Shelby Proft

MONT- 107 N

February 25, 2010

Artists, Choices, and Chance

 Music has the ability to be a creative outlet, a career, or just a hobby for people across the world. The personal choices put into a composed piece or performance are completely up to the person creating the music at hand, whether writing or playing. As seen at the Natural World Cluster event on Thursday, February 18th, there are many different ways to interpret, hear, or play a piece of music. Because of the evolution of so many musical instruments, the opportunity for an original piece of music to be played is endless. There is always a possibility for chance and randomness to play a part whenever music is dealt with, whether it be writing music, performing, or listening to a performance. Throughout this paper, I will explore the ability of chance, randomness, and choice to effect music through instrumental selections and the choices of performers.

 In terms of the performance on Thursday, February 18th, the variety of instruments provided from the Baroque era, compared to our modern instruments today, was of such musical variety. My personal favorite was the difference between the keyboard instruments, specifically the grand piano of our modern day music, and the harpsichord of the Baroque era music. The difference of how both instruments work was clearly present in the sound heard by the audience and creates such a different type of interpretation to a listener. With the Baroque era composed music performed at the concert, I preferred the plucking sound coming from the harpsichord, compared to the deep, solid sound coming from the grand piano. Although at this concert I favored the harpsichord, preferably with other classical music, I enjoy the sound provided by the modern day grand piano. The grand piano, compared to the harpsichord, is a much deeper, rich sound. Also, there is such a variety with the piano, such as how loud you tap the keys, to produce a “piano” for “forte” sound, and the length of the note held, by the foot pedals underneath the instrument. The difference between two similar keyboard instruments shows us how much variety and chance of randomness is capable of presenting itself in the musical world. Although the two instruments may look extremely similar, they produce such a different sound and intonation, that when playing the same piece of music, on each different instrument, it is such a random act to hear each different piece, each time it is performed.

 In a modern day perspective, the method of “auto-tuning” is not necessarily an instrument, but a way in which an artist can alter his or her performance. The largely know rap artist T-Pain is known for auto-tuning his voice in his recorded music. This is a big difference in the way rap and hip hop music originated in the 1970’s and has developed to be technologically altered. The choice of technological advances in music is a choice that an artist makes, which continues to advance the ability of authenticity and originality to take place in a piece of music. If you were to hear T-Pain rap without any of his computer generated sounds, it would be a completely different piece of music. Although the auto-tuning ability is not exactly in the same terms as a tangible instrument, voice, in my opinion is one of the most important musical “instruments” available to the musical world. Chance and randomness are a huge factor in the computer technology being used, each sound generated having a different affect on each note going through the computer system. Choice is also a large factor in the sound of the music generated by this evolution of voice performance. If T-Pain, for some reason, decided to stop auto-tuning his musical work, and let his unaltered, un-revolutionized voice be heard to his audiences, it would be a completely different performance. So, although voice isn’t the same kind of instrument as a piano, it is possible for musical evolution to take part in creating a new way to personalized a piece of music and make it unique to all others.

 When it comes to the Baroque style music heard at the Montserrat event, I think the composers would have preferred that their music was performed with the original intentions of the Baroque musical instruments. Since the music was written intentionally for the sound created by the specific instruments, the musicality should be sustained. Overall, I think there are two possible ways a composer can react to the performance or evolution of instruments in his or her music. First, I think there is the ability for composers to appreciate the evolution of instruments and how it can be a different interpretation of music. As new instruments come into the music realm, artists should appreciate the advancement of their profession. But, on the other hand, I think composers have the right to believe that the way they wrote their piece of music is the exact way it should be performed. Instrumentation should be delegated in the piece of music composed, and this should be followed through with by all performers, but interpretation of the music by a conductor or a musician should be up to his or her creative ability in making a piece of music original.

 I think composers should have everything to say about how their piece of music is performed, by delegating which instruments are used, but when it comes down to how exactly the music is performed, with accents, volume, ect. it is left up to the interpretation of the conductor and the musicians. There is no way a piece of music can be performed exactly to the composers liking unless they are conducting and playing each instrument, which is virtually impossible. Therefore, it is impossible for a piece of music to be completely authentic to the intentions of a composer. Musical interpretation is present in every piece of music performed. Having played the flute for nine years, I have experienced playing solos, where I can choose how loud and quiet I play, how fast the tempo is, and how to interpret the accents on each note, making the piece of music my own, through my own interpretations. And, while playing under a conductor, in a band of over fifty musicians, the choice of tempo is left up to the conductor, and the musicality blend of all the instruments is a mix of each musician, making the piece different every time it is played. Personal choices definitely reflect upon a musical performance as a whole, and create the factor of randomness depicting what an audience hears. The chance that one person, or multiple people, either make a mistake, or interpret the written music differently than the previous time it was played opens the field for an original sound to be heard every time the music is played.

 In all reality, music is a completely random art. Every note played is unique, and each tone heard is different to each individual. A piece can only be authentic when played by the composer himself, and each time it is played after the first, the piece is original and unique to all others. This ability to continually be unique and original, is due to the act of randomness and choice made during the actual performance of a piece of music. Without randomness, a piece of music’s authenticity would be continual, and any interpretive ability would be lost, leading to a more boring, unoriginal world of music.