Conjunctions And Affinities

Elaine R. Barkin

Abstract: "Conjunctions and Affinities" just seemed to happen, flowing along currents of thought, music--at times undertoned, at times overwhelming--always on the horizon; music--mine, yours--as a way of life, our lives a reflection of how we create our time in our world. And thus a commentary which tells of: collecting disparate stuff--then and now--creating congruity out of disorder, overcoming chaos, synchronizing past and present, masks and masking, transfiguring mystifying, dissembling, occasioning personal autonomy, remaking boundaries, questioning authority, construing witchcraft--also then and now---classifying, encumbering, imagining narratives, composing one's voice, hearing others' voices and speaking of them, telling stories, liberating and expressing ourselves, letting it be, experiencing music so as to understand our lives and worlds, and thence be forever changed. Yet, as always, much has been unsaid, much can never be said, much is best taken in as is, absorbed, allowed to suffuse.
Collecting And Masks

"The person who collects...is struck by the confusion, the scatter, in which the things of the world are found...The collector...beset by the chaos of memory...brings together what belongs together...keeping in mind their affinities." — Walter Benjamin [1]

While I was growing up I collected stamps, cigar bands, leaves, ticket stubs, dried flowers, picture postcards, buttons, pieces of colored glass, junk and junk (as Lydia Hammesley has put it) [2], all of which were carefully placed in scrapbooks, shoeboxes or cigar boxes. During my graduate school years away from home, my mom put my stuff in a large trunk and stored it in a basement bin, but someone pried the bin open and removed all contents. It took years for me to get over the loss of memorabilia that also included my diaries, report cards, art work, school work, P.S. 95 graduation book, Third Street Settlement Music School and summer camp stuff, Bronx High School of Science yearbook (the first class in which girls were admitted), Queens College transcripts, concert and graduation programs, and more. Fortunately, my photo albums had not been stored—a growing collection now comprising 40 chronologically arranged albums occupying 7 feet of shelf-space.

Collections preserve memory, sustain identity, and permit past and present to be experienced simultaneously; photos enable the living to see the dead and help to transcend inevitable day-by-day atrophy and extinction. Life and death, then and now, real and imaginary co-exist, compatibly, compliantly:

...Nothing and everything is real in photo albums; nothing and everything is fictional; everything is both true and false; experience and history are reinforced; memories linger or are re-invented; frozen in time, past life is recalled; what was then and isn’t now...

Sound albums, unlike in photo albums, are devoid of people, sites, objects, yet experienceable as the present, alive in the ether forever encircling the universe. Unlike in images that our photos re-present, our musics once never were, had to have been conjured up, made real, performed; music for us now, no matter when conceived...heard images of a time, of times, held in focus, then, now, afterward. Acknowledgment of mortality may have motivated the making of these tracks for you now, leaving traces for others later. [3]

When my family—husband and 3 sons—moved from the East Coast to the West Coast in 1974, chotchkes (knickknacks, mementos), rocks, fossils, sea shells, and several masks came with us. Now, 28 years later, the mementos, rocks, and shells occupy shelf-space in several rooms—‘altar-like’, a friend said, but no one kowtows. Clay, cloth, wood or stone dolls, animals, symbolic figures or tokens take me back to places and occasions, as do the hand-picked shells and rocks that spill out of larger shells or small baskets. A shelf in a small bedroom holds outworn car radios, a vacuum-tube tuner, typewriters, a rotary phone—detritus of communications technology; a large folder holds newspaper photos of car crashes; kitchen drawers contain unusable hardware; a small Celestial Seasonings tin is being filled with newly minted (since 1999) State quarters—this latter collection the only instance where an item can be said to be ‘missing’. Folk, toy, homemade, ethnic, orchestral, and electric instruments crowd a room in which, for several decades, improvisation sessions with friends, students, and colleagues were held: instruments hang on walls, lie atop and under an out-of-tune piano, fill pockets of a large shoe bag. Although neither method nor compulsory end-goal has been stimulus, you might construe collecting as an attempt to freeze the world or you might surmise that collecting borders on the obsessive. And yet, the assembling of sundry affined ‘things’ helps to control the "chaos of memory" and helps to assuage contrariety and incertitude.
Masks—the majority of which were acquired on site—e.g., Mexico, Guatemala, Bali, Java, China, Japan, New Orleans, India, Alaska—are hung high up on the walls of our wood-paneled living and dining rooms. Many are benevolent mythic or tribal archetypes; several are demonic; a few are festive; among the 77 masks, 30 are female. Masks offer humans an unparalleled opportunity to be an-other: the possibility of becoming that which, or one who, we are not; personhood is cast off and swapped with idealization. For a time, we can pretend, deceive, mystify, be transformed—for better or for worse; represent or impersonate without ultimately being held accountable; assume anonymity, like train or bank robbers, rapists, kidnappers, protesters, terrorists, The Lone Ranger, Tom Cruise in Stanley Kubrick’s "Eyes Wide Shut", or band members of "The Residents".

Persons in every part of the world, in sacred or secular contexts and at various stages of humanity’s evolution, have made or worn masks. In many cultures, mask-makers are revered and believed to be in touch with the world of the spirits. For me, the allure of masks flows out of tendencies to role-play, to live several lives, to not give away the show, or to distinguish between private and public—boundaries between which have been severely eroded by mass everything: hype, buzz, and willful abuse of communications media. Elias Canetti has written:

The mask is distinguished from all the other end-states of transformation by its rigidity: it is a conclusion; into it flows all the ferment of the as yet unclear and uncompleted metamorphoses which the natural human face so miraculously expresses...once the mask is in position there can be no more beginnings, no groping towards something new. The mask is fixed; the thing it expresses cannot change...Part of the strength of its power and effect is that the true mask reveals nothing of what is behind it...While the mask is in action it is inviolable, sacred, and enforces distance...The secret represented to those who see the mask from the outside must also have an effect on the mask wearer inside it...[They] [the spectators] are afraid of the unknown; he/she [the masked one] is afraid of being unmasked. The mask is also a weapon or tool which its wearer must manipulate...remaining his [sic] everyday self; at the same time [he {sic} must become] the mask during the whole performance. [4]

Canetti’s insights into power issues are always sensational and, yes, whether a mask is neutral or strong, it is fixed, immutable—but I have been at events in Bali, Java, and Japan where the mask appears to be expressive: "it" cries, "she" laughs, "he" scowls—surely this cannot be. Yet, by their movements and the play of light and shadow, skilled actor-dancers can suggest changes of expression. For us to be able to conceive any such change is to reify the power—the magic, and the poly-hood of the mask and the masked: the mask perceived from without: impenetrable; the mask experienced from within: liberating, multivalent. Humans and all life-forms, are capable of masking themselves without donning a tangible object: desires, motives, thoughts can easily
be obscured—we all practice this now and then, white lying, conning, dissembling—, with effects ranging from the relatively benign to the highly malignant. In a 1984 text, I sought to express the feel of ‘trying others on’:

On the way to becoming we most of us try others on. Not whole bodies. Those parts whose fit might still enable pores to breathe. Ultra tight fits unintentionally wanted by some constrain, intentionally put upon also constrain. The longer the wear the less the bind feels. Wanting fitness at first is all. Itself gets used to. Until. The want to become again revives. We cast off second hands exposing our remaining rawness, selfness. Ourselves becoming again consolidated. Refit. Until. Awareness momently that superficies may become our real thing. Fitness is no longer all. When unawareness of prosthetic appliance environs us we are not us. Then to divest to unbecome to become. And reinvest ourselves with discards of now our own former molting. Or refashion from some scratch never wholly unloosed of old fits. Or invent new starts. Or even as it were to unbecomingly flounder. And reimage ourselves barely unjointedly as we reimagine fitting ourselves all out. Conjoining our unbound first hands. Until. [5]

On The Way To Becoming
Elaine Barkin, monochord, voice

A conjoining of collecting, masks, and composing—as in ‘bringing and putting things together’—came to pass for me in the spring of 2002. During a walk around my block I noticed a stray hubcap which appealed to me, ‘followed me home’, got cleaned up, and after several weeks was transformed into "Pinky-Orange". Feeling energized and wanting to make another, I visited auto junkyards where I bought several more hubcaps at bargain-basement prices. "Pinky-Orange" soon had companions, all of whose ‘faces’ are painted and adorned with junkue, coins, shells, buttons, beads, hardware, earrings, fabric scraps, small soundmakers, and more.

The MASK And The Academy
For over three decades my world comprised the Academy and its inhabitants, a world in whose hallowed halls ‘masked’ colleagues, many in positions of authority flourish[ed], their opaque fixed-faces—both smiley and stiff—impenetrable. Everyday selves put on hold. Hard to tell what’s going on beneath those façades, as those ‘masked’ colleagues silently and rapidly calculate[d] benefits and disadvantages—to
themselves, their position, their department, the school, the world—no matter what was being said or, more often, asked. In Elias Canetti’s words:

The wearer knows perfectly well who he [sic] really is; but his [sic] task is to act the mask….While the mask is in action, it enforces distance.

Unless you willfully precipitate a confrontation or crisis, you might find it hard to identify the precise moment when some of those hitherto collegial smiley-faces drooped—and droop they do. In the Academy, petty concerns and anxieties—real and imagined—about possible indiscretion or unfulfilled promise(s) co-exist with joys and boons. Like life, you might say. You might also become aware of the disparity between the guarantees and the reality of “academic freedom”. You might notice just how the potential and promise of diversity and of teaching what, and the way in which, you believe, get to be short-circuited, disrupted by impositions of compliance that undermine the very foundations of individual and intellectual freedom commonly espoused by Academia’s PR. As Nancy McLean has written:

Justice is not the only reason diversity is so important to higher education. When the excluded gain access, they bring with them what could not be seen [or heard] before: They alter knowledge. [6]

Singularity and idiosyncrasy, often received with mistrust or antagonism, are dangerous for those at vulnerable untenured levels, no less so further up the ladder. Your masked colleague might not tell it to you ‘like it is’ and though today’s dissenter doesn’t get burned at the stake, punishment is nonetheless meted out, albeit concealed to the public. (Yet, lest cynicism and pessimism overwhelm me, maverick intellectuals and artists can thrive and bloom in the Academy, with simpatico colleagues in tow.) Some years ago I wrote:

Autonomy is not so easy to come by. Awareness of the power and bind of institutional authority resurfaces whenever we are confronted with the dissonance of obligation. The deepest senses of what it truly means to be intellectually and socially responsible get muddied over and confused with issues of conformance and adherence to a gameplan that may no longer be in everyone’s—or anyone’s—best interests. We all need to believe in and take our work seriously; develop strategies to make it happen; defend it fiercely if necessary, change it if desired. At times frustrating and lonely, yet psychically enlivening and the only way to feel real. [7]

Students, the raison d’être of the Academy, are in dire need of autonomy as well, in whatever manner possible. Searching for and finding the balance between encouraging the voice of the individual and the managing of rules, regulations, or penalties imposed by the ‘standards’ (or the ‘double-standards’) police, is a lifelong commitment. Without genuine interpersonal opportunities or for that matter input into their course of study, students are constrained by hierarchical and authoritarian systems that deny them their right to make choices or to self-govern—none of which comes risk-free. Student and mentor may be equally fearful of autonomy and liberty, but their absence is detrimental. Alas, though: halls of learning have become more standardized and commercialized; corporate mentality and the need to fund-raise and appease the donor have become more prevalent. David Harvey has written about the consequences of such behavior:

University presidents are being forced to raise more and more money or economize on costs by whatever means to meet the escalating financial needs of teaching and research…the university with the economistic logic of contemporary capitalism, converting knowledge into information and students into consumers, and transforming the ability to think into a capacity for information processing. How can we think in ‘an institution whose development tends to make thought more and more difficult, less and less necessary? [8]

A transition to independent thinking can be difficult for those who have been hardened—or is it
softened?—by a milieu in which dissent or opining on one’s own has neither been advocated nor encouraged. Concerted efforts are needed to invent strategies so as to make such exchange and dialogue a reality, all of which can be life-affirming and life-saving.

Witchcraft And Composing

Autonomy and dissent always endanger the reigning political, religious, social, or educational order. In Western Europe, starting in the 13th century and lingering long after—the onset of the Enlightenment notwithstanding—, witch-hunters, Dominican friars at first, ‘used’ the Church as an instrument of their misogyny and xenophobia. Women (80% of those persecuted as witches), as well as men and animals, were accused of engaging in prurient "demonic sex" or being in league with the Devil. [9] For close to 500 years, official inquiries were convened in order to determine who the heretic was and what was entailed in the practice of heresy; details of the practice, names of associates, were sought, extracted, and copiously catalogued, collated, and corroborated; facts and figments merged seamlessly. Aided and abetted by a society seeking a scapegoat for its social frustration, the witch-hunting craze was, as Hugh Trevor-Roper writes:

the articulation of social pressure...The hatred felt for inassimilable societies—who sought to defend their own identities—was intellectualized as a new heresy, and politically suspect individuals were brought to judgment by reference to it. [10]

Way back then as well as now: Witches are alive and potent in the contemporary mythic imagination: the old bag or bat, the child-eating toothy hag, the poisoning crone, the more ‘attractive’ but equally dangerous and spell-casting femme fatale, as well as ‘good’ witches. Yet, dissidents and outsiders are still vulnerable. Inquisitors and tormentors continue to earn a living. Witch-dom and heresy construal neither die nor fade away; reinterpreted, they appear to be an integral aspect of the ‘human condition’.

In Bali, Rangda the witch is endowed with malignant supernatural powers. ‘She’ has long animal-like teeth, protruding eyes, footlong fingernails, unkempt floorlength hair, pendulous breasts, an abrasive voice, awkward movements, and is always performed by a man. The mere sight of a Rangda mask still sends many Balinese-Hindu into a psychotic, ecstatically entranced, altered state; Westerners are advised not to hang Rangda masks in their homes. Rangda’s followers— demon-witches called leyaks, and every Balinese village has at least one—are male and female. [11] Fortunately the Balinese-Hindu have their Barong— symbol of benevolence—, a large, glittery, bejeweled, bright-eyed, four-footed creature with a furry creamy-white mane and hide, and, most often, a Lion-like face with teeth that clatter, danced by two ‘undercover’ men. The Barong vanquishes Rangda, but she-witch will come again: cycles of good and evil recur until the end of time.
Witchcraft was hung by Emily Dickinson [12]
Witchcraft was hung, in History,
But History and I
Find all the Witchcraft that we need
Around us, every Day— (1883)

In 1993 I composed a song-cycle for soprano and
harp, poems by Sappho, Sue DeVale, bell hooks, a
Santal (South Indian) girl, and Emily Dickinson.
Dickinson’s surly, crude Witchcraft verse is right to
the point and although much of her poetry remains
opaque to me, her inventive words and line-lengths
always astonish. I empathize with Dickinson’s
agoraphobic lifestyle, which enabled her to give us so
much; just as extraordinary was her resistance to the
publication—and misrepresentation—of her work.

"Witchcraft Was Hung"
Susan Allen, harp; Maurita Thornburgh, soprano

Publication—is the Auction
Of the Mind of Man—
Poverty—be justifying
For so foul a thing (1863)

Emily Dickinson’s Witchcraft is "Around us,
every Day"—unmasked and uncostumed—, catching
us off-guard, triggered into action by an imprudent
word, a careless gesture, or by just who we happen to
be or are labeled or demonized as being. Witchcraft as
Atavism, the repudiation of liberty and pluralism,
engendering wanton abuse and misuse of power
committed—executed—by ‘ordinary’ and ‘extra-
ordinary’ people in far too many milieus, some of
whom escape public scrutiny due to cover-up by
agencies in power. No one is not a potential target.

Composing, Labeling And Music Talk
Composing is never simple for me.
Fortunately, I have been nurtured by a societal
mythology of self-determination, I can make
my own path, I can create from scratch, I can
re-invent myself. I hear a multitude of past
voices and seek to discover what my present
is….The sense of "my tradition" has never
been well defined. My musical education
focused on classical and 20th-century
European-American music; later on, various New and Experimental musics. As a New Yorker I looked across the Atlantic to Europe; back then, as a white female, Jazz seemed to me to be off-limits. Although I have always had deep abiding affection for the musics of my East European Jewish ancestors—those sad slow songs in the minor mode, the faster-moving klezmer music—, it was not music I wanted to "try on"...Decades were to pass before I realized that the music of all those 19th-century Western (Teutonic) European, (born or converted-to) Gentile Males (none of which I’ve been or am) wasn’t inescapably my tradition either, yet that music did shape my consciousness of where music had been and what music can be...A predilection for the overtly difficult and not-so-popular hardstuff affected my soundworld decisions, the music I owned up listening to, the concerts I went to, the people I hung out with, the actual notes I chose, and intermittently continue, to inscribe...[13]

When asked "What kind of music do you compose?" the response "unpopular"—superseding "classical" or "new"—has been received with a ‘hmmm’ or a knowing nod. More useful responses might be "difficult" or "serious", red-flag wavers as well. But then, neither "unpopular" nor "difficult" is what the majority is up for. Serious, difficult thinking in music neither 'sells' nor is it conceived as an item to be consumed in a competitive capitalist economy. In our society, which equates Enter- & Info-tainment with knowledge and culture, outlanders are easy to identify. Here’s an excerpt from a text I wrote in 1981:

Composers accept a society that accepts them.
Composers accept a society that rejects them.
Composers reject a society that accepts them.
Composers reject a society that rejects them.

On the other hand, sex sells. A classical music booking agent, desperate to attract audiences, says: "The packaging of [female] sexuality is an attempt to market and commodify Classical music to make it more like Pop, to plug the gap for rapidly shrinking record sales." Such a marketing strategy has always been so in one way or another. LP covers of "exotic" music included "exotic" women to entice buyers; CD album covers include nude or partially nude photos of classical female performers. www.beautymusic.com, ‘The Ultimate Guide to the Hottest Women in Classical Music’, is a web site devoted to female musicians, most of whom are clothed, some of whom are nude and holding their instruments in sexually provocative poses.

"Exploring" Taipei ISCM Chamber Ensemble

"When you label me, you negate me."
— Soren Kierkegaard

Jean-Baptiste Moliere’s Bourgeois Gentilhomme learns that he has been "speaking prose" all of his life. Music students are taught to label entire music-works and units of music-sound—out of context and prior to listening—, from agogic accents, neighbor notes and rows to Sonata Form and every kind of cadence or ‘ground’. Benjamin Boretz has written: "We may not speak as we perceive, but we will so on enough be perceiving as we have spoken." I ‘discover’ that I am a Second Wave Feminist and a Modernist Composer. You might be importuned to declare your ist-ness or acknowledge the ism-hood of your work; there are, after all, stands to be taken and standards to be met. At times we are ensnared by labels—ersatz terms that mask, simulacra that deceive and disguise, substitutes for "pure presence"[15] or experience. Labels, terminology, slogans, and competitive marketing strategies have mercilessly driven educational and creative-expressive practices as well as socio-politico-cultural economies. Perhaps this too has always been so. Perhaps ‘straight talk’ is a figment, out of earshot, an elusive goner.
Of course we all do want to talk about music and our experiences with music. But to suppose that narratives we conjure and theories we choose or invent as ‘explanatory modes of discourse’ are commensurate with music or music-experiencing, is like putting on a mask—or ear-muffs—or ventriloquizing. Impeding rather than enabling. As Elias Canetti said:

…once the mask is in position there can be no more beginnings, no groping towards something new…The mask is rigid; the thing it expresses cannot change…As long as the masked one wears the mask he [sic] is two things, himself [sic] and the mask.

Yet it’s not easy to ‘just’ let music be or come or grab you, freely entering your pores, orifices, and faculties. A profusion of biases, histories, and political positions lurking within each of us wants to be negotiated or made known. My own quest, ongoing for decades now, has been to eschew ideological squabbles, to keep my music talk out of the fray. But that too, like ‘straight talk’, is illusory; I am no disinterested stranger. Yet I continue to look for ways to think/write/talk (about) music, not ready to give up but prepared nowadays to acknowledge that your music and my text, as well as my music and your text, are neither side-by-side nor one-to-one; to admit that they each, and quite contentedly, inhabit their own space. Their purposes for being, their ontologies, are incommensurable. And that’s OK, that clears the air, my head, and my mind.

* * *

But let’s consider the title of a recent book by Ellie Hisama: Gendering Musical Modernism: the music of Ruth Crawford, Marion Bauer, and Miriam Gideon. [16] Can you imagine the title: Gendering Musical Modernism: the music of Carl Ruggles, Henry Cowell, and Leo Ornstein? ‘Are you kidding?’ you might say: those guys don’t sport the ‘correct’ gender—or is it sex?—label, nor is it the point of the strange trip Ellie Hisama has taken.

[Aside #1: "Musical modernism" is a label that has been applied—willy-nilly in many instances—to 20th-century "classically" oriented composers whose expressive language might include free form, unequal time segments, fuzzy—or non—tonality, angled contours, rapid change, multi-hued harmonies, dense texture, dissonance, mixed—or no—meters, an exploration of instrumental resources, and more, all of which still appeal to many composers. Modern Music was the label-analogue to Modern Art which, as in the work of Cezanne, Braque, Picasso, or Matisse, is characterized by recoloration of the natural world, deformation of bodies and objects, multiple or absent perspective, for starters. Many feminist musicologists have vigorously denounced "Modernism" as elitist, cerebral, misogynist, and phallocentric, regardless of the sex of the creative artist.]

But despite the bad rap feminist musicologists have bestowed on "musical modernism" (as well as on 20th & 21st century theoretical & analytical "formalism"), Hisama claims quite the contrary: "musical modernism...is not inherently misogynistic" (p. 11); rather it gave Ruth Crawford, Marion Bauer, and Miriam Gideon "technical means to forge new musical procedures and narratives" (p. 11). Hisama wants to fuse modes of contemporary critical discourse and theory that have been declared antipathetic, antagonistic, or contradictory to one another. She believes that making "connections between biography and musical structure [will enable] a listener to experience new and compelling ways of understanding music" (p. 20); that "the impact of gender on the structure of" these works is a significant criterion for audition and discourse; that a "feminist reading" in
tandem with a "formalist reading" will "impart valuable ways of hearing and apprehending these compositions" (p. 3). (Robert Morris’s post-Schenkerian theories of structural levels of musical contour and Milton Babbitt’s set-theoretic principles figure prominently in Hisama’s "formalist" analyses.)

[Aside #2: "Formalist readings", studies, and interpretations often eschew the personal or the invocation of historical-time. Musical data from within the music is pondered and relied on. Many formalists believe that the musical work itself suggests the questions to be asked; others place an emphasis on figuring out a work on its own terms rather than in terms of other things. Formalist theories and analytic discourse have been labeled "masculine" by male & female theorists & musicologists. [17]

Feminist musicology and its discourse, which emerged from interdisciplinary literary and psychoanalytic feminist theory, engages the personal, the sexual, gender-race-class ideologies, and the social-cultural-political-historical milieu of composers and their ‘subjects’. Feminist theorists-critics claim to have ‘liberated’ analytical-critical discourse from the strictures of ‘just the work itself’. As feminist theory develops, other criteria may be deemed worthy of being musically en- or de-coded.

Hisama prudently states that there is "No biological imperative for women to compose one way and men another", that no "common structural elements or strategies" (p. 9) characterize music composed by women. Furthermore, Hisama says she is not implying "intentionality", inasmuch as Crawford, Bauer, and Gideon didn’t necessarily ‘intend’ to make the connections Hisama so strenuously presents. After reading Ellie Hisama’s play-by-play analyses, listening anew to Ruth Crawford’s String Quartet and Marion Bauer’s music for piano, Hisama’s brave but problematic drift is unmistakable and confounding. ‘Separate but equal’ but hardly ‘integrated’: feminist and formalist theories do not mesh easily. Put in the same room, in opposite corners, occasionally crossing paths, each might be wondering what the other is doing there or talking about: bio-psycho-socio-jabber encounters data-stats-chatter. Music, meanwhile—immured in babble, rapidly disappearing into verbally discursive contexts—, is wallflowering, becoming undone, and deeply desirous of some-any-one’s undivided attention.

"Rhapsody"
Sue-Ellen Hershman-Tcherepnin, piccolo;
Ian Greitzer, clarinet

The Real And The Stand-In

Invocations of biography or sexuality in musical discourse as criteria for, as Hisama claims, "understanding music" or providing "valuable ways of hearing and apprehending [music]", block and invade my body, brain, consciousness, ears, heart, mind. Rather than consider those senses in which our constructs, our structures, our selves, or the natural world are ‘represented’ in music, perhaps we can re-conceive the uniqueness of music as an expressive ‘text’ in but not necessarily about our world. When I listen, I try to apprehend as much of a music as possible, in all of its fullness. As music rolls by I struggle to experience its present and past simultaneously; to preserve its memory and sustain its identity; to have its history, its ‘mind&body-ness’, its life and my own mesh.

My desire for arousal or wonderment is satisfied best when experienced directly from the source, in music and in life. Any rapture originating from music or life that sends me back for more neither needs nor wants secondary sources. Primary sources are where the real action lies. Like everyone else I read program notes or go to other sources eventually, albeit not to help me listen or hear, love or esteem. Music is complete, and plenteous enough without its being intercepted by not-music. Benjamin Boretz has written:

…music can be not necessarily what you hear it as, but, radically and inviolably, what you hear as it…You can cause the theoretical construct, or the metaphorical image, to be heard in the music, but you can’t really read the music out of the discursive text…You could suppose, in fact, that precisely insofar as people value music, they value its liberation.
from the linguistic orders of ‘truth’, value it precisely insofar as it offers an experience of reality without reductive imagery, representation, or definition….In its own language, music is fully specific, just not specifiable; fully meaningful, just not translatable; fully existent, just not representational…As music, music has to be its own interior discourse, its own, only, fully concrete metalanguage. [18]

If music is a kind of language and if, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes, "each language is a kind of song", then music can be heard as "a particular way of singing [saying] the world." Insofar as music is resilient and everlasting, far more so than au courant theories or discourse (which will continue to find their ‘place’ in our evolving and constructed worlds of music-thought), each of us can choose to hear, use, or talk about any music any way. Each of us can decide how and which music intersects with, diverges from, or transforms our lives and our particular "is-ness". But is it the case that all or any of our experiences of music are significantly deepened or heightened by regarding music as a stand-in or surrogate? Hearing ‘what’s there’ is hard enough.

Perhaps strenuous listening to music can help us learn what we want and need to learn and know about our world, about how we think or talk or listen or take in. Perhaps our experiences with music can be regarded as expressions of ourselves, as expressions of our identity. Perhaps music can help us understand those many senses of eloquence and depth and joy. Perhaps purposeful engagements with music can open us to the not-yet-fully-known and help us be more fully conscious of every moment in our lives.

Endnotes
8. David Harvey in a review of The University In Ruins by Bill Readings, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1996. The following excerpt from a January 21, 2003 article in the Los Angeles Times reflects even more insidious and potentially life-threatening possibilities: "Commercial ties and the scramble for profit warp the way scientists conduct medical research and experiments…"
9. In a 16th-century treatise describing "demonic sex", the touch of the male demon is said to "fill up the most secret parts" of the women they sleep with, making the demon men irresistible and "probably stimulating something very deep inside…by means of which these women have greater pleasure than with [ordinary] men." Quoted in Demon Lovers: Witchcraft, Sex, and the Crisis of Belief by Walter Stephens, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.