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Embodied Sound

Open Connection and Musical Expression

The lights gently cast their glow upon the stage as a new dancer moves into the forefront of the scene. Up until this point, you haven't been enthusiastic about the performance. Something just feels off with the dancers. It's as if they are just going through the motions. Your mind has been wandering all night, and you've been thinking more about what you're going to be making for dinner, rather than being present with what is going on before your eyes. As the music gently crescendos, it appears as though the dancer is breathing in the sounds. There is a great stillness on the stage. All of a sudden the lights flash on the stage as the drums kick into a powerful rhythm, and performer explodes from their still point. There's a palpable energy in the air now. There is a quality that's pulling you in. As the string section sings passion into the theater, the movements of the dancer appear to transmute the frequencies to form in their body. As the song and dance evolve, you find yourself completely absorbed in what is happening on the stage. Every emotion of the music conveyed with such power and grace. The performance has now ended, and you find yourself in your seat still feeling the energy in the room and ask yourself, "What was so different about that last dancer"? Then you realize the dancer was the music and the music became the dancer. They were one.

What is this energy? I have often asked myself. It has been something of great interest to me as a performer. Up until recently, I have just simply addressed it as the quality of "being in the flow" or "feeling it", when chatting with buddies about different bands that have caught my attention over the years. There is a particular connection that certain individuals seem to convey when in this state. Over the past few months I've come to recognize it as musical embodiment. An individual giving form to that which is being expressed sonically. It's really something special. When an artist can completely open themselves up to the music that is being created, they seem to generate a field that is absolutely captivating. It's pulls everyone's attention and builds a connection.

For those observing, this embodied musical communication spreads and those in the audience that are also receptive to the sound can take it in and move it through their bodies. A deep sense of connection that can be formed here and a shift takes place. Those crafting the

sound, the sound it self, and those taking the sound in, become one and absolutely present in the moment. It's a palpable feeling though out the entire body and in some instances you may find that movement comes out this space. Not simply the keeping beat of the song, but a deeper movement that can speak to the emotional context and feeling of what the sonic landscape is speaking. When in this feeling, there isn't a mental thought about how your body should move. Your body guides you. It could anything from gentle sways to large movements with the hands. The body begins to speak the sounds through movement. This connection of bodily movement in relation to music has been recently named, embodied music cognition. **Embodied Music Cognition** views that, **through movement people give meaning to music** (Wikipedia). This has been of interest for some time according to an article entitled, "The Role of Embodiment in the Perception of Music" by Marc Leman and Pieter- Jan Maes. **They state, "The interest in embodiment can be traced back to historical work, in which music perception is linked with gesturing, or empathic moving along with the flow of the music, as a method for grasping musical intentions, or with affective and emotional appraisal and arousal"**. They also noted, "It is possible to show that the music contains a trace of the playing gesture, and that listeners somehow mirror the body parts of the player that express these gestures". It's fascinating to think that the movement an individual makes along with a song, can assist them in further understanding the intention of the piece of music. Whenever we go dancing, we could be encoding the intention of the music that is playing through our body!

As stated above there is the aspect of the body moving with the sounds, but there is also the component of how the sounds themselves move through the physical body in relation to embodying the music. The tones will vibrate the body regardless of a person being open to receiving them. Which is one of the many reasons why sound is so incredible. When someone is open to allowing the sound to move through their body, shifts in consciousness and connection can occur. Sometimes when we may hear a joyous song our body gets enlivened and we can feel a deep sense of connectedness to those in our lives. This thought on openness to sounds moving though the body can get into interesting areas like directing the sound to a particular location in the body for a purpose.

Another way to think about embodiment in relation to music and performance is the difference between doing and being. It is one thing to do art. For example, a musician that is just simply reading the music while playing. By all accounts they are doing a perfect job executing the task at hand. They are hitting all of the notes precisely and resting exactly when they need to rest. Despite that, there is a quality that seems to be missing. On the other hand, let's take Jimi Hendrix, perhaps not as technically sound as our first musician. Seeming to overlook precision and go for a more slurred approach, but he generates such a powerful feeling through his playing it completely takes you in. The first player was doing music and Jimi was being music. There is

much more of a dynamic quality to being. This beingness quality ties to ones ability to embody that which they are communicating through sound. It's as if an embodied artist opens up their world to you and invites you in to experience the moment with them. This being in the moment can alter ones perspective of time. When you're in the presence of art that speaks to you, an hour may flash by in the blink of an eye.

Connection and musical expression really opens up an avenue for sharing emotions and intentions. It's incredible what an embodied musical or movement artist is able to do. Whether it is through song or dance the feelings that they are able to share directly with those that are watching are powerful. There is a synergy that further develops with the audience, the performers, and the sounds that can deeply shift the consciousness and promote expansion and timelessness.