

SIMPLICITY VS COMPLEXITY IN MUSIC WITH SPIRITUAL RADIANCE

In the traditions of ancient eastern music, the melodies can range from very simple to quite complex. Some of the simple musical traditions offer an abundance of spiritual radiance, informing us that radiance and complexity are not necessarily interdependent qualities. Complexity for complexity's sake is not a good basis for radiance, but there are some musical traditions which allow for great complexity while offering considerable spiritual radiance. In this case, the complexity is a consequence of the melodic line undergoing a process we can call fractalizing.

In a way analogous to a serrated leaf in which the serrations are serrated and so on into infinitesimal dimensions, the melodic line of certain modal musical traditions can be fractalized to the point of inscrutability. It is not necessary to push the melodic line so deeply into fractalization in order for the music to radiate the special quality that evokes a transcendent state of mind in the listener.

It is normal and traditional in ancient eastern music to intone melodies with very convoluted structure, and that is partly owing to the modal nature of the melodies. This requires something of a technical explanation. For some reason that so far no one seems to have been able to say why, staircase composed melodies have the power to induce a mysterious sense of transport in the listener. Going up and down the scale in a staircase manner – as opposed to jumping around from note to note in pursuit of a clever or catchy tune – mysteriously induces a profound sense of being taken somewhere. Obviously music doesn't move us physically, only spiritually, but with staircase composed modal music, we have this unaccountable and overwhelming sense of having been displaced from one zone to another. Changing pitches has that effect, and changing pitches in an orderly sequence of one by one going up and down a given scale has that effect in profound measure.

Staircase composed modal melodies can be highly repetitive and thus musically boring to ears accustomed to hearing catchy, clever tunes for melodies. The sheer repetitiveness of staircase composed modal melodies begs for the development of the melodic line, and one direction that can take is fractalization. When the contours of a melody develop micro-contours to add an element of complexity for the sake of being captivating, the spiritual radiance can be easily lost. To maintain that sense of radiance, the musician needs to impart a feeling of great deliberateness to the phraseology of the fractalized melodic line.

This is best implemented when the music is meter free. In the absence of an overt beat, the rhythms become both fractalized and asymmetrical, and the phraseology – the way the notes are grouped in phrases - evokes the feeling that a story is being told. It is another mysterious feeling, to feel that wordless melodies are telling a story.

For that effect, there has to be a template, a formula for how the notes in the melody are grouped to achieve a phraseology that is recognizable and consistent throughout the composed / improvised melody. The template for some traditions in ancient eastern

music is remarkably similar to certain patterns of speech. The 'swing' of the phraseology of the melodic line sounds like declamatory speech, in which not only a story is being related, but it is being related with a dramatic flourish in the telling that calls to mind traditions that are rooted in epic legends.

The declamatory style of speech associated with the telling of epic legends adds to the ponderous deliberateness of the meter free construction of certain musical traditions of ancient eastern cultures. And the tendency is for the fractalization of the melodies, a natural part of the maturation process over long periods of time, to increase until the melodies are utterly inscrutable and nearly unlearnable. The fractalization can become so extreme that no one can follow or anticipate the direction of the melody, and that works against the music serving as a conduit for spiritual radiance.

Eastern traditions tend toward the meditative and plaintive. Those qualities thrive and flourish in music that allows the listeners to be steeped in the sound, but weaken considerably when the musician sounds like he or she is in a race to cram as many notes as possible into the melody. The notes per second rate can go as high as the human hand is able to reverse the motion of a bow or plectrum, and when the music making falls victim to the ambition of having the fastest phraseology, everyone loses. For transcendence to occur the melody must drag, it must languish, and induce a kind of delicious anguish at the development of the mode. Of course there are phrases that are expressed in bursts, but they must be relatively brief or the effect will be one of a lack of warmth and spiritual radiance.

Spiritual radiance is an elusive quality that can only appear when the music can be absorbed in a calm and meditative state. High speed phrases are antithetical to that rarified mental state, as is the overly convoluted, fractalized melodic line. The ancient musical traditions of the east should more resemble a call to prayer than a prelude to a horse race or the flight of a bumble bee. Yet the trend is toward a frantic competition for high speed performance. This trend will only serve to dim the radiance that is the reason for being of this type of music.