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Saying it with music: a theoretical exploration of musical encoding with reference to Western art music and the songs of the Ngqoko women

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page..... 0

Table of Contents.....iii

Abstract..... v

Acknowledgements and Declaration..... vi

INTRODUCTION……..……...1

More questions than answers

CHAPTER ONE……6

The Intersection of Meaning and Syntax in Music

1.1. Making sense of Musical Meaning……6
1.2. Making sense of Musical Syntax…..……15
1.3. Intuition and Semantic Intention ... …..……19
1.4. The Value of Semiotics……..……23

CHAPTER TWO……26

Encoding, Communication and Semiosis

2.1. Encoding 26
2.2. Communication 26
2.3. Semiosis and Encoding..... 30
2.4. Musical Semiotics and the Role of Codes..... 36

CHAPTER THREE……42

Eloquence and Musical Codes

3.1. Semantic and Syntactical Categories…..……42
3.2. Content versus Expression……..……43
3.3. Rhetoric and *Affekt*……..……48
3.4. Musical Topics……63
3.5. Structural usage of Topics……81
3.6. Problems encountered in Topical Semiosis..……87

CHAPTER FOUR……...95

Tonal Language, Speech-tone Melody and the Ngqoko Women

4.1. The Evolutionary Origins of Signification 95
4.2. Tonal Languages and Music 99
4.3. Xhosa Music and Speech-tone Melodies 103
4.4. Codes and Overtones: the Music of the Ngqoko Women..... 110

CHAPTER FIVE……...118

Signifying Musically

5.1. Gestural Interpretation……118
5.2. Artistic Cognition and the Intonation Process……123
5.3. Role of the Right and Left Brain-hemispheres……137

CHAPTER SIX……..143

The Temporal Syntax of Experience

6.1. Musical Syntax as Time 143
6.2. The Nature of Musical Temporality 146
6.3. Musical Temporality as Syntax……..154
6.4. Intoning the Temporal Sphere……166

CONCLUSION……..173

To Glimpse the Emperor's Clothes

BIBLIOGRAPHY……...181

Appendix A…….……..190

Compact Disc of Ngqoko Music

ABSTRACT

This research-report presents a theoretical exploration of musical encoding which has its basis in general semiotic theory. By examining what this reveals about the problematic and mysterious issue of music's meaning, I argue that the most visceral and direct form of it is found in the manner in which the composer shapes a certain kind of temporal experience (*erlebnis*) which is engendered by the music itself. This reveals that sensations of goal-directed movement, closure, tension and release are shaped in a phenomenological way against a background of continuity that is established by metrical cyclicity and phrasal periodisation. As a result, the interpretation of certain kinds of accumulative structural effects generated by the gestural (rhythmic and melodic/harmonic) inflections of the temporal and intonational planes become meaningful in a rhetorical, affective (*affekten*) and topical sense. A study of Ngqoko (Xhosa) overtone-music, as a case study into African indigenous music (as opposed to the examples cited of Western art music), shows that an intensification of the relationships between pitch and rhythm that exist in speech-tone results in the formation of melody and a culturally embedded vocabulary of intonations. I argue that this resultant edifice exists in the music of most cultures and that this ultimately serves as the basis of musical encoding. Therefore musical meaning develops in ways that are completely intrinsic to music.

Key Concepts: *affekt*, encoding, gesture theory, intonation, musical codes, music and language, Ngqoko Women's Ensemble, overtone-singing, pre-linguistic speech, rhetoric, semantics, semiotics, speech-tone, speech-tone melody, temporal theory, topical theory, throat-singing, Xhosa music.

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I hereby declare that this Research Report is my own original work.

_____ Date: _____

Christo Jan kowitz