

How To Write A Text About How To Write A Text Score (And Why)

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Legato

1. Write the words, “I don’t speak ‘music’”. (In which the interior quotation marks cradle the delicate word ‘music’, so as to prevent it from breaking.)
2. Ask the question, “Why can’t I read or write musical notation?”
3. Answer (defensively, yet with a certain pride), “I have been playing music for thirty years. At times, I have made a living solely writing, recording and playing music. I have written something like three hundred songs, a few dozen experimental musical compositions, and released eight albums. I have taken and taught classes about music, written books about music, hosted radio shows about music. But I can’t read or write musical notation.”
4. Ask (hoping it will be taken rhetorically), “What kind of ignoramus am I?”

A brief interlude on cognitive style (to the tune of the ocarina part in the second movement of Ligeti’s *Concerto for Violin and Orchestra*):

My mind doesn’t function mathematically, hierarchically, systematically. I process information as magnetic particles, some attract, some repel. I process information as liquid, a little

in this container, a little in that, a little spilled on the floor, a little evaporated. I process information as signs. It's not important to me that I'm hearing a 1-4-5 chord progression, it's important that what I'm hearing is relating itself to the blues: what, then, is the nature of that relation? Respectful? Antagonistic? Ironic? I group. I slurp. I engage. Derrida is never far from my thoughts: "Il n'y a pas de hors-texte" ("There is no outside-the-text.") Conversely, and equally true: everything is (in the) text.

5. Justify this musico-logos-ical incompetence by arguing, "Music isn't a set of numerical values, it's a set of ethical/ontological/epistemological values. That is to say, it's part of life and life's part of it. So, why should I feel compelled to adopt this invented, artificial, specialist language to produce, receive, and talk about music? The language I use everyday, for everything else, ought to suffice. And, what do you know? For me, it does."

6. Continue, beginning to feel like a dead horse is being beaten, yet wanting to persuade: "I use text notation the same way I use everyday language: descriptively, deceptively, instructively, ironically, generously, mischievously. The point is, we all relate to everyday language. We don't all relate to musical notation. If we're interested in the social aspects of art and music, then it seems wise to use the most inclusive language on offer."

7. Being careful not to seem self-important, give an example from the work: "I can whisper a text notation in the ear of an audience member and ask them to 'pass it on' to another audience member, until it reaches the performer on the stage. This doesn't work as well with a little black dot on the end of a stick attached to the third of five horizontal lines, referring back to a cluster of little signs and some numbers."

7a. Go on, another example couldn't hurt: "I can describe sound as 'stubborn' or 'like a fruit bat', or designate its duration as equivalent to 'completely

opening and then closing a door'. The subsequent sounds are now adorned with life-qualities that are unavailable to notation. As are the performer and the audience. Pretty neat, huh?"

8. Conclude by comparing attitudes toward life and music, implying that the former should guide the latter, "I put no faith in higher powers, final answers, destiny. I do not obey a set of behavioral instructions determining my every movement, my tempo, my termination. Why then, would I ask music to submit to these unrealistic constraints? What right do I have to impose them on the listener? We're all in this together. Better yet if cake is served."

9. Always say thank you, "Thank you."

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