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Marja Karelia
Simon Fraser University
mkk9@sfu.ca

Kreutzer Sonata: Expressions of Human Anguish in Music, Literature and Beyond

The Kreutzer Sonata exemplifies expressions of human anguish through a perfect blend of music, literature and other arts. I will argue, as does Martha Nussbaum, that "music is intimately linked with our deepest strivings and most powerful emotions", and that _____ provides the ideal vehicle for such sentiments having profoundly provoked artistic genres for over three hundred years.

Our chain of events begins with the _____ that was composed by Beethoven three years after his deafness crisis. In 1802, Beethoven had written the Heiligenstadt Testament where he expressed his anguish about his deteriorating hearing and writes that "how could I possibly admit an infirmity in the one sense which ought to be more perfect in me than in others. What humiliation it is for me when someone standing next to me heard a flute in the distance or a shepherd singing and I heard nothing. Such incidents drove me almost to despair, a little more of that and I would have ended my life – it was only my art that held me back. It seemed to me impossible to leave the world until I had brought forth all that I felt within me"

The Heiligenstadt Testament was both an outpouring of grief in the face of his growing deafness and a determination to persevere in his art despite this impediment, and the result was his monumental violin sonata No.9 in A Major, Opus 47 for piano and violin. The Sonata was dedicated to the French violin virtuoso Rodolfe Kreutzer, who refused to play it. Never a great fan of Beethoven's music, Kreutzer found the Sonata "outrageously unintelligible" and said, that "one would have to be in the grip of a kind

fragment from the 1860's titled "The Wife-Murderer" dealing with the moral situation of a husband who murders his wife. The development of the ideological and thematic framework of the was infinitely connected with the moral, religious and existential crisis in Tolstoy's own life.

Although Tolstoy was already acquainted with the Sonata, its performance in his family's Moscow home in the spring of 1888 made an especially strong impression on him. As a result, he returned to the idea of writing a dramatic monologue on the theme of a husband who murders his wife, but this time the

Highlights of the plot

The story takes place on an overnight train ride. The passengers begin a discussion on love, marriage and divorce and the protagonist, referred to as Pozdnyshev gets into a conversation with the unnamed narrator, admits to killing his wife and offers to tell him what led him to that act. He claims that the root causes for the deed were “animal excesses” and “swinish connections” governing the relations between the sexes.

After marrying his unnamed wife, periods of passionate ‘love’, that he also refers to as animal sensuality, alternate with vicious fights. Then one day Pozdnyshev arranges a musical evening with friends and invites Trukhachevsky, a violinist and former acquaintance, to play music with his wife, who plays the piano. His constant jealousy surfaces while the two are playing Beethoven’s _____, a piece known for its musical range suggesting emotions from dark anger to deep meditation to exuberant joy.

Pozdnyshev is profoundly affected by the music and complains that some music is powerful enough to change one’s internal state to a foreign one. He manages to dampen his jealousy but returning early from a work-related trip he discovers his wife and Trukhachevsky playing music together in his house. He goes into a jealous rage, attacks his wife and kills her with a dagger. He soon realizes that he has committed an irreversible act and at her deathbed asks for her forgiveness. After eleven months in jail waiting for his trial, he was acquitted of murder in light of his wife’s apparent adultery. However, the question remains: Did the wife actually commit adultery? That question is left for the reader to decide.

- **Controversies**

_____ was controversial for its time and was initially banned in Russia as being obscene, and it si9.6 (t)-2.9 (t)-3tT0 Tw 973

The book also ran into problems in the United States in 1890 when the US Post Office prohibited the mailing of newspapers containing serialized installments of the *Kreutzer Sonata*, a decision later confirmed by the US Attorney General. The case went on to the Common Pleas Court in Philadelphia that ruled that Tolstoy's novel was not obscene. However, Theodor Roosevelt, then a member of the United States Civil Service Commission, called Tolstoy a sexual moral pervert.

- **In the meantime, *The Kreutzer Sonata* inspired Janacek**

Leos Janacek, born in 1854, was a Czech composer, musical theorist, folklorist, publicist and teacher. As he tended to look east for his literary and musical inspiration, evidence of his pan-Slavism is found in the String Quartet No.1, after Tolstoy's novella *The Kreutzer Sonata*, which Janacek owned in a Russian edition from 1900. The novella had first inspired Janacek in 1908, when he completed a piano trio based on the subject. The trio had its premiere in Brno on April 8th 1909, belatedly marking the Russian author's 80th birthday,

Janacek returned to Tolstoy's story and to his piano trio in 1923. The new string quartet, titled

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became synonymous with Prinet's sensual image and the lasting popularity of the campaign earned

The ballet is currently performed on the stage of the Stanislavsky and Nemirovich - Danchenko Music Theatre in Moscow and features original music of Beethoven along with music specially written for this production by the Iranian- American composer Gity Razaz. Robert Binet attributes great importance to the influence of music on the characters and says that, "Music connects the main character with her heart and soul. The violinist who she falls in love with is not really a person as such, but a portal that connects her with music, joy and freedom."

Conclusions

came to life through Beethoven's anguish about his hearing loss and still captures our imagination as it has for more than three hundred years, not only through music, but through literature, theatre, visual arts, films and ballet. Human anguish is universal and I am certain that we can expect yet another version of to resurface when we least expect it as lives on!

This presentation was based on

- Tolstoy, Leo.uer