

## MUSIC APPRECIATION 2: OPINION OR FACT?

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Many peoples usual response to music is, "I know what I like and that's all that matters!" And if you reply that that answer is rather naive or inadequate they may reply, "I don't care whether it is not good music, or that no one else likes it, I like it and that is all that matters. It is a great piece of music!"

In many ways these remarks are inane.

It is one thing to like a piece of music but it is another thing to call it great.

Before you debate this, let me remind you of some comments that have been made

John Lennon was the greatest British composer of all time.

Johann Strauss was as great a composer as Bach

These comments are not made with the additional remark referring to their own type of music i.e. Strauss was the greatest composer of his type of music.

John Lennon did not write any major work nor did Johann Strauss. They may have been good in their own field but they were severely limited. Strauss wrote waltzes, polkas and operetta. He did not write concertos, masses, cantatas, organ music as did J S Bach. It takes far greater skill, knowledge and ability to write the music that Bach wrote than anything by Strauss or John Lennon.

Therefore Bach is the great composer, not Strauss or Lennon

Let me repeat that everybody has a right to like the music of their choice but they must not adopt the notion that because they like it that qualifies it to be great music. Personal opinion is not fact.

Music has to be considered on many aspects.

There is the personal judgment such as I like it. That is understandable but it is based on personal reaction.

But let us take it further with, as an example, Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto no 3

I like it.

But examining the piece here are, at least, four other aspects

It is well written for the piano

It is well written for the orchestral

The music has a form and coherence.

There is variety and contrast from lyricism to excitement.

These four qualities are far more significant than just the comment, "I like it."

This helps you appreciate the music.

Incidentally, there are more than four qualities in this work.

Let us take the Piano Concerto no. 1 by Chopin, or to give it its title, Concerto no.1 for piano and orchestra

Let us begin with the assumption, "I like it."

It is reasonably well written for the piano, but nowhere near as well-written as the Rachmaninoff.

It is NOT well written for the orchestra who have a walk-on part. The orchestral part is negligible and very poor.

There is NOT a lot of contrast or variety in the piece but there is in the Rachmaninoff.

In both these instances, I have presented facts which can be proved to be true.

And what we have proved is that the Rachmaninoff is vastly superior to the Chopin.

These facts help us to appreciate music.

This does not mean that we have to dismiss the Chopin as rubbish but it means we have to be honest about our assessments of music.

Let us take another example from a different standpoint.. The Piano Concerto of Schoenberg. Many will say

I don't like it.

But consider the other aspects

It is well written for the piano

The orchestration is very good indeed

It has form and coherence and abounds in melody.

It has the essential ingredient of originality.

And so for that one objection "I don't like it" there are, at least, four qualities which can be proved.

Each individual has a right to dislike it but to dismiss it as rubbish or not music at all is untrue and hypocritical. Your opinion is that it is not a good work, but, factually, it is.

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