

100 PROBLEMS OF MUSIC

SUMMARY

A key Ideas Original document listing all the aesthetic and practical problems of music and composing. 100 probs is like “musical existentialism” - “coping with the givens of music” (vs. “life” in the definition of existentialism). It wasn’t conceived at once - it was a reflection of the aesthetic problems I faced and observed while working on rendered music. Once I was aware of a problem, a feedback loop began - it led to higher standards, leading to awareness of more problems in practical composing, leading to additions to the 100 Problems’ list, leading to higher standards....A substantial amount of NS was conceived in light of this phenomenon.

These “problems” can be more neutrally called “issues”. They range from philosophical and existential to very physical and tangible. The list originated from my subjective discontents but can be applied to all art and artists: art/artists can be defined (define themselves) by how they address these problems. Within 100 Problems, the more basic and profound the problem, the more important it is to NS. The ‘highest’ problems aren’t exclusively musical: 100 Probs, through extension, bleeds into many existential problems of life, reality and human limitation. The lengthy list of music’s aesthetic problems and impossibilities puts an oppressive burden on music’s creators, and for most of music’s traditional purposes, is unnecessary to the point of irrelevance - but this does not mean it isn’t true. Every artist, even if they choose to ignore these problems or deny them, is under their “umbrella”.

The New Style is built in the shadow of 100 problems (composed in light of it), as is the meta-referential Opus 1, where the protagonist struggles with the “impossibility” of creating a certain standard of music in his day-and-age. The most radical parts of NS - description and the theoretical possibilities that spring from it - are designed to break out of music’s limitations that were first listed in ‘100 Problems’. Historically, many genius works offer solutions to seemingly intractable problems, through new ideologies, processes, vocabularies, cultures, etc., that are either extensions or reactions against the current musical climate.

see: Principles Barriers A sub-category of POTU(G) - aesthetic philosophy
Extremes list Problem orientation: (for solutions) Listening requirements

“As with any scientist or philosopher, I reserve the right to ask questions, redefine questions, or resurrect questions that have been supposedly decided. The art of defining the question or problem is an art in itself, and the answer is determined by the question.”
The reductive nature of “why?”: there is always another layer under an accepted answer. The question-levels typically become more abstract and stark. The zero-truth philosophy breaks down quickly

Most of these problems have counterarguments.

Many times, problems are defined dialectically, when they may have a higher solution to reconcile a seeming catch-22, or may exist on a spectrum. Simply because these are listed as problems, doesn’t mean they haven’t been addressed by various musical languages and composers.

The Problem of the 100 Problems: “The majority of these problems are a non-entity to most listeners (and most composers).”

Vibrating bodies barrier: at the highest level, all music is the same, because it uses sound from vibrating bodies
(resigns the composer to smaller means of uniqueness)

If the composer composes in another medium, he is no longer considered a musician, and the music is considered “something else”

= The ultimate “fixed format” of music, the largest constraint

Audibility barriers of the human ear (high and low frequencies)

“The end of meaningful innovation of musical language as such.”

Past orientation vs. future orientation:

Past knowledge restricting new ways of solving problems, new musical ideas

...yet lack of past knowledge renders one even less likely to solve a complex problem innovatively (they won’t even be aware of it)?

Genius: *Being a singularity means you must create the context and standards.*

= conflict with study of genius, if genius is evaluated using predetermined contexts/criteria.

There is a fundamental conflict between singularity and camaraderie with other artists and even with greats.

If you want to transcend reality 1, you must reject other artists at a certain point.

The impossibility of “high-level originality”:

Impossible because it’s all in the context of sound (the “vibrating bodies” barrier)

Threshold of difference: how much change is needed before a work is considered legitimately new? (subjective)

Messenger difference, time difference

The lack of true evolutionary need for music, music treated as inessential in life

Art as inherently unreal/illusionary (can art become real, in the case of architecture?)

Counterargument: most disciplines are artful?

“Devil’s bargain” where humans are given the capacity to perfect experiences through art, but must contain them in artificial mediums

Inherent separation of music/art from real life

Art acts only indirectly on man, versus more direct disciplines

So much so that artists essentially ‘sit back’ while reality happens

Art, unless created quickly (“in the moment”), amounts to passivity, within a static creation period, while reality constantly happens

(thus the art is already a foregone conclusion)

Counterargument: art shapes the way people think on a large scale, large enough to change reality

Art as reinforcing of idea (one piece and moreso the combination of generations of art with a similar message)
(or simply one hugely influential piece of art or singular artist)

Reinforcing of idea, behavior, way of thought (for and *also against* things)

Art at all times is contributing to a dialogue within all the disciplines

Problem is the *non-physical* power of art versus war, protest, prose-writing, religion

Counterargument: Art is representative of the creative power of man to birth something previously non-existent

Trivialization of certain things in art:

e.g. Murder will always be more disturbing in real life (most people have never seen one in real life, but have seen hundreds onscreen)

Counterarguments: some movies dramatize death much more, or a drama based on the aftermath (or anticipation) of death

Lack of sublimity vs. nature

Lack of complexity vs. nature

Certain subjects are unable to be paralleled by art

“Too many voices” barrier in counterpoint = the individual voices become inaudible

Lack of scale compared to nature (universe, mountains/nature, decibel levels of natural phenomenon, amount of things and variance in nature)

Music’s lack of complexity vs. literature: Joyce etc.

Impermanence of music vs. nature, architecture

Paradox of Choice in Art: the choice made vs. all the others that were cut off (see NS)

Parity: deciding between two different options of equal value (but each will take the work in different direction)

Is the choice worth all that is forsaken by making it?

Ground-up legitimization: Why should any work use the assumptions of any other? (theory, vocabulary, style, form etc.)

Shouldn’t every work have to freshly legitimize its decisions? Why should a decision used in one context be valid in another?

Level of legitimization of choice: note-note, section-section? All? Impossible to reconcile?

Arbitrary vs. deliberate: and at what level are decisions arbitrary? Can improvisation be considered deliberate?

Writing vs. improvising

True totality vs. “weak subsets” (see NS)

Sacrificing the benefits of one style for the purity of another

Emotionality and human immediacy of popular song vs. innovations outside of tonality

Creating your own vocabulary under the shadow of more potent options that are ruled out because they have been done
are you inherently choosing amongst inferior options?

Risk of Idea Redundancy: you do a work and you find a similar work was already done

Impossibility to survey all of the complex system of present artistic creation, as well as all the work done in the past

Redundancy in art as predictable, sterilizing, prone to cliché

Cliché prevents a sincere message from being impactful to an audience

“We can see the commercialization and kitsch-phase of an art form or style before we even do it.”

We are so familiar with the cycle that it seems pointless to create - embrace the cycle and start new styles “for the machine to devour?”

Music faces a higher scrutiny when your own life is involved. (vs. being a spectator of other’s works)

Because humans have the ability to imagine the future, thus the result of a path, I can look ahead to, for instance, the result of years of counterpoint or piano study, mastering of past styles, even mastery of beats, revision of works, etc. as it seems 100 probs will still apply, looming at the end of all these paths. They become, in a way, “foregone conclusions”

You could be chasing something for years that proves to be unworthy.

All artistic POV’s have been taken by many people already, thus current artists are “aping” POV’s.

Hundreds of CGI projects use panoramas of the globe with ethereal music, for instance.

Redundancy of gesture: Boulez: “there are no original gestures left” - composition as recombining gestures that have already been used

Redundancy of harmony

Imitation of past styles is hollow, but also a foregone conclusion.

You can follow rules, study, internalize, revise, make processes, but anything to solve a new problem must be new.

It is not true genius, not highest genius.

Wanting to be able to use the ideological features of styles of the past without composing in the actual idioms.

Yet you have to yield to each language to wield its benefits.

Inventing new music/modern music is in a catch-22 - what’s modern isn’t better than past styles in (most) every respect:

For every parameter, there is a style of the past that better expresses it.

Musical paradoxes:

Tonality being exhausted but most human

Dependence on detail for uniqueness, while the larger concept or form remains generic (yet is the most obvious)

Even the greatest composer of all time is easily outweighed by the totality of all other composers (not even close) = related to the choice problem

Related to existentialism: how does the composer find meaning in his life and work?

Each composer is simply a complex set of musical and personal parameters.

The need for “humanity” and “human traits” in music as impedance:

The ability of humans to relate to a musical language encourages human “disparate dramatic” language to be created, while it discourages/impedes the development of advanced or “alien” languages. This is especially problematic because “inhuman” languages have the most potential for future advancement (see “theoretical possibilities”)

“The ultimate barrier to musical evolution is people themselves, for better or for worse.”

The need for modern music to reject things that are “human” *in the name of uniqueness*

drums	metric regularity	lyric singing	tonal/resolution context
homophony/melody vs. accompaniment		drama-orientation, outward expressivity	
repetition	poetry		

The future will be tonal, as usual: new configurations of it.

There will be innovations will be in science and tech of music, but tonality’s still at the center of music.

Tonal/TL music limit tech. With all the tech and resources in the world, you’d still arrive at the ‘melody game’ at some point, greatly reducing a “possibilities funnel”

Vitality Paradox: What people like is different from what is legitimately new at a moment in history, yet the new *isn’t vital* because there isn’t the vigor/excitement around it, as in popular music, thus new composers aren’t drawn to new music, because there’s no future in it, or no attention surrounding it

Music theorists and analysts:

Criticism: truth as relative, relativity, subjectivity

The amount of time it took to create vs. amount of time music theorists have spent analyzing it

On a much deeper level than even the composer thought of it? “you don’t know he thought that” etc.

Injecting their own personal views/personalities into a work, thus distorting its original meanings

Confusion of categories in criticism - looking for traits in music that one wishes were there is *looking in the wrong place*

Amount of music learning vs. shortcuts: each generation has more theory/ideas/techniques to assimilate, with only a slightly longer lifespan than the generation before. Thus it seems they must learn more, but *more superficially*.

Performers too young for the profundity of the music they play:

when composer was older, and the composition is a product of wisdom, suffering etc.

Simply because the music doesn’t have virtuoso qualities difficult enough to prevent the inexperienced from playing it

Do they really understand it?

Can any performer understand the music as well as the composer?

i.e. can any experience *really* be transferred from one person to another?

Asymmetry of information: between artist/music and listener

The sender vs. receiver relationship is always going to be asymmetrical.

Even when someone likes it, they may not understand it

Even with the artist and himself, the artist may hear things differently

The paradox of the young artist: how can the young artist compose anything, when he knows that his future/older self will be better equipped to realize the work? ...yet the only way to improve is to compose (especially applicable when the young artist is being pressured to publish or premiere)

Massive amount of music in the world vs. the attention each work needs/deserves:

Missing out on more music vs. knowing a smaller amount of music deeply

Essentially one could spend an entire life on one piece of music

The inevitable obscurity of most music: the amount of music “lost” to time, where ‘posterity’ and ‘immortality’ never comes (the fate of the vast majority of music)

This is especially a problem when a musical idea or feature is lost with it

Also relates to existentialism and meaning of one’s life (a composer)

Need for arbitrary newness:

The generational need for the new, and to possess their own music

(yet some go retro, where we re-encounter the problem of the truly new)

The individual need for the new, leading to music being created for an arbitrary purpose

Music ‘written off’ by listeners (esp. Youth) as old fashioned and therefore unlistenable

Self-conscious “artfulness”

Self-consciousness of “listening to music”

Potentially taints the experience and reduces the perception of music’s scale and power

(vs. “blending of senses” in NS)

Barrier of listener’s attention span

Reification/Programmatic representation and need for uniqueness:

Each new subject should be symbolized/represented in a different way, to correspond to their autonomy/uniqueness in the world, yet there are only so many music-based strategies for doing so
 Music's inability to reference a specific extramusical idea/object (without using lyric) - see: NS

Absolutism and gesture:

The inability for a gesture to represent the profound after being used in a lesser way
 Composers using overly-profound, dramatic or extreme music/musical objects/gestures to represent something undeserving (thus profaning/ruining the legitimately profound usage)
 "Subversion of the profound by the trivial"
 Lyrical melodrama: use of over-important lyrics/references in a song (tendency toward extremes)

Lack of musical education

Trivial music elevated to profound in listener's mind by extramusical experiences: concert, memories/nostalgia

Other factors, esp. extraneous, distorting/exaggerating quality of music:

(performance, image, extramusical, celebrity, life story of musician, event associated with the music)
 Music video: using overly profound images for a weak song

Multimedia:

Can stunt the optimization/actualization of purely musical aspects (element burden lessened, each element does less)
 Can be a distraction from music
 Can supplement weak music and make it seem more profound than it is

Audience confusion of quality because of superficial aspect: a profound work compared to trivial because of a superficial similarity (where other/most criteria the new work *doesn't* meet is overlooked)

Music takes on unintended extramusical association: use in movies, advertising, negative experiences associated with music

The co-opting of music to lend profundity to something (esp. undeserving) - commercials, movies, etc.
 Using music for extramusical gain: political, ideological, personal, business etc.
 Art's ability to inflate myths and conspiracies (religious art, etc.)
 Classical as tied to religion and Christian ethic (*but also to the enlightenment*)
 The tie of music/art to fashion/fad

False/Perceived Genre Barriers: obscuring deeper similarities, and serving as a knee-jerk/immediate turn-off factor for listeners

Genre associations with 'type of person': classical = old, dork etc.

Association with a certain culture masking legitimate value in music (classical as "elitist")

Superficially sounding like other works - "instant classification"

Perceived Associations:

(Dissonance with wrong notes or danger, consonance with religiosity, simplicity with the childlike, orchestral maj7 with Disney)
 Problematic because they fix the associations in the listener's mind, making them apply the association in inappropriate instances
 In serialism, for example, most listeners assume the composer is a bad musician, because they associate dissonance with wrong notes.
 Tonality and harmonic language: the pre-determined associations with certain harmonic types
 "Serious" composers being forced toward dissonance
 "Extended" harmony being stereotyped into "jazzy, sentimental, Broadway, pop", etc.

Listener's unwillingness to tolerate ambiguity

Listener's need for a literal explanation
 Listener's need for extramusical explanation

Inappropriate performance context:

Bad performance context: not the fault of the music, the music is "unjustly accused"
 Listening context rejection: inability to accept music in a certain context
 Never liking a certain type of music because you never listened in the context most appropriate to it (car at night = bad for Bach)
 see: "place-time context"

The risk of sincerity and assertion = often tied to reductionism, zealotry, religion, lack of empathy or open-mindedness, willful ignorance

Sincerity as dull or unintelligent (especially when everything is cliché)

Sincerity is always able to be torn down by humor (humor context)

"Wit music" as smartass, annoying, trivial (not the best of it though - or when tied to mastery)

Material-up vs. idea-down: process of creation

Potential for superficiality if material-up
 Choosing concept/function/title for the music last = "bolt-on" profundity, not truly integrated in the compositional process itself

Local event vs. holistic piece:

Hearing only a snippet of a work might give the complete wrong impression (i.e. simplicity in Beethoven, but in a very complex work)
 A composer can only achieve the gravitas present in a moment by preparing that moment through integrating it in a piece
 (but the moment loses sole importance through it being subsumed) = assertion vs. function

Lyricism:

Text vs. no text: Lyrics as a dimension of listening: distracting or augmenting? cheap trick or legitimate domain?
 Listener liking music because of the lyrics
 Listener thinking dull music is profound because of the lyric subject - features of lyrics disguising bad composition
 (most musicals/songs solve the problems of music by using music secondarily)

Expressing your thoughts/experience to others as a hollow, second-hand gesture

Stating the obvious (lyric/textual works)

Stating a simplified POV (helps clarity but is relatively simple-minded/stupid)

Saying something definite about subjective issues as symptomatic of zealotry

Most art is devotional to a subject (not existing on its own?)

Its reason for being is tied to "reality", not self-sufficient, thus is 'tied' to reality but looks impotent compared to it

This is an advantage of music's alleged inability to reference specific things

Conversely, music's inability to reference a specific extramusical idea/object (without using lyric)

Theatre and performance as obviously unreal, thus not as urgent or impactful, comparatively impotent, "pretending"

Theatricality, creating worlds and hypotheticals, is not reality - amounts to escapism

Counterargument: art provides models by which to act and think

Art can provide a document of history that previously was unseen

Art can create phenomena only imagined (or never even imagined before) can come into being in a physical world

Art can create scenarios that dramatize a phenomena better than real life

No rendered music can solve all its philosophical problems, in fact the rendered problems often conflict or ignore philosophical problems.

Cleverness at the musical level may not reference the philosophical level at all

though its genre may fight the battle for it (the "musicological level")

Emulation of the qualities of other works - aesthetic benchmarks, imagination springboard = unethical, fallacious.

EFT is meaningless to NS if it simply toggles existing objects/ideas - "specific" EFT vs. generic objects? (allows for the emotional component)

The need to codify everything in reality in art (rather than accepting reality as the superior version)

(Abstract art has it right in this case - creating new ideas rather than representing)

Though representational art can *create* an imaginary moment, or a perfect moment, or create a symbolic moment

Heart vs. mind in music:

Composer may have cognitive dissonance on what music to compose, because of internal conflict, conflicting impulses

For example, wanting to continue a lineage/tradition vs. innovate, sentimentality vs. intellectualism, etc.

Composing in a past style damns the composer to irrelevance

The approach the audience takes: asymmetry of an emotional listener when faced with an intellectual piece (and vice-versa)

Looping vs. change: inertia: a piece of material "wants" to loop, but this restricts higher-level development of the piece, through-composition.

Genre and orchestration blocks:

New timbre as masking superficial/redundant/clichéd ideas:

Timbre as novelty/trickery? (seen in pop)

Drums vs. no drums: ...and whether they play a central or augmenting role

High-volume drums restricting the climax ceiling

Drums excessively regimenting rhythmic properties of music

Drums restricting agility of music (i.e. "fleeting style")

Individual vs. collaboration: dilution of individual vision

EXTENDED ARTICLES

100 Problems Exploration 4 (NS)

Threshold of differentiation.

The intellectual himself is a luxury in this case, a product of the advancement of society. For most, the question of “is music possible?” or “is it possible to compose music?” is a totally ridiculous, elitist, detached question. It is audacious to suggest that, for instance, the totality of music they listen to, aside from relatively small details, is actually many individual variations on one work. Every piece of music is largely redundant. The modern prolific artist is a remarkable study in ego, to think their music is indeed different enough to justify its creation. This artist, if they searched for a mere hour, would find precedents *and even improvements/evolutions* on their own supposedly ‘personal vision’. Thus the only differentiating detail is the origin, from “me” rather than “not me”.

Another superficial differentiator is the “current” versus the “old/non-current”. Simply creating a work *now, regardless of originality*, creates an urgency for listeners to consume it *now*; to consider and experience it within the context of *now*. Thus the concept of ‘retro’, old in a new context, becomes possible - new messengers can bring urgency back to old styles. With a new messenger, the public realizes that the styles of music/art in the past aren’t irrelevant after all, but were obscured by distance and lack of a vital creator. This, however, is superficial - for many musicians and listeners, Beethoven is metaphorically as alive today as when he was walking around Bonn. Were he alive to tour, teach masterclasses and debate aesthetics, though, he would indeed be “more alive” to more people.

Ultimately, one not socialized to recognize cultural nuances would see almost no difference in most pop music. An alien might see *all* our music as similar - as ‘change over time’, for example. It all depends on the threshold of differentiation.

For someone with a low threshold, music is absolutely-certainly-without-a-doubt possible. The problem of the exhaustion of tonality would seem pedantic. After all, there are quadrillions of combinations. There is an abstract carrot dangling - it is theoretically possible that the most beautiful melody has not been discovered yet. For someone with a high threshold, just the fact that these combinations have tonal implications would be irksome enough to dispel him from composition altogether. Ensemble is another problem: A teenager can pick up a guitar and strum with no cognitive dissonance whatsoever. The experienced composer knows that the choice of guitar immediately restricts choice, determining range of timbre, genre associations, and a categorical inclusion (perhaps redundancy) with every other piece composed for guitar. Add a choice of blues genre, and the guitar composer is faced with the cold reality that they (likely) have no associations with the blues culture at all - and their composition is floating in nothingness, without a context. He could rescue himself with metaphor and use the blues form to comment on his own condition, thus creating an ironic or wit-based framework, a common solution for post-moderns.

At the cloud-obscured peaks of high threshold differentiation are the basic boundaries of music:

- Music happens over time.
- A musical tone is created from vibrating bodies.
- The overtone series and tonal system
- Translation of music from source > air > ear > brain/mind

These are pre-determined, so any piece of music will have these qualities. Some are negotiable at the fringe, such as the use of noise, or the professional capability to read scores to hear them, or analysis of music for its own sake.

The small details differentiate it enough for them to consider it “new”, and enjoy it as such. Music itself struggles with boundaries

What does a composer do when they hear something in their head, or imagine something conceptually, that cannot be done? Are they assuming impossibility when it can be done? Are they clinging stubbornly to absolutes when a facsimile of the concept is able to be created? What about all the things music *cannot* be? Composers are lucky if they can focus on *what music is* rather than what it isn’t.

- ...a drummer wants to replicate a drum sound heard on a record from 1974 (possible with effort)
- ...or when a producer wants to create a song for a singer who’s been dead for 30 years (possible with facsimile/imitation)
- ...or a composer needs a thousand-piece orchestra but has no means of obtaining one (possible with technology or fame)
- ...a composer wants to blend all senses inside the brain of the listener to expand the experience of music (possible with illegal drugs?)
- ...a composer wants to create music outside of the sound wave/vibrating bodies boundary (semantically/categorically impossible?)
- ...a composer wants to control minds, dwarf/control/“play” the universe, attain immortality (impossible? possible through cgi?)

Art as different from reality.

Art is something people normally plan to experience. Nature is the most omnipresent art: the largest art and also the most detailed. Architecture gains admittance into the physical world more than most, as does urban planning and landscape design. Even if one doesn’t plan to experience it, one can recognize when they are experiencing it.

What is the relationship between art and reality? Is art ‘set apart’ from reality? Is art reflective of reality? Supplemental? Art can prompt both action and escape. Obviously art encompasses all of these functions and domains. If there are so many functions to art, is there even a unified definition of what art is? Anything of aesthetic value?

There is a painful realization that art cannot be as omnipresent, vivid, or timeless as nature - of course neither is the human life, barring talk of the eternal soul and afterlife, of which no one can talk of with any certainty. Art can, however, prolong the life of a human beyond physical life. There is a pain of the smallness and fragility of one’s art even in one’s own time and culture. Expanding it to a historical view adds more insecurities. Some resort to the mythical nobility of the “historical dialogue” between themselves and artists of the past and future, others use their art as an audition for God. Some accept their mortality and use creation as a daily ritual of affirmation or healing.

Being ourselves, residing inside of our body, we have a predisposed bias toward our individual existence, actions, thoughts, beliefs, goals, achievements, legacy. It seems a distant theoretical possibility for a musician to someday “play the universe”, but when that becomes possible, every budding musician, from the time they learned to think, would aspire to do the same. Who gets the right to? Is it based on technique and skill, some certification? In a world full of thousands of composers, wouldn’t it be great if I found a stylistic patent, a musical property able to be reserved only for my use, to forever differentiate me from all other artists, past, present and future, unable to be imitated or even approximated? Now, ‘zooming out’ from inside myself, I imagine all artists would aspire to the same. Each artist would be like a continent to himself, each kind of music would become like the disciplines are today, with huge semantic differentiations. Imagine if painting, architecture, dancing, speaking, poetry and writing were each considered styles of music? Of course, there is some ambitious novelist somewhere hoping for the same takeover by writing.

Originality vs. Intelligent Paradox in Cinema/Drama:

Most intelligent concepts/points of view are already codified in society, to the point where they are predictable. Yet if a work of art wants to be considered 'intelligent', originality is a key ingredient. The artist finds themselves looking to be deliberately idiosyncratic to be intelligent. If one artist executes a certain concept, it is 'off limits' to others, unless cleverly disguised or changed. In science, the latest knowledge is assimilated as an expectation of the profession to keep up with the latest advancements.

The musician assimilates as well, but lessens originality in the process.

At what point does the "say it in a new way" defense of art become clichéd in itself? Is it always valid to say the same thing in a new way? Every human has the right to say "I love you" for the first time. Each of us lives an original life - to us. As two humans cannot occupy the same space at the same time, originality in some respect is guaranteed - and knowing someone else is living a life similar to me (or creating art similar to me) is not the same as *me* living it. Knowing that most people in history have faced the same problems as me is not the same thing as *me* facing them, and working to solve them. Does this mean every human has the right to create a love song? Is the subject matter alone enough to make a work unoriginal? Possibly everyone has the right to make one, but only the more original or interesting expressions endure. That is "artistic justice", and a manifestation of an objective system of evolution.

This is explained in terms of a complex system that absorbs the actions of every individual, group, institution and event in the world at any given time. This system is also expandable to include both past and future influences - a sort of objective 'God's eye' view. For a complex set of interrelated reasons, some compositions survive and resonate, some don't - and although we can pinpoint the likely causes of this success (or failure), the totality of the cause is too complex to understand. No work's context is identical to another's - each is born into different circumstances that effect its survival, however slight.

Some artists may be content to "say it in a new way". Some artists may see subjects as timeless universals, and feel it necessary to include them to accurately reflect life. "Love" is just as alive in each generation, so it must be reflected in the art of the time. A new style may be enough differentiation, leaving the subject, and perhaps even a point of view, intact and unmoving.

Ultimately, survival of art/music lies within the mind of every individual 'consumer' who allowed it to survive. Yet designating the mind of the consumer is not an end, but only the beginning - the mind is the subjective receiver of everything external (and internal).

What if everything about a work was new at once, rather than the majority of familiar anchors that accompany most new works?

Most works are "slightly new"

Odds are even a wholly original new work would be understood and assimilated by some percentage of other artists, due to the flexibility of human adaptability. The work would remain significant as the first work of its kind, but it would not remain unique. Even an entirely new language would develop around it.

What about a language so singular that no artist could copy it without being immediately labeled derivative? For instance, Jackson Pollack's drip technique, so original that use of the style by another would immediately relegate it to academic pastiche or kitsch. First, the founding artist must be widely known, especially among critics and the public. If the founding artist never becomes synonymous with the style, there is no possibility of others being recognized as derivative.

Pre-NS "sense integration":

The idea of brain alteration for music is to find a way to be physically 'inside' the music - and therefore mentally and spiritually - rather than being separated from it. As long as object remains an experience separated from our body, external to our body, it is somehow divorced from us. Until then, there is always some part of us that knows that the musical experience isn't real - the mind can wander, we are free to consider the music as serious or trivial.

100 Problems Exploration 3:

Why must we study the music of the past in-depth? A broad overview yes, but years spent in analysis of past works verges on the morbid. Can a second-hand observer, however intelligent or experienced, ever understand a work as well as its creator? At the other extreme, can they abuse their intellect by 'discovering' ideas in the work that the composer never thought - "reading" the work for subtexts, note-note coincidences and such?

I am paranoid enough to think that a second hand viewer can never understand a work. Yet a conductor and performer can perform a work more coherently than its creator - balancing musical lines more tactfully (as an experienced conductor with frequent access to full orchestra), or adding a personal/singular timbre and intensity (as virtuoso performer who has spent years with the work, or adds unique experience). It is a notable phenomenon - a composer typically spends several years or less on a work, but should it catch the interest of posterity, generations will dissect and reinterpret the work, then codify it in recordings, where some interpretations will become definitive and others will become singular fringe and oddity. Different timbres, venues, performers will fine tune the work to its optimum.

How can progress in science happen? Every generation must assimilate more information to keep up with the latest discoveries and innovations, and then specialize in areas with hopes of affecting more progress. Every so often, a more elegant explanation of a phenomenon, or a stark correction of a past explanation, can lift some of this burden. Yet I have often wondered, the skeptic that I am, how (and if) each scientist can possibly know all these principles in depth, and assimilate them in time to make their own contribution. How is it that a past scientist can work his entire career on a problem and present a solution, only to have a teenager learn it in science class? Isn't there an obscene amount of simplification that happens in translation? Probably, but the rigorous peer-review allows a new scientist (in the present day) to "take their word for it", and move on to apply it. It is up to the scientific community to label something as sound or problematic, and if it is the latter, for scientists to divide up the problem into manageable segments and begin work.

The tragedy of music:

In music, consider the Well Tempered Clavier. Child virtuosos can play Bach's masterpiece and then move on to modern music. What was for Bach the center of his musical universe is only one of thousands of works that may catch the interest of a musician, or composer, listener etc., only a few of which existed in Bach's time. He has a mind-boggling amount of competition for listeners. Of course, this is a linear view of time - a modern composer could easily return to music of the past (often to "ground" their modernism is something perceived as more timeless). There are many examples of this in the biographies of famous composers.

...and a current scientist in his twenties can improve on his work?

Opportunity cost: for every piece of music we study in depth, learn to play, or compose, we are neglecting millions of other choices we could have made, some more profitable and some less. Millions of works are neglected.

When you listen to your favorite song for the 242nd time, you have rejected 242 chances to discover another piece. 242 times you have rejected millions of pieces.

100 Problems Exploration 2:

Music is a conversation between the radical, the conservative and the liberal. The radical presses forward, the conservative aches for the past, and the liberal accepts whatever happens as the 'melting pot of music' - this is a musical universal if ever there was one. The conservative will always have the myth that music/art/values (etc.) aren't what they once were, though they typically forget that there is always someone in the present doing the kind of art they feel comfortable with. For the conservative, the masses are listening to music of the future, a bad, dismal, barren future where tradition is neglected. The music they love/respect is no longer at the forefront. For the radical there is the opposite problem - it is the masses are listening to music of the past, while only a select few are legitimately trying to advance the art form. Ironically, the masses are actually floating in a third zone, sometimes forward thinking, sometimes of the past - they are the liberals. For the liberal, the typical response is "I listen to a little bit of everything", or "anything that's good".

Thus political pundit Bill O' Riley laments that Jay-Z is "no Otis Redding", apparently a dig at the evolution (or the conservative's de-evolution) of black popular music. A minor video-blogger on Youtube goes on a rant, "what's happened to music today?" - he sets some inflexible criteria for what music should be, then outlines all the music that falls short. It is essential that he rants on popular songs, usually those ripped from the top of the charts. Why?

...because the Billboard Charts are the source of conservative paranoia. Whatever is on top is an indication of the societal climate as a whole, what we value, especially the youth. "The youth" are the second source of conservative paranoia. These two are united, as youth are the most voracious consumers of new music. The youth are also the most sincere and enthusiastic creators of new (popular) music.

The radical's problem is redundancy. A style, when invented, is a convergence of elements that seem to be governed by a common idea, spirit, climate, culture etc. - unified in some way, however tangible or intangible. The purest styles seem to distill a culture to symbol, then are gradually broadened.

Conservatives will always be trampled on in the scramble for the "new", and are valuable in preservation of the past only.

Radicals will always be ahead of the masses and largely living in the domain of the esoteric and imaginary.

Both deny the constitutional spirit of freedom of speech and choice.

"The democracy of the United States creates individual dictatorships" - where each individual manages their own domain of satisfaction and discontent. Instead of tolerance, *individuals* assume the tyrant role, trying to preserve and protect their personally subjective notions of good, and persecuting the violators. Within the boundaries of the law, each person is allowed to do this.

Liberals who claim that all music is equal need criteria to temper their hedonism. Not all art is equal, or holds the same amount of information and meaning, or has the same amount of impact. Not all art that pretends to be great is, but not all art pretends to be great. Small, resigned works, cynical/ironic works, niche works (etc.) are often championed by the 'open-minded' listener. They undercut and subvert the great sincere tradition of the last thousand years of music, sometimes rejecting craftsmanship altogether. The directness of Dylan + guitar and harmonica can indeed seem much more immediate and accessible than Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*. Reduce it further to a single line of speech: if someone walks up to you, looks you in the eye and says "I love you", it probably will be more immediate than Dylan. It undercuts the need for any music at all.

So where does the 'need to elaborate' originate? How did the simple statement evolve into mammoth works of ambition?

The desire to imitate the complexity of the world around us? The need for the dwarfed yet empowered feeling we experience when faced with the awesome? The protestant work ethic that equates effort with devotion? Insecurity to be dwarfed by the creation of another artist? Equating duration, size and scope with permanence? If humans were to vanish, the only human creations that would resist long-term decay are ones that imitate large geographic features found in nature: the great pyramids, for instance. It could be that artists have this unconscious logic deep in their mind - that the larger and more complex a work, the better a chance it has of survival. Or they simply want to give an idea its just due - especially when it's a profound concept.

This is the dichotomy between lengthily elaborated works of scale and simplicity. When the notion of simplicity is introduced as an alternative and allowed to exist along with these ambitions of scale, the former can destroy the latter. Simplicity engenders a 'third-world' sincerity, where a small gesture is given the same gravity as the elaborate: the underdog kills the heavily favored, and the concept of direct prayer wins out over the Baroque Catholic thicket of ritual. Directness can make elaboration look like folly, especially as small and smart becomes more and more politically correct.

Ambition to complexity and importance seen in classical can be unattractive - a masculine, pompous, western idea. Likewise, irreverence, smallness and simplicity can have a weak, retarding effect. Sincerity coupled with ambition are the qualities of most great art before the 20th century, and (as the "age of irony" tends to forget) much of it since.

So when simplicity is no longer associated with an unskilled artist, and when complexity is no longer valued in and of itself, what happens to the basis of comparison? ...and what happens to the artist's motivation toward a complex work? One could reconcile the two and make a complex work that contains moments of blinding simplicity - reductions of itself. Works of all levels do this all the time. The thesis of a research paper is a simplification of the information and thought that is to follow.

Yet there are a percentage of listeners who are impressed merely by physical property: speed, size, loudness, length. When they see a piece performed, these are the first comments they make. Thus an artist who tortures herself with questions of complexity versus simplicity finds that this dichotomy is a non-entity to most people.

Where is the basis of comparison?

What happens when the majority of the audience holds a hostile/destructive/suspicious viewpoint toward 'great' works of art?

Many times I have been in the unenviable situation of defending classical and other forms of "developing" music against rap, and have also argued the reverse. The *best* rap songs have a chance: sophisticated lyrical patterns and density unseen in other musics, poetic insights (think Reflection Eternal's "Respiration (Remix)"), political symbolism (think Public Enemy or Eminem's "White America"), use of literary form to tell vivid stories (Nas's "I Gave You Power"). What about the music? Sampling is autistic collage, taking a moment of music and repeating it for its immediate effects. Rarely does modern sampling achieve true collage as it did in the late 80's to mid 90's. So most producers are only using the language of music peripherally, as background to poetry. There is no development, little dynamic change or shape, little emotional change - most of the burden is on the lyrics to provide interest. Yet the beats make or break a song, and are what most listeners (especially superficial listeners)

like about rap. Most commercial singles sacrifice complexity for blatant catchiness and simplicity, instead relying on the beat. This is the common complaint from hip-hop purists.

When one looks at styles objectively, they sometimes look like a strange species that beat the odds of natural selection - if one only *thought* about combining these elements, without sound, they would seem incompatible or arbitrary. Yet they usually are organized by coherent social values. So a coherent style is a miracle, and out of it develops both potent and mediocre representations. For every potent display of a style, there are hundreds of examples of artists 'riding the wave', faithfully imitating the most superficial aspects. Others still are hedging their bets, 'spicing' their work with small elements of a new style. For the liberal, this represents diversity. For the radical, this represents dilution and falsehood.

The perspective of this environment can zoom to micro (musical evolution and interaction within the style itself) or, more often, zoom out to macro. Most conservatives will be content to criticize the whole style, the style itself. Its features are corrupt, devoid of musical meaning, insufficient, degenerate - and its influence on any other genre is corrupting. In contrast, the liberal connoisseur might only listen to the pioneers of a style, or those who developed the style to its pinnacle. The actual features of the style *are secondary* to whether they're expressed with vitality and strength. Humans are trained to sense strength of idea and emotion, thus archetypes of a style remain in a culture long after its mediocre periphery has evaporated. What style the idea and emotion are represented in may be immaterial (...Or, what idea or emotion is expressed is immaterial as long as it is in their favorite style. Together, these seem to be the two archetypal perspectives)

"Sing, Sing, Sing" seems to represent 'big band'. "Beethoven's 5th, 1st Movement" seems to represent 'symphony'...and rightfully so? Even an expert in these fields must admit the strength of these works, over the more homogenous works that would be placed within the same style. Yet as Charles Rosen points out, Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven were the anomalies in the classical style, yet they are chosen to represent it.

But, are the most vital expressions always the most intelligent? What about subtlety and nuance? Aren't the aforementioned works simply more overt dramatizations of the style? And is overt drama always the best? In the 'long run' it seems to be the most enduring. As a listener, do I need to listen to/understand anything more than the best of each style/genre? Especially today, when simply one representative from each style could amass a huge playlist?

The 5th Symphony's 1st movement has an opening unlike any other symphony. It is an anomaly, a skeletal distillation, pure fact. One could easily argue that it has the most powerful opening of any symphony. Because of its hook-like quality and its strength, it has come to represent symphonic music among the masses - yet it flies in the face of 99% of symphonies. Not just the intro, but its obvious sectional events - its "eventfulness" en masse - is characteristic of only the most potent symphonies (Mozart's 40th, 1st movement, for instance)

Yet as the expert knows, the study of almost any work can make the listener aware of 'events' and 'eventfulness' where there once was none. Details become amplified to huge proportions if listened to and/or studied enough. Events are created through listening. Abstractly speaking, *every change* in a work is an event, every note/pitch, etc.

On Critics:

Even though I may agree with critics, I hate the act of criticizing. Critics will always be behind. The only way to change the course of 'art' itself is with the creation of more art that can affirm, reject or ignore. Even that doesn't destroy the historical significance of whatever you're criticizing. The best review is to experience a work as it was meant to be experienced, then define it objectively as "what this artist has created". Leave it at that - "I see what this artist has done". That is the most neutral review - the fact that it exists. Even a prosaic description of the work's traits is subjective and reductive - and thus has power to weaken the actual piece.

Aside from the ultimate goal of a silent critic, a critic can try to aid others in understanding a work, rather than making value judgments. Or they can question the work. In my opinion, negativity should always be in the form of a question - for instance, "could this work, despite its pretense at order, seem like cacophony?", "is this work *original*?" - still, the critic has already asserted too much if their criteria isn't shared by the creator. If the creator/artist didn't consider *originality* as an objective in making the work, the critic is using irrelevant criteria, and their asymmetric review has a foundation of sand. The most ignorant people use 'asymmetrical' criteria, damning works for what they weren't intended to be - looking for Rachmaninoff melody in hip-hop, Broadway melodies in serialism, politics in love songs, and realism in late Picasso. Conversely, intelligent people either a.) look for an element where the element should be found, or b.) can find a desired element in *anything* at an abstract or metaphorical level (i.e. seeing remnants of the human model within an abstracted face in Picasso). The latter seems prone to folly - one could completely miss the innate points in a work while finding all types of things that *aren't really there* (and then liking the work more for their presence!) The human being will forever own the right to misunderstand.

100 Problems Exploration 1:

Live performances in popular genres become extended ideas of a previous piece, bringing it into singularity through noticeable reinterpretation. These live performances have a metaphoric quality, using the original version as a starting point/common ground. The orchestra experience, in contrast, is extremely predictable. The orchestra can never be anything less or more than the piece calls for. There is no opportunity for a non-preordained moment to occur, no spontaneous gesture, no expression of a current idea. For the audience, the orchestra must restore a feeling of special event, of gravity, of a group ritual of solidarity that lends a feeling of belonging. There is no danger, little risk. The orchestra plays a fine performance and everyone applauds, and goes home – everyone knows the sequence of events. I would love to hear an especially/disturbingly violent rendition of the Rite of Spring simply because the performers needed to express primal emotion in that single moment. Implanted in any symphonic hall is “don’t disturb the decorum, don’t get too loud, too emotional, there must be restraint and good taste”. Even if one did fully commit to a performance, it becomes farce when the spectators applaud – it seems a condescending reward. Every symphony performance has an air of normality, especially with young symphonies – of good students, piano lessons, beaming teachers, what they chose to wear to balance respectability and a bit of sex appeal, a need for approval and fitting in. Should they play a piece with any sentiment other than normalcy or happiness, one immediately becomes aware of the ‘theatrical’ aspect, a second-handed “look, we’re being dramatic now!” kind of showiness, esp. in the concert hall. I suppose this is accepted in any performance, but surprisingly actors seem less fake than musicians.

Could it be a product of over-clean, over-clear, over-perfect environment/interpretation/people? At least the major-city opera, when people often dress in evening gowns and tuxes has an air of real affluent arrogance, rather than the wishy-washy earnestness of young orchestra concerts with 60-year old “business casual” suburbanites. Movie music presents an insulated art form, where the music is wedded to sincerity through the reality of the characters. The music is part of their world, yet they never acknowledge it. Movies also give a glimpse into the ideal concert hall - symphonic performances within movies are always dramatized perfectly, suspenseful or culmination/peak of action.

Recordings are documents of a specific time in history – a singular moment/“take” – that will never be recreated. A moment in time can be put into historical context as a true auditory document of an era. One could even imagine the events in the world taking place during that exact session or recorded performance

It is also important to a performer, the moment of the height of their powers, the height of attention/the “eyes of the world” turn to them. Thus ‘legends’ who perform after their ‘heyday’, especially if only old material, risk being irrelevant. Yet they can be rescued by singularities of live performance, and those who continue to be vital can still make pinnacle-performances. The degradation of an artist can contribute to a singularity as well – see Billie Holiday on Lady In Satin, or a farewell concert days before an artist’s death, where real life cannot help but enter the domain of art.

What is the risk involved in any performance? Is the risk already ‘codified’ by culture, making the gesture seem cliché? Do we already know the significance and ultimate result of the gesture, forecasting the death of its relevance? At one time, the gesture was vital, and that is the ultimate singularity.

Woodstock: I don’t want to see what happened to individuals who once symbolized youth and are now old.. I don’t want commemorative revivals or museums. If you were there, you know what it was like, if you weren’t, you don’t. A documentary that accurately and objectively reflects the spirit can come close. It can be viewed as a peak, and the generation as a whole can be said to have become disillusioned afterwards.

Another singularity is to hear a piece at a certain moment, for instance on headphones when seeing a certain view/phenomenon or at a certain place (sometimes one can know the singularity immediately, sometimes only in retrospect will the significance be understood). Is music in this case extramusical, or background, superficial, or is it essential? Does the context reveal dimensions of the music that hearing alone could not? It may give it exaggerated significance in the mind of a listener, or create a mannerist fascination in the listener: who, because of the surroundings/context in which the music played a powerful role, now associates the music/genre/artist with a nonstandard cultural value (values most in a culture, subculture or anyone outside of an individual would not agree on)

Personal examples:

Mobb Deep: stoic rigor, existentialism, sincerity, “beautiful violence”
(most would think of them as simply profane, uncouth, primitive, perhaps unworthy of analysis)

Symphonic Soul: grandiose and epic, glacial seriousness – akin to a symphony
(many see them as overblown, over-orchestrated, superficial, laughable in their covers of pop tunes in a dramatic way)

Reasonable Doubt: elegance

Disco and late 70’s disco diva ballads: melancholy sultry intimacy (vs. “the dregs and death of soul” as some see it)

This lends the listener a special/idiosyncratic understanding of the piece of music – their understanding is a kind of abstract art in itself, the insistence of a certain value where the majority sees none, or where the majority sees a different kind of value.

One can also experience material in the way the original creator had viewed it, creating a simultaneity with their original intent and unabstracting/re-grounding the piece in real life/reality (vs. the concert hall or home-listening). If you happen to overhear a wartime symphony during an invasion of your county (or a national anthem), the Rite of Spring in a primitive land (or time traveling), a Mahler symphony next to Austrian mountains, 80’s rap while riding a subway in Brooklyn, or Jazz in a dark smoky nightclub, you augment the music with a full experience in the (perceived) spirit of the music. Whether you perceive the right/correct spirit/inspiration/context of the creator is another matter....is it self-deception if Mahler didn’t think of mountains yet we play his music next to a grand view of them? Is it elevating his music by doing so? Is it disrespectful to play music in the ‘wrong’ context? Is a neutral context like the symphonic hall better because it functions like a “blank-slate”?

When listening to music in the ‘real world’ somewhere, there’s no awkward moment where the lights come on, everyone looks around, smiles, and heads for the exits while bantering politely about the music’s most superficial aspects. When by yourself for instance, there’s no need to congratulate the musicians on how good they played or yourself for being there, no need to abruptly “return to real life” – the obvious stays implicit where it belongs, and never hits the air of cliché. Once spoken or consciously alluded to, the second-hand occurs, and people begin playing social roles with predetermined scripts – “the moved audience at a classical concert”, the “cultured enjoying art for self-improvement”. They subconsciously congratulate themselves for the experiences they put themselves in.

A recording of music exists for its own sake, inviting people to listen but not forcing itself into any context. Although it may be completely foolish/old-fashioned or trite music, if one can sense a time-place in the original or definitive recording, or some sincerity, then the music may take on a serious bent – and may be experienced with sincerity. If one can view the expression of the performer as sincere, often the vehicle of that sincerity is moot – we can appreciate that the performer chose that particular genre as a means of expression, and then consider the expression as vital. On the other hand, as a composer I cannot expect the musicians to feel the emotions which inspired a piece, or think the same ideas, feel the same passion when they interpret it. If they have to “try” to feel or think what they wouldn’t naturally, they are already once

removed from the reality of the piece and the entire performance verges on farce, however sincere their intentions. Music without sincerity - results of commercial opportunism, the efforts of the wily clever/talented yet detached, etc. have their own durability because they aren't as emotionally vulnerable to criticism, and stand as particular monuments in a detached culture.

Some interpreters lend an unforeseen gravity to a piece through interpretation, in symphony but especially in improvisational genres or through performing the piece in an especially appropriate moment. If the moment/context *isn't* appropriate to play a piece (aside from the intent to provoke), the result can be embarrassing and uncomfortable – to the artist and the performers.

Examples:

Music without strong rhythm played in a dance setting

Intimate music played in a group setting

Sensitive music played in a masculine setting, masculine music played in sensitive setting

Less impressive music (that is neither intimate nor monolithic) suffers when juxtaposed against either extreme

Conspicuous music/noticeable music played when intended to be background

A piece desired to be perceived as a singularity is played in conjunction with several/many other pieces

All these instances can cause the music to be rejected, a rejection that is unfair considering the hostile context it was thrust into. Applying this to premieres of works by a composer, the composer would be better off to reject an unsuitable performance context than to accept it only to have the piece struggle in an inappropriate context – where people would damn it for *not being* what it wasn't intended *to be*.

The legend of a piece often clouds the real valuation of it. Often it makes a listener consider a piece with much greater effort – revisiting it to discover its legend, when one wonders if - had the legend lent it such gravitas - it would have caught their ear at all, much less retained the ear for sustained effort. The legend imbues the listener with a moral challenge to understand the piece, as since so many have praised it, there must be something wrong with them should they disagree. Should they reject the piece, or cast it aside for another, they feel like they failed a test from God, or missed out on a key experience. Then again, there are intellectual dimensions to a piece that can't be heard at all...

overvalued and undervalued pieces

Can a moment rescue an entire piece? Many times I have been neutral about pieces of music until one momentary inflection or harmony persuades me to like the entire thing. It seems as if the moment then reflects back on the entire monotony beforehand as ingenious preparation, a deliberate nondescriptness perhaps. Or that the moment is strong enough to stand out as a symbol of the entire piece, where over time the listener only remembers the highlight and begins to love the piece through this distorted memory. On the other hand I have heard entire masses of music with no such moment, where the whole seemed to be cohesive but nothing stood out. In rap, the producer often samples a spectacular 12-second loop out of an otherwise weak song, and the sampled song gains cult status through its 'featuring' the sample.

Power of an individual rescuing a performance – the individual triumphs over mundane surroundings through defiance as an act of defiance, affirming power as an individual, and/or affirming/*insisting* on the moment as singular, overpowering whatever positive/negative or likely lukewarm traits the audience may have.