

Musical Language and its development

The module Musical Language and its development focuses on the relation between instrumental music and human language. Throughout history there have been different views and approaches concerning what a composer/performer is trying to convey or communicate by music, and how that process follows principles and patterns of human language in general.

The module consists of three sections or blocks:

- music before 1800
- music between 1800-1900
- music after 1900

In each of the sections there will be 8 grouplessons (in "masterclass-like" setting) with students performing, discussing and giving/receiving feedback.

Each section will be introduced with an introductory lesson. In these three lessons the following topics will be covered in (very) general terms:

General aspects of language and communication

The academic discourse concerning music and language

Specific analogies between language and music connected with the three timeframes of the module, such as Rhetoric, Aesthetics, Criticism, Judging/assessment, personal musical "languages" in the 20th century.

Introductory lesson

Language

Music

Musical language

What do we mean by the terms?

Bruno Nettl: Music is "human sound communication¹ outside the scope of language".

Steven Pinker: "Music is auditory cheesecake".

Music and language are present in all human communities.

Origin of music and language

In general three views:

music → language

language → music

protolanguage or musilanguage → language & music

Three key features of language:

symbols,

grammar,

information transmission

Language and music share three modes of expression:

vocal,

gestural,

¹ But what exactly is being communicated?

notation

Language and music have:

a hierarchical structure
recursion and rhythm
both are "combinatorial systems"

Linguistics, Morphology, Phonology, Semiotics (disciplines connected with the scientific approach of language)

Symbols and meaning in music

Deryck Cooke *The Language of Music*

Meaning in music: often highly individual²

Absolute versus programmatic music (sound painting, imitation, Leitmotiv, musical symbolism (Debussy!)).

Grammar in language and music

Noam Chomsky and Universal Grammar

Fred Lerdahl & Ray Jackendoff *Generative Theory of Tonal Music*.

Music is a non-referential system of communication.

Emotion and Language

"language" of emotion (basic emotions like anger, fear, joy, disgust, sadness) and "higher level" emotions like ecstasy, bereavement, loneliness, depression, euphoria, ...

Leonard B. Meyer *Emotion and Meaning in Music*

David Huron *Sweet Anticipation*

Recommended reading for a general orientation on the subject in general (Music and Language):

Part 1 of *The Singing Neanderthals* by Steven Mithen.

Recommended reading for a general orientation on the first block: **Music before 1800:**

Rhetoric and Music in GROVE Dictionary of Music and Musicians (Mediacenter)

Music and Rhetoric by Patrick McCreless from Cambridge Histories Online

The Weapons of Rhetoric by Judy Tarling is an important book used by Johan Hofmann.

Peculiar: The musical aspects of spoken language.

Speech-song melody (Deutsch): repeated segments of speech turn into "song" in our perception.

² One personal experience can lead to an association other than or even contrary to the "intention" by the composer or performer.