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Resonare Experience: Listening to What Lives Between the Tones

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Can the experience of listening to musical intervals be a pathway for self knowledge?

The quest to deepen my musical listening skills began with a desire to reconnect with my Dorion School of Music Therapy Training after having received a Master's degree in conventional Music Therapy. It had been eight years since I had graduated from the Dorion training. The time in between had been filled with studying and practicing conventional music therapy in order to receive my degree and certification. Therefore, I found that I had to put my Dorion training on the back burner until I received my degree and certification. At that point, I was ready to return to what had brought me to music therapy in the first place: Anthroposophy and the work of Christof-Andreas Lindenberg. In addition, I had been feeling that as a music therapist, I lacked a depth of listening that I knew was possible. Thus, a possibility of taking the Resonare course, "an orientation course in music out of anthroposophy" (Resonare, 2013, <http://www.resonare.org>) came at the perfect time.

Sure enough, the experience would become a revitalization of music for me. It brought a healing to my callused views of music history and theory. My experience with undergraduate college music courses, most consisting of "rote"

memorization, had deadened my desire to go deeper into the musical realm. I did not know what I was missing until I heard echoes of it in Dorion; but even then, there was limited time for going into the basic anthroposophical foundations of music history, theory, and phenomenology. Finally, now, I could take up a study with others where I could take the time to immerse myself in the most basic elements of music in an environment devoted entirely to experiencing the musical realm in a new and living way.

I was especially inspired during the time spent listening to intervals as a group, when participants and instructors sounded them on the lyre. For it was in these exercises that we would begin to listen for what stood between the two tones of an interval and attempt to come to a universal experience of the unique quality of each interval. However, the journey toward this goal was not so straightforward. Furthermore, these listening exercises became a schooling in self-knowledge; for in my attempts to do this, listening became a touchstone for revealing my shortcomings.

In addition to my musical education, I had grown up in an environment rich with a wide variety of music from opera and classical to folk to hard rock to jazz and pop, plus television and radio commercials, jingles, elevator music, et cetera. All of these had by degrees muddled my ability to hear the most basic elements of music without having a preconceived idea or judgment about what I was hearing. It was not until Resonare that I realized that my listening ability was not an empty cup but was filled with the music, biases, and expectations that I had grown up with. It was in attempting to discover the real relationships between

two tones that I began to realize that my ability to have a true musical listening experience was impaired and not free. For example, in an exercise where we were meant to intuit the second tone of an interval that the first tone seemed to be asking for, I initially felt compelled to respond with my “natural” tendency which came from my musical past.

After having discussed some of these obstacles to purely listening, I became more self-aware of my listening limitations. As we continued the exercises, I began to question whether my tonal responses were what was really being asked of me. I started to think that perhaps my question should be “what does the tone that my colleague is playing want, rather than what do I feel like playing back to him or her?” The exercise challenged my ability to weed out my “natural” responses to find the selfless response. It also challenged me to listen into the space between my partner’s tone and my tonal response. In How to Know Higher Worlds (1994), Rudolf Steiner describes the qualities that are prerequisites for initiation. One of these is our ability to listen. In building ourselves up to the level of listening to our fellow man, we start with listening to nature. In doing this Steiner says:

we must immerse ourselves in this ‘otherness’... To do this, we must disregard what the sound is *for us*--.... Our soul must be filled only with what is happening in the being from whom the sound comes. If we practice this exercise systematically and deliberately, we will acquire as we do so the faculty of merging, as it were, with the being that made the sound. (p. 45)

Therefore, in listening to the other without self-involvement, I would be able to experience what the other is calling out for. I would be able to listen into the space provided by my partner’s tone and come to the right tonal response.

From here, the question arose as to how I listen to others, from my family and friends to my music therapy clients. What lives between me and the other when we are trying to communicate? With this I began to observe that I often said “what?” when someone spoke to me, as I did not hear what they said because I was so deeply immersed in myself. Sometimes I found myself listening up to a point, anticipating a person’s next phrase, often cutting them off and finishing their sentence for them. Essentially, I was not listening, nor was I free to listen. Therefore, the question arose as to how I could train myself to become a better listener and so a better friend, family member, and therapist. According to Steiner, “We must become accustomed to listening in such a way that we quiet our own inner life completely when we listen (Ibid., p. 46)”. He further says:

As students, we should feel it our duty to set aside, as an exercise, certain times when we listen to the most contrary opinions, completely silencing within us all agreement and, especially, all negative judgments. Not only must we silence our intellectual judgment but also any feelings of disapproval, rejection or even agreement. Above all, we must observe ourselves carefully to ensure that such feelings, even though absent from the surface of the soul are not present in its innermost depths. (Ibid., p. 47)

Thus, can tonal listening similarly be used as a tool to teach us selfless listening? And, can we even reach a stage at which we would be able to hear the tone speak to us as if each tone had its own being standing behind it?

Little by little, over the period of the course, my listening seemed to improve. I practiced listening for what the tone of the other was asking before responding. This was a struggle, yet I found that the times that I made this effort were those times when my tone partner concurred that the tone I sounded back

was correct. Then, to take it another step, I sought to bring this resolve into my life by taking the time to completely listen to what the other was saying before responding. I also tried to be more faithful to asking my higher Self before sleep what was needed from me in this or that situation.

Most recently, while helping out with music in a Waldorf-inspired kindergarten, I was asked to take a child who was having a tantrum out of the classroom to help with kitchen chores. As I led the child into the room, she began running and jumped up onto the counter. I thought, "Oh boy, how are we going to do this?" So I asked within what was needed from me and tried to listen. An inner voice directed me to make up a little song just for her and to sing and play it on the Kinder Lyre. As I began to sing and play, she stared at the lyre and listened intently. Then I said to her, "This little lyre has no name and would really like one. Would you like to name it?" She said, "Oh yes!" and looked up at me with great love in her eyes and said "It has a name." I asked her if she would tell me what it was; and she whispered to me, "Her name is Princess Rainbow". I said, "What a beautiful name!" and she gave me a big hug and we returned to the class room.

In conclusion, through this experience, I was able to open up my ability to listen in new ways. Yet it was an orientation to a new listening experience which would need regular practice and tending. My instructors had been doing this tone study work for decades; I am just beginning on the pathway. Perhaps one day if I persist, I will experience the spiritual being of tone and have a true experience of what lives in the spaces between tones. Perhaps one day, I will

experience the secret questions of the human soul that stands before me; and I will be able to answer from a selfless and spirit-inspired I. And finally, perhaps, I will be able to pass along to the one in need the musical element that would be just right.

Glossary

Interval: “Interval, the ‘distance’ between two notes, in so far as one of them is higher or lower than the other. Thus the interval from C to the G above is a ‘fifth’, to the A above it a ‘sixth’, etc (Jacobs, 1967, p. 184).”

Tone: tone: “2a: a sound of definite pitch and vibration (Merriam Webster’s 2003, p. 1316).”

References

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Steiner, R. (1994). *How to know higher worlds* (C. Bamford, Trans.). Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press. (Original work published 1904-1905)

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