

While the music lasts: music and social interaction¹

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My topic is how music can create spaces for social interaction and transformation, and I shall explore this through three contrasting case studies, the last of which is the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra. And it's via the concept of space, and the closely related concept of place, that I want to approach the issue of music and social interaction. In essence I shall argue that music can create its own spaces for social interaction, purely musical spaces if you like: that is, spaces that don't have a fixed relationship to real-world locations, that are in that sense utopian. (Quick definition of utopia: space without place.) Seen this way, the key question that arises in relation to the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra is the extent to which what happens in a purely musical, utopian space carries over into the world beyond it—the real world, as we ordinarily say, though of course music is its own form of reality.

It is then with music and place that I'll begin. Music is a powerful connoter of place, but it's also easily detached from place, when its connotations may (or may not) remain available for purposes of the negotiation of identities and other relationships. Just to illustrate the extremes, consider on the one hand the extent to which Poland has identified itself with the music of Chopin, or Vienna's self-identification as the 'city of music'; and on the other hand, the Western classical music you hear everywhere in Seoul—for instance the snatches of Mozart or Vivaldi that precede underground train announcements—where it carries no connotation of European culture but rather embodies an international modernism.

The detaching of music from place and its embedding in new contexts have generally attracted negative critique, most obviously in relation to so called 'world music': the Irish folk musician Ross Daly complains of 'world music freaks ... surrounded by hundreds of CDs, records, cassettes and DAT recordings, who listen to West African Griots one minute, Japanese Koto music the next and then Bengali music—and ... don't understand the first thing about the

¹ This is an adapted version of a paper first presented at the 'Music, Sound and the Reconfiguration of Public and Private Space' conference held in Cambridge on 18-19 April 2008, which will appear in a book of that name to be published by Cambridge University Press.

music ... they haven't got a clue about the cultural and human background',² while commercial world music has frequently been criticised as an exploitative appropriation of third-world cultural property, relocating it within the structures of first-world capitalism. In the same way, portable music playback devices—Walkman, iPod, iPhone—can be seen as abstracting music from its original contexts of meaning, reducing it to a playlist item, and then interpolating it more or less arbitrarily (indeed randomly, if you use the iPod's 'shuffle' function) into ordinary life contexts, resulting in a solipsistic and even intrinsically alienated experience.

But music continues to signify when so abstracted, and the abstraction of music from place is by no means a creation of mechanical, electrical, or digital sound reproduction. Early nineteenth-century images of musical listening, such as Eugene Lami's watercolour 'Upon listening to a Beethoven symphony', represent a curiously disfunctional social situation in which audience members are physically next to one another but seem to inhabit different worlds: each believes himself or herself to be in private communion with the spirit of Beethoven, so that the public sphere withers away. (The present-day equivalent is of course the iPod-wearing passengers in an underground train.) Here then is an obvious example of music reconfiguring social space, establishing relationships between people—or the lack of such relationship—that would not exist without the music.

Such images of listening embody the form of detachment from context that we call the autonomy of music. And this always problematic, yet undoubtedly historical, autonomy is central to the first of three case studies in classical music and social interaction I want to talk about today. This is Vienna at the *fin de siècle*, the centre of a multinational empire riven by separatist tendencies, in which music formed a primary means for the construction of a supranational identity. In 1906 Guido Adler, who occupied the chair of music at the University of Vienna, wrote that 'as the customs of the Austrian peoples are interwoven in the works of the classical composers of music, as the motivic material is taken from the national stores, which the artists ... work up into classical structures, so may a higher statescraft join the particularities of the peoples into a higher

² Quoted in Laurent Aubert, *The Music of the Other: New Challenges for Ethnomusicology in a Global Age*, trans. Carla Ribeiro (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 55.

unity'.³ In saying this, Adler is proposing music as a model for political supranationalism. But it is his compatriot Heinrich Schenker who spelled out how this musical supranationalism might work. In a review of a concert from nine years earlier at the Hofopertheater, he commented on the way in which Smetana and Dvořák have succeeded in 'bringing their national music into a system', and continued:

The system is naturally that of German art, for this is best able to solve the principal problem of the logical development of a piece of music.... [Smetana] simply applied the German system to Bohemian music, and because he understood the German logic of music as it were in its necessity and sensibleness as no other, it was granted to him to present Bohemian music in a perfection which will not be surpassed. Since then Dvořák has also succeeded, always with the German system as a basis.⁴

Schenker then is asserting the autonomy and universality of 'musical logic' (or as he puts it, the German logic of music), in other words the spatialised conception of tonal theory in which time is measured by orderly—or sometimes disorderly—transitions from centre from periphery, and from periphery back to centre. And this inherently musical space becomes the vehicle for a deeply symbolical reconfiguration of place, in which the individual ethnic traditions of the empire are embraced within a unified, superordinate structure, rather like spokes radiating out from a hub: it's an exact equivalent of the constitutional structures that were at this time being discussed by the legal and political theorists at the University of Vienna. This is a form of musical cartography, the mapping of a rationalised system of relationships onto the known world, using a projection that places Vienna (or more precisely, German culture as embodied in Vienna) at its centre. Small wonder then that it was in the Vienna of the second half of the nineteenth century that the still influential structuralist aesthetic of music developed, which subjected listening to institutionalised criteria and so effectively placed it in the public domain, one might almost say turned structural listening into a civic duty.

³ Quoted in Margaret Notley, 'Musical culture in Vienna at the turn of the twentieth century', in Brian Simms (ed.), *Schoenberg, Berg, and Webern: A Companion to the Second Viennese School* (Westport, CN: Greenwood, 1999), p. 52.

⁴ Quoted in Sandra McColl, *Music Criticism in Vienna, 1896-1897: Critically Moving Forms* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 176.

And without going into details—which I've done elsewhere⁵—this figuring of music as a public arena for ideological and even political work provides the necessary context to understand the Society for Private Musical Performances which Schoenberg set up after the First World War: as its name implies, the aim was to withdraw music from a public sphere now seen as hopelessly compromised. It's also the context within which to understand the nostalgia which by that time attached to such pre-war venues as the Bösendorfer-Saal, known in Oscar Teuber's words as a "'family space', the scene of intimate music-making.... The audience were always aware who was in attendance, bowing and greeting one another, much like a family'. Within this 'family space'—a space at once private and communal—'player and listener alike ... could become autonomous individuals, free from the limitations of birth and wealth'.⁶ This same nostalgia is reflected in Adorno, for whom 'chamber music ... was a site of momentary refuge, a place of promise, imagination, and perhaps memory, where another kind of individuality might be thought, seen, and indeed heard.... a space for a lost sociability... an enactment of musical respect and friendship'.⁷ And I'll complete this series of quotations with one from Philip Bohlman, prompted by the practice of chamber music within European Jewish communities: 'the absence of specific meaning within the text allowed meaning to accrue only upon performance', he says, 'thus empowering any group—for example, an ethnic community—to shape what it will from absolute music'.⁸ This is what I meant by a purely musical space for social interaction and transformation.

My second and third case studies both involve present-day analogues of the nostalgically reimagined musical spaces of pre-war Vienna. If chamber music at the Bösendorfer-Saal allowed the transcending, for a while, of barriers of birth, wealth, and indeed race, then the virtual reality of Second Life is an imagined community that transcends not only these but also physical location, age, and gender, since you don't have to reveal your identity to take part in it. Although

⁵ Nicholas Cook, *The Schenker Project: Culture, Race, and Music Theory in Fin-de-siècle Vienna*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

⁶ Quoted in Leon Botstein, *Music and its Public: Habits of Listening and the Crisis of Musical Modernism in Vienna, 1870-1914* (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1985), pp. 725, 834.

⁷ Quoted in Theodor Adorno, *Essays on Music*, ed. with commentary by Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 522.

⁸ Philip Bohlman, 'Of Yekkes and chamber music in Israel', in Stephen Blum, Philip Bohlman, and Daniel Neuman (eds.), *Ethnomusicology and Modern Music History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), p. 259.

most of the music in Second Life is pop of all kinds, there's also a substantial amount of classical music, most of it promoted by individuals or organizations committed to finding new audiences: Linda Rogers, who in the shape of her avatar Kate Miranda organises concerts at the Second Life open-learning community Cedar Island, writes that 'many of those attending classical concerts in Second Life have little or no experience of live classical music. While classical music series are having trouble attracting new audiences to conventional concert stages, it seems that the internet virtual audience is open to the experience of art music'.⁹ Again, Guy Dammann observes in a blog about the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra's high-profile Second Life concert in 2007 (for which they created a virtual replica of Philharmonic Hall) that 'while in the real world our range of activities is tightly policed by all sorts of beliefs about the kind of person we are, how our actions appear to others and whether our friends will laugh at us, the world of Second Life - like much internet life - is considerably less repressed'¹⁰.

Another thing that the promoters stress is the community aspect of Second Life concerts. The Philharmonic's marketing and communications director, Millicent Jones, said in the run-up to the concert that 'what distinguishes this from doing an audio stream via our website is that on Second Life it will be a collective experience. People will be experiencing the watching of a performance within a group of people, and there will be an opportunity to discuss it: it's about creating a community.'¹¹ And Rogers goes into more detail: 'The principal reason for presenting classical music in Second Life, for me, revolves around the quality of the audience experience. Listening to a podcast or recording is a solitary experience. By contrast, concerts in Second Life are joyfully social, audience members are joyfully celebratory in their anticipation and appreciation of the music in a way rarely matched in real life orchestras. Unique to the medium, listeners silently text appreciative comments, hurrahs, and questions that they hope someone more informed will be able to answer. Sometimes Second Life avatars even decide to dance to the music in the manner of small children at a summer concert at the park'.

⁹ Linda Rogers, 'Bread And Roses: music, art, politics and the intersections between them in real and virtual worlds' (18 February, 2008), <http://breadandroseslife.blogspot.com/2008/02/classical-music-in-second-life.html>.

¹⁰ Guy Dammann, 'Classical music's new lease of Second Life' (15 August 2007), http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/music/2007/08/classical_musics_new_lease_of.html.

¹¹ Charlotte Higgins, 'Website sets out its stall for first online symphonic concert' (14 August 2007), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2007/aug/14/musicnews.digitalmedia>.

There hasn't been dancing at any of the Second Life concerts of classical music I've attended, but the community aspect is certainly there. When you arrive, you may well be recognised and addressed by the promoter; it's reminiscent of the family atmosphere of the Bösendorfer-Saal. Concerts also tend to be preceded by extended discussion to establish whether everyone can hear, which is ostensibly for technical reasons (you sometimes have to repeatedly toggle the streaming controls to get the sound to work), but also plays a community-building function, reinforcing the real-time interaction between participants: to adapt the Conservatives' slogan at the last election, the basic question is 'Are you hearing what I'm hearing?' At a 2008 Bach Festival concert held on April 12 in the Second Life recreation of the Santa Maria del Pi church in Barcelona (Figure 1), one of the artists asked audience members to say where they were from: responses included Spain, UK, USA, and Mexico. When everything was ready to go, the promoter, Tyrol Rimbaud, introduced the programme in a rather traditional music-appreciation manner, and the music began. Audience members texted in comments as the music played, just as Rogers said, and when it stopped, they signalled their enthusiastic applause (though about half of it came from Rimbaud).

If the iPod creates a private space within the public space of an underground train, Second Life does just the opposite: it embeds a virtual public space within private space, for while you play the game from the privacy of your own computer, you are interacting with other people in a public arena, real people, even though under a cloak of anonymity (unless, that is, you choose to disclose your first life identity in your avatar's profile, but most people don't). The limitation, as far as music is concerned, lies in the nature of that interaction. In concerts like the one I've described the music is live, in the sense that it is being streamed in real time (though sometimes accompaniments are all too obviously MIDI sequenced). And the performers' talk before and between items—which takes the form of streamed sound rather than appearing as text—heightens the real-time quality of the event. But when the music plays, there's no synchronization between the sound and the performer animations (which are simply repeating loops), and the time lag resulting from the texting of comments means that the interaction they promote lacks the immediacy, the highly nuanced, communally shared temporality of the experience of live, First-Life music—the qualities that Alfred Schutz described as 'this sharing of the other's flux of experiences in inner time, this living through a vivid present in common', and which he regarded as the model for 'the mutual tuning-in relationship, the experience of the "We", which is at the

foundation of all possible communication'.¹² While Second Life concerts do have the community-building aspects described by their promoters, then, and while they represent an intriguing research resource for exploring responses to music on the neutral ground established by role-playing, the music itself is simply inserted into a virtual space constructed by other means. The music is not, as Second Lifers say, being made in-world at all.

This demonstrates that what I called purely musical constructions of space involve not only the relationships of centre and periphery described by tonal theorists, which like virtually all established music theory are based on notational categories, but also—and perhaps more essentially—the subnotational nuance, the temporal becoming that Schutz saw as the model of intersubjectivity. Nor is this intersubjectivity restricted to musical time. Consider a string quartet playing Mozart. The quartet may well play exactly what Mozart wrote. And yet they don't, because every note in the score is subject to the contextual negotiation of intonation, precise dynamic value, articulation, timbral quality, and so forth. For example, the performers stay in tune not because each independently conforms to a common standard (such as equal temperament), but because each constantly accommodates his or her playing to the others', so that 'in tune' is a social concept, an emergent quality—and the same can be said of all other aspects of music as performance, from the technical to the emotional. It is on this social dimension of making music together that my third and last case study builds, as also on the idea I mentioned in relation to chamber music at the Bösendorfer-Saal of music enabling the transcending, for a while, of barriers of birth, wealth, and race.

In physical terms, the West/Eastern Divan Orchestra brings together young Israeli and Palestinian musicians on the neutral ground of Andalusia, where the Barenboim-Said Foundation is located, but in imaginative terms the neutral ground is that of the classical orchestral tradition. Physically it is a 'parallel place without checkpoints, soldiers, identification cards', but imaginatively it is—in Said's words— a 'practical utopia whose presence and practice in our riven world is sorely needed and, in all sorts of ways, intensely instructive'.¹³ The orchestra is not

¹² Alfred Schutz, 'Making music together: a study in social relationship', in Arvid Brodersen (ed.), *Alfred Schutz: Collected papers II: Studies in Social Theory* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1964), p. 173

¹³ Ramzi Aburewan, quoted in Andrew Patner, 'Oh Amigos! Oh Hermanos!', in the Blogs section of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra website; 'Excerpts from a lecture given by Edward W. Said January 2003 entitled' [*sic*], in the Articles section; <http://west-easterndivan.artists.warner.de/>.

just a symbol of hope, but an enactment of it, and the reason echoes the ethical values implicit in Schutz's 'mutual tuning-in relationship': 'An orchestra requires musicians to listen to each other; none should attempt to play louder than the next, they must respect and know each other. It is a song in praise of respect, of the effort to understand one another, something that is crucial to resolve a conflict that has no military solution'.¹⁴

The Western-Eastern Divan Orchestra project is built frankly on belief in the autonomy of the absolute instrumental music of the Western 'art' tradition, on the idea that there can be such a thing as music that transcends society and consequently creates a neutral zone that facilitates transformation, even the overcoming of intractable racial histories, if only for a couple of hours.¹⁵ Though it seems odd to say this of Edward Said's initiative, this means that it represents an imposition upon its Middle Eastern participants of a distinctively Western conceptual framework—one that is clearly ideological in that it is taken as self-evident, naturalised. As Rachel Beckles Willson has pointed out, history presses in upon the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra: 'Its "democracy"', she writes, 'is rather obviously an enacting of western Enlightenment musical culture as it evolved in nineteenth century Europe', and this history is also expressed in its 'formidably strong hierarchical structure, and an omnipotent leader whose position is maintained by a mystified religiosity'.¹⁶ (That last point, of course, has become the more salient since Said's death.) And it's only realistic to acknowledge that participation in the orchestra is not simply a reflection of idealism: students see it as a means of career advancement and, in some cases, a passport to the West.¹⁷ Journalistic reception of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, in short, has understandably tended towards uncritical adulation.

Yet having said all this, it's still fair to say that, in the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, music is the essential agent in the establishment of a space that not only symbolizes but also, to however

¹⁴ 'Daniel Barenboim and Edward Said upon receiving the "Principe de Asturias" Prize', in the Articles section of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra website.

¹⁵ 'This concert, as you surely know from the coverage in the newspapers, did not end the conflict. Yet, at least for a couple of hours, it managed to reduce the level of hatred to zero' (Daniel Barenboim on a concert in Ramallah, in the Articles section of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra website).

¹⁶ Rachel Beckles Willson, 'The West-Eastern Divan Orchestra', *British Academy Review* 10 (2007), p. 17

¹⁷ Rachel Beckles Willson, 'The parallax worlds of music and museums', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* (forthcoming).

modest a degree, however evanescently, enacts a reconciliation choreographed by the collaborative work of performance, the shared emotional trajectory and nuanced temporality of live music. That temporality, Schutz's 'inner time', is in a sense virtual rather than real, and it's in terms of the analogy I have drawn with Second Life that I hope to justify my use of that term: music constructs a virtual reality to the extent that its reality is not simply an epiphenomenon of the world outside music, that it results from the actions of free individuals motivated by inherently musical contexts. Yet while the music lasts, the reconciliation is not *just* virtual: it is not just a metaphor but a metonym of the world beyond the music, a little bit of reality within which reconciliation is enacted, for unlike in Second Life, the musically mediated interactions between the musicians of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra do not take place under the cover of anonymous role-playing. The crunch question is how long the reconciliation lasts after the music stops, how far it survives the transition to RL, as Second Lifers term the world beyond the game. The hope is that what is done in musical time cannot be fully undone after the music has stopped. The jury is still out on that one.