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Booknotes

Nietzsche once said that without music, human life would be a mistake. Jerrold Levinson refers to this somewhat hyperbolic pronouncement in his *Musical Concerns: Essays in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford University Press, 2015), going on to qualify it; 'without narrowly beautiful music … human life would be, if not an outright mistake, at least a lot harder to bear'. It is interesting that after years of neglect the philosophy of music has become a big topic, following the pioneering work of Peter Kivy and substantial contributions from philosophers like Roger Scruton and Stephen Davies. In the same batch of books as Levinson's, we also have Kendall L. Walton's *In Other Shoes: Music, Metaphor, Empathy, Existence* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

It is no exaggeration to say that, explicitly or not, the spirit of Eduard Hanslick broods over much philosophical thinking about music. These days, Hanslick, the leading music critic of his time in Vienna, famously pro-Brahms and anti-Wagner, is chiefly remembered for his advocacy of the position that music was essentially an abstract art, meaning nothing in itself: pure, absolute music 'has no subject beyond the combinations of notes we hear, for music speaks not only by means of sound, it speaks nothing but sound'. And, on Hanslick's view, non-absolute music was an inferior hybrid, which doubtless led to his being lampooned by Wagner as Beckmesser in *Die Meistersinger*.

No one wants to be thought of as a censorious bureaucrat waving his rule book at us in a Beckmesserish fashion, but apart from that, no one really believes that music speaks nothing but sound, unrelated to the rest of life. No more do they believe that (in Hanslick's words) 'a musical idea … is an end in itself, and not a means for representing feelings and thoughts'. Everyone who listens to music with even a modicum of understanding feels the compulsion to recognise, and if they are philosophers to explain, the power music has over us. Even if like Kivy, they come close to Hanslick and think that music is an art of 'pure sonic design', they recognise its expressive power, and see a philosophical need to account for that. And, as Walton points out, Hanslick himself departs pretty quickly from his ostensible musical purism by introducing metaphorical descriptions of music.

doi:10.1017/S003181911500042X
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https://doi.org/10.1017/S003181911500042X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Neither Levinson nor Walton are Hanslickians. Both recognise music's power to go beyond, way beyond, the formalism of the notes, and both are keen to speak about what that amounts to. Following on from a suggestion of the musical theorist William Benjamin, Levinson speaks of the interiority of music: 'Music is in effect recreated within us each time we listen, by seconding its movement, for the most part without conscious intent, in our aural imaginations, often anticipating each gesture of the music as if it were our own, as if coming from within us instead of from without.' Walton also speaks of the listener 'feeling intimate with the music'. Both consider the thought that in listening to music we encounter a personality: musical works are 'somewhat like persons', according to Levinson, which leads him to discuss which musical personalities he would like to spend time with were he to be marooned on a desert island (*not* Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony, he says, though *Souvenir de Florence* would apparently do). And performers, as well as works, reveal personality: thus Sviatoslav Richter embodied 'massive strength, solidity and self-reliance', according to Levinson; maybe that was how he came over in New York: in London, there was certainly strength, but, far more, poetry, exploration, lightness of touch … and self-reliance? This was a man who, in London, played the last movement of the Hammerklavier as an encore because he had been dis-satisfied with the original performance. (One of the delights of reading Levinson is that he gives the reader plenty of judgements about actual musical matters, including ones related to jazz and popular music).

Walton certainly thinks that there are person-like qualities in music, but in listening we are not always engaging with another personality, and the feelings we excogitate are more like impressions of feelings than representations of them (so music retains its abstractness). In various formulations of his position, for Walton, music induces the appreciator to 'imagine feeling in certain ways'. Music itself is not nervous or angry or sad, but it 'possesses the property of being apt to produce in listeners an experience of there being someone or something who is infectiously nervous'. But we don't have to think or even imagine that there really is a person there, apart from our experience of the music. It is the pure experience which counts, cut off from any object, real or imagined. This appears to be part of what Walton's title is getting at: in *other* shoes, not in my shoes or anyone's in particular, and no actual shoes, but just getting the feeling of being in some shoes, shoes of some sort. What is important in encountering a piece of, say, 'nervous' music, is not even the thought of something outside us,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S003181911500042X Published online by Cambridge University Press

but rather 'imaginative *introspecting*'. Musical works 'don't actually arouse feelings but they do induce the appreciator to *imagine* herself experiencing them'. To all this, one is inclined to respond, poor old listener. Can't they just get on listening to the music without all this imagining and introspecting?

Both Levinson and Walton, wrestle in interesting ways with the emotional and human force and power of music. If we have a doubt with both of their approaches, different as they are, of the way we seem to take music we listen to into our inner selves, it would be this. Even if we do feel at one with music that moves us, as we surely do, don't we often, and in many of the best cases, feel its total strangeness, its alienness to us and its transcendence of anything we could make, do or imagine? There may be a sense of this in Walton's idea of being in other shoes. But to some tastes his actual account may seem to put too great an onus on what the listener is led to imagine and introspect, on the activity of the listener; whereas the feeling many get in listening to Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony is of being pulled along violently by something wholly outside one's control, or, to go to a different level altogether, in the last movement of Beethoven's Op 111 one should have the sense of (over)hearing something from a different world altogether. Sometimes at any rate, in great music, what is at issue is not *our* feelings or *our* experiences, but those of a more powerful or of a more poetic or of a higher and better sort coming to us from without.

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