

How to Listen to Music

T. Akbarov

Fergana regional branch of Uzbekistan State Institute of Arts and Culture

ABSTRACT

To be able to play an instrument, know the notes, and love to sing is, of course, useful for a competent listener - but it is not at all necessary. The idea of listening to music according to the rules seems a little ridiculous: after all, it is such a natural, organic, intuitive thing! Should listening really become an exercise that must be done with precision, like in the gym?

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Music that finds its way to you, captures you and opens up to you effortlessly, and should be perceived as something spontaneous and magical - by passing reason and analysis. However, in this way we will hear only a negligible part of the music: only that to which we are accustomed, the most accessible and closest. "Intuitive" music that requires no skill to listen to is not even the tip of the iceberg, but the snow cap at its tip. Below it are terabytes of sound information, to comprehend which you still need a navigator. Just imagine how much beauty we are losing by reducing the art of music to something that should somehow itself, without any steps on our part, give us pleasure! Therefore, rules are still needed. That is, not even rules, but rather tips, reminders for those who want to become a real listener.

What do the majority think? There is "normal music". Simple, strong, relevant, understandable, exciting, with drive. Attention: in fact, there is no "big" and "small" music. There is no music for every day and for special occasions, like a weekend suit (which you actually never wear at all). There is no rule according to which in one case one must listen to music while singing along and jumping, and in another case one must listen to it while sitting on a chair with a significant face. Music can be simple and complex - that's a fact. It can be simple (and that doesn't mean it's bad), or it can be incredibly intricate. It can be vulgar and sophisticated. It may be popular or strange, "not for everyone." The main thing is that all these epithets can apply to the so-called classics and all other music. The division into styles is useful only in a music store - to know on which rack to find the desired record. However, even then you ask questions: why did this artist get into "rock" and not "pop"? Why is this one in "electronics" and not in "classics"? And who put this in the "classics" - after all, this is pure pop? Each style has its own set of signs. If the concepts of "rock", "pop", "classical", "rap", "electronics" and others did not exist, we would be lost in musical diversity. But don't get carried away with classification. These markers are simply guidelines, poles towards which musical phenomena gravitate. Countless musicians, composers and phenomena straddle the line between classical and rock, or classical and pop, or classical and electronic. They can be attributed equally well to one side or the other. Secondly, each musical style is rich and complex. It is governed by its own laws, connected with its own culture, has its own history and mythology, its own

heroes and masterpieces, its own rubbish and pearls, its own mechanisms of understanding and listening. One should not assume that one direction is more privileged and aristocratic than another. There is nothing “elite” about classical music; it is neither higher nor lower, nor more boring or more interesting than any other. This is a gigantic artistic field with a centuries-old history. Here one thing will seem boring to you, and the other will be incredibly exciting: to understand, you need to know and listen, accumulating experience. Just like in rap, for example. Thirdly, the music that is commonly called “classical” is infinitely diverse. If you compare an Italian madrigal of the 17th century with a French electronic piece of the 50s of the 20th century, it will seem to you that these are not just different styles, but generally different types of art. Yes, there is classical music that does require important concentration and stillness. There is one that is listened to in stadiums, with whistles and hot dogs. There are also “classic” jam sessions (joint improvisations by an unlimited number of musicians). And also performances with video, light and public participation. Where you separate the “classics” from lively, passionate, greedy listening, of which you are certainly capable (you have favorite music, right?) - there your own border will be. It will leave behind what you refuse to know and experience. It's impoverishing and it's very stupid.

A classical composition usually has a composer who creates the original text, written down in notes or using notes and some instructions. But it happens that there is no text at all and the composition is, for example, a joint improvisation of several musicians. Or it is recorded once on tape and exists in this form, like an oil painting - because it consists of voices, steps, slamming doors and clanking of dishes. Classical music is usually complex. It has multi-colored, unexpected harmony, rhythm moves away from primitive repetition and “squareness”, many events occur in a unit of time, creating a multi-layered, whimsically arranged text. But it happens that the music is a beautiful, simple melody accompanied by a gentle plucking of accompaniment, or it sounds like a stream of noise that has no harmony or rhythm at all. Or it is three notes that are repeated a thousand times, like a spell.

If a work combines at least several of these conditions, then it can be said with some probability that it belongs to classical music. But it is much easier to listen a lot and carefully, with pleasure and curiosity, in different styles and areas. And thus train your taste and memory, gain experience as a listener. Ultimately, any music that you are willing to listen to with a keen, demanding ear, reading and analyzing, will open up to you in all its depth and complexity and captivate you.

If, of course, you want to understand it. For the same reason, it wouldn't occur to you to watch a movie, look at a painting, or read a novel in the background. This applies to absolutely any music that you want to “read” and experience with that same “demanding ear” that we talked about above. Find time and devote all your attention to it - of course, if you think that this particular music has something to tell you. This is a little easier to do if you listen to music on physical media.

Reading, working, cleaning the apartment, training, driving, cooking, eating and falling asleep to music is indeed very pleasant. There is a lot of music (in all styles and genres!) that puts you in a great working, training, sleepy and digestive mood. But this is not called listening to music. You will not be able to truly perceive and analyze what you hear. Understand your reaction to this too. This may seem funny, but many people, when they find themselves at a concert, later say that they went “to see Gergiev” or, worse, “to see the violin.” Imagine reading a book without knowing its title, author, time period to which it belongs, or the language in which it was originally written. Or that you came to an exhibition and looked at the paintings for a long time, without specifying by whom, when, in what country and under what circumstances they were painted. Agree: it's unlikely that anyone would want to spend time like this! Don't let this happen when you find yourself at a concert. Be sure to clarify what is performed, in what order, how many parts it consists of, when it begins and ends. It will be much more interesting for you to listen if you understand the structure of the composition and remember who created it.

We love listening to familiar songs and compositions even more than re-reading books or watching films. Already known music gives us a feeling of peace and control, as well as the illusion of time management. Since music is literally the art of sounding time, we are pleased, contrary to the proverb, to enter the same river twice (and three times, and ten times). So we can return to childhood or to a happy moment of the past, or simply predict the turns of musical events. There is nothing wrong with this, but it is classical music (as opposed to non-classical music) that sets a trap for us here. We said above that in most cases -

from the Renaissance to the avant-garde - academic music is a text that can be played differently by different performers. This is how it differs, for example, from rock, where the performance is the text.

In non-academic music, there is a culture of cover versions (“covering” by one artist of another’s song). However, this is not the same as interpretation in classics: covers are always consciously secondary to the original and allow themselves much more freedom, co-authorship, and reinvention. In classical music, the original is absent as such, and the performers try to play the text as accurately as possible, but at the same time find a way to introduce special artistic content into their interpretation.

So: if we often listen to our favorite classical composition in one performance, then little by little we glue together in our perception one specific interpretation and the work in general. Listening to familiar music in different performances is so interesting: we recognize countless originals of one composition. Due to the fact that the text is already familiar to us, small nuances and details of interpretation are heard very well. Sometimes you can even catch the performer playing the wrong notes! In this case, the pleasure is even greater, and the listening experience accumulates a hundred times more intensely than when “ironing” the same interpretation of your favorite music.

We call “modern” literature and poetry that were created over the past one and a half to two decades. It’s approximately the same with other arts, although the rate of “aging” may differ for them. It takes different times for the artistic language to be renewed so much that a building, performance or painting ceases to be “modern”. We treat the concept of relevance most harshly in non-academic music. Sometimes phenomena that appeared in it a year or a couple of years ago are already considered history that has no relation to today. This happens because such music is closely connected with the life of society - its problems, subcultures, minorities, fashion, political climate, instantly changing Internet language. Classical music, on the other hand, seems detached from the present day and its troubles.

Music is imbued with the atmosphere of the time that created it. We listen with pleasure to what was written in the 20th, 19th, and 18th centuries, but we are unlikely to be able to hear this music with our contemporary ears, which were surprised by what seems familiar to us and read information that eludes us today. Therefore, only music created quite recently should be considered “modern” - that which is saturated with today’s air and the atmosphere of the most recent past. No matter how “strange”, “futuristic” and “shocking” the music of a hundred years ago may seem to us, it is just as classic as Mozart and Tchaikovsky, and has nothing to do with modernity.

It so happened that music - especially classical - turned out to be among the subjects that decent, educated, intelligent people are interested in. Parents send their children to music schools for harmonious development “instill” in them a love for the classics, sometimes without experiencing this love themselves. When listening in the background, we consume music, use the results of its action, without particularly noticing the music itself. However, its influence on the entire human being can be traced in the concert hall. Look at an audience listening intently and you will notice involuntary nods, unconscious “conducting” gestures, clenched fists, trembling fingers, raised eyebrows. All these are the results of the effect of music on the body: we freeze, wait for climaxes, want to jump up.

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