

Linus and Lucy: Music Evokes Emotions and Memories

Music has the ability to evoke strong emotions and memories. This episode of Switched on Pop is narrated by Charlie Harding, a songwriter, and Nate Sloan, a musicologist. They explore the theme of nostalgia, created through the presentation of both joyful and sober tones in the song 'Linus and Lucy' from the television program A Charlie Brown Christmas. This most recognizable song from the album elicits bittersweet feelings which create a sense of nostalgia through an unexpected use of jazz music. This podcast and discussion particularly interested me because I play piano and have played this piece. Although it is exciting to play, the tempos and syncopation are quite difficult to master. In addition, I love listening to jazz and I absolutely love Christmas time with all the music that surrounds it. I am also curious about the methods composers use to create the contrasting feelings of joy mixed with sadness which evoke vivid memories of the past. Although all music expresses feelings, this piece stands out as one which floods us with emotions and remembrances. Jazz music has the freedom to combined disparate musical ideas in unique ways to generate complex and mixed nostalgic emotions in the listener.

Most of us have clear memories of watching A Charlie Brown Christmas on television with our families and immediately recognize the song 'Linus and Lucy' after hearing only a few notes. In the podcast, Harding and Sloan offer explanations for our attachment to this music and analyze the compositional techniques employed by Vince Guaraldi. They explore and celebrate this interesting and historic work from a macro, micro and nano level of analysis. From a macro or big picture level, they point out that this piece accurately invokes or creates the dual and contrasting feelings of somberness and reflectiveness juxtaposed with joyful celebratory experiences. These feelings are familiar to all of us

as we celebrate Christmas. We can hear the contrast between the somewhat somber and reflective 'A' section where the bass line plods slowly back and forth, in a slower thoughtful ponderous way and the joyous and celebratory 'B' section where the music is louder, more excited, brassy and happy. On a micro or closer level, we hear within the 'A' section the left hand exhibiting reflectiveness and the right hand showing joy. This duality is created by the clever combination of both major and suggested minor scale themes. Chords are played in triads; the root, the third and the fifth, where the third defines whether the chord is major or minor. In the Western World, major scales are associated with joy and minor scales are associated with sadness. In this part of the piece, Guaraldi skips the third note of the chord in the left hand entirely, resulting in modal uncertainty and leaving the listener wondering what mood is being conveyed. This bass theme is then repeated with the root going up a minor third, but again not including the third note of the chord. This leads to a sense of open-endedness and uncertainty, while the contrasting right hand plays a pleasant and uplifting major scale theme. At the nano or very up close level, the bass in the 'A' section opens on the down beat, but in the next measure comes in an eighth note before the down beat in the right hand. This shift to a syncopated rhythm in the left hand gives the music a sense of energy and anticipates the transition to the 'B' section. In 'Linus and Lucy', Vince Guaraldi chronicles jazz music styles of the 1950s and 1960s. The 'A' section exemplifies "precision jazz" popularized by Dave Brubeck, the 'B' section reflects the gospel roots of jazz, the 'C' section exhibits a Bossa Nova groove, and the 'D' section typifies the hard bop jazz of Miles Davis. This potpourri of styles also elicits nostalgia for past decades.

Harding and Sloan discuss the relevance of this unique jazz Christmas piece and its ability to evoke strong memories of an idealized childhood, which are then considered through an adult lens, more realistic and serious. The advent of Christmas time, in and of itself, often evokes a nostalgia for the simpler days of childhood which tend to be remembered with fondness. At holiday time, we come together with family and friends we may not have seen for a while, who themselves remind us of

previous important experiences we have shared with them. The giving of gifts and expressions of love and good tidings solidifies these relationships. We can feel happy that these people are still in our lives, but then we also remember those who have died and are no longer here to share in the holidays with us. The specific music compositional techniques used in 'Linus and Lucy' evoke these contrasting feelings and create a sense of nostalgia. The hosts explain with great clarity the genius of Vince Guaraldi's composition in their analysis.

Music has the capacity to stimulate emotions, but the ability of jazz to create a nostalgic feeling makes it unique. Many varieties of music provide strong easily identifiable emotions in a predictable way. Even if there are happy and sad elements in any given piece of classical or rock music, they are usually very predictable and separated out over time in the piece. In jazz music, however, the unpredictable and often simultaneous music lines provide a mixed listening experience that can create feelings of joy and happiness right along with an edge of sadness or sobriety. In her article on nostalgia and music, Batcho differentiates between reminiscence and nostalgia (Batcho). She states that nostalgia is bittersweet; a mix of "sadness and wistful joy". She states that nostalgia promotes psychological well-being and a sense of connectedness by "countering alienation and strengthening community." Clearly these feelings will be activated at Christmas time when we are among friends and family.

By helping us to remember more emotionally charged experiences in our lives, jazz music, particularly jazz Christmas music, offers us an opportunity to accept the disappointments across a lifetime, but still hang on to the positive feelings about our childhood hopes and dreams. Simple melody lines tend to create simple or direct emotional experiences in the listener. However, more complicated melodies and chord progressions have the capacity to create more complicated, nuanced feelings in the listener, often both happy and sorrowful. Noy and Noy-Sharav discuss the differences in the kinds of emotion stimulated by the simple melody lines of popular music as opposed to the complexity in feeling created by more refined or higher forms of music such as jazz or classical music (Noy). "Almost all of the

great composers in the last 300 years took advantage of that ability of music to transmit several melodic lines at the same time, using each line for conveying a different emotion. By that they succeeded in ascending to a higher level of dramatic expression, not only to convey or arouse one emotion at a time, but representing also the conflicts between disparate and sometimes opposing emotions.”

However, classical music is very tightly organized and controlled in its playing. Jazz music, on the other hand, lends itself to more improvisation, ambiguity and a sense of unpredictability all of which can tap into deep and very complex emotions. Jazz, unlike other genres, incorporates originality, spontaneity and improvisation. The structural diversity of jazz has been found scientifically to convey and create a wide range of emotions. Jazz is uniquely American. It can be extremely complex, like classical music, but different contrasting elements can occur one after another or simultaneously, which is different than the structured thematic movements in classical music which unfold in a particular sequence as the piece is played. In describing the uniqueness of improvisation in jazz music, McPherson et al. state “The finding that musicians often combine disparate features together in order to convey emotion during improvisation suggests that structural diversity may be an essential feature of the ability of music to express a wide range of emotion (McPherson).” Neuroscience researchers studying jazz musicians have shown an ability to shut down the more self-critical parts of the brain while playing, which allows a unique expressiveness (Steve).

‘My Funny Valentine’ by Rogers and Hart is another example of the capacity for jazz to create nostalgic feelings of joy and somberness through the use of major and minor chords in relation to one another. This song was written for the Broadway musical *Babes in Arms* in 1937, but was not popularized in the jazz genre until the early 1950s. It is neither truly sad nor excessively upbeat, but instead portrays a vague hopefulness and optimism about love. This is achieved by modulating key relationships every four measures between C minor and A flat major. In addition, it creates more emotional ambiguity with a melody using the A flat Lydian scale and unique harmonic sequences. There

is a deep sense of tenderness created by the long held notes as the piece progresses. This song has become an iconic jazz standard due to the depth of the composition, which has allowed multitudes of jazz musicians to interpret it in their own personal way (“Café Songbook”).

Yet another song that demonstrates nostalgic bittersweet emotions is the jazz standard ‘All the Things You Are’ composed by Jerome Kern for the musical *Very Warm for May* in 1939. This effect is again achieved through modulations between minor and major chords. The first five chords used in the melody are all in the key of F Minor and last three measures are in the key of C Major. The theme is then repeated, transposed down by a perfect fourth interval, which creates a sense of mystery or uncertainty. These melodic elements symbolize the yearning for love as the melody builds. The chorus includes at least one chord built on every note of the Western 12-tone scale. Its strong melody and challenging chord structure has attracted many jazz artists to interpret this song with their own imagination (BRADPOTTERMUSIC).

In conclusion, Jazz music has the ability to convey a variety of emotions, including joy mixed with sadness. This can be achieved through the use of major and minor scales, contrasting lines of melody and differing rhythms. The freedom of jazz allows unique opportunities that are not available in other genres. The expression of bittersweet emotions in music readily elicits feelings that evoke our memories of the past which have profound importance to us as individuals. In my subsequent paper, ‘My Funny Valentine’ will be further explored. I have selected this piece because I have fond memories associated with hearing this song and have enjoyed expressing my feelings while playing the melody on the saxophone.

Works Cited

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