

Musicking: A Ritual in Social Space

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I have decided to have a go at the Big One, the central question that musicians and philosophers and others have been worrying away at for centuries but have never been able to answer properly. It's the question, or rather, pair of questions, What is the nature of music and What is its function in human life? If I throw my two cents worth into a problem that seems to have defeated some of the best minds of western thought, it's because I feel I do have something to contribute to it and to its solution.

I became more confident of this a few months ago when I was sent for review a book called *A History of Western Musical Esthetics*, by Edward Lippman. It is a massive, and I have to say masterly, compilation of just about everything of any significance that has been written in the west about the esthetics of music. From Plato and Cicero, Kant, Hegel and Schopenhauer, to Adorno, Lucacs, Suzanne Langer and Leonard Meyer they passed in review, and I read it all very carefully as a reviewer should.

It wasn't easy, and I can't say I found most of it very illuminating. The trouble was that most of it bore very little relation to anything I recognized in my own musical experience, as listener, or as performer, or as composer. In the first place, all the writers dealt exclusively with what we today would call the western high-classical tradition and accepted without question the assumptions of that tradition without seeming, for the most part, to show any awareness that they *were* just assumptions, or that out *there* might be other equally valid sets of assumptions. Never, not once in the whole five hundred pages of the book, was there a single glance outward to the experience of other cultures, not even as far as western popular traditions. And in the second place, the theories they developed were all terribly abstract and complicated, reminding me in their often quite elegant intricacy of those cycles and epicycles that astronomers used to use in order to explain planetary movement before Copernicus simplified things by placing the sun at the center of the system. I just could not make myself believe that so universal, and so *concrete* a human practice as music should need such complicated and abstract explanations.

I think I know what's wrong. It's the old besetting sin of European thinking, the treating of abstractions as if they were more real than the realities they stand for. It goes back at least to Plato. The abstraction 'music' gets treated as if it were a thing in itself, and is then accorded powers of action, and of change and development. And once music is accorded this status of thing, then it's only a small step to the assumption that its essence lies in those objects which are called pieces, or works of music, and that these objects have a permanent nature and meaning. One can almost see them floating unchanging through history, untouched by events and by social change, waiting for some ideal listener to draw their meaning out, by a process of what Kant called disinterested contemplation.

The assumption isn't made as clear as that, of course. Assumptions that are simply taken for granted never are. But you get glimpses of it from time to time, usually when the writer is finding himself somewhat on the defensive. For example, Carl Dahlhaus, the doyen of contemporary German musicologists, says quite bluntly that "The concept 'work' and not 'event' is the cornerstone of music history," while on the same page he says, "The subject matter of music is made up, primarily, of significant works of music that have outlived the culture of their age." And the Marxist critic Walter Benjamin put it in one memorable sentence. "The supreme reality of art," he wrote, "is the isolated, self-contained work."

A musical work, in fact, is assumed to have a platonic ideal existence over and above any possible performance of it. And as for musical performance, it seems that that is nothing more

than the medium through which the isolated, self-contained work has to pass if it is to reach its goal, the listener. Performance may either clarify or obscure it for the listener, but it has nothing to contribute to it. The performer is the servant of the composer and the work, and nothing more. In Lippman's book, the philosophers hardly so much as mention either performers or performance. Instead they bury their heads in their scores with scarcely a glance outwards to that real world where people actually make and listen to music. Like poor silly Brahms, who declined an invitation to a performance of *Don Giovanni* saying he'd sooner stay home and read it. I hate to think what Mozart, the supreme practical musician, would have had to say about that. It would have been a hearty bit of Viennese scatology, I'll bet. Or like Emmanuel Kant, sitting writing day after day in his musty study in Königsberg. I sometimes wonder what would have happened to his theory of disinterested contemplation if he'd ever ventured out as far as the nearest tavern.

In that real world where people make and listen to music, in concert halls and suburban drawing rooms, in slum bedrooms and political rallies, in supermarkets and churches, in record stores and temples, fields and nightclubs, discos and palaces, stadiums and hotel elevators, it is performance that is central to the experience of music. There can be no music apart from performance, whether it's live or on record. You don't even need a musical work at all--after all, in many of the world's great musical cultures there's no such thing--but you can't have music without people performing. You don't need a composer, and you don't even need a listener, at least not one separate from the performers. So it seems to me self-evident that the place to start thinking about the meaning of music and its function in human life is not with musical works at all but with performance.

Now if there is anything that is clear about musical performance it is that it is action, it is something that people do. While it *can* be a solitary action, engaged in by one person alone, it is generally an activity in which two or more people engage together. They may all be performing, or some be listening while others are performing, but either way it is an encounter between human beings, that is mediated by humanly organized sounds. All those present, both performers and listeners are engaging in the encounter, and all are contributing to its nature through the relationships they establish with one another during the performance.

And when I talk about a musical performance, I don't just mean a formal public event, but any occasion when someone is playing or singing, to him or herself or to a group of friends, when an instrumentalist is practicing, when drummers are playing for the dance, when little Johnny is playing a couple of childish pieces to fond parents and not-so-fond relations, when a housewife sings to herself as she makes the beds, when a church congregation sings its hymns or when a lone shepherd plays his flute to his flock in the night. They're all performances.

I found myself trying to find a way of expressing this idea, of rather this linked pair of ideas, first that the essence of music lies in performance, and second that performance is an encounter in which human beings relate to one another. Then I found I was using the word 'music' not as a noun but as a verb. I looked up the verb 'to music' and found that it does in fact have an obscure existence in the larger English dictionaries, but carrying the meaning "to make music" or "to perform." That doesn't add much to our vocabulary, so I have taken the liberty of redefining it to suit my own purposes. I offer it to you now, the verb "to music" with its present participle "musicking" (I put a "k" in there as a little caprice of my own) not as verbal cuteness or *Reader's Digest* style picturesque speech, but as a genuine tool for the better understanding of the act of music and of its function in human life.

This is how I have redefined it; it's quite simple. To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance. That means not only to perform, but also to listen, to provide material for performance--what we call composing--to prepare for a performance--what

we call rehearsing or practicing--or any other activity connected with the performance of music. We should certainly include dancing, should anyone be dancing, and we might even stretch the meaning on occasion to include what the lady is doing who takes the tickets on the door, or the hefty men who shift the piano around, or the roadies who set up the instruments and carry out the sound checks, since their activities also affect the nature of the event which is a musical performance.

It will become clear as we go along how useful this verb can be, and I shall use it from now on as if it were the proper English-language verb that I hope it will become. Apart from favoring the idea that music is action, it has other useful implications. In the first place, it makes no distinction between what the performers are doing and what the rest of those present are doing. It thus reminds us that musicking--and you see how easy it is to slip into using it--is an activity in which all those present are involved, and for which all those present bear a responsibility. It is not just a matter of composers, or even performers, actively doing something for the passive rest of us to contemplate, disinterestedly or not. Whatever it is that is being done, we are all doing it together, even though we may be doing it in different capacities.

And so, when we use the verb we are taking into account the whole event, not just what the performers are doing, and certainly not just the work that is being played. We acknowledge the fact that a musical performance is an encounter between human beings mediated through the medium of organized nonverbal sound. Like all human encounters it takes place in a physical and a social space, and that space, too, has to be taken into account when we ask what meanings are being generated during a performance.

If musicking is action and not thing, a verb and not a noun, then we should look for its meaning not in those musical objects, those symphonies and concertos and operas, or even those songs and melodies that we have been taught to regard as the repositories of musical meaning. You will understand that I'm not trying to deny the existence of those objects, which would be silly, or even to deny that they have meaning in themselves. What I am saying is that the fundamental nature, and thus the meaning of music, lies not in those objects but in the act of musicking itself, in what people do. Only by thinking of it in that way can we hope to gain any understanding of its nature and of its function in human life. Musical objects have meaning only in so far as they contribute to the action, musicking.

That being so, the question which is most useful to us is not, What is the nature, or the meaning, of this musical work? which is the question generally asked by philosophers and musicologists and music theorists alike. Even those who would establish a sociology of music ask the question, in modified form, as What is the social meaning of this musical work? No. The really useful question is, What does it mean when this performance takes place at this time, in this place, with these participants?

You will notice that by framing the question in this way we don't have to assume the existence of a fixed and stable musical work at all; after all, in many of the world's musical cultures there's no such thing, so that the musicologists' question has no meaning. But on the other hand, it doesn't *exclude* the possibility of a stable musical work. It just removes the work from center stage and subsumes its meanings into a larger meaning, that of the total event that is the performance.

The question then arises, In what does the meaning of this human encounter which is a musical performance consist? The answer I am going to propose is this. The act of musicking establishes among those present a set of relationships, and it is in those relationships that the meaning of the act of musicking lies. It lies not only in the relationships between the humanly organized sounds which are conventionally thought of as the stuff of music, but also in the relationships which are established between person and person within the performance space.

These sets of relationships stand in turn for relationships in the larger world outside the performance space, relationships between person and person, between individual and society, humanity and the natural world and even the supernatural world, as they are imagined to be by those taking part. And those are important matters, perhaps the most important in human life.

I want to make it clear what I mean. I mean that when we music, when we take part in a musical performance, the relationships that we bring into existence together model those of the cosmos as we believe that they are and that they ought to be. We do not just *learn about* those relationships, but we actually *experience* them in all their beautiful complexity. The musicking empowers us to experience the actual structure of our universe, and in experiencing it we learn, not just intellectually but in the very depths of our existence, what our place is within it and how we relate, and ought to relate, to it. We explore those relationships, we affirm them and we celebrate them, every time we take part in a musical performance.

There is nothing metaphysical or supernatural about this process, nothing mystical, nothing involving extrasensory perception. On the contrary, it is part of the natural process of biological communication that links together all living creatures in a vast network that the great English anthropologist Gregory Bateson called the pattern which connects.

All living creatures, from bacteria to human beings to sequoia trees, need to be able to give and receive information; it is a condition of being alive. The means of communication are extremely various; it may be a color or pattern of color, a shape, a posture, a way of moving, a chemical secretion, a sound or pattern of sounds. But always the information concerns relationships: How do I relate to this entity? Is it predator, for example, is it prey, is it offspring or a potential mate? Are things getting hotter, or lighter, or saltier, or drier? This information is vital to all creatures and how they respond makes the difference between life and death for them.

Even at the simplest levels there is some possibility of flexibility in the response to the information. But as we ascend the scale of complexity the gestures and the possibility of response become more varied and more complex. Bodily posture, movement, facial expression, vocal timbre, and intonation provide in the more complex animals a wide repertoire of gesture and response. Those gestures and responses still concern relationships and in complex and contradictory creatures, like human beings, the gestures and responses can be complex and contradictory too. Gestures from me to you might indicate to you that I love you, and hate you, and fear you, and are dominated by you, that I should like to kill you but intend to nurture you, all at the same time. Such complexities are not unusual in human life.

Whatever form the gestures of relationship may take they have one thing in common. They do not state who or what the entities are that are related. Those are taken for granted. So that if I make a gesture to you that indicates that I love, or fear, you, the 'I' and the 'you' are not stated, and in fact can't be stated. Only the relationship that unites us is stated. We might say that there are no nouns in the language of biological communication. Nor can the language deal with relationships that are not actually happening or with entities that are not actually present. It is a here-and-now communication.

In contrast, verbal communication as it has developed, uniquely, among human beings, has equipped us to deal with entities that are absent as well as those that are present, and with abstractions and with past and future events, as well as with the contexts in which they occur. Unlike the language of biological communication, the language of gesture, it can deal with matters only one at a time and this is both a strength and a weakness.

It is a strength in that it has made possible the development of those analytic capacities, that step-by-step logic, and that ability to compute about things, that have proved such powerful tools in gaining mastery over the material world. But it is a weakness in that word, in general, have proved less than adequate in dealing with our complex relationships with one another and

with the rest of the cosmos. One thing at a time is just too slow and cumbersome to deal with the many-layered quicksilver nature of our relationships.

The language of gesture, then, continues to perform functions in human life that words cannot. Those functions lie specifically in the exploration and the articulation of relationships, and in this function they are no less precise than words. We have also learned to play with this language. To play is to change the context of the communication concerning relationships, to lift it temporarily out of the context of every day reality, so that we can explore the implications of a relationship without having to commit ourselves to it. Under the privileged conditions of play, the communicative gesture is freed from the immediate and possibly life-and-death situation, and it acquires a less urgent but no less important function as discourse, as a way of exploring and articulating relationships, not only among human beings, but also between humans and the wider pattern of the cosmos. The ancient gestures have been elaborated over the million-year history of the human race into those complex patterns of gesture we call ritual.

Now ritual can be thought of in two ways, both valid at the same time. The first is that to take part in a ritual is to explore, to affirm, and to celebrate the participants' concept of the relationships of their world, or of part of it, whether that part be physical, social, political, religious, or any of these in combination. It takes place in the language not of words but of gesture. Even when words *are* used, they are experienced as gestures rather than understood as semantic structures. And secondly, ritual can be seen as the acting-out of a myth. A myth is a story that tells how things came to relate as they do, and thus how they properly *ought* to relate. The relationships established in the story, that is the myth, give us a model for how we ought to relate, to ourselves, to one another, and to the pattern that connects together the whole world of living creatures. The myth's accuracy as history is irrelevant; what matters is its adequacy as paradigm, as model for living.

During the concentrated and heightened time of ritual, relationships are brought into existence between the participants which model the exemplary relationships whose origin the myth tells. In this way the participants not only *learn about* those relationships but actually *experience* them in action. They explore them, they affirm their validity, and celebrate them without having to articulate them in words.

As one scholar has said, "In ritual, doing is believing. By dramatizing abstract, invisible conceptions, it makes vivid and palpable our ideas and wishes, and the lived-in order merges with the dreamed-of order."

The anthropologist Victor Turner says that ritual may involve "an immense orchestration of genres in all available sensory modes: speech, music, singing, the presentation of elaborately worked objects such as masks, paintings, body decoration, sculptured forms, costumes, dance forms, gestures, and facial expressions." Ritual in fact includes all of those activities that we call the arts. It is, if you like, the cradle of the arts. It is in ritual that the arts have their origin and it is to ritual that they return.

Each of the activities that we call the arts is a fragment of the great universal performance art for which the only name we have is ritual. Each is a way in which we use the language of gesture to affirm, explore and celebrate our concepts of how we relate, and should relate, to ourselves, to one another and to the world. In taking part in those activities we think with our bodies, and we make no separation of body from mind. I should go so far as to assert that finally all art is performance art.

It could be that we have what we call 'art' only when we cease to be aware of the ritual function of the activity and try to divorce it from its ritual purpose. I say we *try* to divorce art from ritual because I believe that what we call 'art' can never be divorced from ritual, and the more we think it can be the more we find ourselves in thrall to the myths that rule our lives.

We notice also that the way in which all those arts issue from and return to ritual is as action, as *performance*. In the enactment of ritual it is the *making*, the *wearing*, the *exhibiting*, the *dancing*, the *playing*, the *singing*, in a word the *performing*, that is valued, not the objects themselves. They are of value only in so far as they serve the ritual purpose. And if this be true, then what is to be treasured in art is the *action*, rather than any created object. And, further, if every living creature is able, and needs to be able, to give and respond to information concerning relationships, then we have to conclude that the ability to take part in the activity we call art is not confined to a few gifted people but is part of the evolutionary inheritance of every single member of the human race.

And what about musicking? We can expect that as a fragment of the great performance art which is ritual, the encounter mediated by organized sounds will bring into existence a complex web of relationships that exists for the duration of the performance. At the center of the web are the relationships which the performers create between the sounds. Radiating out from these, and feeding back into them, are the relationships among the performers, between the performers and the listeners, and among the listeners, as well as with the composer, should there be one apart from the performers, and with anyone else who happens to be present--or even those who are not present, the ancestors perhaps or the unborn, or the deity who is the incarnation of ideal relationships.

You are probably asking at this point, What relationships is he talking about? Well, they're all around us in any musical performance. As an example, let's consider very briefly the relationships of a symphony orchestra playing in symphony hall. First of all, we could consider the physical space in which the event takes place, the vast building itself. Like any building, it imposes its nature on the nature of the event taking place within it. We might ask what is the reason for its great size, for its opulence, for its rows of seats that seat the audience in regimented comfort, all facing the raised platform at one end and limiting the possible social interaction between individuals. We might even ask why it should be found necessary to build such a building at all for the performance of music, and music of a specific kind at that.

We might consider then the relationships between the members of the audience, who sit still and quiet, in row after row of seats, not communicating with one another in any way for the duration of the performance. Each individual is alone with the music among this vast crowd of people. The relationship to the players is of the most distant kind, for players and audience never speak to one another and they enter and leave the building through separate entrances. The social barrier formed by the edge of the platform is as impassable as if it were a brick wall. The audience cannot affect the performance in any way because of another set of relationships dictating the course of the piece being played--the one between the players, the conductor, and the probably dead composer. The listeners don't even pay the players directly, but through their payment to the management of the hall at the box office and also through that part of their taxes which is given back, again not directly to the players but through the orchestral organization, as subsidy. As for the players, they can relate musically to one another only through the printed notations before them and through the conductor's gestures. They do not even have a complete picture of the work to be played, but depend on the conductor's musical perceptions.

The conductor is the power center, the dictator if you like, of the whole proceedings. All the relationships between the members of the orchestra as they play pass through him, because he's the only one who has the complete picture of the work being played, the only one (I have to make this pun) who knows the score. But even he isn't a free agent, since *his* actions also are dictated by the composer's notations that he has in front of him. The players dominate the audience and the conductor dominates the players. The composer dominates the conductor, and the patron dominates the composer, even if today the patron is a committee or a university music

department or a broadcasting bureaucracy. And who dominates them? The event is in fact a model of the way power relations work in contemporary society. The hierarchy has no top to it. The concert hall is a house that Jack built. It wasn't always like this. Here's an extract from a letter that the twenty-one-year-old Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart wrote to his father from Paris in July 1778 telling how his new symphony--it was the one we call today the *Paris*, in D, K297--had captivated the notoriously hard-to-please Parisians. You can't mistake his tone of jubilation. He writes:

In the middle of the first allegro there was a passage I felt must please. The audience was quite carried away, and there was a tremendous burst of applause. But as I knew when I wrote it what effect it must produce I had introduced that passage again at the close--when there were shouts of 'Da capo!' The andante also found favor, but particularly the last allegro because, having observed that all last as well as first allegros begin here with all the instruments playing in unison, I began with two violins only, piano for the first eight bars, followed instantly by a forte. The audience, as I had expected, said 'Hush!' at the soft beginning, and when they heard the forte began to clap their hands. I was so happy that as soon as the symphony was over I went off to the Palais Royale where I had a large ice, said the rosary as I had vowed to do, and went home.

He would doubtless have found the silent good manners of today's audiences strange, and even maybe a bit dispiriting.

The custom of immediate audience response lasted well into the twentieth century. The story of the tumultuous Paris premiere of *The Rite of Spring* in July 1913 is too well known to need retelling, but there's also E.M. Forster's wonderfully funny account in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* of a performance of *Lucia di Lammermoor* in a small provincial Italian town around the turn of the century, where he says the audience buzzed throughout the performance like a hive of happy bees. And then there's the old story about the tenor in a small Italian opera house doing his big aria, getting encored, doing it again and getting encored again, finally beseeching the audience to let him go and let the opera continue, when a voice from the gallery called out, "And you will do it again, my friend, and again, until you get it right."

Different relationships, indeed, between performers and audience! But modern concert audiences seem to be quite happy with the present set of relationships, and I've never heard anyone complain about them--even the fact that they *don't* complain, that they don't seem to want the power to influence the course of the performance, may be seen as indicating a frame of mind. Such a consideration is not just aesthetic, but political, in the widest sense.

Then there are the sounds themselves. I haven't time to go into all the various sounds and sound relationships in all their enormous complexity that go to make a work of symphonic music. In essence they are both rational and at the same time dramatic. They are rational, in that they operate within the closed circle of mathematically tempered fifths and the rational hierarchy of the universal scale from which there is no escape, as well as with simple rationally-organized rhythms that are capable of being notated in a divisional notational system. They are dramatic, in that they bring about in the minds of the listeners tensions and relaxations, conflicts and resolutions, and create surprises and even paradoxes which are then shown to be rational in their tonal-harmonic nature. The performance of a symphonic work is the acting-out of a drama, with climaxes sometimes raised to orgasmic intensity, and final and conclusive resolution. The relationships between sounds can be thought of as metaphors for human relationships and the work as a whole can be thought of as a drama of the progress of an individual human soul

through opposition, struggle and overcoming. Now opposition, struggle and overcoming are all relationships of a specific kind that seem characteristic of western culture. The fact that we use such words of our most prestigious form of musicking shows a kind of cultural bias of which philosophers of music from Kant to Langer seem to have been unaware.

The language in which these dramas are couched is not that of words but the ancient language of gesture. This means, as we have seen, that who or what is struggling and overcoming, who or what, in a word, is relating, is not named or given a location. That, in turn, means that the level of generality of the mythical, paradigmatic events of the struggle is much higher than in the symphony's almost exactly contemporaneous narrative medium, the novel.

But we should make no mistake. A symphonic work is experienced in performance, by performers and listeners alike, not as 'structure' or 'form' to be contemplated disinterestedly, but as a dramatic succession of events in time in which to involve oneself, and even identify with a protagonist, no less than when they are reading a novel. 'Structure' and 'form' are concepts imposed after the event by critics, just as they are when critics talk about the 'structure' or the 'form' of a novel. Any competent composer working in the symphonic or sonata style will place the events of his drama in a linked sequence of tensions and relaxations as carefully as any competent Hollywood script writer.

To take part in the performance of a work of classical music is to experience a special case of the ritual narrative in which particular paradigms of change and development of relationships are expounded. I say a 'special case' because not all ways of musicking are dynamic in this way, and very few musical cultures espouse that concept of change and development through opposition, struggle, and final resolution that characterizes the musical works of the western symphonic tradition. It is, in fact, something of a freak among world musics as a whole and even within the history of western music making. For that reason alone, those theorists and philosophers, and sociologists too, who take the western symphonic style as a paradigm for human musical activity as a whole are likely to find themselves aground in the shallows of a very small and tidal lagoon while the great ocean of musicking rolls around them unnoticed.

What I am saying is this: that a musical performance is a ritual whose relationships mirror, and allow us to explore, the relationships of our world as we imagine them ideally to be. If this idea has any validity, then current ideas about music as some kind of code for the communication, or the expression, of emotions, or for the representation of emotions, or even, heaven help us, for the representation of the morphology of emotions, which is the term Suzanne Langer uses, emanating from a composer to each individual listener through the supposedly neutral and transparent medium of the performance, just don't stand up.

In the first place, performance isn't neutral at all, but is suffused with its own rich collection of meanings. And in the second place, the idea of music as communication of emotions at all has always seemed to me to be a quaint notion. I have plenty of emotions of my own without needing those of others, even if they are those of Beethoven or Bach. I'm not even sure I should want to experience any of Beethoven's emotions. The man might have been a musical genius but emotionally he was a mess.

Gregory Bateson, on the other hand, suggests that emotions are not autonomous states of mind or feeling, but rather are ways in which our computations--that's the word he uses--our computations about relationships resonate in consciousness. If all creatures, from bacteria to human beings to sequoia trees, need some means of getting an answer to the question How do I relate to this entity?, then they need some way of representing this relationship to themselves. For those more complex creatures at least that have attained to consciousness, it is through the emotional state that is aroused that the relationship is represented. Thus anger is the

representation in consciousness of a relationship in which the other will not do what we want, while love represents a relationship of mutual dependency and fear a threat.

So if 'to music' is to take part in a discourse concerning relationships, then we need not be surprised that it should arouse powerful emotions in us. But the emotion that is aroused is not the *reason* for the musicking. It's the sign that the musicking is doing its job. I don't remember ever being made sad by a sad piece or happy by a happy one. And if anyone can tell me convincingly what emotion the *Jupiter* symphony expresses, I'll take off my hat to them. My experience is that a good performance makes me feel elation and joy, a feeling that seems to come from having been placed in touch with my own being and that of the cosmos. After a really good performance, by others and even occasionally by myself--and that's a fortunate occasion indeed--I feel that *this* is how the world *really* is, this is how things *really* are, and I have been put in tune with it.

This gives us a clue also to the way we assess the quality of a performance. I think the quality of a performance--any performance, anywhere and at any time--is to be judged on the subtlety, imaginativeness and comprehensiveness with which we, the participants, are empowered by it to explore and affirm metaphorically the relationships of our world, the extent to which we are empowered to see that those relationships are good and to celebrate them. Our emotional involvement in it, the extent to which it moves us--or doesn't move us, which may be just as significant--depends upon the extent to which we feel ourselves to be--or not to be, whichever is the case--for the duration of the performance part of the pattern that connects as it is modeled by the relationships of the event. Once again, I must emphasize that we are not just *observing* those relationships from the outside, but are actively *involved*, every one of us, in their creation and their maintenance.

The experience of musicking is thus much richer and more complex than conventional western esthetics allows, since in experiencing the relationships of the performance in all their complexity we are experiencing those of the wider world as we conceive them to be and as we believe they ought to be. The phrase 'as we believe them to be' is of course a vital modifier, since not everyone perceives the relationships of the world in the same way.

Members of different social and cultural groups, as we know only too well, have different senses of the nature of the pattern which connects, different concepts of what constitute ideal social relationships, different senses, in fact, of who they are. That this is true even within a single society or nation-state is a truism, and we needn't be surprised to find that members of different groups within that society pattern their musicking in different ways in order to generate different sets of relationships which model their ideal. That means not only the style of the sound relationships they bring into existence or listen to, but also the entire way in which the performance is patterned.

And so we find, even within a single society, not one but innumerable ways of musicking. Of course, there is a great deal of overlap both in musical style and in style of organization of the performance as a whole, since all members of a society have in common with one another a number of social experiences and assumptions about relationships. That's what makes them a society. But there are also any number of differences, any number of deliberate differences sometimes, as one social group sets itself off from others, or tries to do so. There are even antagonisms and oppositions between ways of musicking, as members of opposing social groups use their musicking to affirm, explore, and celebrate different senses of who they are.

In every kind of musical performance there are right and wrong ways to behave, right and wrong ways to dress, to speak, and to react to one another and to the musical performance. To behave at a punk-rock concert in ways which apparently come naturally at Symphony Hall would be to invite ridicule, and even possibly hostility--and vice versa, of course. That these

norms of behavior are felt by those present not as restraints only goes to show how lightly the norms fall on those to whom they represent ideal social relationships. The fact that those who are enjoying the event do not feel constrained but feel rather that they are behaving naturally shows that a musical performance while it lasts brings into existence relationships which model those which they would like to see in the wider society of every day. The lived-in order, in fact, merges with the dreamed-of order.

The differences between, say, a symphony concert and a punk-rock concert aren't clear-cut, of course. It would be easy to set up a simple antithesis between them with the first representing the acceptance, and the second representing the rejection, of the values of the contemporary industrial world, or the scientific world, or the bourgeoisie, or whatever. That kind of antithesis is the stuff of much pop sociology of music, but it doesn't bear much resemblance to the untidy reality of human relationships.

There is too much overlap in the two forms of musicking; for example, in both kinds we share the experience with strangers, in both types we pay for admission, in both the audience is kept apart from the performers and dominated by them, both have a network of stars and superstars whose glamour is part of the deal, and both rely on high technology, to mention only a few common features. We have to be aware that both kinds of performance belong to the modern western style of large-scale public musicking that is mediated by the passing of money. I say 'modern' because the idea of a public musical event for which one pays for admission dates back only as far as the seventeenth century at the earliest and didn't become the rule until the nineteenth.

An unsympathetic witness might even find a certain hypocrisy in the rock-concert situation. Many popular artists make a great show of their unity and their identity with the audience; I remember an aging and justly famous country star sitting on the edge of the stage and announcing "We're gonna be here all night!" We all cheered, even though we knew it wasn't going to happen; we all knew that neither the theater management nor the star's own management, not to mention the theater unions, would ever allow the performance to run over its allotted duration. But we appreciated the gesture and, who knows, he might have been wishing as sincerely as we did that it might be true. I don't suppose that thoughtful artists like the circus conditions under which they usually have to perform today any more than do the more thoughtful members of their audiences.

Again, some popular artists go to the point of behavior onstage which might be regarded as an invitation to sex. But any deluded member of the audience who took the invitation seriously and tried to join the star onstage, or backstage, would soon find him or herself quickly bundled off, and not too gently either, by a team of heavies who have been hired for just that purpose.

Such pretenses are of course absent from a symphony concert. Performers at Symphony Hall don't issue fake sexual invitations, and don't feel the need to pretend the concert is going to go on all night. I said there was a certain hypocrisy in the rock concert. But hypocrisy is the tribute that vice pays to virtue, and the pretenses made in these situations show what those taking part, and that means performers as well as audience, are really seeking in this performance. We can read it perhaps as an ideal of community and conviviality as an antidote to the anomie of our age. The community of a rock concert may well be counterfeit, but people are not on the whole so silly as not to realize this, and no-one can blame them if they feel that counterfeit community is better than none at all.

In any case, what we need to understand is that those taking part in different kinds of musicking are looking for different kinds of relationships, and we should not project the norms of one kind of performance on to another kind. Any performance should be judged on its

success in affirming, exploring and celebrating those relationships which those taking part feel to be ideal. Only the best musicking of which all those taking part are capable will do that, and only those who are taking part can know for sure what those relationships are. And I believe that the best musicking is always done by those who do the best they can with what they have. That may sound like a recipe for smug mediocrity, but don't you believe it--those who do the best they can with what they have will get better. And when I say better, we have to remember that there are many ways of musicking well, and the technical dexterity that is so prized in western culture is only one of them.

Then again, the meaning of performing a specific musical work can change over time. For example, when that great drama of the transformation of a soul which we call Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* was performed in its composer's own day, that performance was, and was intended to be, a powerful revolutionary event, whose musically revolutionary sound-relationships formed a metaphor for the transformation of social relationships. It excited some as a ritual of liberation and frightened the daylights out of others. Today it frightens no-one, and cannot do so. Its musically revolutionary aspects long ago became the common coin of a thousand symphonic works and we can perceive them only at a remove, and through a strenuous exercise in historical imagination. The ritual of performing the piece in a concert hall today gives, if anything, a sense of reassurance that society's relationships are as they have been and will remain so. Do what we will, we can no longer breathe revolutionary life into the act of performing this work. It belongs, if you like, to the established social order and not to any possible revolution in human relationships. That may be okay with you, and it may be okay with me, but we need to understand what has happened to the piece, and we should not fool ourselves into imagining that performing Beethoven's drama of the liberation of a soul any longer has liberatory power. If we want to explore, to affirm, and to celebrate those changed relationships that are called liberation--and not everyone does, of course--we have to find our own rituals.

There must be a link between the nature of the musical work that is being performed and the nature of the performance event, and although that link is flexible and will support changes of meaning it isn't infinitely so. Beethoven's great drama has changed hardly at all over the two hundred years or so since its creation, but the relationships of the event in which it has been performed have changed profoundly. The work is a powerful structure which has so far been able to bear the weight of those changed relationships, but we cannot assume that it will go on bearing them for ever. Sooner or later the link between the nature of the work and the purposes of performance will break and when that happens the work will cease to have anything more than antiquarian interest and will drop from the repertory. That moment may be closer than we think.

Anyway, what this rather roundabout argument comes down to is this: if we are interested in understanding the social nature of musicking, which I take to be the purpose of a sociology of music, then the basic questions we need to ask are two, from which a whole constellation of questions will then arise. The first is, Whose ideal relationships, whose concept of the pattern which connects, is being explored, affirmed and celebrated in this performance? And the second is, What is the nature of those relationships and how are they represented in the performance? And we can ask those questions concerning a man in the subway with his walkman clamped over his ears--he may be listening to anything from Ice Cube to *Götterdämmerung* but the gesture of exclusion is the same--or of the household drudge singing to herself as she mops the floor, or of the crowd singing patriotic songs at a political rally, or of the singing congregation in a church, or of ol' pals singing bawdy songs at a drunken party,--or, if it comes to that, of those taking part in the Ghanaian *adzida* dance or of the players and listeners in the Balinese *gamelan* performance, or of the participants in any of a thousand other kinds of musicking anywhere across the world.

Any attempt to explain the meaning of musicking, and its function in human life, that doesn't at least try to deal with all kinds of human musicking, however, strange, or primitive, or even antipathetic it may appear to our perceptions, just isn't worth the paper it's written on. And we cannot, and must not, countenance any view of musicking that assumes or concludes that any one tradition is better than any other. All musicking is serious musicking, yes even singing dirty songs at a drunken party, and all musical events must ultimately be judged on their ritual efficacy, on the subtlety and comprehensiveness with which they empower those taking part to explore, affirm, and celebrate their ideas of ideal relationships. Within each tradition, each style, there will be some performances where this is done well and others in which it is done badly. Only those who take the trouble to immerse themselves in the tradition, which means the community, will be able to know which is which. We may well feel, however, and we do have the right to feel, that there are ways of musicking which accord well with our own concepts of ideal relationships and others which do not. The choice of ways of musicking is not a trivial matter, even though is it not always done consciously or deliberately.

You may have gathered that I am not at all sure that musicking as it is practiced today in western concert halls and opera houses accords with my own feeling of the way in which the world is put together. You will, of course, have your own view of that. I only hope that what I've been saying will help towards framing those questions which are most fruitful in pondering the meaning of the act of musicking, whether it's social, individual, or political. I still hear myself saying to my students, I don't care if you agree with my answers. The important thing is to see that there are questions to be asked.