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Music 480

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Exam Number Two

Essay Questions

1.) The post W.W.II musical atmosphere in Hungary was similar to those all across the newly communist states of Eastern Europe. All remnants of the previous decadent styles which were mirrors of the West had to be destroyed and a new musical idiom had to be created. For this task, of course, all of the composers of Hungary had to be employed to rewrite the musical language of the country. Of course, since all music was being recreated, the government had to have some specific purpose in mind. The music had to appeal to the people themselves (the common man), and was therefore based on the folk tunes of Hungary. However, the music of this period had a goal more than just to appeal to the people; the music had to organize and unite the public under a common cause--the common cause of socialism. Thus the mass/movement song was born. It was characterized by march rhythms and drum rolls in its early stages which were later filtered out of the music because of its lack of popularity. The simplicity and regularity of the songs, however, was always present. It provided a musical basis for holidays and rallies, a musical style which could be sung by any man and any woman, lying in an

easily singable vocal range. In its effort to unite the people under one common cause, the mass/movement songs employed generic symbols in its lyrics; tractors, machines, plows, and harvests were almost always included, giving everybody a feel of common touch with even the most working class member of society--the rural farmer.

After a period of ten years or so, these mass/movement songs began to show signs of wear. Their lack of popularity was evident and they soon began to be confined to singings only in school or public occasions. Western rock started to invade the public music of the time and the social scene began to change. During the 60's, most of the music being written in Hungary was a mere rip-off of Western music of the time. During the 70's, though, as America went through its own folk revival, Hungary decided to have its own. This revival of folk songs was sanctioned by the communist government of the time, seeing as how folk music was a basis for the mass/movement songs and a tie to the ancient agricultural classes of Hungary. The intelligentsia embraced the music, too, but presumably not for the same reasons as the government thought. The folk music of the time was seen as an escape from the modern, mechanized, industrial world of the communist state and as a look into the past of Hungary when times were much simpler. Revival bands and dance houses popped up all across the country.

With the era of glasnost, coming after the decade of the 70's and its folk revival, the musical picture began to change. The early 80's saw the mass distribution of punk across Hungary. This punk style, however, was basically different from the punk style which was sweeping the West at around the same time. Most of the Hungarian punks had never heard their Western equivalents and thus created a music which was more experimental and odd than its aggressive brethren. Some similarities, though, in performance practice did exist: wild gyrations on stage, vocalized profanities, and sexual overtones were common to this new breed of music. Unlike, the West, though, whose punks were rebelling from their capitalistic surroundings, the Hungarian punks were rebelling from the hypocrisies of their own communist governments. They were also rebelling from the bland rock music which had been fed to them by the government of the 70's (The Big Four). Of course, this music was "unofficial" music, being banned by the government of the time for its leftist tendencies.

Similar to punk in its being banned from official culture was the wedding rock of the late 80's (Lakodalmás Rock). It was excluded from radio, being thought to be in "bad taste". The reason for this ban was that, just as in the early years of communism, the government wanted folk music to be the music of the people. Wedding rock, however, were electronic adaptations of magyar nota; and magyar nota which (although being considered folk music in

the 19th century) were now exposed as simple rural pop music and not true folk music through the studies of Bartok and Kodaly. However, this government ban did not spread its dispersion throughout the nation. Through using the radio stations of neighboring communist countries and a quickly expanding cassette industry, wedding rock flourished. Groups like 3+2 soon became very popular amongst the old people (for its use of old, simple tunes) and young people (for its modern, electronic instrumentation). Still however, this lakodalmas rock never truly escaped the sickly sweet kitsch with which it was associated since its early beginnings.

2.)The Verbunkos style has its roots in the Hungarian dances of the early 1700's. These Hungarian dances were originally instrumental adaptations of vocal melodies which were common during the time. On shifting genres from a vocal style to an instrumental one, along came shifts in the musical qualities. Characteristic rhythmic patterns, such as syncopations and strings of triplets, highly figured ornamentation, and specific cadential formulae started to stretch this music beyond its original pentatonic nature and ally it more closely with a tonal tradition. Soon, these Hungarian instrumental dance versions began to be adopted by the Austrian composers of the time (1760's-70's), appearing as a local color or topic in their art-music compositions. Perhaps because of this classical blend or perhaps just because of a general

growing familiarity of the Hungarian people with classical music, these instrumental dances also began to adopt some traits from the Western styles. Binary forms and functional harmonies were now a part of the genre as well. This product became verbunkos.

The verbunkos style hung around for awhile, fortunately long enough to be discovered by the Romantics of the 19th century. As the main philosophy of the Romantics was to uphold the "pure" of examples of folk art, verbunkos soon became the style of choice. The verbunkos style became the Hungarian composer's vehicle for creating an identifiable national style, and many pieces of music which adopted this genre appeared during the 1800's. Of course, Liszt was the main champion of the amalgamate style (verbunkos and classical music). He based many of his compositions on this musical form, thinking that it gave his works some "Hungarian authenticity". Ironically, though, this verbunkos style was not as Hungarian as was commonly assumed. Since many of its characteristics were adopted from the classical art music of the 1700's, it provided a thin, weak support for classical composition. It was truly a more regularized version of classical phrasing and tonality with a few exoticisms thrown in, certainly not holding any deep musical traditions of its own.

In a similar line of development to the verbunkos style was the repertoire of the magyar nota. The

development of this musical genre began in the Calvinist colleges of the 1700's who were faced with a dirth of musical material. To fill this gap in music, students produced their own type of song, appropriately labeled "student's songs". These pieces were simple in their conception and execution; triads, melodic broken chords, simple meter, and sequences of seconds and thirds tends to make the music historian think that the style may have even been developed out of the German leid of the time.

Nevertheless, just as the verbunkos was embraced by the Romantic intelligentsia of the 19th century, so were these student's songs, praised for the simplicity and thus their "popularity". The middle class bourgeois of the time took these simple songs, reshaping them and remodeling them to their own needs and whims. Since the definition of "folk" at the time was to include anything that was "popular", these recreations of earlier songs did not disturb the sensibilities of the thinking classes of the time. This new repertoire that was created was the magyar nota. Soon, as well as being spread by the middle-class composers themselves, gypsy bands (who previously had no true repertoire of their own) took these magyar nota into their music as regular concert-pieces. The choice of these gypsy bands was both economical as well as musical, for since the gypsy bands usually played at bars and made their money off performing requests for the middle-class patrons, the magyar nota became the music of choice. Because of

this permeation of the magyar nota into so many levels of society at the time, even today these "composed" pieces reflect to many what is an inherently Hungarian character.

Listening Questions

1.)The ceremonial aspect of this song must be tied to its simplicity and repetitiveness. The phrase structure is a regular 8-bars in length and repeats, unvaried as to harmonic content or melodic shape for the entire extent of the song. Also, the contour of the melody is linear, connecting this piece with a vocal tradition. The strophic nature of the verses (text changed as the melody stays constant) also identifies this piece as vocally oriented (and of course, a fixed melody makes the listener concentrate more on these changing words, perfect for a ceremonial dispensation of text). Assuming ceremonial music dates as an "ancient" Hungarian music, one is also not surprised by the modal tendencies of the melody, particularly the non-tonic ending (if this piece were truly tonal).

This particular version of the piece, though, does not sound like an original rendition and must therefore be a performance of a revival group. The phrasing is clean, with all the instruments playing solidly together (a feature unreproducible unless in a studio or with well-rehearsed musicians); the addition of the flute (presumably to evoke a folk flavor) exhibits smooth technique and breathing, as well as a practiced vibrato (again, rare in

village settings); and the general instrumentation belies an arrangement that would be rare in a rural setting: two guitars (one strummed, the other finger-picked) and bells flesh out the musical texture of this piece.

2.) This piece of music seems to be from the mass/movement songs genre so widespread during the post W.W.II years. The a cappella instrumentation proves that this piece will hold up at rallies or holidays when instruments are rarely available. The regular phrasing (in this case, a twelve bar structure) and strophic nature of the song are also key elements of any mass song, focusing on the lyrics which are so important to the piece. Similar to other mass songs of the era, this piece seems to have been composed by someone with at least a modicum of classical training: counterpoint between the voices appears at various times during the course of the 12-bar phrase. And just like others of its genre, this song shows strong cadences, regularized rhythms, a lack of grace notes, and a few wide melodic leaps (which presumably invoke the passion and excitement of the movement); the song may have been originally a Hungarian folk tune (with all its parlendo and grace notes), but through the technique of a classical hand, it has been organized itself to encourage the organization of the people.

3.) This song seems to come from the early 80's. Many features of its construction indicate that it is beyond early punk and has moved into the realm of new wave. First

is the instrumentation: a wah-wah guitar playing mostly high-fretted chords gives the music more of a reggae bent than the aggressive power of early punk; a bass guitar playing chords based on the blues pentatonic with filler licks between the phrases is similar to the 70's funk style playing; and saxophones (first seen in rhythm and blues playing) align this music with more dance related sounds (again, reggae; in particular, the Police). The melody is meant to be catchy and achieves this effect solely through its simplicity. The harmonic content of the song also exhibits a plain simplicity. The verses are almost spoken, in contrast to the aggressive screaming of the punk bands, and again puts this song in a "post-punk" genre of the early 80's.

4.) These two examples appear to be two different renditions of the same song. The first example (4a) is a gypsy band, while the second one is a studio band, probably one that would fall under the category of lakodalmas rock. For these reasons, I am assuming that the piece which is common to both songs comes from the magyar nota repertoire. The main difference between the two renditions comes from their instrumentations. The gypsy band treats the melody heterophonically by backing the vocal line up with virtuostic violin playing; the wedding rock band uses a similar heterophony, but instead of a violin, chooses a guitar or guitar/synth. Supporting instruments in the gypsy band sound like a bass and perhaps an accordion,

while example 4b uses smoother sounding instruments, as well as bells (which were probably produced through a synth). In general, therefore, the wedding rock has "updated" or "modernized" the rendition of the songs originally played by the gypsy bands by using electronic instruments and more modern techniques of recording.

5.)The only thing that strikes me as "Hungarian" in these episodes is the pedal being used in the cello parts and the syncopated quarter notes in the upper lines. Although these traits may be common with "gypsy" music, I fail to see how these features could not have stemmed from the classical tradition itself. Dominant pedals are common in the coda sections of a sonata form and should not seem so out of place here. And syncopations are such a basic rhythmic quality used to add excitement (appearing in much other music besides that of Austrian origin) that it is unfair to call it distinctly "Hungarian". There are, however, two spots which are left unmentioned by Istvanffy, that strike me as more Hungarian than any of his choices. These two spots occur at bars 91-106 and 270-280. Here, the cello changes the dominant pedal into more of a drone, with the characteristic open fifths. And also, such as in measures 101 and 104, this drone becomes syncopated through the use of off-beat accents. In a bass part, these syncopations are rarer than when in the upper voices because upper voice syncopations are tied to a whole tradition of suspension dating to early polyphony. Bass

parts, however, are usually more regular. I therefore think that Istvanffy has made some leaps of common sense in his search for Hungarian qualities in this quartet.

6.)Bartok presents the folk tune without any alteration to its melodic structure at all. Therefore, to make this piece more worth of high art, he has to surround it with a more complicated texture than the melody itself simply implies. First of all, he lengthens the ends of phrases in the melody, causing it to lose any sense of rhythmic regularity and therefore, perhaps, making it seem as if it had more natural parlando rubato qualities. The chords which support this melody seem to purposely not match up with the melody; Bartok often accentuates tritone or non-triadic relations between the accompaniment and the melody: Bar 13 (the return of the melody) shows an Eb drone fifth in the left hand with the melody creating the non-harmonic tones of a major seventh and an augmented fourth. The real drone fifth finally appears in the last bar of the piece, being foreshadowed by all the rolled chords in the texture. (As a note, Bartok presumably gave the melody its octave doubling to allow it to stand out against the thick, rich texture which he has created to surround it).