



Introduction

Joyce among the Music Theorists

With a modest entry in the latest *Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, James Joyce has now attained at least a limited status among the professionals in his second art. Belatedly, they concede that he tried to approximate the forms and techniques of music in various literary works, but many still prefer to believe only in the avidity of his interest. After all, what could a professional writer who was only an amateur musician really know about music? They forget that this particular writer knew a lot about almost everything. Jesuit trained and blessed with both a boundless curiosity and an excellent memory, Joyce also lived at the right time to accomplish what he wanted to do. He belonged to Europe's colony of artists between 1902 and 1941, an age of experimentation, an era in which art producers were consciously trying to escape the limits of their particular genres and media. We now know that, in range of experiments and in measurement of their success, we must compare Joyce with Picasso and Schoenberg, as well as Yeats, Pound, and Eliot. As Maria Kronegger notes (1968, 144ff.), Joyce's habit of writing by accretion has a natural parallel in the preparation of an artistic collage, and some of his specific fictional techniques parallel devices in both Symbolist poetry and Impressionist and Postimpressionist art. Even music historians and theorists recognize his similarity to their most experimental composers. As Donald Grout notes (1980, 734), one must study Joyce if one wishes to understand Schoenberg. Like Kronegger's, Grout's intuitions are appropriate. Especially in *Finnegans Wake*, as many have noted, the language does approximate the sounds and forms of music. Some of that "music" may be atonal, bitonal, polytonal, and even sol-fa, depending upon one's ability to read music in an otherwise linguistic text. Of course, a book that purports to



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deal with all of human history must necessarily include music as part of that history.

Joyce's use of the techniques of music has received insightful treatment from Zack Bowen (1974), a noted Joycean and musician, and from Margaret Rogers (1990), who is beginning to achieve recognition herself. Both have written persuasively about Joyce's "Sirens" episode in *Ulysses* and have discussed ways in which it can be construed as a *fuga per canonem* (that is, a fugue according to canon, where several musical voices repeat the theme or melody in the manner of a round). Rogers's identification of Lydian, Dorian, and other modal aspects of that chapter, though supported largely by primary materials and intuitions, is a solid piece of deductive scholarship. In a more recent essay, Bowen also discusses the chapter as a music-hall presentation and is even more persuasive.¹ In *Bloom's Old Sweet Song: Essays on Joyce and Music* (1995), he collects earlier essays on the subject and further reminds us of his primacy in the area. While I am more comfortable with Bowen's use of documentary scholarship, I have benefited, too, from reading the articles of Rogers and from talking at some length with her about our mutual concern.

More specific focus, that of Joyce's use of Wagner, has been successfully pursued by Timothy Martin. In book (1991), article (1993), and on an International Joyce Symposium discussion panel (1996), Martin carefully traces Wagnerian influences, allusions, and echoes in Joyce's writings. He proves that my own rejection of the Wagnerian influence (1981) was a bit premature. Readers of *Joyce's Music and Noise* might profitably read his works along with this one.

Notable for Irish music generally but less so for Joyce is the Maynooth-originated series called *Irish Musical Studies*. While attempting to chronicle the long relationship of Ireland and music, the series gives only brief treatment to James Joyce. In volume three, for example, Harry White's "Music and the Irish Imagination" identifies Joyce as using musical allusions in his works, notes the presence of music as metaphor in various places, and labels Joyce's musical imagination as lyric. In volume four, Raymond Fearn notes both similarities and indebtedness in "Homer-Dante-Joyce-Dallapiccola: Four Artists in Search of Ulysses." According to Fearn, Dallapiccola admired both Proust and Joyce as "poets of memory," set some of Joyce's poems to music on two different occasions, and owned both French and English versions of *Ulysses* but treated the story differently from Joyce. In his opera *Ulisse*, says Fearn, Dallapiccola used assonance and serial time in the manner of Joyce.

While each reader will have a preferred approach, Joyce is so complex that one can successfully apply almost any critical approach one wishes. I am eclectic but am not comfortable with modes of impressionism and application of critical theory simply for the sake of intellectual exercise. If a critical approach appears to shed light on the work, its author, or the universe of either, I try to use it. This includes the now old-fashioned technique of literary history. Having discovered some information outside the texts that clarifies points within, I make use of that information. Probably I found it as a result of trying to solve riddles within the texts, so I am guilty of “New Criticism” or close reading. Since I find techniques of music within the literary texts, I stray into the realms of comparative literature. I also use psychology, myth criticism, phenomenology, new historicism, and discourse theory where appropriate. I justify my inclusiveness by Joyce’s own example. Besides, in spoofing the famous letter in *Finnegans Wake* (104ff.)—the letter written by Shem, carried by Shaun, scratched out of the manure pile of history by Biddy the Hen (Issy/Anna Livia Plurabelle)—Joyce as author includes many literary critical approaches himself. I simply try to follow the good example of my master.

Robert Haas’s approach in “Music in *Dubliners*” (1992) is another one I can respect and try to emulate. As Haas shows, Joyce began noodling around on the piano at age three, and by age six sang with his parents at an amateur contest. At Clongowes Wood Joyce took piano lessons and both there and at Belvedere sang in amateur theatricals. At the university, if we can use evidence from the works as support, he explored most kinds of music—from madrigals to music-hall songs, Gregorian chants, and operas. During this time, he wrote some music himself, took additional vocal lessons, and competed in the Feis Ceoil (festival of the arts). While Joyce’s early musical activity represents the road not taken, Haas observes that it furnished sufficient expertise for him to use music in *Chamber Music*, “A Portrait of the Artist” (the essay), and most of *Dubliners*, relatively simple works all. Whether he limited the scope of the works because he was also limited musically one can only speculate. Wisely, Haas does not try to reach conclusions that his materials do not allow.

What we do know (solipsism!) is that, in the later and more complex works, Joyce used music more complexly than he did in the earlier and simpler ones. Since he was growing both artistically and intellectually, we should be able to assume that some of that growth included an increasing knowledge of both musicology and music history. Despite his bookishness, we can also assume that some of this knowledge came from others. For



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example, Joyce was in Zurich in 1917 when Ferruccio Busoni, the anti-Wagnerian, was giving instruction to pianist Eugene Jarnach and future composer Otto Luening. Joyce lived next door to Jarnach and seems also to have cultivated Luening, whom he taught how to relate music to literature. He may even have known Busoni and either have read the “New Aesthetic” (1907) or discussed it with Luening, who did read it.² Luening was so impressed with Joyce and his knowledge that, in *Odyssey of an American Composer* (1980) he devotes a chapter to an evening when the two attended a performance of Gluck’s “Dance of the Departed Spirit” (from *Orfeo ed Euridice*) and, on the way home, Joyce took a musical phrase from it, turned the notes into syllables, the syllables into words, and the words into sentences, demonstrating a profound understanding of the relationship of music to literature. (Since this was Joyce, a writer who wasted nothing, he probably used part of that improvisation in the “Circe” episode of *Ulysses*.) Another American, George Antheil (1945), credits Joyce with even knowing, in the 1920s, where obscure musical manuscripts were housed in Parisian repositories. Because of their friendship and mutual interests, Joyce, along with Picasso, T. S. Eliot, Darius Milhaud, and others, attended the premiere of Antheil’s “Ballet Mechanique,”³ one of the most avant-garde pieces ever composed. Ezra Pound, who sponsored Joyce too, even found time to popularize Antheil’s musical theories (1968)—unless these were also his own. Again, one can simply note that Joyce was in the right places at the right times to learn what he needed to know about music and the other arts and to teach others as well.

If not through Busoni, Jarnach, Luening, or even Pound, somehow Joyce encountered the works and theories of Berg, Schoenberg, and Webern during those aesthetically exciting years. Berg’s *Wozzek*, with its numerous scenes and characters, certainly parallels the idea-controlled narrative (what Frye calls an “anatomy”) of *Ulysses*,⁴ and both he and Joyce were given to composing “lyrical suites,” as we shall see. Since Joyce admitted to a great respect for Schoenberg, one should not be surprised to find hints of “serial music” in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. Because Joyce referred to *Chamber Music* as a “diminuendo suite” and *Finnegans Wake* as a “suite” in the key of E-flat, we may conclude that he was thinking of music, if not thinking musically, throughout his career. Because of Luening’s testimony, we know also that Joyce was capable of producing musical forms and of improvising upon them. With such evidence, we are entitled to look for “music” in the works.

One of my arguments is that Joyce makes use of a rhetorical and musical theme and variation throughout the corpus. In early works, he is content to

mention titles of songs or specific lines, allude to titles or names of some sort, and make an occasional reference to a specific musical technique. In some of *Dubliners*, however, he also approximates some techniques and makes use of insightful criticism of specific pieces of music and performances. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* he suggests two examples of sheet music and adds a self-conscious use of music as metaphor for art and artist to the already familiar devices of naming and allusion. He is also, at least, paralleling the formal structure of a five-part rondo in the structure of the novel.

In *Ulysses* he furnishes harmony, counterpoint, augmentation, and diminution, as well as the form of the fugue in “Sirens,” and that of the sonata for the novel as a whole. He may even be approximating “serial music” in Molly’s concluding soliloquy, but, as Bloom says, “There’s music everywhere.” *Ulysses* also invites the reader to look back in retrospective arrangement, to help the author make sense of the corpus thus far, and to look forward to the next work. The echoes and future reverberations are simply theme and variation once again. And *Finnegans Wake* reuses all previous themes, varying them, of course, while furnishing new themes of its own. Its numerous falls are prefigured by the death and wake of the priest in “Sisters,” the first story in *Dubliners*, the decline of the Dedalus fortunes in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*, the loss of Gabriel Conroy’s sexual desires at the end of “The Dead,” and, very likely, in other places and ways. By the same token, a rise is both an erection and a resurrection. Stephen’s emerging sexuality suggests one of these; his identification with Christ and the Easter season another. Finn—again, too, has precedents, as well as all kinds of music. While the novel is in the key of E-flat (Joyce’s own designation in a letter), it includes all other E’s (for Earwicker), D’s and A’s (Anna Livia as delta and Irish A), C’s (Shem’s siglum turned into music), incomplete A’s (Shaun’s), and B-flat (Izzy’s siglum converted from sol-fa, as I show later in discussing the *Wake*). With visual as well as audible signals, Joyce brings his readers into the world of his cosmic suite and moves them back and forth in the rest of the corpus. Even Vico and Bruno become part of the music because they are also part of the philosophical framework. (The philosophy of Bruno, at least, makes possible the “music” in *Chamber Music*; that of Vico is the “music” connecting all of the works to each other.) When one remembers that music, like literature, has both internal and external form, the rest of the story is a combination of intuition, close reading, analysis, synthesis, and a lot of help from one’s friends. I suspect that Joyce worked in this manner, too, but I absolve my friends of any errors that may occur in what follows.



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My second argument is that Joyce uses music to help his characters (and perhaps himself) to discover a place in the universe and to come to terms with that universe or universes. In simple instances, this is exhibited by means of personal consciousness. As the child, whether protagonist or narrator, develops further, however, the family involves itself in his destiny. So do his schoolmasters, friends, and acquaintances. From intellectual growth, whatever the source, the protagonist acquires concepts of nationhood and cosmic concerns. In the early writings, the character may be frustrated by one or more of these consciousnesses, but he still believes that the universe is both ordered and orderly. Part of that expectation comes from exposure to the Judeo-Christian heritage, part from the study of classical physics, and part from awareness of Hermetica. Each of these relates to the philosophy of the music alluded to and furnishes an intellectual climate for that allusion. The journey from *Chamber Music* to *Finnegans Wake*, suites both, involves a similar journey into the disorder of quantum mechanics and back again, with allusions to Thrice-Great Hermes all along the way. (While I was developing my own theory of Joyce's use of quantum mechanics, Thomas Jackson Rice was doing the same, in a more complete form. See his *Joyce, Chaos, and Complexity*, 1997.) If Joyce is eclectic, we must be too.

In Joyce, as in Shakespeare, Dryden, and Milton, music becomes so integral to the texts that it helps both to mirror and to create the complexity that the author desires. Since it adds to the complexity it mirrors and creates, its effective presence may also be a sign of and test for authorial greatness. In the chapters that follow, I will trace the unfolding relationship of music to author and works. Perhaps by so doing I can help to clarify Joyce's greatness.

For whom is the work written? For the widest possible audience, I hope. I have included internal and end notes and a bibliography for scholars and other students. For beginning students of the period, I also have added a glossary of terms that may need to be defined. Since each is a complex topic, I offer only a stipulative, or working, definition. The bibliography suggests works for fuller exploration. My thanks to all who make an effort to read and understand what I have tried to say.