CHARLES ROSEN, *MUSIC AND SENTIMENT* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2010), ISBN 978-0-300-12640-2, x + 146pp, €20.

Charles Rosen is justly celebrated as a seminal writer on music. His best-known book, *The Classical Style* (1971) remains for me one of the most exciting and influential books on music with its numerous insights on form and structure, as well as the breadth of field it addresses, whether considering Haydn's early string quartets or late piano trios, Mozart's operas or his string quintets, or Beethoven's piano music. In comparison with *The Classical Style* and its two weighty successors, *Sonata Forms* (1980) and *The Romantic Generation* (1996), his latest book, *Music and Sentiment*, is relatively short, reflecting its origin as the 2002 William T. Patten Lectures at the University of Indiana at Bloomington. This brevity is not unproblematic and I wish that he had allowed himself more space to discuss some of the various topics. At times, there is, paradoxically, a sense of both the freedom (read: lack of structure) and pressure (urgency) of a conversation, which makes apposite but rather isolated references to support an overall point. At the end of the opening chapter, 'Fixing the meaning of complex signs' (at thirty-two pages the longest chapter of the book's seven), issues such as 'a confusion between music and painting' (31), 'the ascription of affective meaning to certain keys or tonalities' (34), and the relationship of the same to 'questions of the tuning of keyboard instruments' of the eighteenth century (35) are breezed through at a pace which can be unsatisfying given that his dismissals of these topics are at once effective and rather skimpy. There are times when I feel that concepts of focus described in the book are also describers *of* the book. Here are a few: 'One of the most salient characteristics of Beethoven's last style is its economy' (86, Chapter Four's laconic final sentence); 'A brief look at one short piece will show us what could be accomplished and its limits' (42, in Chapter Two, 'Pre-classical sentiment', where he presents just one short example in a chapter about the Unity of Sentiment and the avoidance of monotony within Bach's style). Indeed, the opening of the Preface appears to me to link his convictions about the *simplicity* of understanding music and his aims in writing a not-too-complicated book about the same:

> This book was written from the conviction that understanding music does not come from memorizing an esoteric code. Many aspects of music, of course, benefit from a long study, but grasping its emotional or dramatic meaning is either immediate or requires only becoming familiar with it. Understanding music in the most basic sense simply means enjoying it when you hear it … However, specialized study can bring rewards by allowing us to comprehend why we take pleasure in hearing what we appreciate best, and can enlighten us on the way music acts upon us to provide delight. (ix)

Rosen takes great pains in his first chapter, 'Fixing the meaning of complex signs', to criticize the many attempts that have been made through the history of music-analytical literature to tie particular affects to particular motifs or thematic shapes.

While I can accept his assertion that 'other approaches to affective meaning in music that do not rely upon a code centred on single and simple parameters are far more fruitful' (27) , I am unconvinced by his claim that 'the succession of pitches of the motif of the *Adagio* [of Beethoven's Sonata Op. 110] may indeed be used, as [Deryck] Cooke observes [in *The Language of Music*, 1959], to signify grief, but it can also be employed to mean more or less whatever else a composer chooses to do with it' (19). He goes on to cite Liszt's ability in his Sonata in B minor to 'make any one of his motifs sound successively diabolical, amorous, religioso, majestic, transcendent, or what you will' (19); this seems a bit of an exaggeration—the warm-hearted theme that opens the 'slow movement' of that work (*Andante sostenuto*, bar 335ff), which may or may not be related to earlier motifs, Liszt effectively and affectively leaves almost alone, repeating it twice (bars 395 and 712) without altering its broad affective character apart from briefly magnifying its scale in a moment of triumph at bar 395 to resolve the long build-up of tension in the preceding thirty bars.

I recall an excellent example by Leonard Bernstein in his book *The Unanswered Question* (originally a series of filmed lectures) where, in the chapter 'Musical Syntax', he discusses what he calls 'grammatical modifiers'. He shows how Wagner's 'Fate' motive from The Ring can be modified by three different harmonies that underpin different presentations of the melody (63, Harvard paperback edition)—leading to what he calls 'Cruel Fate, or Kind Fate, or Tricky Fate' (the last of which is the most fun!). And he adds another modifier, presenting a waltz version of the same motive—'Cruel Fate waltzes'. Certainly the sentiment is altered each time under the influence of these changing modifiers; however, the Fate motive itself still acts as the 'noun' in Bernstein's parlance (with harmony as 'adjective' and rhythm as 'verb'), it is still the core of the expression and as such it limits the range of deviation available to the expression, and thereby to the affect which is one element of the expression. To put it crudely, 'Fate' motives such as those in Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony or Wagner's Ring are unlikely (even in Liszt's alchemical hands) to make a catchy and genuine Wedding March theme, no matter how they are manipulated. There are limits to the non-perverse, non-parodic malleability of sentiment around a particular motif, limits that derive from the motif itself. Rosen does assert that 'an insistence on providing a fixed meaning for single musical elements arises from a confusion between music and language' (30), and Bernstein himself writes 'I don't mean that it names "Fate", either; it is a *musical* noun all by itself no matter what it stands for in the opera'; but nonetheless I differ from Rosen when later on he again suggests infinite affective malleability: 'It is clear that at this time any theme can be given whatever emotional significance the composer chooses if he knows how to go about it' (64).

I feel similarly about Rosen's clinching example, the different affects of the same six-step descending thematic shape, as presented in the Scherzo (main theme) and *Arioso dolente* of Beethoven's Op. 110. It is true that the presentation in the Scherzo is 'far from grief-stricken but is jolly and folksy and perhaps a touch sinister or satirical' (16), and that this derives from a 'very different rhythmic and harmonic configuration … as well as the tempo and the accompaniment'; however, the innate darkness of this particular 'noun', the stepwise descent in the minor mode from the fifth degree to the leading-tone, has *not* vanished completely even here, as Rosen recognizes ('a touch sinister or satirical'). In fact, satire is a good way of putting it. In the Scherzo, Beethoven could be said to be sending up the dark theme, all the more so as the bars that follow (Scherzo, bars 5–8) sound very like a loud belly-laugh in C major—rather like one operatic character mocking another's grief by parodying it and laughing. Both aspects remain—the fun and the parodied grief. Or compare the similarly shaped opening theme of Paganini's *La Campanella* (most famous in its version as a Liszt *étude*)—here the bouncy six-eight rhythms, fast tempo, sharp melodic staccato and simplest of harmony combine to make the basic minor-mode descent from the fifth degree to the leading-tone jaunty and light; despite this, from the arrival of the minor-sixth degree in bar 6 of the Liszt piece there remains a wistfulness in the theme that is inescapable and, when the music concludes with a fortissimo, thunderous final statement of the theme in repeated octaves, it is not tragic but sounds stern and fateful and is intended to be overwhelming. You can take a 'sad' theme and 'jolly it up', but it doesn't really morph the theme's natural association out of recognition; Bernstein's 'Tricky Fate' example positions itself on a different side of the stage from 'Cruel Fate', but it is the same stage.

Interestingly, when Alfred Brendel gave his final Dublin recital a few years ago, his programme included, along with Beethoven's Op. 110, Haydn's C-minor sonata and Schubert's Impromptu in F minor, D935 No. 1. The Haydn and Schubert pieces both have opening themes based on the same stepwise descent from the fifth to the leading-tone used in Beethoven's *Arioso dolente*—Haydn ornaments it, and Schubert adds a full octave to this descent, making it very long—and, significantly, in all three cases the theme then leaps upward to the minor sixth degree before returning to the starting fifth (the pathos of the minor sixth degree comes up later in Rosen's own Chapter Four, 'The C minor style'). The point is not to demonstrate some sort of copying of ideas between the composers but to note that the attached affects or sentiments in all three cases are not widely separated (all three have dark, even tragic, import). It is in this sense that I think that he is unwise to dismiss the merit of Cooke's point in *The Language of Music*. While Rosen is correct in that musical affect does not depend on a learned tradition of fixed musical motifs, he seems to undervalue the clear historical fact that certain motifs (such as the one dealt with above) tended to be used to provoke

a particular area of sentiment. Yes, composers can buck this trend with a particular motif if they wish, most obviously through parody (as I have suggested in connection with that Beethoven scherzo, and as Liszt's Mephistopheles—the 'spirit that negates'—does to Faust's searching theme in the last movement of his Faust Symphony). But it is perhaps wrong to deny that (just like the falling fourth ostinato in minor mode from the Crucifixus of Bach's B-minor Mass, inter alia, which he discusses on pp. 24–5, and which he admits is 'a useful formula for writing serious music') particular motivic or thematic shapes within a tonal framework lend themselves naturally—not just through tradition or repetition—to evoking particular types of emotional reactions in people. Much has been written on the subject of *why* this natural tendency exists, but if this were *not* the case, if this tendency did not exist, why then did composers like Haydn, Beethoven and Schubert in the above examples choose an essentially identical motif (minor-mode stepwise fall from dominant to leading-tone followed by leap to minor sixth degree and fall back to dominant) to express a similarly dark range of emotions? Whereas, despite Beethoven's Op. 110 scherzo movement which drops the pathetic leap up to the minor sixth and which I suggest may even fall into the category of parody, they did not in general reach for that shape (or mode) when they wished to convey strong positive joyful sentiments (for which tonic triads and scales in the major mode dominate, as in the finale opening themes of Beethoven's Fifth or Sixth Symphonies, or his Emperor Concerto, or Schubert's 'Great' C-major symphony). To this degree, I think that Cooke's book of fifty years ago has not lost its value; it seems an exaggeration to dismiss, as Rosen appears to do, the suggestion that particular motivic shapes cast in major or minor mode seem naturally to favour the expression of particular emotions (an aspect of the 'noun') even if it is indeed possible to vary considerably the detailed affect-complex by manipulation of other parameters. I appreciate that Rosen is above all attacking the notion that a learnt 'code' was required for people to experience sentiment in music—and I can agree with him in that regard; but it is where he over-emphasizes (to my mind) the malleability and the 'ambiguity of the musical vocabulary' (15) that I have to differ.

Once he moves to the analysis (with examples) of the representation of sentiment through the periods from the Baroque to the first half of the twentieth century, his arguments are typically concise and instructive. As remarked above, in Chapter Two, 'Pre-classical sentiment', he only selects one movement by Bach (the rather unusual *Allemande* from the Partita in B flat) for a close study of 'the range of expression then possible, the subtle variety of inflections of sentiment contained within a well-defined framework' (42); but his analysis is brilliant, showing at once the constraints of that style and at the same time the all-too-clear germs of many elements of the classical style—'establishing a firm tonal basis, contrast, increasing excitement and pathos, and eventual resolution' (47). This analysis is unusual in this book in that it deals with a

complete movement, whereas otherwise Rosen treats 'mainly the initial presentation of a theme, as any extensive account of the way the meanings of motifs change in the course of a work would carry us too far afield' (4).

In fact, as we move into the third chapter, 'Contradictory Sentiments', and as examples from Haydn and Mozart move centre stage, the focus narrows to the contrasts of affect, possible under the new style, that arise within opening themes of movements. With Mozart, these internal oppositions tend to use clearly differentiated, juxtaposed motifs (as in the opening bars of the Jupiter Symphony), rather like two characters in an opera giving their opposing views in quick succession; whereas Haydn 'was the master of a technique for creating a dramatic contrast with the use of a single theme … the double presentation of a theme in two different realizations with opposed affective significance' (60). It is interesting to note how this parallels the much better-known tendencies of these composers when it came to second subjects—Mozart typically inventing a new contrasting subject, Haydn very often re-presenting at least a portion of the first subject; but Rosen of course is here mainly highlighting contrasts *within* the first subject area, often within the first few bars.

This remains the focus for Chapter Four, 'The C minor style'. Rosen states that:

> a tradition of dramatic C minor works developed in the late eighteenth century, many of which exhibit initial material of opposing sentiments. It is with these works that we can see the advantage for composers of displacing contrast from the large structure into the initial material itself, juxtaposing drama and pathos—the drama centred on an authoritative tonic harmony, while the pathos often emphasized the sixth degree, A flat. (72)

Here, he touches enjoyably on many C-minor classics of the piano repertoire, including Mozart's C-minor concerto and sonata and also the C-minor concerto of Beethoven, as the latter enters the fray for the first time since the prologue set the scene with the opening of the finale of his Emperor Concerto. Whatever slight regret there might have been at the paucity of examples in Chapter Two, here (in Chapters Three and Four) there is delight as Rosen sure-footedly picks a salient, illuminating path through this rich terrain, highlighting both common elements and new developments as he goes. As always with Rosen, there is room for an acerbic comment here and there: '… that is why there is no answer to the foolish question that so often comes up as to whether Beethoven is classical or romantic' (84).

Beethoven then gets a chapter to himself ('Beethoven's Expansion') where Rosen traces the evolution of that composer's ways of using contradictory sentiments (or articulated contrasts) in opening themes and the succeeding resolution of that contrast, from his early piano sonatas to the late ones. This concentrated chapter culminates in demonstrating how Beethoven transformed these techniques by enlarging them, particularly through the use of long continual increases of intensity on a large scale,

filling the gap of an initial extreme dynamic contrast and thereby resolving it. The opening of the *Hammerklavier* sonata—a work which Rosen has previously subjected to exegesis in both *The Classical Style* and *Beethoven Piano Sonatas: A Short Companion* (2002)—appears as the *ne plus ultra* of this procedure.

Rosen hints more than once during Chapter Five that this use of continual large-scale growth in intensity will be influential after Beethoven's death, and he chooses 'Romantic Intensity' as his title for Chapter Six. Examples from Chopin's nocturnes and from Liszt and Schumann show the new propensity for increasing intensity in an unbroken way without disturbing the Unity of Sentiment (revivified from the Baroque, if transformed). Metamorphosis rather than dialectic is now the order of the day: 'We have both an affective unity and a dramatic change within the character of the sentiment that goes far beyond the affective nuances of Baroque style' (103). Some further fascinating examples follow from Wagner, Chopin and Schumann, confirming in various different ways the new aesthetic's departure from dramatically opposed sentiments, while a single example from Schubert's last piano sonata illustrates his usage, at the end of his life, of both the new intensification and the old opposition at once (which recalls that acerbic comment about 'classical or romantic' Beethoven, quoted above!).

The final chapter, 'Obsessions', covers mainly the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, from Brahms to Berg, via Richard Strauss, Debussy, Ravel and Stravinsky. Here, the battleground for sentiment has shifted away from both the oppositions of the Classical period and the intensifications of the Romantic, largely because the tonal ground on which both of these were based has shifted and lacks the old solidity. Expression of sentiment now finds new foci in tone-colour (examples from Brahms, still within the stability of the old era, and Richard Strauss, the latter using dissonant pitches or colours to work directly on the nerves of the listener), repetitive-obsessive harmony as tone-colour (Debussy, Ravel, Berg) and disruption of rhythm and accent (Stravinsky). This last chapter, like the book as a whole, presents stimulating views on its subject, and reinforces the overall sense of a distillation of knowledge in an economical but weighty ensemble. All these years since he wrote *The Classical Style*, Rosen has lost none of his powers to transmit his close observations and I am sure that this book, like his others, will intrigue musicians and music-lovers for generations.

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