

CHAPTER I

We as human beings have tried endlessly to explain or understand music since we first had a conscious knowledge of it and its effects. We have spent an infinite amount of time figuring out what a composer is telling us, and we wonder if we have ever gotten the message in the first place.

As we know, music is universal and has taken us beyond our limits imposed by our own languages, beliefs, or ways of thinking. It has obviously spoken to us, since we are still making it, performing it, studying it etc., and yet, we are still trying to analyze it in a way that we ourselves are complicating the matter and taking it out of proportion.

It is in our nature, when we hear a piece of music that provokes a certain feeling, we immediately search for ways in which we can explain how these sounds and rhythms affect us the way they do. A way to rationally put into words all the emotions that can cause our body to tremble, cry, or just simply burst out laughing.

Someone once said “Music is a part of the Great Beyond of human expression”¹ when attempting to describe it, and even though it is an extremely general statement, it helps us sum up why people are still creating and expressing themselves through this art form. The composer, or person that creates has obviously found a perfect way to say things that have not been able to say just by using our common language or words.

Mahler once said “my need to express myself in music begins only where the inarticulate thoughts prevail, at the gateway to the ‘other world’, the world where things can no longer be fixed in time and place”². Different composers write for different reasons

¹ Fisk, Josiah. *Composers On Music; Eight Centuries of Writings*. Northeastern University Press, Boston, 1997. p. 5.

² Fisk, Josiah. *Composers On Music; Eight Centuries of Writings*. Northeastern University Press, Boston, 1997. p. 6.

and it would take thousands of books to explain exactly what every single composer says through his work.

There is no one way in which composers create or compose ideas that will later become entire pieces of music. Derrick Cooke explains how the process begins unfolding in the creator's head. He first describes how the work originates in the composers mind as a "conception". He later goes on to list four possible ways in which this process develops. Cooke says this conception "can arise in four main ways:

- 1.- From a literary text which the composer feels an urge to set to music.
- 2.- From a literary idea which the compose feels an urge to use either as a basis for a vocal and instrumental composition or as a programmed for a purely instrumental work.
- 3.- From an ideal or concept which the composer feels drawn to use as the basis of a purely instrumental work without a specific programmed.
- 4.- From a purely musical impulse, the desire, say, to write a great symphony"³.

We can not forget that inspiration also plays a fundamental part in the creative process. Inspiration, "the sudden materialization of a musical idea in the composer's mind"⁴ is the next step in the writing process. A person may not always be inspired, but there are times, when, suddenly out of nowhere, ideas start flowing and when we realize it, the basis of a great piece of work is created. In Aaron Copland's words, inspiration is when "The

³ Cooke, Derrick. On Musical Inspiration in *Music Culture and Society; A Reader*. Oxford University Press, Great Britain, 2000. p. 34.

⁴ Cooke, Derrick. On Musical Inspiration in *Music Culture and Society; A Reader*. Oxford University Press, Great Britain, 2000. p. 35.

composer starts with his theme; and the theme is a gift from heaven. He doesn't know where it comes from, has no control over it. It comes almost like automatic writing"⁵

It must be pointed out that, even when these ways of composing work for some people, it might not for others. This process is unique in every person, since it is an individual task. Every composer has his or her ways in which to proceed towards one goal, which in this case is to develop a piece of music. That is what makes it interesting and beautiful.

There is one thing that seems to be a constant in every composers attempt to create music. Out of every reason there might be to create, one stands out the most, and that is the purpose of expression. Ever person whether female or male has something to say. Music is the best tool for this, since it is a language we all understand when our words fail us. In Cooke's words "It must be that he has something to say, whether he knows it or not. In other words, a certain complex of emotions must have been seeking an outlet, a means of expression, of communication to others; a state of affairs of which the composer may have been quite aware, or only half aware, or completely unaware".⁶

Music is there for everyone and does not judge its recipients (audience, listener) based on their sex, race, religion, sexual orientation, color etc. Once we understand the goal that is inherent in music, which is to transmit a message whether we know it or not, and once we understand a little bit of the creative process, we have to realize that it all sounds wonderful when we say it, but once we look at the matter in a practical way, the composer faces difficulties as well as any person doing their job.

⁵ Op. Cit. p. 35.

⁶ Cooke, Derrick. On Musical Inspiration in *Music Culture and Society; A Reader*. Oxford University Press, Great Britain, 2000. p. 36.

In the “real world” composers can not aspire to live solely on their compositions. In classical music, a composer is also a teacher or has other ways to make a living. In popular music, for example rock, this might not seem true if we look at the amount of money they make, though this will be further discussed in chapters to come. Although it is a profession that is both fulfilling and necessary for the artist, he deals with troubles as anyone does. This is even more so if the composer happens to be a woman.

Women have had their share of obstacles in the world of composing. It is now that musicologists and investigators are trying to find more about the role of women in music and their contributions. Our lack of knowledge and the situations that she has had to face can be attributed to the ways in which we, as a society, have establish the parts that men and women are supposed to play within a community.

Our ideas of gender and gender roles have been a barrier to our creative development and for the better understanding of our own human race. But what exactly is gender? What do we understand from this word and from what it implies?. Mary Crawford and Rhode Unger describe gender as a “system of power relations that affects individuals, relationships, and society”.⁷ But we tend to mistake the meaning of the word “gender” and we automatically attribute it to our physical identity, in other words, our physical sex. When a child is born we identify it and relate to it as boy or girl depending solely on its genitalia. This is not necessarily the baby’s gender. In this case, when a child is being greeted by its parents, the blue (boys) or pink (girls) baby clothes that awaits it is what “genders” the kid and specifies the role that he or she will be playing in society. This is what should be understood when we talk about gender and not our physical-sexual identity.

⁷ Crawford, Mary and Unger, Rhoda. *Women and Gender, A Feminist Psychology*. McGraw Hill, New York, 2000. p. 564.

It is here at this very stage of our lives that our ideas about gender and roles start developing. As early as a child comes into the world, its parents notions on life are automatically passed on to their offspring. In society “gender is important because it is a major way by which to classify people”⁸. Unfortunately, even though it has been the way the world has worked through history, “the classification of gender into male and female, ignores a significant part of the human population, persons who are, for example, hermaphrodites, androgynous or sexually ambiguous”⁹. This separation has been an obvious one in the world of music, especially when women have shown that their work is just as good as that of their male colleagues.

There is one thing we must understand to get a precise notion of this evident separation. Gender roles are in fact dictated by cultural institutions, for example, the family. At the same time these roles assumed by families are a direct result of structured institutions like those of the law and religion. This last one will later come up when analyzing the song “Icicle” by Tori Amos.

As we know, religion plays a major part in people’s life. Though, we can not generalize, the way we live our lives is strictly based on religion principles. According to Navajo Dhruvarajan, some religions, if not all of them, place women in an inferior position to men. She writes “All of the major world religions are patriarchal and accord women a subordinate status in the gender hierarchy. Women are believed to be biologically and spiritually inferior to men. They have a body that is periodically unclean due to menstruation and childbirth, they are impulsive and morally deficient, and they have

⁸ Op. Cit. p. 77.

⁹ Gerhard, Mary. *Genre Choices and Gender Questions*. Chicer.

uncontrollable sexual urges”¹⁰. This is a harsh statement to believe for those of us who have enjoyed a different experience outside the scrutiny of religion. Unfortunately in some countries, male religious fanatics still inflict fear and abuse on women. This often ends up with genital mutilation of young girls and even in forced abortions when the fathers know their spouses are having a female child.

Once we realize women’s disadvantaged position within religion, it is not surprising that society has been structured to function in this way. “Dominant groups (men) impose their beliefs and values on subordinate groups (women) in their attempts to control them. These beliefs and values come to be build into institutional structures and our lived experience occurs within those structures. As these practices are reutilized, people come to accept them as normal and natural”¹¹. Women get so caught up in these ideas that eventually, and as history has told us, cause women to think and acknowledge their subordinate status as “natural”.

When our roles are established, the man, which is stronger, takes on the task of providing for and heading a family. The one role left out for women is that of being a mother. Crawford and Unger describe “Mother is one of the most fundamental archetypes of woman, and motherhood has been regarded as women’s ultimate source of power and fulfillment”¹². This becomes sort of a paradox. In music, women were not acknowledged for their creative work, yet they are creators by nature.

This has resulted in a series of “mother myths” which are the following:

¹⁰ Dhruvarajan, Navajo. Religion, Spirituality and Feminism in *Gender, Race and Nation; A Global Perspective*. University of Toronto Press, Toronto/London, 2002. p. 274.

¹¹ Dhruvarajan, Navajo. Feminism and Social Transformation in *Gender, Race and Nation; A Global Perspective*. University of Toronto Press, Toronto/London, 2002. p. 295.

¹² Crawford, Mary and Unger Rhoda. *Women and Gender; A Feminist Psychology*. McGraw Hill, New York, 2000. p. 346.

1. Ultimate fulfillment as a woman is achieved through motherhood. Motherhood is a natural and necessary experience for all women. Those who do not want to mother are psychologically disturbed, and those who want to but cannot are fundamentally deprived.
2. Women are naturally good at care giving and should be responsible for infants, children, elderly parents, home and husband. A woman who experiences conflicts among these demands is maladjusted or poorly organized.
3. A mother has infinite patience and the willingness to sacrifice herself to her children. If she does not put her own needs last, she is an inadequate mother.
4. A woman's intense, full-time devotion to mothering is best for her children. Women who work are inferior mothers.¹³

These assumptions as stupid and ridiculous as they might sound in this time and age were the fuel and pretext for women to stand up and question society's structures. They obviously made a statement and their efforts resulted in the creation of the "women's movement", which would later become what we know as "feminism".

¹³ Crawford, Mary and Unger Rhoda. *Women and Gender; A Feminist Psychology*. McGraw Hill, New York, 2000. p.347.