

Follow up to in-class guided writing on Richard Wagner

Below is a sampling of student reactions to Wagner's creative output (excerpt from *Jewishness in Music* [1860] and Prelude to *Lohengrin*, Act III [1850])—all of these ideas could form the basis of a meaningful analytical paper: interpreting the meaning of musical sounds and showing how your listening experience evolved based on specific information to lead you to an interpretation.

Wagner is similar to...

Ludwig van Beethoven

Beyoncé

Justin Bieber (many votes for this one!)

Johnny Cash

Kelly Clarkson

J. Cole

Daddy Yankee

Céline Dion

Drake

Eminem

Gabriel García Márquez

Michael Jackson

Jay-Z

Bruno Mars

Pablo Picasso

Prince

Cristian Ronaldo

William Shakespeare

Tupac Shakur

Taylor Swift

Tyler the Creator

Lil Wayne

The Weeknd

Kanye West (so many votes for this one!)

John Williams

I don't think there are [truly] any artists in today's day and age who can compare to Wagner or even Beethoven.

Reinterpretation of or adding depth to the first impression

I listen and I hear and see a group of people who think they are superior to the rest of the world. It sounds like an anthem of victory to me.

The piece doesn't have the same lively tone. I now imagine him waging a war against the Jews and being excited about it. Then I feel a part where it gets calm and he feels like he won.

When I hear it now I can't help but picture a chase, the very powerful parts being Germany trying to take over.

It sounds even more drastic and emotional than the first time around.

There is a sense of wonder and epic-ness. Maybe there is a sense of wanting to destroy but also to create.

It's lost its awe.

Listen with new context or associations (musical and biographical)

My listening experience is different now because now I know who the artist is. I now listen to compare him to Beethoven because he thought he was better.

I am still hearing the same sounds, but now it's the feeling that it gives me that's different. In the beginning of class, many of my classmates believed the piece sounded grand and heroic, and that is still the case. However, it has changed into something grand that is a salute to the pride that Wagner has for himself. I feel he has created this piece of music to prove he can do it, rather than to entertain.

In the beginning, I did not really associate this musical piece with anything political. However, after learning about Wagner's anti-Semitism, my thoughts on this piece have been tainted. Now I am imagining German nationalism being conveyed in the beginning with the triumphant music and something negative associated with the Jews during the more ominous parts of the piece. Overall, in my opinion, Wagner is not as memorable as Beethoven's work.

Listening experience has hanged for the worse

My listening experience has changed significantly since reading the passage from "Jewishness in Music." I feel less excited and this piece just feels dull to me. I'm guessing his outlook and views have definitely impacted the experience for me.

I'm definitely considering his ego. Even the most beautiful music cannot make me consider liking a racist.

After I understand his ideas, I feel a little bit sad listening to his music.

It still sounds the same, but I didn't want to hear it or evaluate it anymore like we did in the beginning. His negative comments ruined the positive out of the song.

Separating the artist from the person

Being an artist is different (a person with talent to do/make/compose music or sing) than being a human being (whatever the mindset/beliefs we have).

I can't match a face to the music, so I'm not thinking about Wagner.

You cannot separate the artist from the person

My listening experience is different from when I first heard it because now I feel as if by listening to it I'm supporting him and his statement. Therefore, I can't really connect to it spiritually as I first did.

I can't help but keep thinking that this person is not very nice. I feel a little uneasy. I didn't like the piece that much at first and now I really don't like it.

Conflicted

It's still the same. The music still instills excitement but the view on the composer is in a negative light. I may not agree with his ideas, but his music is not bad.

I'm intrigued and disgusted at the same time. My ears can't help but enjoy the sounds but my mind is just fighting against liking his music because of how Wagner views Jewish people.

Well my experience now is still the same. I still get the same feeling I got before, and Wagner is a douche.

I feel he is a genius in music but a bastard in life.

Listening is just listening, man

The first time was enjoyable, but the second time was much more comfortable and recognizable.

Wagner's ideas don't make me feel anything. Unfortunately, thousands of people also feel this way and if I were to get upset each time I came across ignorance it would only take away from me. I think it is unfortunate that he carried these thoughts with him. My listening experience didn't change. I still got the same thoughts and feeling that I got the first time listening to the piece. Fantastic ending, which I noticed this time.

Big takeaways:

1. There is no single right or wrong way to listen to or think about music.
2. Different information is relevant or helpful in different situations.
3. You may prefer to know (or not know!) certain things—be cognizant and purposeful in your knowledge seeking or ignorance.
4. A listener's reaction to a musical experience reveals what matters to that individual listener, what principles they bring to the listening experience, what knowledge they have, and how they think about music.