



## MUSIC AND LANDSCAPE APPRECIATION: A COMPARISON OF THE EXPERIENCE

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Through the ages, an appreciation of landscape has stimulated composers to write music which stirs the listener's imagination. Numerous pieces have endured as careful and insightful descriptions of the physical and cultural landscape. On the one hand, then, musical literature has been enriched by composers' understanding of the beauty of forms of the land.

Less obvious, however, is the notion that the structural forms and musical ideas which composers have developed and used in their compositions to heighten the enjoyment of listening can provide a framework for geographers and their students to understand and enjoy the form of the landscape. Both issues are the subject of this essay.

### **Landscape Experience as a Linear Experience**

#### **Time Art and Space Art**

Works of art are sometimes classified into time arts (music, literature) and space arts (paintings, sculpture, architecture). Space art can essentially be comprehended all at

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once. A painting, for example, can be viewed for a second or two, and its overall composition and subject matter are remembered. Architecture and sculpture also reveal much of their total message in an instant. Such art is not linear, in the temporal sense. Of course the full enjoyment of these pieces requires the viewer to attend to details of the work through time, moving the eye from the details then back again to the whole. The two-second view reveals a basic message of the work but not its full richness.

Time art is linear; its comprehension is revealed through time. In music and literature, for example, a two-second exposure tells virtually nothing about the whole. With time art, one is expected to remember elements which were revealed early in the piece so as to compare them with what transpires later. Repetition of, or allusion to earlier elements helps insure that the listener will remember earlier material and thus adds enjoyment to the artistic experience.

Landscape is not an art form; it is not intentionally created to provide beauty for human enjoyment. Nonetheless, perception of landscape certainly can be a source of aesthetic enjoyment. Like perception of art, perception of landscape can be spatial or temporal. As a spatial experience, landscape can be viewed in the same way as a landscape painting, that is, from a single vantage point where the viewer sees immediately the nature of the whole, but may then attend to the specifics by focusing upon details in the view. The viewer alternately focuses on the details and then on the gestalt of the landscape. This notion of landscape, i.e., that of a vista viewed from a single point, is perhaps the most common use of the term.

More subtle, and for geographers more difficult to explain, is the notion of landscape as a flow of experiences through time and space. An obvious example would be an automobile trip along a road with the observer attending

alternately to the view in front, then looking right and left to ever-changing details. This is the experience of landscape which is closest to the musical experience. To gather full meaning from the landscape experience, one must remember what has passed by earlier in order to relate those items to whatever is in the present view.

### **Smetana's "Moldau"**

To illustrate the concept of landscape and music as temporal flow, let me use the example of "The Moldau," by Bedrich Smetana. The 1874 symphonic poem is conceptualized as a journey down the river Moldau (Vltava) from its beginnings to the city of Prague. The piece begins as two simple flute melodies which signify springs emerging from the mountain slopes of Bohemia. Pizzicato notes of plucked violin strings are drops of dew or rain feeding the springs.

Soon the full strings of the orchestra join these melodies to present the first statement of the Moldau theme, haunting, tenuous, played in the minor key. After the initial statement of this theme, the full orchestra provides the musical development. New images are introduced: a peasant wedding, horses and riders in a hunt, tranquil meadows and lowlands, and for excitement, a dramatic plunge through white-water rapids. Ultimately the traveler emerges at Prague, its ancient citadel instilling a sense of grandeur, pride, and nationalism. The music is dramatic, played in the major key, bold, noble, fulfilling. The trip was successful.

### **The Form of the Symphony and the Form of the Landscape**

Most introductory music appreciation classes and associated texts examine the form of the classical symphony, well exemplified in Mozart and Haydn, modified somewhat by Beethoven and later 19th Century composers, then more or

less abandoned in this century. The forms of the classical symphony can be studied for the lessons they might provide the landscape observer.

Typically the symphony had four movements with the following forms and tempos: a sonata allegro first movement, a slow second movement (andante or adagio), a dance-like third movement (minuet and trio or scherzo), and a finale in a rondo or theme-and-variation form. These movements now will be described as they relate to landscape analogies.

### **Sonata Allegro**

The first movement of the symphony is almost always a sonata allegro. Allegro is a tempo designation meaning bouncy, fast but not excessively so. In the landscape, one can imagine here that a traveler is moving down a highway, smartly but not at a frantic pace. Objects in the landscape move past steadily. There is rich variety in what is passing by.

The term sonata here refers to a type of form wherein distinct themes are played one against the another, contrasting in tonality and feeling. Their interaction provides the basis of the tension within the movement. Usually two themes are developed, sometimes more. First comes an introduction and initial exposition of the themes. After this exposition there is development, wherein the themes are altered somehow, played softly or loudly, played in the high or low octaves, or otherwise modified from the original statement, thus imparting an interesting and agreeable sense of complexity. The themes interact: now one is played, now the other; one appears to dominate only to be superseded by the second. Finally comes recapitulation. The conflict is resolved as the dominant theme emerges most strongly, played dramatically in its original form.

A comparison of this form can be made with the comprehension of visual "themes" in the landscape. We may imagine driving down a road, noticing that among the multitude of objects which catch our eye, two classes of phenomena emerge in our consciousness. For example, we may attend alternately to objects of the physical landscape and those of the cultural landscape, beginning with a domination of physical-environment items. As we proceed in our journey, we see one, then the other set of landscape phenomena interacting visually. In places the physical dominate, elsewhere culture does. Here the rocks and soil command the view, only to become shrouded with a mantel of buildings and fields, but later still the buildings give way to rock outcroppings. Physical and cultural continue to intermingle until finally we round a bend and see only a physical landscape.

### **Andante or Adagio**

The second movement is moderate in tempo (andante) or slow (adagio). Its feeling is contemplative, reflective. Changes in the musical ideas are presented but they are subtle and gradual. They provide a break from the very involved, up-tempo first movement and the dance-like third movement, and often they contain the composer's most profound thoughts. For example, the second movement of Beethoven's 3rd Symphony, "Eroica", is intended to evoke images of a funeral march associated with Napoleon's campaigns.

The second movement of a symphony is analogous to driving in a landscape which lacks great variation. The unappreciative or uninitiated might describe such a locale as monotonous. The desert landscape, for example may be viewed thus. The general form of the desert landscape may be one of simplicity and homogeneity: light-colored earth, a sprinkling of gray shrubs, virtually flat relief.

But like a symphony's second movement, the desert landscapes are far from boring to those who know their secrets. The changes, though subtle and gradual, are profound. The light-colored earth, upon close scrutiny even from the moving car, reveals intricate changes from white to brown to gray to nearly black. The shrubs show linear or areal patterns, greater or lesser densities, taller or smaller heights. The topography likewise shows highs and lows, flats and arroyos, outcroppings and bare soil.

### **Minuet and Trio**

The minuet and trio (scherzo in the 19th Century) is a balanced movement with a dance rhythm. Essentially the first third of the movement (minuet) has an AA-BB form (theme "A" played twice, followed by theme "B" played twice). The middle part (trio) is a bridge between the two minuets with two new melodies presented. The final third is more or less a repeat of the first, though somewhat shorter. The movement is intended to be light and happy, balanced both literally and symbolically. It provides a pleasant break from the somewhat ponderous second movement and the profound finale.

A simple landscape comparison to this movement might be the drive through a small town which lies in the midst of agricultural land. One enters the town to encounter residential land (the first third of the experience). There are variations from block to block, but basically the district is homogeneous. Then the driver encounters the central business district, a distinct change from the residential land, a new landscape experience. After transecting the CBD, the driver again reaches the residential district on the far side of town, which is virtually identical to the district first encountered. Finally, the driver leaves the town altogether.

### Rondo and Theme-and-Variation

The last movement of the classical symphony may be sonata allegro again, but commonly rondo or theme-and-variation forms were employed. In a rondo, which literally means "round," a theme is played, call it theme "A." This is followed by a second theme, "B." Then there is a return to theme "A." Then a new theme "C" is introduced. The music again returns to "A," to be followed by a new theme "D," and so forth. The dominant theme ("A") provides a returning point, as if we are home, then we go out, come home again, then go out somewhere else, return home, and so forth. "The Moldau" is a rondo, with the basic Moldau theme as the "A" theme and other images providing "B," "C," and so forth.

In the landscape, we may imagine driving in California's Sacramento Valley where there is a juxtaposition of orchard and field crops. The orchard crops — olives, for example — will be evident for a few moments of the drive, then they end, and sugar beats appear. After the fields of sugar beats, olives again dominate the landscape, then bright yellow safflower sparkles on the land. Olives again dominate, followed by deep-green hay crops, and so forth. The olives, theme "A," provide a visual constant against which the other crops can be compared.

The theme-and-variation form is well revealed by the name. A musical idea is presented in its elemental form. The theme is then reproduced, but changed somehow, then changed again, and yet again. The alteration may be in the instruments used to play the theme, the register (high or low), or perhaps the tempo. Or the actual melody may be disguised, as other melodies become incorporated into the basic one. Occasionally the music returns to the original statement, so that like the rondo, we have a place to return to.

The second movement of Haydn's Symphony No. 94, the "Surprise" Symphony, is a famous example of theme-and-variation. The simple theme is played first with quick, graceful notes, then repeated with a bold and dramatic addition (the "surprise"). In all, four variations make up the movement.

In terms of landscape, imagine a corn landscape typical of Iowa. The basic theme might be stated thus: fields of corn, soy beans, and fallow. In the background a farmstead: silos, barns, ornamental trees and the farmhouse. Mile after mile the landscape does not change in its general appearance, but close inspection reveals that there are variations which appear in each farm. The corn/bean/fallow ratio varies from farm to farm. The farm houses may be two-story or one-story. Silos may appear in sets of two, singly, or missing totally, and so forth.

### **Program Music and Environmental Description; The Continuum of Precision**

The form of music may provide a framework to experience and enjoy landscape. By attending to the form of the land, just as by paying attention to the form of music, one is able to heighten one's enjoyment.

We might also gain insight into the role of environment and music by investigating how environmental images are communicated musically. Environment is presented in various forms of program music. Program music is music that is inspired by or that suggests something other than a purely musical idea. The inspiration for the program may be a great battle (e.g., Tchaikovsky's "1812 Overture"), a literary piece (Mendelssohn's "A Midsummer Night's Dream") or a landscape. Program music is contrasted with absolute

music, in which the music is independent of the objective suggestion of title, text, or program, and dependent on structure and musical ideas for its power and comprehension.

The distinction between program and absolute music sometimes is not as crisp as these definitions suggest. Much music with apparently very explicit programs will examine the program subject rather briefly, then will become involved in musical development which no longer has the program nuances clearly explicated. The intent of the composer is not to describe a program but to create beautiful music.

Notwithstanding such intricacies, it is to program music based on landscape description that we turn our attention. It is my position here that one can identify a continuum of precision in landscape program music which would identify the explicitness of the description of landscape in the music.

### **Actual Sounds**

At the most explicit extreme, one can imagine musical scores in which the actual sounds of landscape phenomena are presented to the audience. For example, in Verdi's "Anvil Chorus," an actual blacksmith's anvil is struck rhythmically. The sound is unique, exact. It conjures images of a smith pounding the anvil in his shop.

A grandiose use of actual noise-makers is the "1812 Overture," properly presented. The program of this piece is Napoleon's defeat at Moscow, and the score calls for actual cannon to be fired at the end of the piece. When played indoors, drums suffice, but correctly the piece is to be played out of doors with actual cannon blasted on cue.

In the modern repertoire, composers have the advantage of using electronic recordings in the score, actual recordings of environmental sounds. With modern sound reproduc-

tion, the sound of waterfalls, superhighways, battles and birds can all be quite explicit.

### **In the Style of**

Musical themes and melodies may relate directly to some recognizable national or ethnic group — gypsies, Spaniards, or Irish, for example. When these melodies are incorporated into larger pieces, they provide “accents,” or suggestive references to the group alluded to. For example, in “The Nutcracker Suite,” we are asked to imagine vignettes from far parts of the globe: Spain, Arabia, China. Characteristic stylistic elements which can be identified with these places are woven into the more general piece. In “The Moldau,” the river journey passes a village where a peasant wedding is taking place; we know this because we hear the dance music which is taken from Czech folk music. Likewise, Beethoven borrowed freely from German dances, and Tchaikovsky’s “1812 Overture” has unmistakable snippets from “La Marseillaise,” suggestive of the French soldiers. Music “in the style of” is less precise than the actual sounds and requires that the listener be familiar with the reference. Listeners to the “1812 Overture” who are not familiar with the French National Anthem will miss the nationalistic reference.

### **Onomatopoeia**

In language onomatopoeia identifies a word whose sound suggests its meaning, such as buzz and hiss. In music, onomatopoeia is the use of an instrument to represent an actual environmental sound. The flute, for example, is commonly played to sound like a bird, as in Beethoven’s 6th Symphony, “Pastoral.” In Prokofiev’s “Peter and the Wolf,” a number of “characters” are represented by instruments, flute for the bird, oboe for the duck, horns for the

wolf, and so forth. In Gershwin's "American in Paris," trumpets make taxi-horn sounds, conveying a feeling of a Paris where taxis hooted constantly.

Some of these sounds may be rather explicit — a taxi horn is, after all, a sort of trumpet — but most are really rather abstract. Whereas one may say that a flute can sound something like a bird, it is hard to believe that an oboe sounds much like a duck, and harder yet to hear a wolf in a set of horns.

### **Capture the Feeling of**

Less precise yet is music which is intended to capture the feeling of some environmental experience. For example, Debussy's "Clair de Lune" (Moonlight) is intended to impart the feeling of tranquility and introverted reflection which one may experience on a bright moonlit night. "The Grand Canyon Suite," by Ferde Grofé, presents movements in which a desert thunderstorm is described, as are sunrise and sunset over the Grand Canyon, and a mule trip, with the hee-haw and clip-clop of the mules introduced onomatopoeically.

### **Absolute Music**

Finally, the other end of the precision continuum is reached with absolute music. The music is not intended to convey any environmental image, or program of any kind. If the listener should entertain thoughts of landscape, such notions do not originate from the music itself.

Music which is intended to evoke a landscape image may be successful or not depending on how environmentally-precise the sounds are. Overall, we must admit that music is not an efficient means to transmit environmental ideas. Music appreciation professors frequently play selections and explain the program. The students will readily agree that in "Peter and the Wolf," yes, the flute reminded

them of a bird and the oboe indeed became a convincing duck. However, if the experiment is reversed the music fails to communicate these explicit images. That is, if program music is played to novice students who are asked to provide the program, it is most unlikely that they will deduce the content of the program. For example, most who listen to vivid pieces such as "The Moldau" or "1812 Overture" will not once think of a river or a battle. Only the most explicit musical onomatopoeias or stylistic references will evoke the proper environmental images.

Environmental program music certainly does not fail if the subject matter is unknown to the listener. It then can be appreciated as one does absolute music, for structure and musical ideas alone. However, knowing the environmental subject of the program does heighten the total experience. Moreover, first-hand experience of the environmental stimulus heightens even further the pleasure of the music. To properly enjoy "The Moldau's" ride through the rapids, one should experience white-water rafting personally, feel the swirl of the twisting boat, recoil from water splashed in the face, sense the exhilaration and fear of negotiating a boat through waves and rocks. To appreciate Grofé's Grand Canyon sunrise, one should see it for one's self: first the dark calm of the desert air in the pre-dawn cold, then dim light and the first orange rays lighting the sky. Ever brighter these become, ever more vivid, until finally the blinding disk of the sun explodes on the horizon above the canyon wall.

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The enjoyment of music and the enjoyment of landscape, therefore, are in many ways similar. They both can be appreciated as time art, linear in nature. The musical forms of the classical symphony may be universal and quite appli-

cable to landscape appreciation. Universal, that is, in the sense that the formal arrangement of elements may be the same in music as in other art forms. For example, theme and variation of elements is commonly employed in painting and in literature, and in other art forms as well. The careful balance of the sections of the minuet and trio of a symphony has its counterpart in the architectural balance of the classical temple. Logically, therefore, we can suppose that persons with artistic training and disposition are likely to seek to discover artistic arrangements in landscape elements, and thereby detect beauty in the environment.

On the other hand, landscape appreciation has provided the stimulus for the creation of musical compositions which have survived well. Smetana, Grofé, and hundreds of other composers experienced the beauty of landscape and preserved that beauty in their music. It would be well for geographers to seek out and convey to others the similarities in environmental structures and those of allied disciplines, such as music. The enjoyment of both music and landscape may be enhanced substantially.

Landscape, as discussed above, is not art per se, any more than an interesting piece of driftwood can be labeled a work of art. Notwithstanding, individuals with training in art appreciation retain the ability to recognize order in formal elements in the objects encountered in everyday living, such as landscapes. Their ability to apply principles of art appreciation to natural elements equips them to perceive a richness of beauty which might otherwise go unnoticed.



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