

Melody, Rhythm and Text

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(Published in Journal of the Indian Musicological Society, Edi. Wim van der Meer, Vol. 41,
Indian Musicological Society, Mumbai, 2008)

For some years now Music forum is taking second looks at all musical fundamentals. Melody, rhythm and text are considered fundamental elements and therefore the concerned concepts in every event describable as musical. This is the reason for taking them up for a discussion.

Such attempts can look back, look deep and look around and many more. From among these possibilities we are precisely trying to concentrate on looking deeper. In brief, looking back is to adopt a historical approach. Looking around is a broad suggestion of looking at the issue comparatively or anthropologically. Looking at the issue as a cultural manifestation in a particular or specific culture is perhaps aptly identified as ethnomusicological. All these and other such approaches have their own validity and relevant places in musical thought or thinking processes. However what we are attempting is different and it can be described as philosophical. Philosophical approach is relevant to all humans irrespective of their caste, creed, nationality etc. In fact some may argue with some force now that the philosophical approach can hardly be confined to humans. Non-humans need to be included in the proposed deeper thought. Even if we leave alone the aurora lights, dune-songs and many more - there are aquatic and aviary music-producers to be considered. This is the background on which it is necessary to proceed to live up to our ambition to be philosophical in our discussion.

Melody

Obviously this kind of approach is unlikely to accept Melody as an accepted or acceptable arrangement of pitches - different or otherwise. In the philosophical contexts it is essential to remember that the discussed pitches or pitch - levels may not be attributable to deliberate, purposeful human creators or their groups. At the most we may conclude that in perception of Sound as an expressive aspect of human existence in its totality and an initial judgment made as to the high, low or stationary state of the sensory expression - is identified as "melodic". What a majority of music-making

cultures today understand, practice, and receive as notes, scales, chords and many more are all highly processed entities far removed from the basic, fundamental or philosophical phenomenon expressed as low-stationary, high acoustical manifestation of the life-force - which may or may not be functional. It is only in their case that classifications such as noise, musical sound and many more can be conceived.

Rhythm

Every acoustical occurrence is also perceived as an event that enjoys another fundamental quality: namely that of Duration. It is advisable if not inevitable to mention at the outset two other subtly distinguished concepts as relevant to the discussion of Time-Music interrelationship. These can be usefully verbalized as "permanent" and "eternal". (It may not be necessary to mention that concepts, their validity and operations are not dependant on the users' knowledge or awareness of those covered by their working). Permanence refers to the state of inherent unchangeable or constant qualities while Eternity focuses attention on the absence of beginning as well as end.

As a fundamental and philosophical phenomenon of musical consequence and relevance is the fact that Time identified as Musical Time is contrasted with what is understood as Chronological Time. Our immediate concern is of course the Musical Time. Time is one theme about which everybody can say (-like St. Augustine-) that "I know what it is if not asked to define it - but the moment somebody asks me to explain it I am speechless!" Rhythm being one of the important products of Time, it is time to understand it a little better!

Beings are never out of Time during their life-time. This variety of Time is measured by outer clocks etc. that can be described as objective time-keepers. The other variety is measured by inner clocks that can be identifiable as subjective time-keepers. The former variety - which I have often described as the chronological time is logically public time and it is a result of convention accepted by the cultural group concerned. Biological indicators such as digestion, sleep, heart-beats, pulse-rate and finally the brain-impulses are also beyond the realm of private time. It is pertinent to note that Yogic exercises and many more are advocated to change original or usual category of time-impulses and Contemplation is invariably recommended.

What is identified as Musical time is a manifestation of Contemplative Time. It has certain characteristics making its successful exploration inevitable for artistic fruitfulness.

As indicated earlier the primary characteristic of Musical Time is that it is a product of Contemplation of those who are usually described as Creators, Artists etc.

Now Contemplation enables a major achievement in this successful exploration of the Musical Time what is experienced is Time itself and not something measured by it. Waiting for a friend and for a local fast train differ because they produce qualitatively different experiences even when on the physical plane they are equal.

Expectably these experiential possibilities allow emergence of features such as lengthening, shortening repeating and variation and the consequent evaluation of the temporal expression involved. Once again the physical absolute aspects are blurred out of recognition, perception and effectiveness of action.

What becomes possible due to all this and similar processes is the effective emergence of patterns or structures to convert the entire activity leading towards a "form" and it constitutes the first step towards becoming a "genre".

Coming back to structure it is hardly essential to stress the analysis, interpretations, and hierarchical insights leading to the evaluations will be unthinkable unless a work can bring to notice components as contributing to the emergence of a structure. Perception that something has become more than a mere activity to reach the level of an individual work is undoubtedly basic to all quality-related decisions. The perception of structure and the possibility of listening, practicing and repeatedly - may also allow more insight into the work and appreciation of the complexity level and many more, may improve the ability to experience the minutiae of the creative act - obviously with enriching effect.

Musical time enables ordering of musical information and this ordered information undergoes a qualitative transformation because issues such as individual-styles or style-based groupings are clearly stated and addressed to with logical rigor. This is not to suggest that problems are solved. It means that more interconnections are experienced, the nature of the problems as "aesthetic" becomes apparent and to that extent the exciting, inherent and a fulfilling ambiguity (which is not to be confused with self-contradiction) of import is sensed.

In sum, music can conveniently be classified as a Temporal Art because it is mainly shaped by Musical Time - which is a product of Contemplative Time. Artists etc. are able to explore Contemplative Time and hence the Time-flow can be stopped, continued, made to move slower or faster and many more. It is necessary to remember

that these and other explorations result in manipulation of tempi and not Rhythm. Rhythm is an aesthetic principle not necessarily confined to temporal manifestations. Rhythm essentially bestows a flowing quality on the concerned entire creative and presentational activity while Tempo-manipulation obviously segments, sectionalizes it. Rhythm actually refers to the totality of art-experience and the motive to maintain its aesthetic quality. On the other hand Tempo-manipulation and the strategy of segmenting refer to a craftsman's ingenious interest in developing one effective device helpful to realize the quality of Rhythm. The Tempo-manipulation makes use of what is known as "pauses". Pause is not silence but what can be described as "soundfulness". It is instructive that there is no single word as "chiaroscuro" (light and shade) in music. It is difficult to say that music is sound-silence. All sound is potentially music though a specific sound etc. may be more or less perceivable. A perceived sound may be intended, designed and produced to actualize the melodic manifestation or tempo-manipulation. Depending on the producer's intention and, the concerned sound-occurrence may make its contribution to the entire effort.

Incidentally, in the term Principle of Rhythm i.e. Layatatava (लयतत्त्व) the reference is to the quality of getting merged on account of its uninterrupted operation. In Indian terminology there has been a clear hint as to the distinctions made here. In brief, it is to be noted that there are two basic roots connected with the phases discussed here. The first is लय (लयते) to move. This directly refers to the movement, flowing quality which is the fundamental quality leading to the aesthetic concept of Rhythm as indicated above. The second root is ली (लीनाति) rare meaning is to adhere, to obtain, and ली लीनाति to melt, dissolve - again leading to the final, merging as distinct from segmentation or manipulation of tempo and many more between sections, units segments describable as slow, medium and fast etc. is traceable to this root-formation.

Text/ Language

This brings us to the third and final fundamental concept referred to as Text. As will become clear that to use the term language instead of text is to avoid a conceptual problem and this overlooking needs to be corrected.

Normally the term text takes one to the body of "linguistic" expression that provides a dimension to a musical work - vocal or instrumental work to cumulatively bring forth the important phenomenon identified as Composition. With Samhita as the equivalent of the term Text a little thinking provokes "What about instrumental music -

in which language in the accepted sense hardly plays an active role. Quite a few traditional tabla-players and many more have been heard to explain in praise of a composition, "But see the poetry of it!" Obviously the reference to a qualitatively superior genre in a metaphorical manner is a strategy to attract attention to the aspect of the composition. Otherwise it is difficult to describe compositions made of say दिङ् दिङ् घा or धेत् धेत् ऋक् धेत् etc. as examples of use of language. Hence Melody, Rhythm and Text is a more valid listing of the fundamental principles of music. And yet there is an original, genetic conceptual reason of the text-language pairing. The reason is that both of them are immediately, inevitably and unexceptionally connected in the human cultural march due to the nature and functioning of the act of breathing. Breathing has been the primary act to help perceptible (which is not entirely related to audibility) emergence of the proposed manifestation of Sound. Further, the concept and term for the desired act of making breathing culminate into the musically fruitful operation is Bhash (भाष) language - which stops at bringing forth the aspect as "speech act". Obviously, the reference is to a purposeful, mostly conscious application of the working of specific parts of human vocal mechanism. It is to be noted that there is no direct or indirect attempt to establish linkage with the aspect of "meaningfulness". This is the reason why use of the term Text instead of "language" is advocated. It is the production and projection of the textual matter through breaching and speech-making which effectively supplies the units that inherently include the melody as well as the tempo-manipulation. It is also helpful to remember that a use of text instead of language makes the emerging musical effort more accommodative as well as "acceptable".

Finally, it is to be noted that fundamental concepts and their functions are irrespective of the category a particular musical manifestation belongs to. Perception of the fundamental concepts may vary but a complete absence cannot even be a theoretical possibility. Emergence of genres, codification of their formation, usage and employment are further flowerings of musical efforts. The richness, complexity and performing potential and many more will depend on the individual user or the cultural group involved.