

Emotions



Emotion has a major role in information transfer between people. Emotion can make or break a message, simply because emotion sets something in motion which may make it either easy to accept and understand the message or completely unacceptable even to try to understand it. Just remember the commotion about the Mohammed cartoons, which clearly demonstrated the role of emotions.

The (mental) motion is contained in the etymology of the Latin word *emovere*, which means *to set into motion*. An extra meaning of this word is *bringing off balance*.

Emotion is of vital importance in visual and performing arts, most works of art are conceived with the express or implied intention to invoke emotions. The result will be a kind of emotional resonance if the work of art is observed by its (re)viewer or listener. A complete spectrum of emotions between surprised poignancy and downright horror.

Music transfers emotions in multiple and sometimes cumulative stages.

First the composer puts emotions in his work. The player may attempt to make these emotions clear in his or her interpretation, possibly helped by the composer's directions in the score which give a clue about the expression. Additionally, some study of the composer's life and the historical circumstances in his/her era might help in reproducing the emotion of the work.

Secondly, the player adds his or her emotional contribution while playing the piece. The player may have derived this component from his or her personal impression of the piece, including its possible associations, e.g. if the tune popped up in your mind the moment your (girl- or boy-) friend broke up with you.

Finally, the emotions arrive with the listener, where they put things into motion in his or her mind.

For me it is a complex and intriguing process, this road between conception and experience of a work of art, specifically a piece of music.

Some pieces have such a strong inherent emotion, that the player cannot add anything but his skills to interpret the piece. On the other hand, the emotion of the player may be so overwhelming and dominating, that he defines his own message with the music, leaving the intention of the composer completely outside consideration.

To be fair, often we don't know what the composer intended with a specific piece, specifically if he or she did not tell or write anything about the composition. ;-) Even in that case, the composition will still be a prey for some passionate musicologist who will attempt to find its higher purpose anyway.

Suppose you would ask Mozart what he did actually mean to express with a simple Minuet for piano. In my mind's eye I see him frowning and producing the well-known giggle from Milos Forman's movie. Then after a while he would shoot a quasi-innocent and mischievous glance, simply saying: "Well, eh just for fun, ein *Witz*, une *Bagatelle*!"

So far so good with an in depth musicological and emotional analysis of this Minuet!

The next question to Mozart would be what he intended with *Don Juan*. I guess he would tell another much more emotional and sadder story, if he would tell it at all! A story which might explain all those dark and desperate emotions from this opera.

I have great admiration for musicians who dare to express the emotions of the composer or themselves in an interpretation, particularly when emotions are almost or actually overwhelming them.

Last spring I attended the funeral of one of my in-law aunts. She had a family in which music played a leading part: two of her daughters are professional musicians, one on the piano, the other on the viola. Both are involved in both teaching and performing.

A great wish of my aunt was, that sadness and sorrow would play the second violin on her funeral, she was satisfied with her life and did not wish her next of kin to forget that. A last wish which is quite demanding for the bereaved who face such a great loss. Nevertheless, they granted her wish, her funeral became a farewell with deeply personal involvement. Some people spoke about her and her significance in their lives. Others spoke through music with tones in the same sense.

At this occasion, the emotion in the music was predominant. All musicians expressed it in the notes of the pieces who had been my aunt's favourite works. They played an emotional movement which turned the music into something transcendental. At that time, their music became a harmonic vibration which connected this world and the Great Beyond.

The final piece was played by both daughters, on piano and viola. They performed a part of *Quator Pour la Fin des Temps* by Olivier Messiaen. This is a modern and intensely emotional piece. A lot of these emotions are implied by the historical context of the piece: it was first played in the freezing cold in Stalag VIIIA, a prisoner of war camp, in 1941. At that day, the players used every bit of often damaged instruments, they could lay their hands on. The piece is based on text from the bible-book of *Revelation of St John*, hence the title which translates as *End of Time*.

This piece represented the sad parting of my aunt, with all emotions of sadness, rage, recalcitrance and resignation which had been in the days since her death, and would remain for the time to come. Emotions which painted all notes, every phrase and all dynamics of the music which at that very moment became a monument and an epitaph for my aunt, built by people who dearly and deeply loved her.

Emotions which struck and moved me...

The real goodbye was a quiet slipping away, which came in the last phrase with an almost whispered final chord. The sense of the inevitable...

A sense, accompanied by my sincere and deep wonder for the worthy goodbye, both daughters had played for their mother. And admiration for the way they had shared their emotions with those present.

This is how music can transfer emotions, the deepest movements of the soul.

A logical question would be: "How can I bring emotion in my play?" I found out that *admitting* emotion is the key, which also indicates some of the problems involved in doing so. Do you *dare* to play that way?

The positive side is, that often you don't have to search for emotion in the music, because you feel it by intuition. If you select your music to study and play, the emotional aspect forms part of the selection criteria. You feel somehow what the piece is telling you, which is a good start for expression of its (emotional) feelings.

If you are going to be successful? Well, that's the challenge. For myself I noticed that I need a certain mood to have the courage to play emotionally, it doesn't come by itself. In fact it has a lot to do with an aspect of my personality: my hesitation to express my emotions in public (;-)) except sometimes on (web)paper, isn't it?).

Though... I know some pieces of music in which emotions slip through without effort. Examples are *Plany* by Llobet and *Despedida Ultimo Porto* by Baden Powell, both guitar duos we sometimes play. In that case, it becomes a challenge to guide the emotion to the audience, without letting it paralyze your play.