

Song for Eternity. An Interpretation of The Beatles' Music

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to specify the components of effect The Beatles group exerted on mass-culture in the 60s of 20. century. Their new music style possesses such features, which is able to address all people over the world. These features will be analysed while listening to their songs. The first question is what the roots of their songs are. It is obvious that they rooted in Western and Eastern traditional folkmusic, not only in rhythm and blues. The second question is if there is a modification of emotional effect of traditional tonality functions or not. The answer is that the Minor tonality has got such function as the Major does: joy, brightness, and happiness. The third feature is their striving after synthesis between classical and pop music, Finally, the fourth feature can be seen as a synthesis between eras and cultures, i.e. modern and Baroque.

Keywords: Tonality; Consonance of text and music; Synthesis between eras and cultures

Introduction

As an adolescent member of the "Great Generation" in the 60s I was an ear-witness of a miracle how four young men from Liverpool, the "Fab Four", changed both mass culture and the modern history of Europe, indirectly. While listening to the Radio Luxemburg at the evenings in November, 1962 I could hear a curious music turn aside from usual rock and roll or rhythm and blues sound forming a dull and drawling melody, which reminded me to Arab even Hindu folkmusic. I suspected that some new style started in beat music, however, I had an aversion to it. This was the "Love Me Do", which becomes one of my favourite songs later. At that time I had no idea about what present time researchers stated: The Beatles phenomenon produced more fundamental effect than touching young people's taste- and behavioral culture either in Europe or all over the world [1,2]. There might be a role of their effect to intensify cultural and political movement against Western social structure. These

culminations were civil rights movement in USA, protests against war of Vietnam, hippy movement, and European liberal student revolution in 1968. The Beatles' influence may also be regarded as a loosening effect of ideology in socialist Eastern bloc, which might be capable to undermine trust political system in large numbers, and it might be one of the emotional preparations or "tuning" of Hungarian political revolution in 1989. Hungarian people could feel the authentic power of mass culture in 1983 when Szörényi-Bródy's rock-oper titled Steven, the King was shown in Buda to give tribute to the first saint king, who had founded Hungary [3].

You can raise a question what kind of facts could be presented in the background of their worldwide success. Although traditional rock music has a mass-effect on young generation this style could not have been effective enough for that purpose. The Beatles had to make a new music style, which the whole world could be touched with.

Results

In the course of analysing their new music style I found out the following items:

- Specific tonality functions;
- The match of text and music;
- The signs of synthetic function of music between eras and cultures.

Discussion

Specific Tonal World

As regarding roots of Beatles' tonal world the Beatles songs often sound in modal scales characteristic to Mediaeval European music. Their relationship can be verifiable to Irish and Celtic, moreover Hindu folkmusic because of using quart in harmony. It is almost obligatory formula for composers to build harmony with third and sixth intervals since Baroque era in European music with a consequence of consonance listeners accustomed to hear. Contrary to this formula the songs e.g. "Love Me Do", "This boy", "I'll Get You", "Any Time At All", "Eight Days A Week", "Yes It Is" and "You've Got to Hide Your Love Away" sound with fourth interval harmonization, which is characteristic to the Middle-East music. I think of their mission to build a bridge between Western and Eastern music, which was intuitive task for the first time, then became an intentional project later. George Harrison had got an affection for Hindu music so he learned to play the sitar, e.g. in his songs as "Love You To", "Within You Without You", "Blue Jay Way", and, "The Inner Light". It is interesting that John Lennon and Paul McCartney also used Harrison's instrument in their songs titled "Norwegian Wood", and "Across the Universe".

Another effect they use while making music the re-interpretation of classical Major and Minor tonality function. The early world-wide hits e.g. "She Loves You", "From Me To You", "Ask Me Why" are such songs, which contradict to opposite functions of Major and Minor tonality a traditional principle dominated since Baroque period in European music. As a matter of fact they do not use typical scales of American rock and blues, exclusively. Major tonality sound expresses light, masculinity, joy, and solemnity, while Minor expresses feminine and gentle character, melancholy, sorrow and tragic feelings in European classical music [4,5]. Contrary to tradition the Minor part of the song-not rarely the B strophe of ABA form-exactly contains such Major features as purification, relief and brightness in several compositions. There's an excellent example the song of "There's a Place". The A

theme within the ABA form sounds in Major tonality, however, monotonous, reasonably troubled, and still reinforced by replaying again and again causing to feel hopelessness. The text is about that if we feel sad we can hide in a place where "there's no time". The four tones of the A theme is endeavouring to fly upward and outward without any success, and this is the reason why harping on itself with compulsive and fruitless efforts twelve times altogether: "there's no time". Nevertheless, after A during the B strophe in Minor tone Sun is rising. This time the love is murmuring to cease anxiety. The melody line rises a quint, that is, five tones so as not to come down into a "prison of Major gravity" previously experienced. All of these can hint some kind of lightness and playfulness of fight difficulties; not an ascending to firmament but ascending to "Minor-ment" symbolically: "In my mind there's no sorrow".

The song of "A Hard Day's Night" dated from 1964 may symbolize a whole era, within the daily life of a hand toiling in factory, whose work was essential for Western economy and wealth in order that peaks be ascended inaccessible before. Man in the street is unmoved by this success of economy, which is demonstrated such a way in the upbeat of the song as a repulsively unpleasant chord banked up with second intervals. The first strophe is tormented, Ringo's rhythm section produces hammerbeats, and, the harmony is so constrained as if not belonging to the melody. And, then the "Minor-ment" is coming: the melody line is ascending, the Sun is rising, when singing peace and happiness felt with the loved girl at home. In the middle part arranged without vocal an utterly empty, metallic and heavy feature regarding series of repeated octav intervals played synchronously by solo and bass guitars gives the impression of a hard work even still more. Rumour has it that Lennon wrote, instrumented, and taught his song of world-wide success at night-the hard day's night-before concert [6].

Match of Text and Music

A fine consonance of text and music can be experienced in the two songs previously mentioned. Let's see another two examples! As to the text of "I'll Follow the Sun" the lover calls his darling's attention to that he would not be found some day since it may be clouded over, however, he still follows the sun. It is a clear metaphor about a possibility of their partnership's getting cloudy, and, he cannot take that risk. What may be responsible for that cloudy mood? The instrumental music starts in a Major cherty voice nearly with a springing rhythm. After the short introduction the text begins with: "One day you'll look...". During the first two

words the melody leaps a quart upwardly still being inside the Major key, but the third word can arouse the listener's interest for a sudden turn to happen. This turn falls on the word "you". From that "you" a quart leaps upwardly, too, starting higher with a half note than the first word of the text, namely. If the second quart ascended not a half but a whole note the melody could practically be exultant as either in the Movement 4. of Mozart's Jupiter Symphony or in the Movement 3. of Beethoven's Piano Sonata Op. 110. That's all very well but the second quart started on "you" is amplified with half a note dimming still the sounding of "look", and, this amplified quart can be heard in dark tone and a little bit dissonant differing quite from the cheerful Major key, when you make someone sense your ill feeling by means of an obscure face expression. As a matter of fact a break is predicted, anyway. Henceforth music is cheerful, again so the sorrow was presented in the only moment just mentioned. How simple this song would be without that dissonant chord. With that happiness becoming cast for a minute it is made even still more splendid since the darker the shadow the brighter the light is.

Similarly, the spirit of "In My Life" is determined by only one chord and an upset of music from own rhythm. With the text "There are places I remember" the song is starting, however, two unexpected turns happened after the word "remember" has been delivered [7]. Conventional harmonization is upset by a hurried and dissonant chord, meanwhile the melody falters, the rhythm becomes such as a heartbeat with arrhythmia due to an early beat taken of bassguitar and drum, then in order that rhythm be balanced again the melody takes a compensatory rest. May we say that it is an agonizing but happy heartbeat as a kind of musical extra systole. The unstable heart is upsetting once more in the B strophe after the "moments" and the "living" words causing heart-throb. The composer's extraordinary and deliberate idea connects memory with important moments in which he can remember somebody or something so much. In order that repeatedly upsetting emotional balance be restored Lennon and McCarthy use a brilliant solution. After AABB strophes gone with slow rhythm a faster and tighter music can be heard, when a harpsichord dated from the 17. century starts to play imitating an ornamented Baroque motive as if the emotional shock previously caused by "musical remembering" could be taken to the past of more objective narrative. Without that emotionally shocked and restored remembering presented as a drama in music, after all this song would only be a hit but not a masterpiece.

Synthesis Between Eras and Cultures

How pop will be cultural elite? Hackneyed expression of "men of the people" quite suits The Beatles since their song titled "My Bonnie" is worked up from a folksong, which started them on the way of success. Notwithstanding their early pieces already reveal an individual, not a populist, tone. In the field of artistic expression related to music and poems they take advantage of solutions never heard and getting astonished as such surrealist music of "Strawberry Fields Forever", and, as an idiotic text of "I Am the Walrus", the "johnlennonism" of "i am he as you are he as you are me" [8].

By the time the young men "have regained consciousness" they have become to be fashion gurus and charismatic leaders of a whole generation of culture, who possess such power due to which they are able to control the world "by viscera". Similar to Olympian Gods their position has inevitably corroded their relationship with certain groups of interest in society, even with the public. Two songs are presented as examples to illustrate that.

The "Fixing a Hole" is about an artist's loneliness, hermetic closeness, and, at the same time a curious freedom, about that he needs all holes to be mended, when the rain gets in not allowing for his fantasy unlimitedly wandering. As creative fancy proves to be unfathomable all effort is fruitless for anyone to translate a message of work to every day's language. Contrary to polished melody and scoring of the first strophe, the public of every day's people is performed with a loud and primitive march in the middle part of the song. These people cannot comprehend why they could not get to the composer's room, that is, why they could not understand his art.

There's another song titled "Fool on the Hill", which is likely to be the summit of The Beatles' life-work according to my opinion. The text is about a man unknown for anybody standing alone on a hill seeing sunset with a foolish grin on his face, and the world spinning round day after day. His head is in a cloud he is talking with thousand voices but nobody hears him, and because nobody answers everybody thinks him to be fool. But he knows the others to be stupid. The lonely man, who is treated by everyday's people as a fool, has a contact with a world over clouds, that is, with transcendence, which can be considered as esthetic, moral and religious symbols at the same time. Representatives of elite arts, who are usually treated as a little bit fool, could believe about their works to be addressed to the sphere of transcendence,

where a mortal being of earth could not get to. The lonely man can be considered as a representative of a moral symbol either since in the spinning round and manipulated world he stands persistently on the hill in order to take responsibility for his mediatory role between heaven, that is, idols of mankind, and the earth. In the religious sense the man seems as a symbol of Jesus Christ in the 20th century, who is busy on the work of redemption while remaining incognito. As he cannot be recognized, he is disdained by people. The song seems to have a marvellously resigned sorrow transmitting a disillusion. A disillusion of trust upon unlimited development of Western economy in everyday's people, who are step by step losing confidence towards fulfilment of welfare and democracy, because of they more and more bitterly recognize to be continually cheated, moreover, treated as fool. A special, resigned and gloomy music is taking the text on its back. The melody written in modal scale is walking slowly stopping time and again among blooming branches of trilling flutes, accompanied by a piano accordion-like sound in the manner of a french chanson. When getting to the top the song is falling down in Minor key as if becoming sorrow about blindness of those men, who cannot recognize Redeemer although He belongs to them. As Jesus has fulfilled His fate the fool has played more to be fool dancing the waltz, opening his arms wide, and, singing on the top of the hill to mirror the whirling world gone crazy as in a Tarkovsky-film. It is a song with cathartic effect for eternity.

Notwithstanding never studied classical music nor were able to score reading, the musicians from Liverpool, besides building a bridge between Western and Eastern culture mentioned earlier, had a strong ambition for realizing a mix, more precisely, a synthesis of classical and pop music. This ambition might be originated from a flight of their talent, moreover, from a high-flying purpose that the gap between elite and mass culture should be bridged by means of their art, and the followers of classical music will be made a conquest of them. Nearly incredible that they achieve more, as the teenagers fed by their music have evolved such taste of world, which tried to obtain the elite musical culture, too. The opening began in 1965 with the "Yesterday", a song to be more than an evergreen hit having become a symbol of mankind's nostalgia. What we can hear: a rhythm guitar playing empty octaves, Paul McCartney's soft voice, and a classical string quartet. That's a turning point in the history of 20th century. It is as melody flying, declining, and getting again to the peak that is McCartney's trademark. How far different this is in contrast to those songs ascending or declining in a way

with repeating the same motive in sequence, partly, because of lacking composer's originality and creativity, partly, in the interests of making a conquest of listeners' ear with cheap means. What a marvel is that the ear of beat-generation habitually accustomed to rock 'n' roll can be set to the sound of a string quartet in classical music. There's neither lack of comprehension nor protest, on the contrary, this new sound is completely accepted due to a declaration happened in pop music. "Yesterday" is presented in the tone of classical music. Not only happiness gone in love but a transient harmony of human life at all has been lamented from that time on.

Their wish to realize a synthesis of classical and pop music is manifested in several original ideas. There is promptly the counter-moving phenomenon, a constructive principle in Baroque music, when lines of melody and accompaniment part are going in opposite direction of each other can be noticed in several songs, e.g. "Help!", "For No One", "Michelle", and "With a Little Help from My Friends". Speaking about Baroque music we can forget neither trumpets in "Penny Lane" recalling compositions of Bach and Vivaldi nor use of harpsichord as in "In My Life", "Fixing a Hole", "Strawberry Fields Forever", and, "Piggies". As in "Yesterday" a string quartet accompanies both the tragic ballad in tone of "Eleanor Rigby" and the story of a leaving home girl, whose parents would not understand her behavior as their love has been changed to money in the "She's Leaving Home".

Once a music critic of New York Times resembled their melody and harmony treating to that of the Schubert's songs [9]. In a Schubert-song titled as "Der Neugierige" ("The curious") from the cycle of "Die schöne Müllerin" ("The miller's lovely daughter") Major tonality of low-key happiness becomes sorrow for a moment. Likewise an unpredicted Minor-key turn is wedged in the course of their song "Penny Lane" as a tool of nostalgic remembering meanwhile noise of Liverpool's streets revived with trumpets in Major-key can be heard. A peculiar story is woven relating birth of "Because" [10]. Lennon's second wife, Yoko Ono played the first movement of nightmarish mood from Beethoven's Mondschein (Moonlight) piano sonata. Lennon expressively liked it, then he asked her to play it in the opposite direction. The accompaniment of the song played backwardly is sounding on a keyboard instrument meanwhile above it a polyphonic vocal is singing upon the eternal beauty of nature and love. This is the story how has been born one of the loveliest Beatles' song as a result of a coproduction of Ludwig van Beethoven and John Lennon.

Although becoming a symbol of rebellious young people in the 60th they often evoked aversion from the elder women and men, however, a lot of representatives of the middle age group came on the scene among the fans of "mop-top" musicians soon, due to their songs composed in the style of the 30th, and the 40th in the 20th century, e.g. ragtime and foxtrot from which "When I'm Sixty-Four", and "Honey Pie" can be mentioned as distinguished pieces. Naturally, they had less successful pieces, too. A John Lennon's interview reveals that they also have recognize that issue. There is some talk about "Good Night" remembered to a Hollywood film-music wished to gain satisfaction of the public at large, which was called by him to be a sweet lemonade [11].

From the second half of the 60th on their music increasingly comes close to European classical tradition, which can be experienced in two relations. Firstly, pieces of musical matter in their discs show more and more inferences, which contributes to the whole program to be designed as a suite, which is composited from movements loosely tied to each other as in the albums of "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" and "Magical Mystery Tour", especially in the album of "Abbey Road". The "Abbey Road" album brings new dramaturgic and editing principles: a theme returning again in the form of a "ritornell" comes on the scene ("You Never Give Me Your Money"), songs are continued without an end on several occasions, and there is a finale ("The End"). You can see elements of big form in art creating connections among movements. Secondly, they use sounds of several instruments produced by means of a computer as the same as of a big orchestra to reach sound of classical music with trombones in "Good Morning, Good Morning", "Savoy Truffle", with horn in "For No One", with celest in "Being for the Benefit of Mr. Kite!", in "Fixing a Hole", and in "Strawberry Fields Forever", with winds in "Fool on the Hill", and, with a piano and drums in "A Day in the Life", and "Sexy Sadie". Their willingness to mix several kind of styles can be recognized in musical parodies. The "White Album" is considered as rich in that aspect. We can heard as an ironic echo of singing members of Beach Boys in the "Back in the USSR", and a praise of beauty of Ukrain and Moscow girls, which is a parody of "Help Me Rhonda" a song of the group of Coast of The Pacific Ocean.

We enjoy ourselves recognizing to a special declaiming of the contemporary pol-beat star Bob Dylan, whose self-importance is caricatured, while listening to the ballad of a making ridiculous cowboy "Rocky Raccoon". They had a mutual corresponding relationship with the other star group the Rolling Stones. When it turned up that one of

the most effective group of rock and white blues had been arrested because of supplying their biological wants on the road The Beatles put the question: "Why Don't We Do It On The Road?" in the White Album. The Stones did not owe them an answer so as to the Beatles' Virgin Mary's prayer titled "Let It Be" they riposted with a play on words: "Let It Bleed".

Conclusion

I always believed to be shamed of being a Beatles' fan in the sight of the followers of classical music, and, of being a follower of classical music at the same time in the sight of The Beatles' fans [12,13]. It is lucky that such a Hungarian expert of magisterial knowledge and talent as András Pernye [14] spoke up for them, which reduced their strict judgement. I do not believe that I have could succeeded to unravel the secret of The Beatles' music. Everybody thinks something else of what could be the key of the secret. That is all right. The bigger the puzzle the more the attempts is to be interpreted. How much life would be grieved if masterpieces off the bone were exhibited in an exhibition hall of a museum of paleontology once and for all.

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