

is a whole complex of referential meanings, which enormously complicate the notion of what and how music means. Parallelism, or the perpendicular? A waltz is a piece of music in 3/4 time, but its rhythm also suggests certain social constructs, a certain period, key composers, and all this whether everyone recognizes the waltz rhythm or not. The polyrhythms of “world music” bespeak multiculturalism, or new colonialism, profound cultural interchange, or dabbling dilettantism, an overdue acknowledgment of discounted expressions or a dubious favor done in the name of political correctness. After the first instance, when one pauses to ponder, the connections and disjunctions proliferate.

Of course musicians and musical commentators have also grappled with these problems, and in many different ways. The first established theories of musical meaning were imitation and expression.⁶⁵ These have substantial use and merit, but they are not systems of signification. Although it sounds like a storm in Beethoven’s Sixth, and Debussy’s *Prélude à l’Après-Midi d’Un Faun* evokes languor and *La Mer* has a certain spray surrounding it, these pieces are finally impressions and approximations. Though these are musical sketches that evoke the objects sketched, “impressionism” for music is only a simile, and it falls short of our experience. Language, to be a language, must communicate comprehensibly to all those who use it. The fact is, not everyone will hear the water or be stirred by the storm. This is a kind of musical onomatopoeia, but sounding like something is not the same as utilizing an array of linguistic signs to communicate an idea which lies outside the materiality of those signs. Although languages are full of imitative harmony, of words that sound like things, these words are finally special cases that differ from the mainstreams of language.

As for music’s ability to express an idea or articulate some sensation, Raymond Monelle expresses a common view that is difficult to refute, that “music is a presentation of feeling rather than a direct expression,” and so we seem to have a standoff.⁶⁶ Overtonal complications, Pudovkin’s practice, music theory, all affirm the great difficulty of suggesting clear meaning, of affecting intellectual montage through music.

But here is where source music, particularly classical music,