

# Why Music? Is Music Different from the Other Arts?

Institute of Neurology, Queen Square

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## TRANSCRIPTS

### Can Music Portray Happiness and Sadness?

*Stephen Johnson with Ian Ritchie, Ian Brown and the Sacconi Quartet*

**Michael Trimble:** So, we're now going to move into the final section. There is the debate to come of course, but for now some music. I'm just going to hand over to Ian Ritchie, who's very instrumental in the charity as you'll see if you look in the programme. There is a very long list of very, very important roles in relation to the arts and music in particular. I'm not going to go through them all, it would take too long, but I'm going to ask him if he would take over chairing the next session.

**Ian Ritchie:** Michael, thank you very much. I'm going to say very little indeed, other than a word or two of introduction to the artists. We have indeed heard important messages earlier in the day of the relationship between performers, between musicians and their audiences, and I can assure you that everybody on stage represents music making and connecting with audiences par excellence. The quartet have a wonderful record among the younger generation of chamber musicians around the country for their very special engagement, not only with the public but also with composers in that very important sacred triangle that Britten spoke of, that triangle between the composer, the performer and the audience and bringing that wonderful dynamic connection together.

And the same also must be said of Ian Brown. Fantastic pianist, as a soloist and as a chamber musician, also a conductor. A great musical collaborator and communicator, and a great champion of new work as well as classical work.

And of course Stephen himself. A wonderfully communicative broadcaster, writer and, as you will have gathered from everybody here from last year, a fantastic communicator on the subjects we are dealing with, the subject being the relationship between music and emotion. Can music portray happiness and sadness? Actually, can music *arouse* happiness and sadness? Which is sometimes a different thing. But we'll learn all about it now, and hopefully in the concert tonight. I'm going to hand over now, without saying anything further, to Stephen.

**Stephen Johnson:** Thank you. Just one thing to say though, before we get started. Ian is going to be trying to play some extracts from some particularly challenging piano music on an instrument that bears about the same kind of resemblance to a concert grand as a blow-up doll does to a real person. So this is a kind of act of heroism in its own right. But, it's sounding promising I can tell you. Ian can probably make music even on a silent keyboard.

We've been hearing a lot about music today, but it really is about time we heard a bit more of the subject itself. Now, I'm just sort of drawing breath after some of the stuff we've heard today, I feel a kind of double sense of awe; awe at how much

has been understood already scientifically, how much progress has been made by neurophysiology, and another sense of awe at how much remains, not only unexplained, but probably inexplicable. It reminds me of a favourite little parable of mine of Kafka's about crows. If you imagine that crows represent science and the heavens represent the unknowable:

'The crows maintained that it would be possible for a single crow to capture the heavens. This may be true. But ultimately it says nothing against the heavens, for the heavens simply signify the impossibility of crows.'

So, we've heard from Stravinsky already, a typically self-distancing, ironic, Stravinskian deadpan remark about music. On other occasions Stravinsky said that music, of itself, could express nothing, absolutely nothing. That's actually a statement that, to me, says a great deal less than it actually seems to say because you could say that language, of itself, can either express nothing or very, very little. If I make the statement 'I am sad', what does that communicate to you in my saying it just like that? As a simple conveyance of factual information, ok, you can believe it or not, but for it to express itself and have any kind of resonance (there's that word again) there has to be so much more, to register the emotional fact if I want you to believe that I really am feeling sad at this moment, which fortunately I'm not. There are so many other factors involved: the tone of voice, the melodic curve, the rhythm I bring to it, the body language. Generally speaking these are musical elements. You could say that the statement 'I am sad' without music, if you said it in a drab monotone, would evoke no physical emotional response in you at all, or puzzlement perhaps, or depending on how I say it, it could sound insincere, self-piteous, or that wonderful Yiddish word kvetching. Or if you imagine it said in a low voice of a child it could be achingly moving.

In classical music there are all sorts of complexities that we come to here. We've talked about the question of what is it that the composer means to convey, if that's a conscious issue at all. There's a very nice passage I like in the composer Paul Hindemith's autobiography where he says:

'Imagine you get a commission to write a tragic overture and you've got a week to write it in. Does that mean you have to feel tragic all week? What if you get a large cheque on the Wednesday?'

Somehow, however, the music continues if you're in the right frame of mind to express tragic emotions, or to convey or portray some sort of idea of tragic emotion. What's going on? There is also the other dimension of how these people interpret it, and I hope we're going to get a little bit more insight from these people today, talking about and playing some of the music I have chosen, and we'll bring in you of course, at the end, and talk about your reactions, and that's when it gets particularly interesting.

There is one basic equation about happiness and sadness, which is central to the understanding of Western classical music, and I think to the understanding to a lot of pop music as well, and that is the idea that the minor key tends to express darker, sadder emotions, and the major tends to express brighter, happier emotions. Ian, could you oblige us with a minor chord and then a major?

[Plays a minor chord.]

That's a lovely Beethovenian minor chord there. And now a major chord please.

[Plays a major chord.]

Did most of you experience a kind of lightening of mood in that second chord? Yes, quite a lot of you did. I'd be very interested to hear from those of you who didn't.

Could this be, to some extent, a representation of our culture and the way we're brought up to experience music? I remember talking some years ago to a great Russian friend of mine, and I remember saying to him 'Dmitri, why is it that so much Russian music, from symphonies to operas to pop music to folk music to even the jingles on the radio, is in the minor?' And he said something that I'll never forget, he said 'that is because we reserve the major key for inexpressible sorrow.'

But that in itself is a very interesting point. I know there are some people, for instance, that say that they never find Mozart sadder than when he's in the major key. I was talking to Ian about this for a little bit before, and we were talking about Beethoven, who's very germane because in some ways he is the pioneer of the modern emotional language of music and not just in classical music alone. We were talking about this whole question of major keys expressing positive, happy emotions and you came up with a very good example, a paradoxical one in fact.

**Ian Brown:** Yes, exactly. Sorry, I'm doing my Elton John impression here. There's a story about Elton John, he was always very jealous of people like Mick Jagger who could prance around the stage, looking sexy and so on, and he said 'here am I stuck behind this 9 foot plank of wood.' But I'm not stuck behind a 9 foot plank of wood. I wish I were! If we take the *Appassionata Sonata* of Beethoven's – this is the beginning.

[Plays beginning.]

So it's dark, dark. But the slow movement, which you expect to be the saddest movement, is in fact in D flat major.

[Plays example.]

Now is that sadder or happier than the F minor opening? I don't know, but it's very interesting. It has an ambiguous quality because it has, in the major, almost a sort of spiritual quality, if that isn't too pompous. Another wonderful example is the *Archduke* slow movement from the *Archduke Trio*.

[Plays example.]

But what if I put that into the minor?

[Plays example in the minor key.]

I can hear Beethoven turning in his grave, but that is an example. It is almost more, not painful, that's the wrong word, but maybe you can think of a better word. A wonderful example I think also is the Bach B minor Mass, the *Crucifixus*, starting in E minor.

[Plays example.]

This wonderful minor phrase of great tragedy, and it comes to an end in E minor and you can imagine the choir, soft, soft, soft, soft strings, but then it isn't the end in E minor, he goes on...

[Plays example.]

...unexpected, and ends in the major. The greatest tragedy in the history of Christendom or whatever; it doesn't end in E minor, it ends in G major, ready for the *Resurrexit* in D major. One final wonderful example is the most famous chord in the world.

[Plays Tristan chord.]

Now that chord – doesn't this just remind you of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra? – is desperate to do all sorts of things. That note wants to go down to there...every note is pulling...and so it resolves from this most painful, most tense resolving. But of course it hasn't resolved, because that's still a seventh chord wanting to go to A major or A minor. But of course Wagner doesn't do either of those things. In fact he doesn't resolve the chord for five hours.

**S.J:** And by that time you really want it to resolve.

**I.B:** Yes, you desperately want it to. And many deaths and two dinner breaks later, he resolves into B major which lifts you, and you walk out of the opera house lifted, don't you? You don't walk out thinking oh my God. But of course it's been a terrible tragedy, so why does that B major chord express what we have just seen?

**S.J:** We've brought up an interesting question here, about the whole matter of context in music. This is very interesting for me because pop music can express very powerful emotions and can do so in a very raw and direct way, but on the whole it tends to express one emotion in a kind of categorical state. One gesture, such as 'I feel sad' or 'I feel happy' usually because somebody else is involved in some way or other. When I thought of that, I thought of the impact I had on hearing a Prince song called *I Hate You* which expressed what it had to say I thought pretty effectively, but then towards the end actually, Prince managed to convey the idea that this emotion was beginning to resolve itself in another kind of direction, and immediately I thought, I wonder if he's been listening to Beethoven? Because Beethoven is the absolute master of this question of how context can change the meaning of music. We had a hint of it in the way that we heard how the slow movement of the *Appassionata* works, after having followed the F minor first movement.

Now, I want Ian to give us an example from one of my absolute favourite Beethoven piano sonatas – one I've set myself as a task to learn before I'm sixty – the last movement of *Opus 110, Piano Sonata in A flat*, the next to the last piano sonata.

It has a melody in it that Beethoven called the ‘Klagender Gesang’, the song of lamentation, so he’s giving you a fairly hefty clue. He’s also given you a hefty clue in that he’s put it in the key of A flat minor, which is seven flats, as many flats as you can have, which is going to make the pianist feel a little bit queasy to start with. So already there is something in the way that the information is going from the composer to the pianist privately, which says to prepare yourself for something a little out of the ordinary here, in that word, ‘Klagender Gesang’. The first time we hear this melody, it has a very characteristic little falling phrase. Could you just play that phrase Ian?

[Plays example.]

Now that’s almost an archetype of sadness. If you think of the Albinoni *Adagio*, it’s almost exactly the same phrase, although Beethoven wouldn’t have known the Albinoni *Adagio*, so he wasn’t pinching it. That little figure turns up as an image of lamentation again and again in works, so there’s already a matter of association. Let’s just hear a bit of the melody as it occurs the first time. Ian if you could just take it a little bit further?

[Plays example.]

Thank you Ian, that was beautiful, and I don’t quite know how you managed it on that machine. Just before we go on, did anyone experience that as conveying or arousing happy emotions? None of you. One person? No. I didn’t think so. This last movement goes on quite a journey. A fugue grows out of this which goes through a variety of keys and then we end up in a key very different from that A flat minor. Would you play that chord of A flat minor again, Ian?

[Plays A flat minor chord.]

And now we end up in G minor.

[Plays G minor chord.]

So, a fundamental for anyone with any kind of memory of where we started: a sense of dissonance in the relation of the new key to where we started. We have a reprise of that opening ‘Klagender Gesang’, only what Beethoven does with it is absolutely extraordinary. He now breaks it up. He’s marked it *ermattet* – exhausted. *Klagend* – weeping. He actually breaks up the phrases so that it no longer flows as Ian played it the first time but you can actually feel the catch in the breath. It sounds like somebody trying to speak and finding that the emotion is so intense that it’s almost choking them. Could you give us an example of that, Ian?

[Plays example.]

Now I don’t know about you, but I actually find myself, things in my diaphragm, catching my breath as I’m listening to that. Something extraordinarily empathic seems to happen. And it’s almost as though you can...well, not just emotions, but as though the thing was close to verbal expression. You had something that I think the great violinist Sándor Végh said to you, Ian.

**I.B:** Yes, Sándor Végh, a great violinist and teacher. He said in a very loud, guttural Hungarian accent which I will not imitate, but he said: ‘Don’t sing to me. Don’t sing. I want you to speak to me.’ And we can do that in the way we play, the way we phrase things. Not necessarily in making very long lines, but in a way, broken up lines. So if you say ‘speak to me’, you don’t say ‘speak – to – me’, you say ‘*speak* to me’, so you’re always emphasising notes and releasing notes, and that can actually contribute to what you’re saying, this feeling of a sigh.

**S.J:** When we bring in string instruments it gets even more interesting, because articulate and extraordinarily expressive as Ian is on this contraption here, the violin in particular has even more capabilities when it comes to imitating the intonations of the human voice. In a slightly similar passage from the *Cavatina*, the fifth movement of Beethoven’s *Opus 130 String Quartet*. *Cavatina* of course means a song, and it is in song form. That is, you have a melody at the beginning, a very sung melody, and then a contrasting middle section before the opening melody returns. The contrasting middle section is absolutely extraordinary. He does what he does there, in the finale of *Opus 110*, but from this point he’s relying even more on the kind of vocal inflections that the string instruments can bring to the music. If you think back before Beethoven, instructions on music tended to be as simple as *adagio* or *allegro*, fast, slow, quiet, loud. Beethoven writes instructions, shortly after that passage in *Opus 110*, there is one of my favourite markings in all of music, which is *nach und nach wieder auflebend* – little by little returning to life, and you can actually feel it happening as this fugue reassembles itself from the wreckage at the end of that aria.

The marking in the slow movement in *Opus 130* is *beklemmt* – oppressed, and here again, a very simple pulsating accompaniment on the strings. If we could ask the Sacconis to play this. we’ll hear just how close it can get to the sound of human speech. All those melodic and musical elements that come into human speech, that make human speech really convey emotion, beyond the facts of the words.

[*Sacconi Quartet performs example.*]

Extraordinarily affecting music. Beethoven’s secretary Karl Holz records that when Beethoven read through the manuscript for the first time he actually wept as he read it. Extraordinary to remember that Beethoven hadn’t been able to hear a thing for about fifteen years when he wrote that music. So he must have been living it and experiencing it in his head incredibly intensely at that moment. It is the kind of music that, when you know it well, even the memory of it can evoke those sort of emotions. Yes, a very strong nod there from our leader.

We’ve had some pretty sad music already. Time to turn to the counterpoint – happiness. I don’t know about you but I find happiness a rather difficult emotion to define. I hope that doesn’t say more about me than it does about the concept. My own feeling is that the Americans have a lot to answer for writing the pursuit of happiness into their constitution. It was after all, two and a half millennia ago that the philosopher Heraclitus said that ‘the faster you run after happiness, the faster it runs from you.’ But it is a word that seems to have changed its meaning over the last century. After all, if you look at the old Anglican prayer book and you come across the psalm *Happy is the Man who puts his Faith in the Lord*, that doesn’t mean he’s jumping up and down going yeah! It means he is well-situated, well-established, he is happy in another sense, in a basic fundamental existential sense. We’re not talking about joy here, we’re talking about a mood of general content, a different kind of

emotion. But often when you ask musicians about happiness, who are the kind of composers who express happiness? One name pops up over and over again, and that was Beethoven's teacher, Haydn.

The Sacconis have brought along two rather nice examples from Haydn's string quartets today. We'd like to start with the beginning of one of Haydn's last quartets, the opening of *Opus 77, No. 1 in G*. Here's a theme that, again, I don't think I'm courting controversy, says a generally happy state of mind.

[*Sacconi Quartet performs example.*]

For some reason or other it just invites that little delay we got at the beginning of the fourth bar, the little pause, that little element of teasing, playing with the notes. You can imagine the composer having a wonderful time as he wrote it, and that may well have not been the case. But certainly that's the effect that's conveyed. Again, did anybody in the audience experience that music as sad? No. Nobody's even going to pretend that they thought that was sad. Ray Tallis and I, when we were at Cheltenham Festival the year before last, we did a little not quite controlled experiment on the audience. We played them various examples of music and we asked people to fill in forms to say what emotions they suggested. And I chose one deliberately that I thought had an ambiguous character and the happy/sad/ambiguous lineup was about 80-90% in agreement wasn't it?

There's this idea that's often trotted out by people who get uncomfortable around the idea of talking about emotional connections with music – and they do exist still, unfortunately – that somehow or other, actually, no, if you play one piece of music to people they will vary enormously in their reaction. Well there will be some emotional variation but what Ray and I experienced, either from the reactions of musicians or from audiences, does suggest that there is far more congruence about this sort of thing than the propagandists would have you believe.

I remember a while ago being in a café in Ledbury in Herefordshire where I live and they'd got Classic FM on in the background. I'm not a great fan of background music myself actually, I'd rather listen to it, or not, but the music was there in the background and on the whole it was the more innocuous, less demanding end of the classical music spectrum. Two girls were chatting behind the counter. I think I was the only person in there, having a coffee and a cake, and suddenly on came Samuel Barber's *Adagio*. There was a momentary pause, and then these two girls started talking about someone they knew who'd died only just recently. And they carried on talking about this while the Barber played in the background, neither of them acknowledging that this was in any way connected to the music. The Barber stopped, there was a little announcement, and we went into something else, and the subject changed. That was extremely interesting, but again, it's not scientific and yet so many of us will have known this kind of lineup, this curious convergence there seems to be when it comes to the emotional character of the music. But I wonder, how much of that has to do with how the performers played it? We saw the looks on their [*the Sacconi's*] faces and they had very different expressions from when they were playing the Beethoven. And also, there are little basic things like tempo where you express it. Perhaps you could try playing that a little slower and heavier and see what it actually does to the character of the music?

[*Sacconi Quartet performs example.*]

Believe it or not, I do actually remember once hearing a performance like that, and someone said to me at the end ‘what’s all this about Haydn being happy?’ I loved the little whine at the end. When you played it a moment ago it expressed delight, I could see it in your faces, but now it suddenly seems to express something quite different.

Now, the Sacconis have brought along a very nice example from the previous but one Haydn quartet, *Opus 76, No. 5*, the slow movement, as an example of a piece that seems curiously poised between the happiness/sadness axis. I’d like to bring you in here please Ben. This is the slow movement of the quartet and there are various elements in this that as soon as you look at it on the page are telling you that this is something a bit out of the ordinary aren’t there?

**Ben Hancox, violin:** Yes. Again, he writes these special words that you see that often follow a tempo marking and in this case it’s *mesto* which means sad, but at the same time we’re in a key that is riddled with sharps – F sharp major. What I was thinking about whilst listening to what we’ve been talking about and also hearing Ian play is, I think it’s often the sense of architecture, and how the composers knew where to place these moments. For example, the extract we played from the *Cavatina*, where that happens, in the movement itself, but where *Cavatina* is placed within the context of the entire *Opus 130* quartet, and in the same way *Opus 76, No. 5*, what we’re going to play you now, follows some incredibly bright D major chords.

**S.J:** What people say about D major, which Haydn, who had an intuitive feel for the string quartet would have known, is that it’s got a lot of open strings in it, which tend to be rather bright. Maybe you could just play us the sounds of some of the string so we could hear what they’re like? If you could give us a chord of D major then we can hear how bright that sound is.

[*Sacconis play a D major chord.*]

Can you hear the open strings reverberating? Now, with F sharp major there aren’t any open strings. So almost immediately you’ve got a darker sound haven’t you?

**B.H:** That’s right. I think what was touched upon was this sense that...I feel in the *Cavatina* but also here, it almost feels as if one is physically being lifted. I think it’s that sense that when you have this paradoxical major key, that you still feel that it’s a very difficult emotion to pin down.

**S.J:** Well, we should hear a bit of this now. So, the slow movement from *Opus 76, No. 5*.

[*Sacconis play example.*]

So much for the idea of Haydn as the inspired prankster who didn’t do deep feeling. That’s a pretty marvelous exception to that I think. In the way that that movement goes on and the way it recapitulates the first idea, again this whole question of context, and the vogue word is ‘narrative’ but basically we’re talking about storytelling. But this is music which, while it obeys certain formal rules to do with music and symmetry, song forms, dance forms, at the same time seems to have

an element of storytelling built into it. One of the essences of narrative is change, transformation, and the way that ideas are transformed as they go through the process, adds intensely to the expectations, and Ian and I will be looking at that in connection with the scherzo of the *Hammerklavier Sonata* in a moment, which is one of the works in tonight's concert, the scherzo that is. Ian's not going to play the entire *Hammerklavier* and certainly not on this thing here.

But what about this whole question of ambiguity? One of the works in tonight's concert which is really fascinating from a point of view of people's emotions is the Elgar *Piano Quintet*. There doesn't seem to be much divergence, except that an awful lot of people who know the Elgar *Piano Quintet* talk about how fascinatingly ambiguous they find its mood; how difficult they find it to describe; what it is that this music is about. Elgar himself often turns up quite high on lists of composers who may have suffered from bipolar affective disorder. There is plenty of evidence for this in his life. He would have these hyper-manic episodes where he would produce work at fantastic speeds, often after a period of intense depression. Rosa Burley for instance, one of his friends, talks about when he was writing the *Organ Sonata* early in his career. She went round every day for a month and virtually had to drag him out of bed, sit him down and get him to write, and at the end of the month there wasn't much on paper. And then suddenly something happened. Elgar produced this piece at terrific speed and was exhilarated for a couple of days and then crashed. There was an incredibly poignant letter after Elgar completed his *Violin Concerto*, another of these works which he's written at enormous speed, a work which seems to contain universes of feeling. He's thrilled with it, sends it off to the publisher. Two days later he's writing a letter to a close friend and says:

'I went and sat on Hampstead Heath and sobbed and wrapped my coat around me and thought I hate it, I hate it so much, and it's too late to burn it, it's already at the publishers, there's nothing I can do with the wretched thing.'

Elgar has a remarkable ability, particularly in his later works, to convey the idea of things that seem emotionally poised on a knife-edge. When we were talking about this over lunch I'd actually chosen the beginning of the finale of the quintet because it turns from music that seems haunting, as Elgar himself described it, with these strange death taps, drum taps in the background, suddenly into a robust, confident Elgar who sounds more like the Elgar of *Land of Hope and Glory*, except that itself has a kind of question mark over it because of the context. We were thinking of doing that and then I suddenly said, 'oh, there's that second theme in the first movement isn't there?', and everybody in an instant said yes! Let's just hear the beginning of the second theme of the first movement of the Elgar, and again, what kind of emotion do you think the composer is portraying? What kind of emotion does it arouse in you?

[*Sacconis and Ian Brown play example.*]

So who'd say that was a happy little tune? Who'd say it was a sad tune? Who'd say it was both? Quite a few of you, interesting. Elgar himself had an expression for a certain one of his moods which he calls 'smiling with a sigh' and I think that hits that pretty much on the head. We certainly all felt that today.

I think again, there's an element of memory and context in this which is more important because, if you could just play that little figure from the very beginning of the quintet, it starts with some particularly dark, haunted music and these strange little drum taps.

[*Ian Brown plays example.*]

When you hear that little second theme, there just in the background dimly is the memory of that much more funereal figure from the beginning of the piece. So again, context does an awful lot to how we understand this music.

To end with, as a way of flagging up the concert tonight, Ian and I are going to take a quick look at the scherzo of Beethoven's *Hammerklavier Sonata*. The movement itself is only three minutes long, it's a tiny movement and it seems to compress an enormous amount into a tiny, tiny space and yet there are so many fascinating changes in the course of it, and how the changes relate have such an effect on how we emotionally receive this music. To start with, Ian, could we just have a bit of the beginning?

[*Ian Brown plays example.*]

Sounds pretty jolly doesn't it, on the face of it? There's that kind of dance rhythmic element in the background. That sort of rhythm is a rhythm to you that suggests something particularly lively, Ian?

**I.B:** Well, definitely, yes, it's like the grace notes in the Haydn, it immediately gives you a spark. It's like a bubble of champagne.

**S.J:** Nicely put. And then there's something questioning that comes just a little later isn't there, just in bar 18.

**I.B:** Yes, exactly.

[*Plays example.*]

**S.J:** And the piece takes a moment or two to pick itself out of that doesn't it.

[*Plays example.*]

There's something about those two emphatic B flats at the end, which is Beethoven saying, I'm damned if I'm going to give into this feeling at this point. And then comes what would be conventional, because scherzos normally run in this basic symmetrical A – B – A pattern, scherzo – trio – scherzo. Then comes what would be the trio section. And this is in the darker key of B flat minor, but Beethoven again starts it with all sorts of dislocating and unsettling things here doesn't he Ian?

**I.B:** Yes, absolutely. Everything is slightly displaced isn't it? It starts with an incredibly simple B flat minor arpeggio, but you can't decide what the next rhythm is going to be, there's no pattern to it.

**S.J:** Yes, this is still in three beats in a bar, but as Ian plays it try and conduct along in your heads and see if you can keep to the three in a bar pattern, it's not that easy.

**I.B:** Just to give you a clue, it starts on an upbeat.

[Plays example.]

**S.J:** Yes, it still catches me out every time I hear it. It creates a slight sense of unease for me Ian...

**I.B:** Yes, exactly. You should be thinking, well it's easy, one-two-three, nice and comfortable.

**S.J:** Almost like the *Eroica Symphony* in the minor, except it's not – it's almost impossible to sing isn't it.

**I.B:** And here he adds an extra beat, which throws you off completely.

**S.J:** Just in case you'd got comfortable. And then something happens which is really bizarre. You don't normally change time signatures in a scherzo do you? You stay in three in a bar all the way though, but then something arrives that...well, maybe you could give us a demonstration Ian?

[Plays example.]

Yes, it's suddenly as if Beethoven had taken up another career as a silent film pianist. And then there's that lovely bit of pure Tom and Jerry. Roger, this morning, mentioned Heinrich Schenker, the great pioneer of the idea of the deep structure of music, he analyses this music and shows that it is a perfectly functional dominant minor ninth preparing for the return of the main theme. But could anything seem less relevant to what actually happens there? It's quite shocking isn't it, for a moment you don't know where you are do you? It's as though Beethoven is actually pulling at the fabric of the structure to see if it will actually snap.

**I.B:** Yes, and the beautiful thing is of course, that after the silence...the silences are as important as the notes aren't they, in a sense.

**S.J:** Well, I can't remember who it was that said that a good composer really knows how to use silence most of all, but Beethoven is a fabulous example of this. Also, what happens to the effect of that little supposedly happy tune when we hear it after this hint of a nervous breakdown in the middle of the scherzo? The whole character, when that little figure comes back has changed. Something inside you protests and says, what's this innocent happy little figure doing after what we've just been through? And as usual, Beethoven doesn't simply leave it at that does he? We get to near the end and there's the most fabulous thing, where it seems we get to the end of the piece and he starts to hammer home his home key of B flat in big octaves, and then something very strange happens doesn't it?

[Plays example.]

And that's how it ends. That's a marvelous example I think of just how context can change. What initially sounds like a happy little tune and you put it through quite an adventure in less than three minutes.

**I.B:** And suddenly it's full of threat isn't it? You wonder what's going to happen next. It's as if he takes this simple little tune and knocks it on the head. But the little tune wins in the end.

**S.J:** And then after that comes one of Beethoven's greatest and most exploratory, darkest slow movements. It's extraordinary how that curious, surreal almost, adventure sets this up.

**I.B:** Yes, absolutely. Well again, the distance of keys. We end in B flat, and then we get into F sharp minor, just a completely different world all together. Vaguely reminiscent of late quartets isn't it, that sort of theme, the way it's harmonised,

**S.J:** Yes. Well, I'm still impressed that you were able to make that scherzo work on this Ian. It's time I think really to throw this open to the floor and get some people's reactions or questions.

**Question:** We've talked about music evoking sadness and evoking happiness and we can all listen to music and...I cry at a piece of music, but there's still a sense of which I'm not genuinely sad. At that moment it's evoking a response in me, but I'm not really sad, I can go away after and make a cup of tea and chat as much as I could before. So are we really experiencing those emotions, or is it some kind of vicarious emotion, we're not genuinely sad or genuinely happy?

**S.J:** This is something that fascinates me actually, because I remember saying many years ago, that in dealing with serious clinical depression, I found that the music of Shostakovich had helped me and a friend said 'What?!' and I did think this was a peculiar paradox; that a composer of some of the bleakest, violent, sardonic, apparently comfortless music in the 20<sup>th</sup> century should have been so helpful in this kind of process. But I remember doing a documentary about Shostakovich in 2007 and we were lucky enough to meet people who had survived Stalinism, and in one case the Siege of Leningrad. Over and over again we got the same reaction. What was the music that helped you through this? Shostakovich. Shostakovich. Shostakovich. You'd have thought that living under a system like Stalinist tyranny, the last thing you'd need was music that made you feel what you were feeling already.

I remember talking to a remarkable man called Viktor Kozlov, who was 85 and who had been a Red Army clarinetist in the war, in the Red Army band, and he'd been got up one morning and told get your clarinet, get your parachute on, we're going to drop you into Leningrad and you're going to play a symphony. And this was the *Leningrad Symphony* of Shostakovich and if you remember, the city of Leningrad was cut off for two and a half years. The first winter of the siege was absolutely catastrophic. Temperatures plummeted to minus 45. A million people died of either hypothermia or malnutrition. It wasn't any warmer in the buildings than it was in the streets. People were living off soup made from boots and the linings of books. And when Viktor Kozlov played in the rehearsal, half the orchestra had died and they couldn't rehearse for more than ten minutes at the time, because none of the wind

players had the strength to blow for any longer than that. So they were given special diets. And this is not, on the whole, Shostakovich's *Leningrad Symphony*, a happy, positive, Haydnesque get-up-and-dance piece by any means. I remember his wife was there as well. He was this wonderful robust, hospitable, old-fashioned Russian gentleman and I said to him at the end, 'when you hear this music today does it still have the same effect on you?' And he grabbed my arm so hard and I remember him saying 'It's not possible to say', and him and his wife, it just hit them, and they started sobbing, and it was a truly extraordinary moment for me, to encounter something like that.

I remember also talking to a 93 year old critic who'd been at the first performance of Shostakovich's *Fifth Symphony* where Shostakovich has rehabilitated himself at the height of the Stalinist terror, and had done so in writing a piece that was not the prescribed, aren't we all happy in this Stalinist utopia, the piece was prevalingly tragic until the end which managed to provide this miraculously ambiguous but somehow convincing enough triumphant ending, and I asked what was it like? And he said 'you have no idea. You're living in hell and all around you art is grinning lamely and telling you that this is utopia, then suddenly you hear music that expresses everything that you feel and you want to cry for joy, because you realise you're not alone, something is speaking to you', and he said something to me which I shan't forget and that was 'there is nothing in the world more affirmative, more positive, than to hear your worst emotions transformed into something magnificent.'

It reminds me of a line which reduced me to tears when I was reading Kafka's *Metamorphosis* in German for the first time, something I'd forgotten when I'd read it years before. Towards the end of that seemingly terrible story, Gregor, who's been transformed into a giant cockroach...it's getting towards the end and we know that his end is not far. He hears the sound of a violin playing, and suddenly he's incredibly moved, and there's this line: 'how could he be a beast, if music could make him feel like this?' and this is the kind of feeling that over and over again, what they [*the Russians*] were hearing was something analogous to what they were feeling. So closely analogous, that it could have the effect of making you cry and weep and yet at the same time there was something about the process of aesthetic transformation of this which, rather than simply leaving you with the emotion as it was in its raw state, turned it into something which you could contemplate, you could see, and see your own self reflected in a positive way back in it.

I don't know if that's a helpful way to put it but it isn't simply a question of turning on the tap and letting those emotions out. It's about what you make with them, and how you transform them. The thing about the Beethoven, even in the slow movement that follows, which has some desperately sad music in it, is that all of the time you're aware of the fabulous ingenuity that he's created. You're aware of the fact that their imagination is working at full stretch as they transform these emotions into art objects and that in itself says something about being human, that I think distances us from simply being left in a pool of our own emotions. I don't know if that answers your question. But yes it is and no it's not, I think is what I'm basically saying.

**Question:** Something that I'm very interested in, about the way music can provoke emotions, is that it seems to still work even if you don't like the music you're listening to, or think it's very good. For example, my children watch a lot of Disney movies and the music that they use in Disney they use very specifically in order to provoke emotion. Now I don't particularly like it, but I do find that it makes me well

up whether I liked it or not, and I wonder how that works? It just seems to work completely viscerally. The tricks that composers are using work on me whether or not I approve of what they produced in the end.

**S.J:** It has a habit of getting under the wire of our defenses doesn't it? One thing that I've noticed is, I've often felt that if there's somebody who really, really irritates you, it's quite possible that the reason they do so is because they remind you of something in yourself that you'd rather not acknowledge. And I've even got to the stage of asking myself now, when there are composers I really don't like, is it because there's something in me that they trigger off that I'm not comfortable with? The classic example for that with me, until I was in my mid 20s, was Mahler. I took every opportunity to sneer at him. I think I probably upset quite a few people with remarks I made about Mahler, until one day the horrible truth hit me that the reason I really, really didn't want to like this music was because it made me feel far too uncomfortably aware of things I'd really rather not acknowledge in myself.

There is that remark of Noel Coward's: 'oh dear, how potent cheap music is'. So what composer better understood that 'cheap music' in inverted commas, music that we think is not any good, can still get under that wire, can't it?

**Question:** Are you saying that secretly I want to be a fairy princess?

**S.J:** I couldn't possibly comment.

**I.B:** There are also certain composers I think, who have a reputation for being a bit manipulating, and you can sort of say...Richard Strauss has this reputation. I mean, I like Richard Strauss, so I am seduced by it, but sometimes you sort of feel that you're being seduced against your better judgment because he's such a wizard at manipulating harmony in particular. With those composers you sometimes feel that there is something not quite genuine about it. Which of course you never feel about the Bachs and the Beethovens and so on. I don't know quite what the difference is, but you can feel him planting certain chords at certain times.

**S.J:** There's still always the question of whether outright rejection is the honest response to that. You may come up in the end that that is exactly what Strauss or Puccini are doing. I have my doubts with Puccini, I sometimes think no, actually he's searingly honest, but it is a curious journey to go on; the moment you try to become aware of your own reactions to a piece of music and why can be very complex and multilayered.

**I.B:** I think you should just lay back and enjoy it.

**S.J:** Enjoy being a fairy princess?!

**Question:** Just to talk about cheap music, I was going to say something about Irving Berlin which is that *Stepping out with my Baby* and *Putting on the Ritz* are in minor keys and yet the most poignant song he wrote, *What'll I Do* is in the major. I don't know what that proves...

**S.J:** It just goes to show what a complicated subject this is.

**Question:** May I ask, in this context, what about Deryck Cooke and *The Language of Music*? I think Professor Scruton has found him unsatisfactory as an analysis of the way music affects us, but it seems to me that a great deal of this discussion was dealt with by Cooke in that book and I'd like to know whether I'm allowed to go on admiring him.

**S.J:** Well you're certainly allowed to go on admiring Deryck Cooke, he was a marvelous man and a force for good and did some extraordinary things, not least the remarkable performing version of Mahler's *Tenth Symphony* without which we would never have known that the *Ninth Symphony* was not the end of Mahler's journey and that he was actually heading off somewhere else at the time he died, and actually the thing itself is pretty remarkable, once you've made a few allowances, in its own right. I think the problem with Deryck Cooke, and I think I read Roger's objections to Deryck Cooke some time ago, and partly agreed with them, was that Deryck Cooke was trying to come up with almost a dictionary of musical expressive terms, and they're a lot more slippery, as we've tried to show in the process of the discussion, than actually being able to say: 'this is a sad phrase, in whatever context it appears it will sound sad', because we've shown that context can change things very, very much indeed. The way that it's played can change things very much, which is not a question which comes into *The Language of Music* at all. But I still think it's a remarkable book. I think it was a very brave book, because at the time when Deryck Cooke wrote that, it was deeply, deeply unfashionable in academic circles, musicological circles particularly, to talk about expression at all. I can remember when Charles Rosen's wonderful *The Classical Style* came up he was taken to task by some writers for using terms like 'melancholic' to describe a theme, or 'lamenting' or 'triumphant'. There was a received opinion that emotional response was subjective and therefore could not be analysed and could not be spoken of meaningfully other than as a subjective experience, whereas musical analysis was the scientific way to approach music. And as somebody who in a course of lecturing at Exeter University has read twenty analyses of the first movement of Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*, all of which came up with utterly different priorities, I can say that that is a load of nonsense. Musicological analysis is as subjective as anything as you will read on the subject of music. But I think Cooke was trying to make an effort in what I think was the right kind of direction.

**I.B:** He also said, this is not a dictionary. He was very open to the ambiguous.

**S.J:** He did say that, but it comes over when you read that, much more categorical than I think he probably planned.

**Question:** I wonder if I could come right at the end, to link the beginning and the end of what has been said today about tears, because we haven't distinguished much between tears of sadness and tears of joy, which I think is very important. But very little discussion goes on about what tears are. And I think if I could just bring a bit of neurology into this, a bit of an understanding of what they mean. It seems to me, that because the body can only communicate within its own terms, it sends out all kinds of behavioural signals, it seemed to me for a long time that when people move into tears, they're actually sending a signal out, that this curious thing called the self which we keep pretty well defended most of the time and intact, the self itself has become fluid. So what the body does is convey fluid to us. And so at that point of

fluidity, the self can be permeated, in way that it can't at other times, and so there's this extraordinary experience with some of the arts in which whatever it is that is being conveyed penetrates very deeply into the self, and the response of the self is to allow that penetration in and convey it through tears because it became fluid at that particular point. I think the beginning and the end of this session has talked about that fluidity which I think is an extraordinary aspect of the arts we've been talking about.

**S.J:** Well thank you, I shall take that away and think about it. It just reminds me of one of my favourite sayings from Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, which is worth bearing in mind, as we talk about this kind of thing as well, which is 'excess of joy weeps, excess of sorrow laughs'. Our emotions are very much more complicated sometimes than even we think they are when we're actually experiencing them. The release of tears is possibly an extremely valuable safety valve, I think in the midst of that kind of thing, of which I think we could only be profoundly grateful to people like Beethoven, and to these people of course, for bringing Beethoven to life for us again, which of course he would not be without them, so please give them a round of applause.