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Music or The Vocabulary of Music Transcript

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Music or the Vocabulary of Music

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When I hear the phrase 'now that's what I call music', I feel nothing less than a huge pang of envy. This has been tempered by the sloganising of this phrase, which now acts as a parody of its previous self, but even in its parodic version it reminds us of a nostalgic certainty, about what music is and where it lives, that as a composer I can never enjoy and which, for me, is in fact a total fiction. I am less and less sure what it is that I call music (although, of course, I know when I hear it). The starting point for this year's lectures is therefore the absence of any global or historical consensus about what we call music, a confusion that has served the art very well over many hundreds of years. Through this year I shall be looking at what music is, how we present it and how it has changed. In my second talk I will even admit to doubts as to whether it exists at all, on the grounds that it is continually being mislaid: does it live in its score, in a recording, in a box under the stairs, in a drawer? Where did we put it?

I said that confusion about all this has served music well; this is because as a species we are incurable control-freaks, who cannot help trying to reduce our world to properties that we can bend into service. Our success in using language as a control mechanism is a modern example - witness the globalised sway of English, or the use of phrases like 'national security' to put a government's actions beyond scrutiny; and yes, these do have their music counterparts, in the obscene meddling of the most culturally bankrupt regimes of our time, most notably between 1940 and 1960. Yet music always has the last laugh at our pathetic attempts to harness its power. Aside from the rights and wrongs of their political associations, Wagner's operas and Shostakovich's symphonies now float free of their puny shackles simply because the intrinsic message of great music is a sealed one to the individual listener, while the manipulated message to thousands dies with the fate of its ideologue. This is what ensures lack of consensus: if we each opened a different message in this room, and then could not divulge these one to another, any overall interpretation or 'spin' would be impossible. This remains true even if there is a whiff of collaborative misuse on the composer's part. If his music is good, it will not even submit to his intention; effectively deaf to his hammering on the cockpit door, as it were, the plane now flies itself. I have outlined before my experience of how the new work leaves its creator behind, meaning - or perhaps 'saying' - whatever the listener opening the message finds it to say; I learned this when a manic listener to an upbeat (or so I thought) new work of mine congratulated me on plumbing the despair of the human condition. But because we cannot understand music, we cannot misunderstand it either; all listeners have won, and all must have prizes.

I have digressed into the huge question of what music can be made to mean, because all this ensures that any debate about the nature and substance of music will be danced upon a blancmange of individual judgement and preference. For example, a debate about the effect of music on the listener cannot be separated from that listener's assumptions about music's social purpose; and even in 2002 the world's societies are gloriously divided about music's purpose. For some of us it is something sublimely useless, to be encountered in a concert hall, while for others it remains a thing of function, whether for ritual, work or healing. Against that background, therefore, it is happily impossible to lay down the law about, say, what music 'means' to a listener; more widely, the very essence of music is shrouded in an uncertainty that has multiplied with the widening stylistic diversity of the last century.

It is a fair assertion that some bygone ages, like some societies today, show wide consensus about what music is, though we shall see that these successive views may conflict. It is just because the Classical language of the 1790's was so clearly defined that the achievements of the young Beethoven clearly stood out in contrast. In an earlier lecture (1) I pointed out that the sense of affront arising then from a radical departure such as Beethoven's 7th Symphony itself reinforced a tacit agreement about boundaries; basically, the extreme expression of a Beethoven or a Haydn could be clearly recognised as departure. In the modern age came individuation, the proliferation of individual languages - when there is less of a shared picture than ever of what music is. As I expressed it in that talk,

"Having heard an orchestral work by X last week (in 2002), offers no guaranteed context for what you will hear by Y next week, as it might have for quartets by Haydn and Mozart."

The Classical Style may again be probed in connection with the starting point for today's title, which comes from Constant Lambert's book *Music, Ho!*. Lambert wrote (2) that

"While others are concerned with the vocabulary of music, Sibelius is concerned with music itself."

As I say, the consensus of the late 18th Century provides an interesting yardstick for this searching remark. Before turning to the last 100 years, therefore, let us reflect upon that earlier age. Lambert was noting something about musical surface; and it is striking that the much-vaunted 'clarity' of the Classical surface depends not least on readily distinct roles for material - musical roles such as introductory, melodic, accompanimental or conclusory. This distinction had been evolving in musical syntax since around 1600, and it survives to our own day most obviously in popular repertoire. Such a distinction seems an obvious place to begin a consideration of the notion of 'vocabulary' in music.

Away from music for a moment, students of information theory will know that the impact of an element is in inverse proportion to its appearance, so that, for example, a word occurring all the time (e.g. the article, the) lacks much status, or is, in the terminology, 'redundant'. As the Microsoft Encarta dictionary puts it: (3)

"The highest value for the information content is assigned to the message that is the least probable. If a message is expected with certainty its information content is 0."

In other words, general vocabulary scores low on information content, being commonplace. This has a tempting parallel with those roles in Classical music, clearly evolved to distinguish between the individual musical idea and mere general vocabulary, to borrow Lambert's distinction. So an accompaniment cliché alerts us, through familiarity, to its lack of information content. Here are classical and more recent examples of the routine accompaniment type that may be taken as having 'redundancy' and certainly 'low information content'.

EX Classical Piano and Popular Song introductions

The strummed guitar riff, or the piano arpeggio accompaniment, is so commonplace that it has to be remarkable to take on a status beyond its subservient role, though long before that it may come to convey surprisingly powerful recognition signals (4).

So today we are talking not about the hero and heroine but about the extras - the crowds on the street. If such crowds are the 'vocabulary' of everyday life, then I am investigating here how background vocabularies may similarly support the abstract drama of music.

The distinction between, at its simplest, theme and accompaniment is a plain one. However, the greater the composer, the more dangerous this tempting distinction becomes: numerous minor Classical sonatas support their melodies with such material, but the great composer will of course have the bright idea of using such background support as the actual foreground itself. Beethoven certainly had a go at it:

EX Beethoven: Sonata in C sharp mi, op 27 no 2 'Moonlight'(i)

It is easy to overlook how absolutely radical this idea is, until we consider that in art or poetry, using supporting materials as subject-matter is more the province of the modern avant-garde - Paul Klee, Gertrude Stein. For all that, it was not Beethoven's own, for Mozart at least had already sought to blur the classic duality of materials of his time. I am not talking about the typical theme that outlines an arpeggio shape - at least half all Classical themes do that - but that which profiles 'non-theme material' drawn from the lingua franca of classicism, which is after all a kind of sewing-basket of odds and ends used for such household tasks as accompaniment and conclusion. From my early youth I recognised something unusual about the opening of the 'Prague' Symphony - it sounded as if Mozart was beginning it with what, more properly, was an ending. We all know what the end of a Classical symphony sounds like, and to me, aged 11, this was it:

EX Mozart: Symphony no 38 in D (i) opening

I even sensed a kind of ludicrous parody here, something which I think may be more obvious to children than to over-familiar adult listeners. If that opening is somehow an example of end-as-beginning, like Beethoven's later Eroica Symphony, there are other examples of accompaniment-as-theme, in Mozart's chamber music for example. Chief among these, the slow movement of his Eb Quartet K.428, is rightly celebrated for its radical and un-Classical harmonic progressions, which show little recourse to orthodox melodic content in achieving their effect.

EX Mozart: String Quartet in Eb K.428 (ii)

In truth all these accompaniment-as-theme examples are about harmony, for that was the role of the accompanimental figure in

the Classical work-basket - to outline, sustain and later undermine a temporary harmonic centre. Beethoven's 'Moonlight' is no different - here, as in the Mozart, the arpeggios are incidental really. Even melody, when it appears, is merely a meagre scrap - 'Pom - po-Pom'

So these examples, great exceptions in elevating the commonplace, show how clear we are now - maybe clearer than listeners then - about function in musical material. If we hear the arpeggiated accompaniment known as 'Alberti bass', in D major, we sense that a D major theme cannot be far behind. The confounding of our expectations is possible because of its framework, a set of assumptions that so clearly separates the work-basket from the big idea.

In this context, then, the work-basket might equate to Constant Lambert's 'the vocabulary of music' the commonplace stuff - while thematic content might be what he calls 'music itself'. But both these elements are indivisible partners in an honest delivery, the one needing the support of the other, while what riled Lambert in the period of Sibelius was that this distinction had, he felt, broken down. Lambert was not attacking everyday coinage in music but its misuse, which we shall discuss below. So this detour into the Classical language merely establishes that there was in 1780 some consensus about subject matter and vocabulary, while in the period addressed by Music, Ho! it would be one of many 'givens' going into the melting-pot. I don't share Lambert's pessimism, but he was making a prophetic distinction, one that has resonance for all music written since. I feel therefore that it deserves exploration, in case it throws light on the nature of musical identity and surface in our own time. Essentially Lambert was commenting on fading opposition between musical idea and musical vocabulary. However, that language of music evolved in the later 18th Century from the Baroque, and here, perhaps, music and its vocabulary can more meaningfully be separated. The language of the high Baroque was globalised, in pan-European terms, in the way that English is a global currency today - its elements appeared everywhere, but in markedly different regional accents. From Potsdam to Rotterdam to Vienna to Naples was the same musical soup, endlessly stirred by travelling musicians. At the heart of this language was the Italian manner, so influential elsewhere else - the 'received pronunciation', as it were. In this way an overlapping musical territory could be occupied by a Geminiani in Italy, a Charles Avison in Newcastle Upon Tyne and even, to an extent, a Turlough O'Carolan playing Baroque-inflected Irish Harp in the great houses of Ireland. JS Bach is, of course, the greatest of all these assimilators, so great that he far surpasses the Italian models being assimilated, enriching them with his richer North German accent.

When a musical language is so prevalent, it is worth looking closely at its components; what makes the margarine spread? In fact the very usability, the transferability, of music in the Baroque was part of a concept about music that effectively guaranteed a shared musical expression. In the words of George Buelow (5),

"Composers in general sought a rational unity that was imposed on all the elements of a work by its effect."

This writer stresses that such a network of aesthetic signals, known today as the 'Doctrine of the Affekts or Affections', existed more in the attempts of theorists than in the understanding of musicians; yet he is clear that this "rational unity" was built upon a set of universally understood components intended to create widely recognisable states. These components were called Figuren or 'Figures', and were as close to a vocabulary of music as has ever been amassed. Figuren were musical fragments, intended originally to correspond to speech figures in Classical rhetoric, which, in proliferation, wove a clear musical identity. So when we listen to a Baroque structure, even one by Bach, we can actually break down what we recognise into small - and not very individual - components, for Bach's genius lies in what he does with them - in this example, a falling bass-line.

EX Bach - Crucifixus shape from B minor Mass

The aesthetic outlook of which this was a part was of course markedly different in its assumptions from our own. Uncomplicated by the modern concern with individuality, listeners expected less what they had never encountered before than what they already had. In Buelow's words, again (6),

"To compose music with a stylistic and expressive unity based on an affekt was an a rational, objective concept, not a compositional practice equitable with 19th-century concerns for spontaneous emotional creativity... The Baroque composer planned the affective content of each work, and he expected the response of his audience to be based on an equally rational insight into the meaning of his music."

So that falling bass in that Crucifixus was a recognised asset in the evocation of pathos. I think it follows from this that the prevalent vocabulary of Baroque music is of a part with its massive output and, inevitably, with its uneven quality - a communicating art, but one that is thus inevitably conforming in its dimensions.

The obvious result of this, clearly, was a ready audience, and a sense of musical ownership whose loss over the last 100 years has been a main theme of my talks. In the same way we find that, today, the high degree of redundancy and conformity in commercial pop music is locked in a cycle with the mass public, which at once consumes, and thus dictates the return of, its formulae. And it was this shift toward the realm of public reception in the 17th Century that introduced into music that element of mass-production, a commercial imperative that heralded the modern age of what is being called 'the music business'. Such elements did not pertain in the same way when music centred around the elite institutions of church and court. Let us remember that it was the 17th Century that saw the advent of public opera and public concert, huge innovations in the reception of music that were only possible in an era of mass-production: then, as now, demand/supply/vocabulary were locked in a ceaseless dance. We all know what mass-demand for a product does to the quality of hitherto specialised materials. So, if not the Classical language, maybe to some extent the Baroque demonstrates the role of musical vocabulary as subject-matter. And yet, I fear, this, too, is something other than what Lambert meant! The crucial difference lies in the new self-consciousness that arises from the modern lack of consensus about art: earlier composers, composing in the only way for which their training prepared them, belonged to a consensus about what music was. No casting around for paths forward was necessary, for no difference of view existed about the role of music, which was "to make felt the affekts through simple tones and rhythms", according to the writer Neidhardt in 1706 (7).

The aesthetic restlessness of the early 20th Century, by contrast, had everything to do with debate about the role of music. If the Baroque desire to 'move the passions' of the listener reminds us of some aspects of Romanticism, then it was part of a long span; in this light, Stravinsky is a truly revolutionary figure in being perhaps the first great artist for 250 years to challenge this emotive aesthetic role. Stravinsky's famous claim that music is 'of itself powerless to express anything at all', is nowadays presented as evoking an earlier (Baroque) objectivity, long swept aside by the indulgence of Romantic expression; however, I think the idea of a powerless music, one that is about the logic of its discourse only, would have been as incomprehensible to a Baroque theorist as to the most overheated Wagnerian acolyte. In fact this 'return to 18th-century objectivity', now known as 'neoclassicism', represented a very modern response to the late Romantic sunset; it was a time of unparalleled uncertainty. Nothing better illustrates this ferment about what music is than Stravinsky's aesthetic of objectivity - this explosive concept that music was no longer what it had been taken to be for several hundred years. Music, Ho! deals extensively, and by no means sympathetically, with this symptom of upheaval. Neoclassicism was similarly foreign to the strand of late-Romantic tradition represented by Schoenberg (though it later touched him too) and his scribe, the philosopher Adorno; Adorno saw Schoenberg as the greater innovator, but if it is innovation that we seek, then Schoenberg as the upholder of 'properly understood, old-fashioned tradition' pales beside the iconoclast Stravinsky, whose view of what music was not about is, truly, a new one (though prefigured by the thinker Eduard Hanslick in the mid 19th Century).

We have seen a clear division in earlier music between 'thematic' foreground ideas and workaday subsidiary materials that supported them. But what worried Constant Lambert in the 1920s was the new fashion, led of course by Stravinsky, for revisiting this latter repertoire as a new raw material. This apparently outdated, discarded miscellany of tonal bits and pieces was being reawakened to play a role in the new language of Stravinsky's works after *Pulcinella* in 1919. It is this revisiting of something already discarded that marks the music of the modern age from those we have briefly examined in the light of musical vocabulary. The composer himself called the 1920s 'a decade of samplings, experiments and amalgamations', which neatly covers both the eclectic and the sometimes trivial face of what transpired. It is this to which Lambert referred as 'the vocabulary of music'.

What must have been immediately striking at the time was a profusion of faux-naïf arpeggios and parodied scalic mottos - this distorted Classical 'vocabulary' - while what is striking in hindsight is how Stravinsky, at least, managed to invest these with a personal flavour. Thus our first reaction is that we recognise something, and our second may be that, after all, we don't.

EX Stravinsky from Stravinsky Octuor

The lack of sweeping thematic foreground in favour of small motifs and clichéd fragments is a part of neoclassicism's rebellion against thematic Romanticism - leitmotifs, big tunes, themes and more themes. It is now possible to embrace and enjoy, as part of Stravinsky's language, what amounts to this anti-thematicism, this determination to build the greatest edifice upon the most slender raw material - and indeed, such economy and resource is a solid technical achievement that is frequently admired in Haydn (8).

However, giving credit to a composer's knobblier quirks is a luxury often not available to contemporaries, and what can be savoured nowadays was clearly a negative step in 1930, at least when seen against the traditional fabric of thematic and tonal rise-and-fall painted by Sibelius.

EX Sibelius 5th Symphony

Against that cultural backdrop, the dessicated cuttings-out of Stravinsky must have appeared like the doodles of a pretentious art student, yet hindsight has revealed that these disjunct collages, so often compared to Picasso's displaced images, do have heart of their own. For all that, it must be owned that they are the tip of a very large and variegated iceberg, many of whose neoclassical chummings admirably justify that jibe aimed at the Baroque itself about 'sewing-machine music'. For what is remarkable about the neo-classical movement is its variety - what else have Honegger, Martinu and Villa-Lobos in common? - and the way it permitted a facility that is the very antithesis of the hard-won honings of Sibelius. Hindemith has born the brunt of our abuse for this, and he does show facility to be a terrible master. It may not be an accident that this movement in music, in which ostinato repetition is so much a feature, saw the return of huge compositional outputs among Hindemith, Martinu, Shostakovich and Milhaud, to name a few. This handwerklich approach to composition had not been seen since the divertimenti and sonata sets of the 18th Century, which, as we saw, were features of a supply-and-demand approach to musical production. For Hindemith this was a quite conscious philosophy, which he called *Gebrauchsmusik* - music for making use of - a much misunderstood doctrine, and one to which posterity has not been kind.

But we may reflect once more that, here again, a philosophy of high output went hand-in-hand with the means to affect it via a vocabulary. Lambert saw it for what it was, but possibly overlooked its positive qualities, for a prime aim uniting many neoclassical composers was to rediscover clarity of texture and direct rhythmic textures. Whether this vocabulary was a recycled one from 200 years earlier, it let some light into instrumental texture as well as facilitating its production.

The example of Stravinsky shows that a resource is not necessarily condemned by its trivial origins: as in our Bach example, it was the personality of the composer, not the actual material, which defined the result. The transforming hand of, say, a Bartok, who strangely married Baroque rhythmic figures with folk inflections, is all that is needed for the alchemy of art. Even Milhaud, the prolific member of the group 'Les Six', hit the target with one of his most brazenly eclectic neoclassical ideas, the ballet *La création du monde*. This opens with a close reworking of the opening of Bach's *St John Passion*, but, with its wailing saxophone and blues inflections, is a confection of such colourful and disparate elements that it is completely convincing.

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What I hope emerges here is an amplification of the musical theatre set out before Lambert when he distinguished between 'music and the vocabulary of music'. The 1920s and 1930s were highly unusual in historical terms for seeing a conscious revisiting, in many guises, of musical elements of the past; this was, as I noted, a movement whose self-consciousness must have appeared something like desperation beside the traditional achievements of Sibelius and Elgar or, in another sphere, Schoenberg and Berg. Furthermore, this is an era that has much to tell us about the later 20th Century, for we have never subsequently been able to lose that self-awareness that arrived with the conscious exploration of another musical world. Stravinsky's claim that he was not a creator but a thief may have marked him out 60 years ago, but in the age of post-modern cultural tourism the ranks of thieves have swelled to thousands; today we are all aware of stylistic pluralities among the choices that we make, and of the collapsed boundaries between contemporary musical areas.

I believe there is an element of vocabulary since 1950, but clearly this notion is at best a murky issue, and more treacherous still in one's own time, without the reassurance of hindsight. There is a further obstacle nowadays, of course, for the very notion of common rhetorical elements such as delineated the Baroque language is itself now pejorative. The cult of individual artistic expression, which no amount of anti-Romantic reaction has dislodged, enshrines the personal in a way which, we have seen, would be meaningless in the late 17th Century, when a composer was part of a trade. So none of us today wants to think we belong to 'a shared vocabulary!' The modern put-down 'thank you for reducing my work to a cultural stereotype' well expresses our distaste for finding ourselves part of aesthetic -isms.

Further evidence that former notions of musical vocabulary may no longer operate comes from the market. If musical vocabulary is linked to mass demand for production, as we have suggested in regard to previous periods, then it may seem fruitless to seek it in classical music of today. Demand has steadily declined, for reasons explored in previous talks, so there is precious little commercial pressure on the avant-garde! On the contrary, the trend since 1910 has rather been toward the individuation much discussed in previous talks - the development away from consensus to personal language. This lack of consensual style today challenges the very notion of a vocabulary - for what is the style that it would define?

In my inaugural lecture I discussed Adorno's claim that while anything in Mozart could be exchanged with anything else without a loss of coherence, Schoenberg's cantata *Erwartung* existed in the only possible form - there was no supporting common language. This extreme claim is addressing the vocabulary question, and it identifies a possible point in the early 20th Century where music became a personal utterance. Such a point is often attributed to Beethoven, but the reality is that consensus

remains wide throughout European Romanticism - symphony and sonata, operatic genres, orchestral and chamber media, even the continuing reliance on treatment of Sonata Form, or goodness sake! In the modern age, every one of those consensual areas was to be challenged.

The compromising role, or, if one supports it, the facilitating role of vocabulary in Romantic musical expression was clearly exposed by the philosopher Adorno in 'Music and New Music'. Adorno described (9) how the radical nature of modernism centred upon a rooting-out of just such a rhetorical element, in an austere purification of anything taken for granted. He wrote

"Again and again composers of the stature of Schubert, Chopin, Debussy and Strauss were seduced into sacrificing integrity of structure to the need to conciliate. The repugnance aroused by these insinuating, ingratiating gestures, which have wormed their way into even the greatest works, forms part of a qualitatively new music."

The venom in that description is perhaps more Adorno's own than that of Webern, Boulez and company, but the fundamentalist tinge is authentic, at least among a small and transient phase of music history in the 1950s. Adorno is saying that the only truly new music is one purged of all 'redundant' vocabulary elements. That this precludes comprehension seems merely to have enhanced the radical path, by the way.

So if neoclassicism was a flirtation with vocabulary, the curve of modernism has been an experiment in lack of it. It was a perilous experiment: if European modernists sought the elevation of idea, content or whatever is the opposite of vocabulary, then the widespread rejection of this in the concert hall suggests that content is not enough. Vocabulary, however workaday or 'redundant' it may appear, does have a crucial function in discourse; modernism showed what happens when it is removed. Just as shared phraseology allowed mass participation in the European Baroque, lack of it has led ownership of art music to wither in our recent troubled century.

Adorno offers (10) one more profound slant on this central question of content versus language. It is consistent with the purging advocated above that he sees vocabulary not as a servant of content but as a disguise of it; as in the above passage, he aspires to an artistic expression that is all content and no representation.

"Dramatic music... from Monteverdi to Verdi presented expression as stylised communication - as the representation of passions. The process is totally different in the case of Schoenberg. Passions are no longer simulated, but instead, genuine emotions of the unconscious - of shock, of trauma - are registered without disguise through the medium of music."

It is interesting that Adorno sees modernism as surpassing that earlier 'representation of passions', that we discussed earlier. Baroque composers engaged in stimulating those passions might have struggled with the idea that art could embody, rather than just stimulate, them - and I noted in my inaugural lecture (11) that even today, we as a society seem far from ready for an art so stripped of expressive devices as to be 'genuine emotion'. Adorno's picture of modernism at least demonstrates how far away from vocabulary some Western music sought to travel in our time. For all that, we may feel that this conscious separation from familiar discourse in itself led to a vocabulary, especially in piano vocabulary, whose low clusters, jagged linear fragments and silences are all too easy to mimic. Vocabulary may be harder to stamp out than they thought.

Our consideration of musical rhetoric in the post-modern age must, therefore, end by asking whether any subsequent rhetorical elements have nonetheless re-entered musical discourse. What has happened to musical rhetoric in the 50 years since then?

My view of musical languages of our time is that a vocabulary has returned, but that it is again hard to distinguish from main foreground material; this is because of individuation, certainly, but also due to the elevation of musical texture as subject-matter, one of the most startling developments of the last century. No departure from music of earlier times is more marked than the promotion of textural, decorative elements to music's foreground. Examples of this are of course diverse stylistically, but any of them complicates the search for obvious vocabulary.

Perhaps I should clarify what I mean by 'texture as foreground', for the listener may ask how a texture can be a foreground. It is in fact commonplace in music since 1950 for a 'sound-object' to replace linear, melodic ideas as what is developed or contrasted; direct examples come in Ligeti's 1960s scores - a mass of writhing instrumental lines forms the subject-matter, for its slow evolution is 'what happens' in the work. In this way an element traditionally regarded as musical clothing, rather than musical body, has become the body itself. Lambert might have regarded this as a further foray into vocabulary if he had lived to hear it, for it is another challenge to traditional hierarchy. That this can be broken down into formulaic elements is at any rate easily established by its prevalence in any 'eery' modern film or television score.

The instrumental area that, more than any other, has taken a textural role in the last 100 years is percussion, the orchestral Cinderella. Traditional pulse-based functions of emphasis have been supplemented by melodic and, above all, colouristic roles that have done much to bring texture issues into the realm of musical subject-matter. Stravinsky again comes to mind; and here, in the 1920s, is Bartok, partnering piano and percussion to evoke genuinely unfamiliar expression in his 1st Piano Concerto.

EX movt ii

If the percussion agenda of Stravinsky, Bartok and Varèse contributed to the centrality of timbral subject-matter, the only instrument to have done more to promote colour in our time is the orchestra as a whole. It is here, in the diverse orchestral show repertoire, that timbre confounds vocabulary issues, for it is possible in orchestral writing as never in chamber or solo media to merge decoration and substance.

EX Gerhard - Concerto for Orchestra

Later in his career, Schoenberg warned (12) against the siren allure of colours - better "to be coldly convinced by the transparency of clear-cut ideas", as he put it. Yet orchestral history has largely turned a deaf ear, preferring the unrivalled wash of colour that the modern orchestra affords. Ironically, the post-romantic, soloistic scoring of much modern orchestral writing emanates from a tradition of Schoenberg's own earlier work; his use of the orchestra as a vast chamber ensemble reached its apogee with 5 Orchestral Pieces op 16.

Schoenberg already demonstrated in that work a concern with the profile of foreground ideas, and how to signify them within a rich texture, when he introduced the practice of identifying the *hauptstimme* or 'leading voice' with a sign. I think it is symptomatic of this concern with clarity that much later he spoke up for 'cold logic' and clarity, though frankly my ears prefer the fantasy of the earlier work!

I think the study of vocabulary in music brings us inevitably back to the identity of the musical style being supported - especially in terms of harmony. So the figures and other ostinato bits-and-bobs of the Baroque, like the 'Alberti' arpeggios of high Classicism, supported home key-centres. The recycled equivalents we find in Stravinsky, accordingly, suggest but then side-step those key-centres - as when, to open his Symphony of Psalms, he outlines a *mélange* of Bb major 7th and G major 7th arpeggios against a suggestion of E minor. The music is 'in' none of those keys, but they are linked subliminally, by means of a scale that he uses for that movement.

EX Symphony of Psalms - (i) opening

Any vocabulary servicing music of our own time will, likewise, support its language. In harmonic terms this is likely to be atonal or post-tonal, but it defines the expressive area of harmony just the same. The simplest parallel here is in the major 7th interval, or Do-Te [sung]: this had virtually no role to play in the melodic outlines of music in a key, and has correspondingly become something approaching a Figure in post-tonal music; its swooping curve is amazingly prevalent in the instrumental lines of modern scores. Perhaps one of the earliest is Varèse's *Octandre*, in which an oboe solo begins with a highly affective leap.
[EX]

For all that style itself has 'gone personal', other rhetorical features still emerge as shared. For example, the cluster of notes dissonant to one another has come to define the language of modern atonality in the way the arpeggio defined tonal security 250 years ago. The difference, a fascinating one that I outlined earlier, is that we now shudder at belonging to this conformity: although materials like the cluster appear in many of our scores, there is an underlying reluctance to be defined by the clichés of a common language. I know I am on the lookout for any off-the-peg avantgarde-isms in my own vocabulary; yet it is hard to imagine the landscape of music in the 18th Century if composers had been thus fearful of the shared membership represented by the arpeggio, or the V-I headmotif that begins so many themes. This is because the legacy of Romantic individuality is our ineradicable belief in art as personal expression; we are all individuals now. The sole challenges to this have been disreputable - or worse - attempts at political manipulation that I mentioned at the outset.

This cult of individual expression overwhelmingly, therefore, confined vocabulary nowadays to within the personal canon of composers. Because vocabulary supports stylistic identity, it will be easiest to find in composers blessed with personal character, that quality that, we have noted, perhaps carries greater value today than in other ages. The more distinctive the composer, the easier it is to uncover the means that define that character. The repeated fragments that make up a texture by Lutoslawski are inevitably taken as characteristic of that composer's expression, while the restless spiky onrushings of Franco

Donatoni help to define what he says to the listener. Music has become 'the vocabulary of music', again, but within individual composers' work. So here is Donatoni, being Donatoni:

EX Donatoni - In Cauda II

The most seductive of these manners pass into something that is not so different from the 18th Century language - a mulch of routine consensus made up of fallen petals from the most striking plants. The pulsing reiterations of Steve Reich are everywhere among the work of my students, for example, while other youthful scores sport the airy, semibreve-filled serenities that Arvo Pärt has readmitted to music. A generation ago our scores were jumping with those angular major 7ths and fevered chromatic motifs; some still are.

In the published abstract for this talk, I asked is contemporary music any more than an amalgam of stylistic practices? I think the above reflections suggest that yes, it is, in the right hands; I believe true subject-matter can be found. But at the same time - as in the 17th and 18th Centuries - the leaking of vocabulary elements into common ownership does create a modern work-basket that is perhaps an indispensable tool - maybe so even for Sibelius - for the creation of 'music itself'.

EX Sibelius - 5th Symphony (iii)

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1 Hellawell, Piers, 'Music of the Last Century: Will The Last Listener Please Turn Out The Light', Gresham College 2000, www.gresham.ac.uk/music

2 Lambert, Constant, Music, Ho! New York 1966 p.?

3 'Information Theory', Microsoft® Encarta® Reference Library 2002, © 1993-2001 Microsoft Corporation.

4 The openings of 'Hard Day's Night' by the Beatles and Led Zeppelin's Stairway To Heaven are examples that triumphantly rise above 'redundancy' to my generation.

5 George J. Buelow: 'Figures in Music', The New Grove Dictionary of Music Online ed. L. Macy (Accessed 06/08/02), <http://www.grovemusic.com>

6 George J. Buelow: 'Rhetoric and Music', The New Grove Dictionary of Music Online ed. L. Macy (Accessed 06/08/02), <http://www.grovemusic.com>

7 *ibid.*

8 To build symphonic activity on the merest wisp of motif is also a hallmark of Haydn's pupil Beethoven, against whose status Stravinsky rebelled; it is the absolute opposite of the thematic saturation of arch-Romantic Tchaikovsky, whom Stravinsky paradoxically adored.

9 Adorno, T 'Music and New Music' in Quasi Una Fantasia, Suhrkamp Verlag 1963, pp 249-268.

10 Adorno, T 'Schoenberg and Progress' in Philosophy of Modern Music, Sheed 1973, p 38.

11 Hellawell, P 'Music of the last Century: Did Schoenberg Get it Wrong?' Gresham College 2000, www.gresham.ac.uk/music

12 Schoenberg, A 'Composition With 12 Tones -1', in ed Stein, E Style And Idea, Faber 1975, p.235