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Analysing Intertextually: The Case of the Exposition of the Second Movement of Bartók's Sonata for Solo Violin Sz. 117

ABSTRACT

Background

According to the ideas mainly proposed by literary theorists Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes, a text should be understood not as a “self-contained system but rather as a field of traces and tracing of otherness, shaped by the repetition and transformation of other textual structures” (Martínez 1996, 268). Therefore, *intertextuality*, as scholar Thais E. Morgan explains, proposes a shift “from the triangle of author/work/tradition to that of text/discourse/culture replacing an evolutionary model of literary history with a structural model of literature as a sign system” (Morgan 1985, 1).

The discourse around intertextuality has been gradually incorporated into musical-analytical literature often through Harold Bloom's concept of *influence* (Straus 1990, Korsyn 1991). Bloom describes the relationship between two works as a struggle between one author and her precursor, a process in which the later author must suppress the influence of the earlier one in order for her work to achieve artistic legitimacy and consequently a position in the canon. However, by focusing on a binary relation between precursor and successor, and by praising artistic originality and intentionality, the ideology behind the concept of *influence* in fact attempts to limit the inevitably irreducible plurality of a text as understood by theories of intertextuality, as well as the possibilities of exploring ahistorical intertextual relations.

Regarding the discussion of influence in music analysis, Lawrence Kramer comments:

Narratives of influence systematically efface the broad social and discursive fields of cultural transmission in favor of a narrow drama of individuation between heroic personages. They consistently misrepresent ordinary intertextual relations—similarities, analogies, citations, allusions—as extraordinary devices that defeat the purpose of intertextuality itself or else are defeated by it. (Kramer 2011, 114-115)

Kramer argues that *influence*, as it is typically applied to musical analysis, is more of a narrative genre and less of a methodology, and that, consequently, it should be regarded not as a principle of explanation but as an historically conditioned object of interpretation. In other words, *Influence*, with its obsessive fixation on artistic heroism, arises from an intellectual and esthetical tradition that reached its highest point at the end of the nineteenth century, an ideology that is, in fact, at odds with the ideas of the post-structuralist thinking from which the modern concept of intertextuality arises.

Aims and repertoire studied

The paper presents an analysis of the exposition of the fugal second movement of Bartók's *Sonata for Solo Violin vis-à-vis* two other fugal works for solo violin: J.S. Bach's *Sonata for Solo Violin* no.1 and Eugene Ysaÿe's *Sonata* no. 1.

Methods

Bringing into the discussion the relationship between *intertextuality* and *musical influence*, and by shifting the presupposed agency from the composer to the reader, this paper adapts some concepts from Harold Bloom's *theory of influence*, as applied to music by Joseph Straus (1990).

Implications

Without attempting a historical claim, and going beyond a binary relationship between two works, the paper suggests that the meaning of some seemingly stable structural aspects not only of Bartók's fugue but also of Ysaÿe's and Bach's can be considered as dependent on its dynamic position within a proposed intertext.

Keywords

Influence, intertextuality, music analysis

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