

PROPOSAL OF AN ALTERNATIVE REPERTOIRE FOR CLASSICAL MUSIC AUDITION THROUGH THE ROCK GENRE

ALEXANDRA BELIBOU¹

SUMMARY. The subject of this article aims to put in the mirror two fundamentally different musical genres. It is the stylistic difference that seems interesting, so in the following pages, I chose to analyze rock creations that quoted or processed classical music. Rock music, a genre that appeared in the second half of the twentieth century, could not escape the influence of classical music, so, as we will see throughout the paper, there are many rock pieces influenced by classical scores, works that remained in the top of the preferences of rock music listeners. Some of the rock musicians chose to quote classical fragments, others chose to process them, or to be inspired by certain elements of their composition, such as melody, harmony, and rhythm. I believe that this type of comparative analysis is helpful in the case of music education teachers who want to introduce the classical genre in the students' favorite repertoire, through the medium of rock music. Thus, the second objective of this article is to propose an alternative to traditional music auditioning.

Keywords: rock, comparative analysis, rock cover, audition.

1. Introduction

This article aims at highlighting the combination of two different musical genres, to propose an alternative to the traditional music audition of the classical genre, in the case of music education teachers who face the cultural and preferential barrier regarding the musical genres listened to by their students. Given that this stylistic difference seems specifically interesting, I chose to conduct a comparative analysis of rock works that quoted or processed fragments of classical music. Rock music, a genre created in the

¹ Lect. PhD, Transilvania University of Braşov, Faculty of Music, xela_irig@yahoo.ca, alexandra_belibou@unitbv.ro

second half of the twentieth century², could not escape the influence of the classical music quality. Thus, various influential pieces of classical music have arisen over time, which remained in the top preferences of rock music lovers.

Some of the rock music creators chose to quote classical fragments, others chose to process them, or to be inspired by certain elements of their composition, such as: melody, harmony, rhythm, and metrics.

Through the comparative analysis conducted, I tried to highlight how the expressive valences of classical music can be transferred into compositions of a different musical nature. By overlapping two completely different musical universes, works with clear meaning and expressive intention can result, without depleting any of the languages. So, this research approach may be of interest to students who prefer a rock repertoire and who, by accessing this comparative paradigm, can access the world of classical music much more easily, through a transfer of meaning.

According to Andrei Marga, “*art is a field of diversity, more than science, philosophy and theology*”³. This diversity, which the rock songs that I have chosen to discuss about, in this paper, try to unite, is of great interest.

2. Discussion

In the following lines, I have inserted some examples of analysis of rock compositions that quoted or processed fragments of classical music. As we will see, when the rock bands chose to process classical music segments, they considered all levels of musical construction: rhythm, melody, harmony, orchestration, tempo, dynamics.

In the two parts of his book - *Histories, Aesthetics and Ideologies and Sounds, Structures and Styles*, Mark Spicer talks about an unintentional transfer of musical values from classical music to the melodic and harmonic constructions of rock music over time, with quotes without specific references to the source, but framed in a new paradigm that thus generates a new sound reality⁴.

2.1. *Because* - The Beatles

Written in March 1969, *Because*, the last song of The Beatles' album, *Abbey Road*, is composed by John Lennon and inspired by the first part of the *Piano Sonata op. 27 no. 2*, by Ludwig van Beethoven.

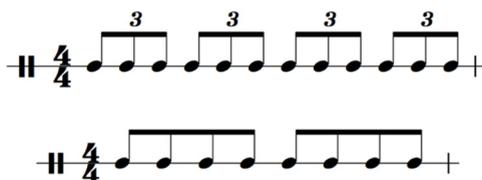
² Belz, Carl, *The Story of Rock*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1969, p. 15.

³ Marga, Andrei, *Profunzimea artei (The Depth of Art)*, Editura Libris, 2020, p. 9.

⁴ Spicer, Mark, *Rock Music*, Routledge, New York, 2016, p. 107-218.

The key of the song is C sharp minor, as in the original sheet music, and the time signature is compound binary. From a rhythmic point of view, if, in the work signed by Beethoven, we find a ternary rhythm framed in binary measure, The Beatles frame the arpeggio sequences in a binary rhythm and binary measure, according to the following scheme (the top line shows the rhythm ostinato from the original sheet music, and, on the bottom one, the rhythmic processing of The Beatles):

E.g. 1



The rhythm of the two compared works

What makes the rock song resemble the classical work, in a first audition, is the texture written in unfolded arpeggios:

E.g. 2

Because

Words and Music by John Lennon and Paul McCartney

Slowly

mp

With pedal

The instrumental beginning of the work *Because*

From the comparative analysis of the two works, we noticed that The Beatles understood the harmonic-melodic and rhythmic requirements implied by the processing of an established work of classical music. Thus, partially following the harmonic progressions, metrics and atmosphere of the creation signed by Beethoven, the band The Beatles adds, with increased attention to detail and accuracy⁵, developed vocal harmony and instrumentation overlapping the ostinato-arpeggio rhythm.

⁵ Hunter, Davies, *The Beatles: The Authorised Biography*, Ebury Press, 2009, p. 292.

2.2. A Whiter Shade of Pale – Procol Harum

Procol Harum, a British rock band, created in 1967, with baroque and classical influences in musical compositions, is best known for the hit *A Whiter Shade of Pale*, which ranked number 1 in the British charts, in June 1967. The introduction, performed on the Hammond organ, is inspired by *Aria* from the *Orchestra Suite No. 3 in D major*, BWV 1068, by Johann Sebastian Bach.

The inspiration from the music of Johann Sebastian Bach, to which I refer to, is observed both in the gradual descending line of the bass, an element preserved throughout the song, and in the melodic line performed on the organ, which retains an interval and rhythmic pattern like that of the baroque music sheet. It can be seen, in the examples below, that the song begins on the third of the tonic chord, in both cases, with a long note, on a bass moving downwards. Also, the ornamentation that uses appoggiaturas is a common element of the two works. Homogeneous compound binary metrics and major tonality are another common element (D major in Bach's version, C major in Procol Harum).

E.g. 3

Aria introduction – Bach

E.g. 4

Organ introduction in *A Whiter Shade of Pale*

Creating a lyrical and evocative composition, Procol Harum managed to insert a spark from Bach's music into a rock creation. The spark we are referring to has led to a loan, in terms of melodic, harmonic, rhythmic plans, so that the rock song we are talking about is of interest to us, as a form of composition that processes and reinterprets Bach's creation.

2.3. *It's a Hard Life* - Queen

It's a Hard Life, the song of the British band, Queen, written by the vocalist, Freddie Mercury, in 1984, is part of the album *The Works*. The work in question is the third single of the album, which ranked 6th in the British charts. The melodic and textual beginning of *It's a Hard Life*, contains a musical quote, the fragment *Ridi, Pagliaccio, sul tuo amore infanto!* from the aria *Vesti la giubba*, part of the opera *Pagliacci*, by Ruggero Leoncavallo.

As a general observation, classical music elements follow the musical arrangements of the band Queen, as they become increasingly more ambitious, throughout the years⁶.

E.g. 5

23 ghioz-zo e' l do lor, Ah! Ri - di, Pa - gliac - cio sul tuo a - mo - rein fran - to!

30 Ri - di del duol, che t'av - ve - le - na il cor!

**Fragment *Ridi, Pagliaccio, sul tuo amore infanto!*
from the opera *Pagliacci*, by Leoncavallo**

⁶ Ross, Daniel, *Queen FAQ: All That's Left to Know About Britain's Most Eccentric Band*, Rowman & Littlefield.

IT'S A HARD LIFE

Words and Music by
FREDDIE MERCURY

Freely
♩ = 52 N.C.

I don't want my free - dom. There's no rea - son for liv - ing with a bro - ken

Slowly
♩ = 82

heart. This is a trick - y sit - u - I try and mend the bro - ken

Vocal introduction of *It's a Hard Life* by Queen

As can be seen from the two previously inserted musical examples, Queen quoted measures 25-31 from Leoncavallo's sheet music. If the original sheet music is in E minor, the song *It's a Hard Life* begins in G minor. The simple binary metric from the original score is replaced by a composite binary in the case of rock processing. The rhythm is altered in the quotation from the rock song, but this does not change the rhythmic stress. Queen's quotation lacks a tonic cadence, so the musical phrase remains open from a tonal point of view.

2.4. *Pictures at an Exhibition* – Emerson, Lake and Palmer

From the field of progressive rock, we included the band Emerson, Lake and Palmer, with the live album *Pictures at an Exhibition*, released in 1971. As the title suggests, the album contains reinterpretations of excerpts

from Modest Mussorgsky's creation. What defines those from ELP (short for the band's name) is the timbre reintegration of classical works, which is also true for this album. If Mussorgsky's creation is written for solo piano, the band ELP chose to include drums, bass guitar, electric organ, Hammond, synthesizer, and church organ. So, this example comprises an interpretive variant, different from the one indicated in the classical sheet music. Thus, a legendary album was born, recorded live, in which segments of Mussorgsky's suite are performed on various instruments specific to the rock genre, and other original compositions use thematic material from them, being inserted among the quotes mentioned.

The sections quoted and processed from a timbre, dynamic and agogic point of view are:

1. Promenade: played on a solo church organ
2. The Gnome: instrumental, group
3. Promenade: Hammond and vocal
4. The Old Castle: The entire band plays an accelerated version of the original sheet music, connecting the following song of the album, which borrows thematic material from this one.
5. Promenade: instrumental, group
6. The Hut of Baba Yaga: instrumental, group
7. The Great Gates of Kiev: as in Mussorgsky's suite, the entire journey ends with this section, with an added voice over the entire band.

About this album, the musicologist Eric Hung states: "*ELP's Pictures is a sprawling eleven-movement work that contains strict and free transcriptions of Mussorgsky's original, variations on themes by Mussorgsky, and original ELP material*"⁷. There are different opinions on this musical production; Paul Stump describes the transformations done by ELP as being "*intelligent and tasteful*"⁸, while Bill Martin writes that he prefers listening to the classical version⁹.

⁷ Hung, Eric, *Hearing Emerson, Lake, and Palmer Anew: Progressive Rock as "Music of Attractions"* <https://journals.library.columbia.edu/index.php/currentmusicology/article/view/5057/2324>, accessed on March 10th, 2022.

⁸ Stump, Paul, *The Music's All That Matters: A History of Progressive Rock*, Quartet Books, London, 1997, p. 100.

⁹ Martin, Bill, *Listening to the Future: The Time of Progressive Rock, 1968-1978*, Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 1998, p. 199.

3. Conclusions

As we have noticed, from a comparative analytical perspective, the fragments of classical music processed in rock creations go in several directions. One type of processing is the inspiration type, not quotation, in which case the rock music creators chose to be inspired by classical works and to only preserve certain elements of the composition, adapting them to the rock genre. I noticed that this type of processing refers to following the harmonic progressions from classical works, or to the melodic contour.

Another case is that in which the rhythm has been changed, so that the expressive and atmospheric message changes in the rock work. Another type of inspiration is the interpretive one, in which case the special element is the distinct instrumentation - leading to a different sound and different dynamic, which makes the expression change significantly.

This paper does not claim to be an exhaustive musicological analysis, nor does it seek to emphasize the aesthetic equality of the two different musical genres mentioned. What this paper is trying to do is to propose an alternative to introducing classical music into the musical universe of students who are not familiar with this genre, through a genre more accessible to the public without musical knowledge. Thus, through comparative audition lessons, one can learn both the elements of musical composition, viewed comparatively in a pair of music works as those presented above, with the aim to broaden the musical horizon of young people.

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