arts. She wrote that composers write music with a profound knowledge of feeling, and that the listener is given insight into those feelings. She concludes that *if the arts objectify subjective reality, then art education is the education of feeling*.

Bennett Reimer, in his *A Philosophy of Music Education*, conceives of music as a collection of *objects* or *art works*. He says that the aesthetic experience must be central to music education. Our job, says the MEAE philosopher, is to teach our students how to perceive music objectively so as to achieve nirvana: the *aesthetic experience*.

Informal Musical Knowledge

Informal musical knowledge, unlike *formal musical knowledge*, is not found in textbooks. It is the common sense approach developed by people who know how to do things well. They know how to proceed, and in doing so how to evaluate what they have done in relation to what needs to be done. They can spot problems and apply new (or familiar) techniques to reduce the problems. Once a set of problems has been dealt with, they can move to a new set of challenges and begin the action-reflection-investigation-make changes-action mode of working.

In music, an example of the above process is the music rehearsal. Each participant is called upon to reflect critically in action. This means knowing when and how to make musical judgments based on an understanding of the musical situation or *context*. The context is the standards and traditions of practice that are involved in that particular kind of music making.

The most important source of informal musical knowledge is one's own musical reflecting-in-action. It is a *situated knowledge*: it arises and develops from musical problem finding and musical problem-solving in a genuine musical context, that of a real musical practice.

Question No. 5 Explain why music listening qualifies as a form of thinking and knowing.

Being able to listen to music proficiently does not just happen. One is conditioned from before birth to recognize tonal patterns and styles of music familiar to the mother and her culture. At first, the child listens for his mother's voice, perhaps singing, and then to the voices of those around him. The child then begins listening to the music of his culture and to all of the music of his world. As the child includes more styles and subdivisions of styles to his listening experience, his listening capacity expands.

The child who possesses musicianship, who is learning to make music, who is acquiring formal, informal, impressionistic, and supervisory musical knowledge, brings with him all of the early exposure to musical sound patterns and cultural practices. This young music-maker, or *musicer*, begins to listen to himself, and to himself in relation to others, as he makes music. This skill of *listening-for*, which musicers use constantly in order to evaluate their progress, is a form of thinking-in-action and knowing-in-action. The kinds of musical knowing required to listen competently, proficiently, or expertly for the works of a given musical practice, are the same kinds of knowing required to make music of that practice. Learning to listen critically, with strategic judgment, develops from listening for one's own efforts to make music well.

Music listening and music-making are mutually interdependent; they are two sides of the same coin. This *praxial* idea of music listening as a part of music-making, makes a great deal of good common sense. The more familiar we are with a particular style, or practice, of music, the better able we are to listen competently to music-making within that style. There is no better way to become familiar with a style or practice than to be able to make music oneself in that style.

This idea of active rather than passive listening is the opposite of that upheld by proponents of the MEAE philosophy. The latter would have listeners focus on the structural elements only, and from a psychological distance, in order to achieve the *aesthetic experience*.

Question No. 4. Explain the relationships between musical knowledge and musical “challenges.”

Before one plays baseball, one must know the rules, then one must learn how to throw a ball to another person, how to catch a ball, how to hit a ball with a bat, how to play the various positions, and then, how to put it all together and actually play a game. As one gains skill in playing, one wishes for other, more-skilled players to be on the same team with, and to be challenged by on the team with which one is facing off. This process of looking for greater challenge for oneself continues as one becomes proficient at each level. The ultimate goal is the Dream Team, both to be a part of, and to be challenged to play against. The result is constant self-growth, self-actualization, and enjoyment.

The description of learning to play baseball and of creating new challenges to pit one’s skills against is like that of learning to make music. One needs basic skills in order to begin, and the initial challenges need to be chosen in proportion to those skills of musicianship. If the challenge is too great for the level of musicianship, frustration will result. If the challenge is too minimal, the result is boredom. If the challenge is matched with the musicianship, the result will be self-growth and musical enjoyment, or *flow*. But the satisfaction at each level will not last long. With achievement of success at each level and strengthening of the skills involved, will come desire for greater challenges. Without the new challenges, there is possible boredom and frustration. And so, we begin again, with greater skill and greater challenge. *For enjoyment and self-growth do not result from the partial deployment of musicianship or the continuous success of meeting less than demanding challenges.*

The perpetual challenge for a teacher is not only to teach musicianship, but to present appropriate challenges by which to exercise the musicianship. As I write this, I am mentally searching for ways in which to challenge my choral students who know (mostly) the music for their concert on Wednesday, December 18. They are tired of the music, think they know it well enough, and yet I have to come up with ways in which to get them to rehearse for the next two days. Whatever I come up with, it must be challenging, but fun! If I continually do the same old thing everyday, I will lose them, and will also risk teacher burn-out in the long run. Musical practices are dynamic, not static. If stasis sets in, like mold, music is doomed.