

# **Music as Affective Cognition of the Universe**

Santa Cecilia Lodge – Rome

## Introduction

“Speech is one symptom of affection  
And Silence one –  
The perfectest communication  
Is heard of none

Exists and its indorsement  
Is had within  
Behold, said the Apostle  
Yet had not seen”!  
(Dickinson E., *The Complete Poems*)

“Why cannot there be  
a type of expression  
through which I can  
speak *on* language?  
Let us suppose that music  
is that type of expression”.  
(Wittgenstein L., *Quaderni 1914-1916*)

Let's try to think about our everyday life, concentrating especially on what we think is the most important thing in it. We shall call upon our actions, result of desires and projects, and upon our human and environmental relationships. It is not possible to *be alone*, even if it is possible to *feel alone* (Bertirotti A., Larosa A., 2005). To feel oneself alone, that is, far from other living beings, even if near to nature, is in effect the mental result of a relational absence, the most important one: *communication*. Human beings, as all living organisms, have the more or less conscious necessity of *sharing something with each other*. Emily Dickinson reminds us that the most perfect communication is *silent*, even if no human being can do without expressing it.

From the moment we are conceived, in our mother's womb, we are not alone and in this state, at the *existential minimum*, we start life in two, in close symbiosis with our mother<sup>1</sup>. In the womb we enact a two way, most refined and silent communication, made up of *actions, sounds and emotions*. In an invisible way, we begin *building* our body and our mind and begin to feel emotionally tied to her who nurtures us. Therefore our development configures itself as an *architectural process emotionally lived*. From the first weeks we begin living and we shall continue to live even outside that narrow space, when the world will welcome us in another expanse.

But shall we really find this space? Shall we manage to express our primordial emotional world in the outside world? Shall we be able to discover a real correspondence between the world of affections and emotions and that of knowledge? And if this latter were the development of a Great Emotion? Essentially, are emotions a language? What relationships can therefore exist between these latter and their codified expression? What traits can a *code* reveal of those emotions it *represents*? And, if the language of emotions possessed a *sui generis* code, for example music, what could be the objects it sends back to?

We shall try, in this brief paper, to furnish some reflections that flow from the above stated questions.

## A constant, continuous and slow communicable building

Starting from the eighteenth century, the firm belief is generically affirmed that music is initiation or expression of feelings and emotions, stating that it has a privileged relationship with our emotional world rather than with reason and concepts<sup>2</sup>. Actually certain proximity exists between music and language; this proximity is witnessed at least by the fact that from more than two centuries we discuss of it and we try to separate it and distinguish it from language. Therefore, even if it can seem strange, the long path that brought music towards autonomy passes through the sixteenth century theories of harmony and through the Camerata dei Bardi<sup>3</sup>. Thanks to melodrama, instrumental music has made its path in which sounds, without the help of the word, enjoy expressive and affective autonomy. The idea that music can join itself to word and from this latter can gain advantages and vice versa, springs from this opinion. Two autonomous codes can find a meeting point in order to express affections and emotions and strengthen the results.

From the nineteenth century *formalism* develops, according to which music is part of a *universe semantically closed* and on whose base it is possible to save the specificity of music itself. But from these convictions surface radical thesis, that actually drive music away from a generally accepted linguistic dimension. In other words, language has objective referents, viz. it indicates elements of reality or of our imagination that are, however, well identified and recognizable, while music is auto-referential, with references to our interior experiences even though culturally shareable. Even if musical language does not manage to *denote*, it is able to emotionally connote, that is, that it is able to express an affective world otherwise denied to the world of sounds.

Even Igor Strawinsky, radical formalist, recovers the expressivity of music, stating how much music is expression and symbol of a unity of a superior order:

“The unity of the work has its resonance. Its echo, which our soul senses, resounds more and more. The finished work spreads therefore as communication and flows through its beginning. The cycle is then closed. In this way music appears to us as an element of communication with our fellow creatures – and with the Being” (Strawinsky I., 1952:97).

We have, in the introduction, mentioned the necessity of a world that lets express ourselves and we have asked ourselves if on the earth there is a space for each individual. Beyond the obvious answers, tied to our planet's geography, the necessity of obtaining the *space* to express ourselves is an important but unresolved question. Each individual and culture has developed techniques to invent themselves differently from what habits impose. Daily life is an approximation by defect to ourselves and without art we could not have the space to live and to imagine ourselves far from daily habit (Musio G., 2006). The ineffable, the unreachable, becomes music because it is too big to be held in words. Sound becomes one of the Bricks through which one can build a Harmonic Temple in which, under form of music, the Great Architect of the Universe is reflected. Actually, in music there is, alive, an *overflowing of meaning*, a sort of superabundance of meaning thanks exactly to the absence of word. It is not possible however to make music or to make use of it without disclosing its deepest sense, that tied to *silence*. When I listen I am able to silence my truths to listen to other people's. For this reason, music is like the frequent calls of God to *listen to learn to listen*. Listening becomes, with music, an *ethic category*.

For this reason even if music is not a language in the sense of denotation, it is, as Strawinsky reminds us, a *communication*. Music *does not speak* and does not want to speak. Music *communicates* and creates *universal affection* because the *absence of sense* can be translated in *excess of sense*. The most universally shared meaning has to do with emotions and affections. The Great Architect of the Universe is, *in primis*, an Affective construction and only secondly a Rational one. Nothing is elaborated by the superior cognitive systems, those which have their site in the cortex, if they are not first loaded with interest and emotivity. Everything that man keeps in his own memory has first found an *emotive raison d'être*. Each one of us singles out its own personal cognitive targets drawing them from an emotive reservoir that often is defined *motivation*. The writer prefers to speak of *motive*, because the word appears with greater efficaciousness tied to man's total existence.

We have seen that the formalist School tends to consider music as a *closed semantic system*. And yet even if it were truly this way, you would not be here reading this paper. If music were a closed semantic system I would not need words. We should not have to speak about music but only about the formal aspects that characterized it. But this is not possible especially when the meaning of music is hidden in the unique experience every individual makes of it. It is therefore necessary to confront one's personal emotive experiences that a certain score evokes with those that the same score, for example, evokes in others. In this comparison and through language one inserts the mechanism of verbal communication understood as further explicitation of the more intimate musical one. The enlargement of the personal emotive dimension is realized even beyond verbal communication. It can happen also through the *gestures* that link music to a Universal Architecture.

The *gestures*, that is the executive rituality, are exactly what link music to the musical rituality of Masonic works. It is possible to answer the question regarding the correspondence between affective and cognitive world, one of the initial questions, in an affirmative way calling on the meaning of *musical ritual gesture*. In the same way during the Lodge works each Brother shares in an orchestration of gestural meanings built on the Organist's music<sup>4</sup>. We consider this music, chosen by the sensibility of the Brother Organist, the harmonizing idea of the Great Architect, to whom the entire *corpus* of the Lodge works conforms and inserts itself without solution of continuity. In this way, even the individual emotions can harmonize themselves in the rituality of the temple, raising above personalisms and landing at universality through the mechanism of *evocation*.

Music in fact evokes meanings but never arrives to the Meaning. Moreover, music never exhausts itself in meanings but it dances around them. If it reaches them, it would transform itself in language and would go towards its ruin. But not everything in language is order and syntax. Not everything is calculation and reflection. A great part of language is sound, is music. According to a more up to date formula, one could say that music represents the pre-linguistic element present in language itself, in every established language (Bertirotti A., 2003). According to J.J. Rousseau music expresses the sentiment understood as *expressive impetus*, not yet mediate by schematic and sclerotic structures. Music is *natural primordial power*<sup>5</sup>. But sentiment in the pure state risks the *informal*, it risks being confined in the *screech*, in E. Munch's pre-linguistic painting. For these reasons, Rousseau refuses pure instrumental music: it is too far from sense, lacking even in the aspiration to denotation.

The reconstruction of the lost Unity, that is. the soul's cry, that takes its shape representing the expressive act in its completeness, is *singing*, where music becomes symbol and language finds again all its primordial expressiveness. Rousseau's polemic against harmony and against Rameau's theories in favour of melody, in effect expresses a conception of music understood as temporality, as flow of conscience<sup>6</sup>. In the melody of singing our affections live and express themselves, against the abstractions of harmony, with its pre-fixed vocabulary. The musical world recuperates its Unity, its form and its fullness only in the vital contact with language. Rousseau therefore perfectly singles out this *proximity* of music and language, at the same time realizing how language presents a sort of musicality. Rousseau's positions account for the existence of vocal music, even if they seem insufficient to motivate pure instrumental music in its autonomy and expressiveness.

Romanticism comes towards us and tries to explain the self-sufficiency of instrumental music placing it under the colours of relationship with the word. Music reaches where words do not, in those spaces where words are silent and leave place to the unspeakable, that is, to musical expression.

Does music always need language to define its meaning or better its sense? Even if theoretically untranslatable, it is highly probable that music needs *metaphors* rather than literal meanings. Michel Imberty affirms that

"it is not possible to pass from language to music by subsequent degrees of generalization, since the two systems are not of the same order. And all the works that persevere in seeking strict correspondences, of term to term, distort the problem" (Imberty, M., 1986:56).

In this sense music does not *mean* but rather advises, exactly as the Great Architect of the Universe. Both create

"(...) imaginative forces that provoke and orientate the verbal associations; or, if we wish, semantic directions that, under form of vague and floating impressions show them selves to the subject's conscience that crystallizes them with words in precise meanings" (Imberty M., idibem).

In this sentence we find the focal points of this article and the evocative dimension of the Great Architect who produces music. Moreover, thanks to this communicative peculiarity, music distinguishes itself from verbal language, creating that specific relationship with the world of affections.

With verbal language, *possible and real* affections can be shown using terms that nothing have to do with connoted affections. It is a purely conventional relationship, which is merely cultural. In music instead, the musical phrase plays the symbolic role of *resembling something*. It possesses an intrinsic relationship with the affection it denotes, expresses, alludes or yet that gives rise to in the listener. One could almost assert the cognitive existence of an isomorphic co-relationship between a particular musical expression and the emotions it causes. In verbal language all this happens only when the word has a strong connotation in prosodic sense. The word is therefore *exclaimed, intoned, shouted*. In it the musical element is insinuated, not foreseen in the pure verbal expression. In some cases, the musical element (prosody) can considerably increase the efficaciousness of the verbal discourse, while in others it can even contradict or thwart it. These considerations let us deduce the presence of a certain *semantic autonomy* of the musical expression, that can assume an *emotional colouring* both when combined with verbal language and when it

remains isolated as an independent, autonomous element. Music, even when isolated and autonomous with respect to verbal language, however maintains that ambiguous and perhaps contradictory nearness to language. Perhaps just this nearness enables us to speak of music and to do it according to a metaphorical *translatability*. No discourse on music can however exhaust its meanings or better, its *sense*.

Actually, even the speeches on the Great Architect of the Universe contain a real *non-translatability*, simply because they are tied to a universal esoteric dimension, as Cicero reminds us:

“What is this sound that strikes my ears in so loud and agreeable a manner? To which he replied—It is that which is called the music of the spheres, being produced by their motion and impulse; and being formed by unequal intervals, but such as are divided according to the justest proportion, it produces, by duly tempering acute with grave sounds, various concerts of harmony. For it is impossible that motions so great should be performed without any noise; and it is agreeable to nature that the extremes on one side should produce sharp, and on the other, flat sounds. For which reason the sphere of the fixed stars, being the highest, and carried with a more rapid velocity, moves with a shrill and acute sound; whereas that of the moon, being the lowest, moves with a very flat one. As to the Earth, which makes the ninth sphere, it remains immoveably fixed in the middle or lowest part of the universe. But those eight revolutionary circles, in which both Mercury and Venus are moved with the same celerity, give out sounds that are divided by seven distinct intervals, which is generally the regulating number of all things” (Cicero, *De Republica*).

Seven, the number of the perfectly realized man, is the number of the hermetic androgynous<sup>7</sup>. Seven are the days of the week, seven are the planets, seven the degrees of perfection, seven the celestial spheres, seven the colours of the rainbow, seven the notes of the diatonic scale, seven the petals of the rose, seven the branches of the cosmic and sacrificial tree of shamanism, etc<sup>8</sup>. Some septuples are the symbols of other septuples. Seven represents a complete cycle, a dynamic perfection<sup>9</sup>. Every lunar period lasts seven days. Seven represents a period of change, of renovation after a finished cycle<sup>10</sup>. If we associate number four, that is, the symbol of the earth, and number three, that is, the symbol of the sky, seven represents the entirety of the Universe in movement. Seven can also involve a certain state of anxiety because it indicates the passage from the known to the unknown: a cycle is finished, how will the next be?

The universality of a language is given by the number of metaphors it contains because it is they who manage to go beyond the different existential peculiarities.

“The music of nature contains in itself the nature of all the things/ since it is here that we find the great cosmic music/ the marvellous harmony of Heavens/ Elements and of all creatures/ especially human Music/ so it is here that exists in harmonic accord of the Human Body/ or of all the internal and external senses” (Kircher A., 1650).

Therefore we can deduce that the most *significant* metaphors are linked to universal natural elements which transcend the particular cultural datum. Metaphors unite men, while literal sense, at times, can divide them. Music is like the Great Architect of the Universe: this

is a metaphor. Music is a universal metaphor of a universal architecture, of a continuous building in time of the Masonic Temple.

Music is understood by all, apart from language or education, like the voice of a god. The *translator*, in this case, is each one's inner life because our soul speaks the language of music like the one of god<sup>1</sup>.

For this, music

“remains a merely virtual language, in which we elaborate an intention of sense which it not returnable at level of words and phrases of verbal language. From this, the almost infinite pluralities of possible interpretations, their relevance and at the same time their partial arbitrariness: the latter marks the inevitable discarding from the universe of the speech as such established (what we have called *primary connotation*) and the universe of poetical or musical *intentionality*. This breakdown confirms the opposition sense (intentionality) – meaning (manifested- disguised)” (Imberty, M., op. cit.:82-83).

These words can be applied, exactly as they are written, to the Great Architect of the Universe in his relationship with music<sup>2</sup>. This is the *Great Metaphor of the Universal Architecture*, because in its virtual communication it continuously suggests speeches about Creation. Music and speeches about the Great Architect (that is music and Masonry) are contiguous, integrated and near, in the sense that one completes and lengthens the other. This explains, for example, how W.A. Mozart and his music, which presents itself not as an illustration but as an integration of Masonic contents. This problematic wedding between the Great Architect and music has, in effect, always occurred and the results have always been for the most part very good. It is highly probable that there must exist an intrinsic motive for the goodness of the union and of its *naturalness*, witnessed by the insistence with which musicians have always searched for the collaboration of a god or a demiurge<sup>3</sup>.

The good Rousseau has undoubtedly had a right intuition especially when he speaks of an original unity, now lost, where singing (therefore *metaphorical music*) is the complete expression of a man who has not yet been alienated by a civilization that fragments its own faculties<sup>4</sup>. What does it mean when one affirms that music adheres to the Great Architect and He dissolves in music? Certainly not that music *illustrates* or *explains* the Great Architect but not even that He explicates in meanings hidden in music. It is one language, made possible just by this original nearness between two contiguous expressive Worlds.

There is a close relationship between the sound of music and the sound of the metaphoric world of the Great Architect, that is between music and rituality or yet between music and Masonic actions. In the objectivity of a universal musical architecture, in its impersonal denotative power, music brings in itself the world of all men's affections, *because all men desire a metaphor of their existence that justifies its exertion*.

## Note

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<sup>1</sup> Two is the number of opposition, conflict, reflection. This number indicates the realized equilibrium or the latent menaces; it is the number of all the ambivalences and the halving, the first and the most radical of the divisions (the creator and the created, white and black, masculine and feminine, matter and spirit etc.), from which all the others derive. Number two is the symbol of dualism on which every dialectics, every effort, every battle, every movement is based; but the division is the principle of multiplication as of the synthesis. Therefore two expresses an antagonism that from latent becomes manifest; a rivalry, a reciprocity that can be of hate as of love; an opposition that can be contrary and incompatible or complementary and fertile. In symbology, a double image (two lions, two eagles, etc.) strengthens, multiplying it, the symbolic value of its image or, in the opposite way, halving it, showing the internal division that weakens it (Chevalier J., Gheerbrant A., 1986).

<sup>2</sup> Music does not communicate through rationality but through *unreasonable sentiment*; all this recalls the path of Faith.

<sup>3</sup> For example, the theorist Zarlino stresses the merely linguistic character of music and its consequently denotative power, even if it is limited to the area of our affections.

<sup>4</sup> Kircher, in his *Musurgia Universalis* (on the marvellous effects of consonances and dissonances) elaborates the idea of God as the organ constructor and the organist, and he establishes a parallel between the six days used for the Creation and the six registers of a cosmic organ. In effect six is the number of creation, the mediator between the Beginning and the manifestation. The world was created in six days, in the six directions of the space: the four cardinal points, the zenith and the nadir (Chevalier J., Gheerbrant A., op. cit).

<sup>5</sup> Music is born from a vibration, and the new unifying theory – that is the theory able to see every power working in nature as a particular expression of a same unique great Universal Power – said the *string theory*, hypotizes that everything is in effect a vibration of a string. Music, exactly as the Great Architect, pervades nature. This concept is Stefano Pisani's and it is the result of long evening chats under the marvellous Neapolitan sky.

<sup>6</sup> The way in which both sound and voice manifest themselves is that of temporal succession. For this reason sounds, in particular, have with spiritual *life* a closer relationship than forms and colours; and the human voice, in its infinite ductility, can adapt itself to the thinnest mixtures, to the subtlest variations of one's sentiment (Frege G., in De Ponticelli R., 1982).

<sup>7</sup> When Buddha was borne, he measured the universe taking seven steps in the four directions. The four essential steps of his liberating experience correspond to a seven day halt, each under four different trees. Muslim mystics affirm the Koran has seven meanings. A Prophet's tradition says: "The Koran has an exoteric sense and an esoteric one. The esoteric sense has, in its turn, an esoteric sense and so on, up to seven esoteric senses" (Locatelli U., 2006).

<sup>8</sup> Even in Africa seven is the symbol of perfection and unity. The Dogon consider it the symbol of the union of the contraries, of the end of dualism. This union of contraries is also the symbol of fecundation. Therefore, since for this reason the word is analogous to sperm as the ear is to the vagina, for the Dogon seven is the sign of the Teacher of the World, god of the new rains (Locatelli U., 2005). J. Chevalier and A. Gheerbrant tell us that in stories and legends seven expresses the states of matter, the steps of evolution, the degrees of consciousness: consciousness of the physical body, of emotions, of intelligence, of intuition, of spirituality, of will power, of life (Chevalier J., Gheerbrant A., op. cit).

<sup>9</sup> In *Hekalot gabbati* (The great treatise of buildings) the mystic can reach the base of the throne only passing over a series of seven buildings, whose main entrances represent as many halting-places of a path towards knowledge (Busi G., 2005).

<sup>10</sup> In Attar's famous poem the different stages of interior evolution are symbolically represented in seven valleys: Research, Love, Knowledge, Detachment, Unification, Stupor, and Privation (Attar Farid ad-din, 1986).

<sup>11</sup> Stefano Pisani's concept.

<sup>12</sup> Every time a musician *interprets* a musical composition he melts with it, in order to understand it and be used as an instrument. This reminds us of the attitude we have with regards to the Sacred Scriptures. We interpret them in order to interpenetrate in god and to allow him to utilize us while knowing him.

<sup>13</sup> It is a collaboration that is free from the necessity to perform a precise identification of transcendence. Actually, musicians are used to a communication, music, which has no meaning, as God has no face.

<sup>14</sup> Music is the metaphor of man's life and of the image of an Ecumenical Architect who sums in himself the characteristics that all the people of the world attribute him without bothering His perfection.

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