

DANIEL PESCA

AESTHETIC STATEMENT

I hope to never stop changing as an artist; so my aesthetic statement is necessarily a snapshot, not a manifesto. But when I pause to consider my recent works, those from the past decade or so, I find that they fall into two broad categories. First, there are those that relate to traditional genres of Classical music—pieces I write because I have loved this repertoire my entire life and its language is dear to me. However, I find it inadequate to merely contribute to such genres without reimagining and interrogating their inherent principles and values. My love for Classical music entails an obligation to keep its genres fresh and alive. I resist any way of working that would cause my creative decisions to become automatic. So, while I often have certain models in mind in the initial stages of creation, I transform them until they are irrelevant to the final product. Schumann, Chopin, Fauré, Debussy, Janáček, Webern, and Feldman are among the composers whose works I have used as models recently.

The other category of my works transforms literary concepts and imagery, which inspire me and excite my imagination. Among my heroes are Henry James, Virginia Woolf, Franz Kafka, Vladimir Nabokov, Jorge Luis Borges, Italo Calvino, Kazuo Ishiguro, and Lydia Davis. I do not consider my works in this category to constitute program music, because I always aim to make my works autonomous. Besides, I agree with Mallarmé that “To name an object is to banish a major part of its pleasure.” To yoke a work of art to a meaning is to diminish it. I draw from literature because its concepts of style, narrative, temporality, and perspective stimulate my musical thinking, and because I admire its emotional power and beauty of imagery.

I think of myself as a transformative creator, not the sort that creates from nothing. Art comes not from a vacuum, but rather from sensitive and thoughtful engagement with one’s environment. The need for novelty can become an unhealthy obsession, especially when it breeds antagonistic, iconoclastic attitudes towards earlier art—attitudes incompatible with my personality. I prefer to write from a perspective of love: love of music, love of literature, and love of the tradition of each. But to love a tradition does not mean to preserve it in an airless glass case, or to create facsimiles of its masterpieces. Rather, it means enlarging that tradition with one’s own voice and experience, however idiosyncratic. From the music and literature that I love, I have curated my influences. I see my environment through the lens of this self-determined artistic lineage; it is the context and the perspective from which I compose.

I value detailed engagement with simple musical elements. Even the most modest musical material offers something worth exploring. I take endless delight in the local details of great music; however grand its large-scale sweep, it also displays a constant awareness of its basic materials and their inner relationships. It abounds with small surface features that cause delight, wonder, and pleasure when they are contemplated on their own—and therein lies the essence of what music is: the play of relationships between sounds. My music reflects on the richness of those relationships.