

American Music Survey

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American Music has developed immensely over the years and has shown a great diversity in every type of music. It has given sight to what it means to be a virtuoso, how the different extremes of music are performed and what performance aspects are left to the performer, and what distinguishes scope and power in music, whether it be a performed by a large group of performers or a small group of performers. Music has developed and evolved alongside, and away from the European norms, making way to the vast world of music we encounter today.

What classifies a virtuoso on any given instrument? Does virtuosity exist when composers consistently demand it of performers? Using four musical examples to support your position, show how virtuosity may or may not exist in relation to a “standard” high level performance.

Virtuoso is defined as someone who is extremely skilled at something, especially at playing an instrument or performing (Unknown, 2017). The term virtuoso tends to be synonymous to someone who is an expert or can dazzle an audience with their ability to dazzle the public. These performers have outstanding technique, stage presence, and great showman ship and possess the knowledge and understanding of their instrument or performance medium which allows them to make mistakes, correct these mistakes, and performing flawlessly in a public setting. The discipline that it takes to work as a virtuoso is one that is incomprehensible to most adults. The definition of virtuoso in our modern time has led the common people to some misconception of the term. The term is most commonly used in conjunction with someone who plays faster and louder than most and is able to draw attention to oneself more, than attracting attention to the beautiful music. Creating a very derogatory meaning for the word.

Virtuosos, constantly tempted to indulge in an exhibition of exemplary technique and have succumbed to the temptation. A true virtuoso will generally object to having the term coupled to their name. This may be due to a great sense of humility or even the understanding that this term is commonly misunderstood. However, the amount of work and effort it takes to become a virtuoso is an extreme discipline that showcases the most difficult pieces that one can perform. A virtuoso looks at each performance as a way to improve, a way to better themselves, and a critique in the purest sense of the term. As they invest their time and energy on a piece of music, they are creating a response to this music that is insightful, thoughtful, and intellectual which is in turn symbolic to the performer themselves. This not only becomes part of their performance but also in a collaboration in a way with the composer. This allows the performer to create a true performance experience closer to that which the composer intended. This in turn creates an appreciation and understanding that each interpretation, each piece is a unique and situational experience, by taking risks in their performance, and being thoroughly prepared.

Virtuosity continues to exist because the music that is being created for a specific instrument. So, does it remain in existence when composer constantly demand it? It seems that it remains to be seen, regardless of what time period or era, virtuosity still remains to be present. The idea that all the music is within reach of the commonfolk would put a damper on expert live performances, leaving out the classical entertainment genre. With the feeling that some pieces are atrocious and out of reach for one musician, may assumably be an enjoyable encounter for another musician. The first great virtuoso, Franz Liszt once said that “A true virtuoso must call up scent, and blossom, and breathe the breath of life (Unknown, 2017).” He states this in turn to state that in order for one to truly be virtuosic you must become one with the music, breathe the music, and be the music. Otherwise, the emotion is missing, the music is meaningless, and the composer’s true essence will remain a mystery.

Examples that I find show true virtuosity are:

“The Union, Concert Paraphrase On National Airs” by Louis Moreau Gottschalk,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y2cQOAHVnfs&list=PLx7JGy4Letfbuu4-hH6PKEjYBRj6swLGl&index=33>

Piano Concert No. 1 in Bb Minor- P. Tchaikovsky- Ivan Bessonov, and Dimitris Bonitis,

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nV8d1FOj_bc

18th Variation from Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini- Performed by the Five Browns-

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wKfclqXONhU>

Candide Overture- Leonard Bernstein, Arr. C, Carpenter- Performed by Cameron Carpenter-

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zq_cy-ztcHc.

Smaller forms vs. larger: does the length and genre of a work dictate its scope and power? Is chamber music “lesser” than symphonic to the general public? Does the modern American attention span play a role in this? Post two examples to support your thoughts. I’m especially interested in shorter works/smaller forms you find powerful.

Symphony music and chamber music have their differences in many ways, not only but their scale or size, but also by their type of music, and different groups of instruments that can be used. Chamber music is described as music that is played in the chamber of royalty (Begg, 2012). This means that a chamber orchestra, or chamber ensemble is not made up of 30-50 members like they are in contemporary groups, but they are made up of only 3-5 instruments so that they the ensemble is better suited for that of the chamber to which they will be playing in. Looking at that point of view, that helps with the understanding of how and why these pieces were written. The music was written to provide a more intimate experience for the recipient of the musical performance. The combinations are unlimited and allow for any number of instruments and any cohort of instruments to perform the chamber repertoire. Chamber pieces tend to be shorter in length, although some are just as long as symphonic, pieces. The scope and power of chamber music only seems to be lesser than that of the symphonic or larger music due to the number of performers, but the overall impact of the music is the same to that of symphony music. Smaller music has the same emotional effect to that of larger scale music, Emotion is completely subjective and effective to the individual and their personal experiences.

Symphony music is defined as music that is performed in a much larger medium than that of Chamber music. A Symphony is an ensemble that has anywhere from 40-150 or more members. This music is meant to be performed in a concert hall or larger performance medium. Symphony music, due to the large number of performers in each group, require a leader, this leader is called the conductor (Burns, 2007). The conductor is viewed as the organizer of sound, the imagination behind the entire picture. However, the performers are the canvas that conductor uses to create the intention of the composer. The conductor takes the larger scale of this music, interprets the power and intensity, and delivers the overall picture of the piece to the audience, within the larger performance venue. The scope and power of

symphony music is generally much more bold, powerful, and emotional. It has a much broader use of timbre, tonality, and emotional sustenance, which are conveyed through the phrases, instrument families, and even the use of the meter and rhythm.

Comparatively, these types of music are not any lesser than that of the other. If anything, they are very much equal in performance stature. Chamber music compare to symphony music really is unfair to say the least. The performance medium, the venue that they are performed in, and the way that they are performed are barely comparable to say the least. Each performance medium has their own perks and downfalls. The number of players in chamber music makes a much more versatile performance medium, allowing chamber music to be performed essentially anywhere, small living rooms, small dining halls, small multipurpose rooms. It holds its equity in the music world due to this versatility. Symphonic music is much larger, the perk of this music is that when this music is performed, although it has to be performed in a field, in an outdoor concert shell, or even in a stadium, the music is something that is felt physically at times due to the innate dynamic of the music. Mahler's Symphony No. 2, also called "*Symphony of a Thousand*." It has been said that with the performance of this Symphony is that the volume of this performance is so loud that it vibrates the cloth of the clothing of the conductor. The power behind this work is substantially bolder than what is experienced in a chamber piece, however, the importance and significance does not make it more important than the other.

The attention span of the modern American, disappointingly I feel has a lot to do with the rating of lesser or greater. Due the length of the music is the main catalyst in how each of these genres is viewed. The average attention span of a modern American, is approximately 8 seconds, and scientists have found that this is down approximately four seconds from their study in 2000. This takes the short attention span, puts it up against the extensive length of the larger symphonic work, thus creating the thought that these pieces are lesser due to that lack of focus. The use of cellphones has really decreased the modern attention span discounting the longer performances and the overall concert experience. I feel that as we started using cellphone, our attention spans in America truly have decreased. The modern

school of thought is that why do I need to sit here and listen when I can just look it up. Having the world at our fingertips has really taken out the longer live performance experience.

Examples:

Small/Chamber Music

Clapping Music- Steve Reich- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FcFyl8amoEE>

Wind Quintet Op. 43- Carl Nielsen- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BQDdD66tv1w>

Symphony No. 8- Gustav Mahler- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LKof4e_7cYA

Jubilate Deo- Dan Forrest- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BVyCzNg6o0o>

Where do the extremes of music—total serialism and chance music—leave the performer?

Is the role of the performer diminished when there is little or no interpretive license? Does this make every performance of a serial work the same? How do you see the role of composer in chance music? Is there any control over the musical product or is it entirely dependent upon the individual performance? Use examples from the composers discussed in the text to support your position.

Serialism and chance music are styles of music that deserve a great deal of respect. These styles receive a bad name due to the sound of these styles. They have a great deal to offer, but the normal ear is not able to understand or appreciate it. The performance aspect this music is something to be desired, allowing the performer to take full responsibility of the performance and interpretation. Chance music is indeterminate, allowing the performer a personal connection and improvisation. Chance music is just that music to take a chance one, scores are printed with specific instructions telling them how to play, what to play, or the duration of the of the aleatoric section. Serialism is an entirely different type of music. Serialism is defined as a serial pattern in music that repeats over and over for a significant stretch of a composition. This type of music type of music usually uses the twelve-tone scale, and sometimes even a matrix to develop the note sequences.

The performer is left to their own devices with these two styles of music, they have such an open nature that is almost leaves the performer something to be desired. Chance music allows the performer performance freedom in small sections of the piece while providing the performer directions on the structure of those small sections. A very exciting part of the performance, where nothing is the same at any performance. Serialism is not necessarily as free as chance music; each performance is the same and the music doesn't change. The freedom of serial music not freedom of performance, but it is freedom of usage of the scales that are using. The performance is the same, the music stays the same but sound it's something different.

The composer's role in chance music is that they are the master mind behind the piece. The reins in chance music are loosened from the composer determining the path of the work, to the composer writing the music and then just letting the music happen. This type of music is truly glorious, given

creative freedom to the performer. The composer allows the performer to take the reins and give it the creative drive and life that they see fit to the work. This is very evident in several pieces, Terry Riley's "*In C*." By giving the performer the freedom, creativity, and interpretation, it creates an intrapersonal connection for both the audience and the performer.

As the performance has been rehearsed, formulated, and presented, the end product although it is in the performer's hands, it is also out of the performer's hands (Hitchcock, Mann, 2000). They are in control, but in all actuality, it is out of their hands. Although the composer creates the piece, they have very little control over the end product because of the type of music they have chosen to produce. This would not be easy for anyone as the composer to give up the control and creative freedom as the creator. It does, however, give the greatest creative power and interpretation to the performer allowing them to create a performance with their own flare and not having to interpret from the composer's standpoint which is sometimes easier when it comes to a performance. It eliminates the original authenticity of a time period and gives it a first-class arrival to the current time period. This allows personal connection and interpretation to the foreground and showcases the true colors of the composer.

Examples

In C- Terry Riley- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DpYBhX0UH04>

Sonata V (from Sonatas and Interludes)- John Cage-

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jRHoKZRYBIY>

Concert for Piano and Orchestra- John Cage- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NE6n2VBo2cM>

December 1952- Earle Brown- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7K2dyqrw6cY>

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