

As stated by Antheil, the dramatic form, “a kind of modern opera” text, is just another program, or something external to the music—drama and poetry—which sets and contextualizes that music.

With regard to film appropriations of source music, this suggests an intriguing musical mutability. Compositions were inflected by the original source as well as the present cinematic context. The result could contradict or confuse, but a certain cavaliness notwithstanding, it could also overcome a perceived limitation lying at program’s core. Multiple musical elaborations meant that Liszt’s “wrong poetical interpretation” ceased to be such a problem. Programs could carry their original sense as well as being transposed to other settings and tailored to other narratives.

Dictionary objections may arise at this point. As already mentioned, Roger Scruton warns against a common misapprehension. Music with “a narrative or descriptive meaning,” for example, music that purports to depict a scene or a story, is validly programmatic. However, Scruton feels that to refer to all music with extramusical reference, to events, personalities, or feelings as programmatic is impossibly broad, reductive, even useless.⁴⁵

But the fact is that, though Scruton quite properly points out some of the dangers of over-generalizing the program, generalization can still be appropriate. Other institutional statements allow for a broader application of the principle.

Recent scholars argue that the dichotomy between absolute and program music is false, that the best program music can be appreciated without knowledge of the program. . . . Furthermore, some of the finest absolute works (eg. the symphonies of Haydn) are rich in references to dance rhythms and other stylistic conventions that a listener must recognize in order to follow the composer’s thought fully.⁴⁶

I would take this statement even further. Given the models of multivalent meaning already presented, given multifarious networks of intention and reception and indeterminacy and connection, I contend that *all* music has a program, even several programs. Literally, intentionally, this means that our understanding of a composition by Franz Liszt is enhanced when we