

Pärnu Nüüdismuusika Päevad 2024 | Pärnu Contemporary Music Days 2024

KOMPOSITSIOONIMUDELID 7 | COMPOSITION MODELS 7

Sürrealism ja muusika | Surrealism and music

20.-28.1.2024

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Surrealism in music

Examples analyzed later (see more links below)

- 1) Imhof "Angst II" art performance (2016)
<https://youtu.be/bjVGOLmWmRw?si=Wi4jNDLKai6FJUJu>
- 2) Satie Parade (1917)
https://youtu.be/IuZ4DYywpqpw?si=3V2LDLE7HjDmI_Y9
- 3) Messiaen Turangalila-Symphonie (1948/1990)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EYq3XCEf9eo>
- 4) Dassin Les Champs-Élysées (1969)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d7-UcdcK4AA>
- 5) Dali & Walt Disney - "Destino" (1945/2003) film soundtrack
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y_TlaxmOKqs
- 6) Cage 4:33 (1952)
https://youtu.be/AWVUp12XPpU?si=O_D5dfoz5hjPr9Ca

Lecture part

I. Introduction:

A. Definition of Surrealism in Art: - Surrealism, as an artistic movement, emerged in the early 20th century, spearheaded by André Breton. It sought to explore the irrational, subconscious, and dreamlike aspects of the human mind. Surrealists aimed to free themselves from conventional artistic constraints and tap into the realm of the fantastical and imaginative.

B. Overview of Surrealism in Music: - In the realm of music, surrealism manifests as a departure from traditional norms, encouraging composers to experiment with unconventional sounds, structures, and themes. Musicians embraced the surrealist principles of spontaneity, unpredictability, and a focus on the subconscious mind, challenging established conventions in pursuit of a more abstract and evocative musical expression.

II. Historical Context:

A. Emergence of Surrealism as an Art Movement: - Surrealism officially emerged in the 1920s with the publication of André Breton's "Surrealist Manifesto" in 1924. The movement grew out of the Dadaist rebellion against rationalism and societal norms post-World War I. Surrealists embraced automatism, a method of spontaneous, subconscious creation, and aimed to reveal the hidden workings of the mind.

Surrealism in art often featured dreamlike, fantastical, or bizarre imagery, with artists like Salvador Dalí, René Magritte, and Max Ernst leading the way. The movement extended beyond visual arts to literature, film, and, notably, music.

B. Parallel Developments in Music: In tandem with the visual arts, surrealism found its way into the realm of music. Composers sought to capture the essence of surrealist ideas through innovative approaches to composition and performance. Notable musical figures like Erik Satie, John Cage, and others embraced surrealistic principles, challenging the traditional boundaries of musical expression.

The historical context includes the aftermath of World War I, where the disillusionment with established norms prompted artists to seek new forms of expression. This cultural backdrop fostered the emergence of surrealism in music as a response to societal upheaval, mirroring the movement's origins in visual arts.

Understanding the historical context and the core principles of surrealism sets the stage for a comprehensive exploration of how these ideas translated into the realm of music. This foundation will help us appreciate the depth and significance of surrealism in musical expression.

III. Characteristics of Surrealist Music:

A. Use of Unusual Combinations of Sounds: - Surrealist music often employs unconventional combinations of sounds, instruments, and techniques. Composers sought to break away from the familiar, experimenting with dissonance, non-musical sounds, and unexpected harmonies. This approach aimed to create an otherworldly, dreamlike atmosphere that challenges the listener's expectations.

B. Exploration of Dreams and the Unconscious: - Surrealist music delves into the realm of dreams and the unconscious mind. Composers draw inspiration from dream imagery, surreal narratives, and the subconscious self, translating these elements into their musical compositions. This exploration contributes to a sense of unpredictability and emotional depth within the music, inviting listeners to experience a journey through the inner recesses of the mind.

C. Disruption of Traditional Musical Forms: - Traditional musical forms, such as sonata-allegro or ternary structures, were often disrupted in surrealist compositions. Composers sought to challenge established norms by introducing fragmented structures, unpredictable transitions, and non-linear progressions. This departure from tradition allowed for a more open-ended and abstract musical expression aligned with the principles of surrealism.

IV. Surrealist Composers and their Works:

A. Salvador Dalí and His Collaboration with Walt Disney (e.g., "Destino"): - Salvador Dalí collaborated with Walt Disney on the animated short film "Destino." While primarily a visual collaboration, the film's soundtrack, composed by Armando Dominguez, complements Dalí's surreal visual narrative. The music enhances the dreamlike quality of the animation, featuring elements of Latin American music and classical motifs. This collaboration showcases how surrealism can transcend traditional art boundaries, influencing both visuals and music.

B. René Magritte's Influence on Erik Satie: - Erik Satie, a French composer and pianist, was influenced by the surrealist paintings of René Magritte. Satie's compositions, such as "Parade," reflect Magritte's emphasis on absurdity and unconventional perspectives. Satie's music often features eccentric instrumentation, playful melodies, and a rejection of conventional tonality, aligning with Magritte's surreal aesthetic.

C. John Cage and Experimental Music: - John Cage, an influential figure in experimental music, embraced surrealist principles by challenging traditional notions of composition. His famous work "4'33" features a pianist sitting in silence for precisely four minutes and 33 seconds, emphasizing the ambient sounds of the environment. Cage's exploration of silence and unconventional musical elements aligns with surrealism's focus on the unexpected and the transformative power of art.

Understanding these characteristics and examples will provide our students with a nuanced perspective on how surrealism manifested in the musical realm and the diverse approaches taken by influential composers in embracing and interpreting surrealist principles.

V. Surrealism in Lyrics and Performance:

A. Exploration of Surrealistic Themes in Song Lyrics: - Surrealistic themes in song lyrics involve the use of unconventional and dreamlike imagery. Lyricists draw inspiration from the surrealists' emphasis on the subconscious and fantastical, crafting narratives that evoke a sense of ambiguity and mystery. The goal is to transcend literal meaning, inviting listeners to interpret lyrics in a more subjective and imaginative way.

An interesting example of surrealist poetry used in songs that is worth observance is "Les Champs-Élysées" by Joe Dassin. The lyrics were written by the French poet Pierre Delanoë. While the song is more widely recognized as a chanson and not explicitly surrealist, Pierre Delanoë's poetic style often incorporated dreamlike and imaginative elements, aligning with surrealist tendencies. "Les Champs-Élysées" is celebrated for its whimsical depiction of a stroll down the famous avenue in Paris, and the poetic language used in the lyrics carries a touch of surrealist inspiration.

B. Theatrical Performances and Visual Elements: - Surrealism in music extends beyond auditory experiences to incorporate theatrical performances and visual elements. Musicians and performers often integrate avant-garde stage designs, costumes, and multimedia elements to create a surreal atmosphere. The synergy of music with visual elements enhances the overall performance, engaging multiple senses and reinforcing the surreal narrative of the music.

VI. Implications of Surrealism in Music:

A. Breaking Conventions and Challenging Norms: - Surrealism in music has profound implications for breaking conventional norms. Composers and musicians deliberately challenge established musical structures, tonalities, and forms. This departure from tradition allows for a more expansive and experimental approach to musical expression. By breaking conventions, surrealist music paves the way for innovation and the continuous evolution of musical genres.

B. Impact on Audience Perception and Experience: - The implications of surrealism in music extend to the audience's perception and overall experience. By defying expectations and introducing unconventional elements, surrealist music prompts listeners to engage on a deeper, emotional level. The unpredictability and dreamlike qualities of the music can evoke a range of emotions and thoughts, offering a unique and transformative experience for the audience. The impact lies not only in the auditory realm but also in the broader emotional and intellectual responses elicited from the listeners.

Understanding the incorporation of surrealist themes in lyrics and the multi-sensory experience of surrealist performances, along with the broader implications for breaking musical conventions, provides a comprehensive view of how surrealism influences and transforms the landscape of music. This exploration encourages audiences and our students to embrace the unconventional and appreciate the transformative power of surrealist music.

VII. Case Studies for students:

A. Analyzing Specific Musical Pieces for Surrealist Elements: - Dive into specific musical pieces that exemplify surrealist elements. For example, explore Erik Satie's "Parade" and dissect how its unconventional instrumentation and playful melodies reflect surrealism. Analyze John Cage's "4'33'" to showcase how silence and ambient sounds can be utilized surrealistically. Provide a detailed breakdown of these compositions to highlight the integration of surrealist principles in music.

B. Discussing the Reception and Interpretation of Surrealist Music: - Explore how audiences and critics have received and interpreted surrealist music. Examine historical reviews, reactions, and the evolving perception of surrealist compositions. Discuss the challenges and controversies faced by surrealist musicians, as well as the ways in which their work has influenced subsequent generations of artists. This analysis will provide insights into the impact and reception of surrealist music over time.

VIII. Contemporary Influence:

A. Traces of Surrealism in Modern Music: - Identify and discuss how surrealism continues to influence contemporary music. Examine specific artists and genres that incorporate surrealist elements in their compositions. Whether it's in the lyrics, sound experimentation, or overall aesthetic, trace the threads of surrealism in modern music. This section allows your audience to recognize the enduring legacy of surrealism in the evolving landscape of musical expression.

Examples

1) Surrealism in Anne Imhof

Anne Imhof

“Angst II” (2016), art performance

Hamburg old train station – National Contemporary Gallery

<https://youtu.be/bjVGOLmWmRw?si=Wi4jNDLKai6FJUJu>

In this space, music flows as a vein of bloodstream throughout the hall in a way that every time the bloodstream or music reaches a certain individual, the individual is activated with a voice of expression. The individual is activated with a voice of self-expression that magnifies the truest self in them.

While the music could have had a complex voicing or a composition that explains the series of events, the composer has put great thought into the simplicity of the syllables and vowels used.

“Aah Aah Aah maaah maah maah” which is the voicing used is something so primordial in nature that it surpasses not just the barriers of race, caste, colour, creed within humanity, but also surpasses humanity itself. In a way that the voicing used is so congruent with the primary call of most animals, whether it comes to their first calls for their mother or for food or as a way of communicating with their immediate environment.

What makes the piece truly surreal in nature is its ability to not evoke superficial forms of self-expression within the actors involved, but to evoke a certain kind of action which could only be assumed to be taking shape in the dream state or the subconscious level.

Examples of these can be seen throughout the piece as for instance, where the teenage girl is pouring diet Pepsi at five minute nine seconds, across the wall in the form of paint or more deeply symbolised as pouring the offering of the modern society onto the blank canvas from the carrier or vessel of a person clad in a T-shirt full of skulls. The scene is flanked by two spectator-like actions, preceding and succeeding the scene.

Whether it be the teenage boy who is sitting on the top of the first floor and enacting eating from a packet of nuts to precede the scene. Or the teenage boy, who is smoking upside down and enjoying his evening round of birdwatching, while he watches diet Pepsi poured down the white walls of modern society.

The ease with which the teenage boy seems to be smoking in his upside down posture at five minute 18 seconds, symbolises a deeply subconscious state, where he can be incomplete odds with himself, and still go about modern life, pretending that everything is alright. This I feel symbolises the inner movements of a lot of people who live lives of quiet desperation, in modern environments.

Another noticeable part is how the vowel sound used in the music goes so naturally with the actual act of chewing gum, which people again do casually in the modern society, either as a way of breaking stress, or I'm just become so habituated to it that they have lost the idea of attaching symbolism to the act itself.

This is where the score is so powerful as it is able to encapsulate all of these different elements within the modern society on the subconscious level, and still have a voice for all of them in a way that the music seems to casually score, their deepest polarities.

While the piece might be 100 years older than when surrealism was invented, I find that this is a clinical detection of what surrealism was eventually intended to portray that the modern man does not deserve art of beauty, but deserve art of a certain realistic reflection which could eventually bring him to a place of inner acceptance from which a higher sense of beauty can be created.

In this understanding, I could say that surrealism in this piece is able to transfer the responsibility of art onto the consumer that is the audience, and coaxing them to find beauty by accepting the polarities inside of them.

Focus:

5:09 min

teenage girl pouring diet Pepsi on the wall

5:18 min

teenage boy smoking in upside down posture

2) Satie Parade (1917)

Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra conductor Antal Doráti

https://youtu.be/IuZ4DYwqpw?si=3V2LDLE7HjDml_Y9

Instruments as characters

Instruments as filters

Special instrument: Typewriter

Focus:

2:24 min

specific instruments come in as new characters

6:14 min

typewriter comes in

Later added separate recording of the Satie part (larger part) to resolve technical issues of the original recording. The last 2 min are from the original recording again.

3) Messiaen Turangalîla-Symphonie

Olivier Messiaen - Turangalîla-Symphonie (1948/1990)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EYq3XCEf9eo>

Special instrument: Ondes Martenot

Focus:

1:03

semi quaver rhythm comes in
main rhythm

1:33

statue theme with trombone

2:00

piano theme
flower theme in the clarinets

1:39

most surreal theme
amazing surreal mood
long rhythm
how to replicate a rhythm a mood like this
10 min in duration
Visualize the whole sonic structure/scape of this section.

All these themes become the backbone of the piece.

4) Joe Dassin Les Champs-Élysées (1969)

<https://youtu.be/tDWeLlvYyYU?si=UCZQi5HyUxrg-0K1>

“Les Champs Élysées” is the greatest hit of French-American singer Joe Dassin (1938-1980). Released in 1969, the song and was a French adaption of Waterloo Road, a British song released the previous year by Jason Crest. The French version’s lyrics were written by Pierre Delanoë.

More detailed background

<https://www.frenchlearner.com/songs/les-champs-elysees/>

French + English

<https://www.madbepo.com/french-songs/aux-champs-elysees/>

French + English subtitles together

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d7-UcdcK4AA>

5) Dali & Walt Disney - "Destino" (1945/2003) film soundtrack

Composer Armando Dominguez

Music only link:

<https://youtu.be/YIyzfg8ik5k?si=ee3MAzfbUqQ4AOBj>

Text:

Now I can smile and say:

Destino, my heart was sad and lonely
in knowing that you only could bring my love to me.

Destino, this heart of mine is thrilled (excited) now.

My empty arms are filled now as they were meant to be.

For you came along (appeared), out a dream I recall (remember).

Yes, you came along to answer my call.

I know now that you are my destino (destiny=future).

We'll be as one, for we know our destiny of love.

Esther R. J. Dali did the drawings, A. Dominguez did the Music, Dora Luz performed the song, Disney directed the short and the musical director was Alberto Dominguez.

<https://www.artsy.net/artwork/salvador-dali-assuerus-adamavit-esther>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Destino>

Destino is an animated surrealist short film released in 2003 by Walt Disney Animation Studios. Destino is unique in that its production originally began in 1945, 58 years before its eventual completion in 2003. The project was originally a collaboration between Walt Disney and Spanish painter Salvador Dalí, and features music written by Mexican songwriter Armando Domínguez and performed by Mexican singer Dora Luz. It was included in the Animation Show of Shows in 2003.

This link contains the animation:

Walt Disneys Destino (Full) 6:30

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y_TlaxmOKqs

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T2iDIJfzadw>

A feature about the background story

Dali and Disney A Date with Destino

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eBqLSDfWQjs>

6) Cage 4:33 (1952)

Berliner Philharmoniker, conductor Kirill Petrenko

https://youtu.be/AWVUp12XPpU?si=O_D5dfz5hjPr9Ca

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/4'33''>

4'33" is a modernist composition by American experimental composer John Cage.

It was composed in 1952 for any instrument or combination of instruments; the score instructs performers not to play their instruments throughout the three movements. It is divided into three movements, lasting 30 seconds, two minutes and 23 seconds, and one minute and 40 seconds, respectively, although Cage later stated that the movements' durations can be determined by the musician. As indicated by the title, the composition lasts four minutes and 33 seconds and is marked by a period of silence, although ambient sounds contribute to the performance.