Cog316 Book Question Set 1 – Emotion and Meaning in Music

The questions in this set provide an opportunity for you to get acquainted with some of the ideas articulated by Leonard B. Meyer on aspects of emotion and meaning in music.

1. Characterize the “absolutist” view of musical meaning.

2. Characterize the “referentialist” view of musical meaning.

3. Which camp do you lean towards? (No fence sitting!) Pick one – absolutist or referentialist – and defend your leaning in just a sentence or two.

4. According to Meyer, absolute meanings and referential meanings can and do exist in one and the same piece of music. (True/False)

5. Which sort of meaning was Leonard Bernstein questioning in the “conversation” that we examined last week, absolute or referential? Explain you answer.

6. Characterize the “formalist” view of musical meaning.

7. Characterize the “expressionist” view of musical meaning.

8. Stravinsky was a notorious formalist. (True/False)

9. According to Meyer, Stravinsky’s formalist (anti-expressionist) stance was misguided because he failed to appreciate that emotion might arise from within the music itself (that is, because he found relationalist view abhorant and he erroneously equated expressionism with relationalism. (True/False)

10. Which type of fellow do you take Bernstein’s LP to be, a formalist or an expressionist?

11. Meyer’s work in “Emotion and Meaning in Music” is concerned mainly with:

   (a) those aspects of meaning which result from the understanding of and response to relationships inherent in the musical progress of a work
   (b) relationships between the musical organization of a work and the extramusical world of concepts, actions, characters, and situations.

12. Meyer’s work is best characterized as

   (a) absolute formalism
   (b) absolute expressionism
   (c) referential formalism
   (d) referential expressionism

13. The (absolute) formalists and the (absolute) expressionists are both faced with the problem of explaining the manner in which a abstract, nonreferential succession of tones becomes meaningful. Consequently, Meyer believes that these two camps should consider themselves to be allies rather than opponents. (True/False)
14. According to Meyer, the psychology of music has, since its beginnings, been plagued by three errors: hedonism, atomism, and universalism.

(a) How does Meyer define hedonism?
(b) How does Meyer define atomism?
(c) How does Meyer define universalism?

15. In 50 words or less, answer the question “What is the subjective evidence for an emotional response to music?”

16. Briefly, indicate one “difficulty” that Meyer mentions regarding the subjective evidence for an emotional response to music.

17. In 50 words or less, answer the question “What is the behavioral evidence for an emotional response to music?”

18. Briefly, indicate one “difficulty” that Meyer mentions regarding the behavioral evidence for an emotional response to music.

19. In 50 words or less, answer the question “What is the physiological evidence for an emotional response to music?”

20. Briefly, indicate one “difficulty” that Meyer mentions regarding the physiological evidence for an emotional response to music.

21. What is the “central thesis” of the psychological theory of emotions?

22. Briefly, articulate the difference in perspective between Dewey’s take on emotion and MacCurdy’s take on emotion.

23. What assumption does Meyer articulate regarding how the theory of emotions relates to musical experience.

24. Meyer suggests that musical experience differs from nonmusical experience in three important ways. What are they?

25. What does Meyer mean by the word “tendency” with respect to music?

26. What does Meyer mean by the word “expectation” with respect to music?

27. Say something interesting about the relationship between the tendency/expectation phenomena and musical experience.

28. Identify one thing that you find to be particularly interesting in the section beginning on page 26 on Conscious and Unconscious Expectations.

29. For this question, consider the “rest of the chapter”, from page 29 to the end. Moreover, consider a “sensible salient passage” to be a contiguous group of from 1 to 3 sentences which you find to be particularly informative and attention grabbing. Read the pages and select what you to be the five most compelling sensible salient passages. Then, write them down!

30. In three sentences, describe your reaction to this chapter of your book.