

HYPOCRISY IN MUSIC

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As, probably with most things, there is hypocrisy and insincerity in music and its evaluation.

Hypocrisy is claiming to have standards and beliefs contrary to one's own real character. It is also being two-faced. It could include having a set of rules for some music but a different set of rules for other music.

There are people who try to thrust some music down our throats and if it is music that we do not respond to, then they treat us with disdain and disrespect.

One example will suffice. Sir John Barbirolli said that if you did not love all of Elgar's music you were neither a music lover nor a musician but completely ignorant.

This means that many famous musicians who disliked Elgar's music were not musicians and were ignorant and that would include Sir Malcolm Arnold, Beecham, Boult, Karajan, Ravel, Stanford and many more. It would also include me.

Barbirolli's remark is not hypocrisy but insanity!

Boult's classic remark is worth repeating, "If Elgar's music is played badly you blame the orchestra; if it is played well, you blame Elgar".

There are people who say that in music all that matters is what they like. The expression is, "I know what music I like and that's all that matters!"

There are so many people who genuinely like substandard music and elevate it to greatness. For some weeks now, the most purchased CD in the UK is of Johann Strauss waltzes played by Andre Rieu and his ensemble, not the masterpieces of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Brahms and these four named composers are vastly superior to Johann Strauss.

Contemporary music comes in for a lot of criticism and some go as far to say it is not music at all. Others say that if it has no tune it is not music.

And this is where the hypocrisy comes in.

Many of the piano works of Chopin, Debussy and Scriabin have no tunes and yet the critics of the 'modern stuff' like these three piano composers. Many of the works of Chopin, Debussy and Scriabin are slight, tuneless and structureless pieces of no consequence... and no tunes!

Debussy can do no wrong but Webern can! Webern did not write tunes and so his music is not music at all. In some Debussy there are no tunes but his music is not rubbish! Hypocrisy!

I have heard so-called music lovers dismiss some great modern composers. Boulez's music is not music at all! Then what is it? A recipe for Lancashire Hot Pot? The editor of a music website has written that Liszt was a poor composer and he did not understand the piano and that Wolfgang Rihm hasn't a clue as to how to write music. This editor cannot even read music!

The real fact of the matter is that people choose what they like and that is fair enough, but it is not fair for them to rubbish composers they do not like unless there is a solid musical reason for it. And it is ridiculous for them to claim that inferior composers are great composers!

It may not be important to many but Chopin's musical grammar is often wrong. He uses double flats when a natural is required. He was a lazy composer in that he did not include instructions for the pianist whereas the music itself lends itself to changes of tempo. How does one play the middle section of the Scherzo no 2? Chopin does not tell us.

You may protest, "Academic reasoning. Does it matter? Surely the pianist will play it as he sees fit!"

Indeed. And so with all the recordings of this piece there are so many interpretations and reviewers, some of whom cannot read music, who make judgments which are not musical.

No wonder the great Alfred Brendel said, "Good pianists play great music; the rest play Chopin".

I disliked the music of Britten before I knew anything about him and his awful lifestyle. I did not like his music for musical reasons. He would write notes that the instruments could not get such two A's below middle C for the viola and B flat below the staff for a concert flute and because certain conductors like Norman Del Mar pointed such things out, Britten would fly into a rage and sack them from his self-promoting narcissistic Aldeburgh Festival.

The other reason for my dislike for Britten is also a musical reason. He stole music from other composers with a very slight alteration and so in his music we find bastardisations of Albinoni, Constant Lambert, Prokofiev and others. There is a modern day composer of musicals who does the same, using, for example, Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto and Ravel's Bolero to produce Broadway songs. And he thinks no one will detect his plagiarisms!

Is this hypocrisy? Well, it is certainly dishonesty and fraud!

But you mention this to some people and they dismiss you and say that this does not matter.

Let us consider another matter, the composer Amy Beach. Is her music any good or, is it just derivative of Brahms? The latter is correct.

There are composers who are so repetitive that their music is boring. Schubert is the obvious case in point. For further details see my article on Schubert. As in his Sonata in D, who wants to listen to five minutes of broken chords? In his Impromptu in A flat the theme is done to death, overcooked and burnt.

So many people who call themselves music lovers say, "If you can't whistle it, it ain't music".

Let me not come across as faultless. I am not.

For years I avoided early music. In my defence, I felt that romantic and modern music was more original and, in that, I was probably right. Years later I discovered Locatelli and other early composers and I kicked myself for my forty years of neglecting these masters.

To my shame, I also avoided opera and also regret all those years of neglect. There are great operas such as The Marriage of Figaro, Aida and Lulu to name but three.

But let us return to these composers of trite tuneless piano music. Lovers of Debussy say that although many of the preludes are tuneless they have atmosphere. Does that make it good music?

Consider film music. Humphrey Searle's music for the film The Haunting is atmospheric, realistic and frightening. It is this music that makes the movie scary, yet there are no tunes or thematic material. People complained about this splendid music and yet Debussy, Liadov and Scriabin could write tuneless, non thematic, atmospheric music and their music is acclaimed as great but Searle did not write music!!!!

Hypocrisy? Prejudice?

Prejudice is an unfair and unreasonable dislike, intolerance and dislike without a valid reason.

There are some composers whose outputs are of a high standard throughout. But there are so-called musicians and music lovers who rubbish these composers.

If I call Debussy, Chopin, Liadov and Scriabin poor or bad composers it is because I can produce musical reasons, which I have done, and have taken into consideration people saying that music without tunes is not music at all!

Some musical experts have said that Britten's best music was written by Prokofiev and others, so does this make him a poor or bad composer? In coming to this decision, put to one side his illegal sex with underage boys, that he was a sex offender and just concentrate on his music and his plagiarisms.

There is even more absurdity in music. Elton John and Jamie McCullam are great pianists. Are they?

Horowitz, Janis, Katin, Hamelin are great pianists. Elton John and McCallum are in a much lower league. Can you imagine either of them playing Prokofiev Concerto no. 3. It would be beyond them.

But idiots are in the classical world as well. One composer said that the Beatles were as good as Bach! And if you want to read about one classical idiot read my article on Charles Hazlewood.

There is another matter. Should composers write music primarily for performers or for the public? Or for themselves?

The majority said 'for the public' since they pay to go to concerts and buy the CDs and, if the composer, is alive, he gets the benefit from both ticket sales and sales of CDs.

However, some music is written for showman and showwomen performers and that will bring in the paying public. Many people go to concerts and buy CDs not for the music but for the artist. To see Marc Andre Hamelin play is an experience; to see Hilary Hahn play even if she is playing an awful violin concerto is an experience; to see the Caruducci quartet play would be memorable. I will never forget Sybil Michelow in Brahms's Alto Rhapsody or Peter Katin in Liszt Concerto no. 1... unforgettable!

There is also prejudice concerning image. CDs and tickets will sell if the artist is glamorous or handsome. Andrea Bocelli fills halls but he is not a good singer. He is nasal, as was Peter Pears, and often out of tone. But silly women think he is sexy! So they are not evaluating him or his talent or the music!

Nicola Benadetti is a violinist who won the Young Musician of the Year with an awful performance of Szymanowski's glorious Violin Concerto no. 1. That is not prejudice on my part. I followed her performance with the score in front of me and I could itemise all her inadequacies. There are those who believe she is physically beautiful and that is what sells her CDs. The CDs are not bought for the music or the performance but for the glamour content!

Modern music was in turmoil some decades ago. There was only so much you could do with the tonal system and 'tunes that you could whistle'. Tonal melody was, or was, nearing being played out. Could you write a tonal melody that was completely original? The answer was no or very unlikely and so composers had to find new methods. Schoenberg invented serial music but very few composers could write in that complex style. Yet Schoenberg, Berg and Humphrey Searle wrote glorious romantic music in this very strict discipline and with tunes and/or memorable content.

Some of the sterile preludes of Debussy and Scriabin have no impact at all but Schoenberg's A Survivor from Warsaw, the final pages of Berg's Lulu, the Bartok Piano Concertos and other moderns have a tremendous impact. Does that make their music greater than Debussy and Scriabin?

Remember Barbirolli, 'You can't be a musician or a music lover if you do not love everything that Elgar wrote'. He also said that no good music was written after 1934 and, because he is a famous name, people will go along with this nonsense.

Some people want to think that because they admire a composer then that composer is great! It does not follow!

If you do not like a work or a composer it does not mean that they are poor composers worthy of being rubbished. However, if a composer writes poor music, such as the examples I have quoted, they may not be worthy of being called a good composer let alone a great one!

Before publication of this article, I submitted it to many professional musicians who unanimously agreed with what is written here. Many said that I was not strong enough in my presentation.

Also see the article [The Man is in his Music](#)

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