

Richard Clayderman and André Gagnon - Common References of Componistic Stylistics

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Abstract: *Richard Clayderman and André Gagnon are two personalities of consumer cult music, attesting the power of sound art to impress the great masses of the public. Their stylistic features have common elements and deserve to be caught in a musical analysis that highlights the sound way that creates value in miniature genres with great audience.*

Keywords: *consumer, music, miniature, popular, piano*

1. Introduction

Richard Clayderman and André Gagnon are two personalities of consumer cult music, attesting the power of sound art to impress the great masses of the public. Their stylistic features have common elements and deserve to be caught in a musical analysis that highlights the sound way that creates value in miniature genres with great audience.

2. The problems: Richard Clayderman and André Gagnon, models of popular cult music

Richard Clayderman is the artistic pseudonym of Philippe Pages, a French pianist born in December 1953, who succeeded in a challenging period of anti-musical values, to put into the foreground of global music, with collaborators Senneville and Toussaint, multiple albums of compositions reinterpreting or rearranging works well known to the public at large (soundtracks, classical music, accessible works).

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His musical career began in 1976 and has moved, after promising studies in the Paris Conservatory, to the field of the accompanying bands and successful soloists of his time. The most important moment was *Ballade pour Adeline*, composed by Senneville for his daughter of the same name. The work was to be sold in over 22 million copies, and its tripartite structure under the form of lied is based on a discourse with arpeggio that establishes a song that remained in the emotional memory of millions of people. Initially composed for piano, the work also acquired an orchestral version and one dedicated to the guitar. At 23 years of age, the life of Clayderman was to change due to his sensitiveness and the delicate touch with which he interprets the *Ballad for Adeline*. His career included almost 1500 different melodies recorded in the style of the new Romanticism that was to proclaim that the romantic element – besides being eternally human – will never disappear from the history of the music for large masses people. The combination between the advantages of pop music accessibility and the professional discourse of cult music made his music very accessible and well sold.

“Romantic prince Richard Clayderman (...) on the basis of the classical piano music, adds the modern elements. Combining the classical music and the popular music, he gives the classical piano music new brilliance and new vitality. (...) Richard is romantic” (Yang, CQ, 2017).

With respect to Clayderman, we cannot speak of the nature of his composition, but only of interpretive aspects. The most publicised of his works (which was also the first one) keeps in line with classical music, but is meant for the public at large.

Ex. 1. *Ballade pour Adeline* (theme)

The work begins with an introduction that suggests entering into the tonality and atmosphere of the ballad. Initially, the discourse is divided between the lower level of left hand and the higher one (supported by the right hand), and the main melody has a fairly repetitive character. Although composition methods are minimal, this is one more proof that the value of an artistic work is not conditioned by the complexity of the methods used, but by their authenticity and quality. The melody is intoned in parallel sixths, with a multitude of repetitions of the same accord, with mainly gradual flowing, the support being performed by arpeggios unfolded in large harmonic positions.

Ballade pour Adeline has a triple-penta lied structure with ABABA scheme, in which element B proposes minimal tone change (minor tonality) as well as in musical discourse. The climax is marked by the return of the theme with an octave above the first intonation, enriched with extra voices tinted at third or sexta. B is reduced in size and importance, imposing the theme of Section A, which remains in the listener's consciousness. The work ends with a coda that actually resumes the theme again, in slightly modified manners, with a concluding look.

The other great example that we discuss now, in terms of composing, is André Gagnon, born in 1936. He has become one of the most well-known composers, conductors, arrangers and actors of his country. He used the same merging of pop styles with so called classical ones in order to create and interpret music accessible to the wider public, dedicated both to soundtracks and theatre. Like Clayderman, he very early on manifested tendencies as a composer, being able to study in the Conservatory in Montreal.

The two artists represent examples of professional musicians who knew how to reach the public's heart, so as to mix value and cult dimension with worldwide popularity.

Gagnon launched his first album much at the same time as Clayderman, in 1974, but the one in the following year was to bring notoriety. Before 1980, he also entered the field of cinema soundtracks. His compositional range is much more developed than that of Clayderman, who gained particular popularity at an interpretative level. After 1990, he also entered the genre of opera, being scheduled in the large theatres of Canada. A climax of his career was the composition of the soundtrack for the movie *The Pianist* in 1992.

His recordings include albums from 1964 to 2016, and the list of films with which he collaborated as a composer is impressive. His music is more elaborate than that interpreted by Clayderman, using multiple harmonic strategies and articulation of musical discourse; nevertheless, preserving his innocence, melodic character, quietness and sensitivity, presently so absent from consumer music.

Ex. 2. *André Gagnon – «Après la pluie»*

In the work APRES LA PLUIE, the quiet falling of rain is epitomized in sound by means of descending triads and sixths. Like most works signed by Gagnon, this is more elaborate, presented in an orchestral sound, more developed at modal and melodic level. Rain is symbolized by the theme that has equal short values suggesting the drops, constantly interrupted by unsteadily segments based on the embroidery formula.

POUR LES AMANTS uses the same structure as consumer music: an introduction, followed by a tripartite form and finalized with a conclusion, proposing a dynamic music, with disco or jazz accents, that surpasses courageously the pattern of lyrical music of the neo-romantic type. The work fits into the genre of ambiental popular, very much tasted by the great audience in the 80-90s of the last century.

TOCCATA ROCK proposes a new melodic pattern in André Gagnon's creation, based on the repetitiveness of some metro-rhythmic formulas made up of short and incisive values, limiting the melodic dimension to the upper plane (actually integrated with the entire musical discourse). Mixing baroque (from where toccata comes from) and modern styles (the one of rock music) brings with it challenges that relate to the placement of melodic structures over the rhythmic ones, coming out of the intonational comfort zone of blues music.

The image displays three systems of musical notation for a piano piece. The first system shows the beginning of the piece with a treble clef, a key signature of two flats (B-flat major), and a 4/4 time signature. The music starts with a rest in the treble and a series of eighth notes in the bass. A dynamic marking of *mf* is present. A repeat sign with first and second endings follows. The second system continues the piece with more complex rhythmic patterns in both hands. The third system shows further development of the piece, including a section with a key signature change to one flat (F major) in the bass line.

Ex. 3. André Gagnon – « Toccata rock »

3. Chapters and headings

R. Clayderman and A. Gagnon thus subscribe to a neoromantic current that has not ceased to exist in various forms immediately after the romantic era was exhausted. This neoromanticism is a continuous presence in the history of modern music in such a way that it supports and is based precisely on the general-human sensitivity.

“The characteristic of the basic theoretical attitudes of metamodernism, specific metamodernist "sensitivity" are the artist's identification strategies regarding the positioning of his statement with respect to other contemporary forms of artistic creativity. The spectator tactics and the main receptive attitudes embodied in metamodernist visual materialw are associated with the dominant forms of sensuality in metamodernism” (Venkova, 2018).

Neoromantic music seems to be an artistic response to a much greater challenge than the strictly artistic one, that of recovering the silence, melody, innocence and elegant universe of the interwar years (both in cult music and consumption music), to retrieve “a gentler age, a state of lost innocence, which as

its subsequent reception has showed proved an enduring site of cultural memory” (Taylor, 2008).

The works written and interpreted by Gagnon and Clayderman have managed to reach the consciousness of the global public precisely by preserving the values promoted by romantic art (regardless of the time and space of its historical existence), values embedded in the level of perennial human virtues such as passion, confession, subjectivism, love of people and nature, attachment to the fantastic facts, the feeling of natural and exuberant equally.

6. References

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