

Daniel Barenboim

Reith Lectures 2006: In the Beginning was Sound

Lecture 5: The Power of Music

Recorded in Jerusalem

SUE LAWLEY:

Hello and welcome. Over the past five weeks we've been to London, Chicago, Berlin, and now Jerusalem, in the company of our lecturer Daniel Barenboim. All these places are central to both his music making and his philosophy that music has the power to transform and improve the world. Last week before a mainly Palestinian audience he described music as a great equaliser. An orchestra can't bring peace, he said, but it can bring the understanding, patience and courage for people to listen to one another. Today we're in the Jerusalem International YMCA, but this is no ordinary YMCA. It was designed in fact by the architect of the Empire State Building, and described by Field Marshall Lord Allenby, when he opened it in 1933, as a place where - and I quote - 'jarring sectarians may cease from wrangling and men's minds be drawn to loftier ideals'. A noble note then on which to introduce our last lecture. Please welcome the man who argues that music should be seen as a metaphor for life, capable of demonstrating the great qualities of leadership. Ladies and gentlemen, Daniel Barenboim.

(APPLAUSE)

DANIEL BARENBOIM:

Thank you very much. Today I would like to concentrate on the fact that music has a power beyond mere words. It has the power to move us, and it has the sheer physical power of sound, as we know. Throughout this series of Reith lectures I have been focused on the content of music and its relationship to life. Here, today in this final lecture, I would like to explore the power that music has over us, the power of the association that music evokes - that is to say I would like to distinguish between the substance of music, and our perceptions of it, and ultimately to consider the difference between power and strength in music, and in life.

It is essential to understand that music is conceived of, and eventually delivered, from the point of view of one individual. As a result subjectivity is an integral and necessary part of music. And therefore the permanent relationship between subjectivity and objectivity is an essential aspect of music making, as it is of life. Even the freedom of speed in music, what is called tempo rubato, which is nothing else but Italian for stolen time. Tempo rubato can not be willfully conceived, but must inevitably have at the very least a contact with the objective sense of time, i.e. not stolen. And here again we are confronted with what I like to see as the moral responsibility of the ear. After all, it is the ear that determines audibility and transparency in music. It is the ear that must guide us in tempo rubato to have the moral strength to give back what was inadvertently stolen. In other words, when taking time in parts of a phrase, we must find the right place to give it back. This is not unlike the moral responsibility to give back what has been stolen. I will give you a very simple, or I should almost say simplistic example. In the first movement of the

Tchaikovsky piano concerto, which I am sure you have heard many times, there is a very beautiful and interesting second subject.

(PLAYS FEW BARS OF PIANO CONCERTO)

etc. Now, if played totally without any sense of freedom, you get only the sense of regularity.

(PLAYS SAME FEW BARS DIFFERENTLY)

Now quite apart from the question of style of how much freedom there can be, it is I think quite evident that it needs a certain amount of freedom where the melody and the harmony create a specific kind of tension which needs more time for the ear to perceive and understand, and therefore then has to find a way to give it back.

(PLAYS SAME FEW BARS)

And now...

(CONTINUES)

I have to take the time there, but then I have to give it back...

(CONTINUES)

If I wouldn't do that, this is what it would sound like.

(PLAYS SAME FEW BARS AGAIN)

I have nowhere to go. There is a certain logic in the speed that goes in there. Because music only expresses itself through sound, and takes place in a given time. It is by its very nature ephemeral. What is difficult in real life is something that is essential in music, that is to be able to start from scratch each time we play something, because what we did yesterday, and what we did this morning, is gone, and we must start over as if for the first time but with the knowledge of the last time. It is very difficult for the human being to truly have the courage and the ability to start from scratch, to start from zero, to take experience from the past and yet think it anew. And yet this is essential, in music as well as in life. Music allows us certain emotions or combination of emotions that are practically impossible in life without sound - that is in life without a musical dimension. We know at least since Spinoza that joy and its variant lead to a greater functional perfection, and that sorrow and related effects are unhealthy and should therefore be avoided. But music allows us to feel pain and pleasure simultaneously, both as players, and as listeners.

It is crucial to distinguish between the nature of music on the one hand, and the associations that it evokes on the other. Consider how Beethoven was misused and abused in German politics, by Bismarck, by Hitler, and by the East German Republic. The irony of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony being played in the Nazi era - 'Alle Menschen werden Bruder' - 'All men will become brothers' - all that is except a few. In other words the concept of fraternity is being defined in advance in the sense

that you can keep some people out of it. We are talking here about a critical distinction. We are back at my earlier question about the knife - a question that I raised in one of the earlier lectures. Is the knife an instrument with which we can commit murder, therefore a violent instrument, or is it one with which we can feed the other? The knife in itself is not moral, it is the human being who has the capacity to make it moral or immoral, and it is the human being who has the responsibility of creating the associations. And therefore the problem with playing Beethoven's music in Nazi times, or even with playing Wagner's music here in Israel, is not the music in itself, but the association that it evokes in people. This I am afraid is linked to political correctness, and is tied to ideological thinking. When you play a piece of music you must find the content, and you can only do that from the point of view of one individual. And no matter how wide and objective that individual tries to be, there is inevitably an element of such activity in it. The use and abuse of Wagner's ideas and music was an integral part of the last years of the Third Reich - in fact of the whole Third Reich - and it is not only understandable, but self-evident, that somebody who suffers from this kind of association is not only unwilling but unable to hear this music. And there is no reason in the world to force him or her to do so.

It is not my intention - it never was, and it never will be - to force this music or any music on anybody, and I certainly do not question the horrible associations that holocaust survivors have with specific pieces of Wagner. I can only hope that time will eventually help to liberate these human beings from previous negative associations, ultimately to hear the music for what it truly is. It is not my place to tell those who suffered from terrible associations what to do about Wagner, but I believe it is my place to tell those who can and want to listen to Wagner, that the music itself is not the agent of the suffering. In the meantime however, I do believe that it is equally important not to force negative associations on those who fortunately do not suffer from them. Therefore, in the democratic society, the decision whether it is permissible to hear Wagner or not must be individual and not imposed by law or even worse, the result of a taboo. True democracy can only exist without taboos.

Obviously it is imperative to differentiate between substance and perception. The problem with association is that one is the victim of the perception, and not of the substance. It is critical that we are not just slaves to the associations created by listening to a piece of music, but that we understand its substance, in the same way that a leader has to understand the substance of what his people are telling him. I went into great detail, and I'm afraid I cannot do it again today, or into the fact that one can only articulate the content of music with sound and not with words, but the fact that one cannot articulate it with words of course does not mean that it doesn't have a content. And although music means many things to many different people, and very often means many different things to the same person at different times - poetical, mathematical, sensual, philosophical - it is only expressed through sound and therefore it can be said without a question of a doubt that it has something to do with the human being, that it has something to do with the human condition. And this is the humanity of music.

I had the great privilege of attending several lectures given here in Jerusalem by Martin Buber(?), many years ago. It was Buber who made me realise the necessity of always looking beyond one's first impression, of digging deeper and finding connections. As he wrote in *I and Thou*, and I quote, 'There is nothing that I must not

see in order to see, and there is no knowledge that I must forget. Rather is everything, picture and movement, specious(?) and instance, law and number included, and inseparably fused.' As human beings we often tend to want to manipulate the element of time. When we are in a pleasurable situation we would like it to go on forever, and when we are in a painful situation we wish we could shorten it, in both cases because we either want change from a painful situation, or we want to keep change from interfering with pleasure. But music shows us the inevitable flaw of life, which depends on change, the fluidity of life. The Zionist idea was a Jewish European idea, but even Zionism cannot go against the very nature of life, which brings constant change with it. Change for me in this case means the development of the idea in the geographical and cultural context that we live amongst our neighbours, that Israel does not remain a foreign body, European inspired, in the Middle East, but becomes an integral part of the Middle East. Therefore it is essential to integrate Arab musical culture into an existing rich but dwindling Western musical life in Israel. For this reason I will donate the entire sum of the prize that I will receive from the Korn-Gerstenmann Foundation at the Jewish Community Centre in Frankfurt on the 7th May, for the studying and research of classical Arab music in Jerusalem, precisely because the Zionist idea was a Jewish European idea but the State of Israel is not in Europe, it is in the Middle East. And therefore if Israel wants to have a permanent place it must become part of the Middle East, and it must be aware of the culture that already existed here, and not pretend, as has been done for a long time now, that it was a desert and an uncultured one at that. For the future of Israel it is necessary for Israelis to open their ears to the Arab culture. this is not an issue of Israel denying its European roots but instead a question of enriching and enhancing its European heritage by placing it side by side with its Middle Eastern heritage. Otherwise the State of Israel will remain forever a foreign body, and as such there is no possible perspective of future for its remaining here, because a foreign body can exist in a society, or in music, or in a human being, only for a limited amount of time.

Transition, let us not forget, is the basis of human existence. In music it is not enough simply to play a statement of a phrase, it is absolutely essential to see how we arrived there, and to prepare it. One plays a statement one way at the beginning of a piece, but when the same statement returns later, in what we call in musical terminology the recapitulation, it is in a completely different psychological state of mind. And therefore the bridge, the transition, determines not only itself but what comes after it. It is important to recognise that the present does not exist without the past, and that the present would be different with another past. At the same time, what we do in the present is inevitably the prelude to what the future will be. And the future is determined not by something that we passively wait for, but it is the inevitable outcome that we prepare for from the present moment.

Therefore in my view the future of the State of Israel must develop and find the golden mean that will lead to harmonious internal and external relations, just as in a piece of music its harmony can be achieved even if it is made up of conflicting elements, albeit of the strongest and most radical nature, as long as each element can develop itself to its fullest. The genuine and original idea of the renewal of Jewish settlement in Palestine has been totally overwhelmed and diverted by forces that believe that power and not what Buber called the command of the spirit, that power rules the social and political destiny of humanity. This celebration of power has led to an insensitivity and misunderstanding of the fact that the command of the spirit can

mean in this case nothing else but a true realisation that this is a land for two people, with opposing narratives, but of necessity equal rights. To quote Martin Buber again: 'There can be no peace between Jews and Arabs that is only a cessation of war. There can only be a peace of genuine co-operation.' End of quotation. Therefore peace requires dialogue, a dialogue which consists of sensitive talking and often painful listening.

(BRIEF APPLAUSE)

It is essential in this regard to understand the difference between strength and power. Power itself has only one kind of strength, which is that of control. But even the great power of sound, in Beethoven, Brahms or Wagner, does not have to create the association of power that works exclusively through control, but instead through actual real strength, the accumulative strength that comes from the build-up of tension. Even the most powerful chord has to allow the inner voices to be heard, otherwise it has no tension, only brutal aggressive power. You must hear the opposition, the notes that oppose the main idea. In other words, the concept of transparency is essential in music, because if it is not orally transparent you cannot actually get the totality of the music, you only get one line of it. In Mozart for example, very often in the operas you have perfectly harmonised ensemble, and yet every single voice is saying something completely different, and all this at the same time. But you still have a definite sense of organisation, you have main voices and you have subsidiary voices - music would be totally uninteresting without this. Even at the moment when all the elements are unified, when everything comes together in a single chord, you still hear all the different voices.

Let us consider for a moment the example of playing in an orchestra. When very powerful instruments, the so-called musical heavyweights - trumpet and trombone - play in a chord where the whole orchestra is playing they have to play in such a way that they give a full sense of power, but that they allow the other instruments, who are less powerful, to be heard at the same time. Otherwise they cover them up, and then the sound has no strength, only power. See the difference? Therefore when you play in an orchestra everybody is constantly aware of everybody else.

In my view this is a model for society. Leadership throughout history, and it is probably inherent in the human nature, has been based on the effect it can produce because of the weakness of the people, not because of their strength. How wonderful the world would be if it were ruled by people who understood this lesson from music, and understood the importance of combining transparency, power and strength. But if music is so human, if music is so all inclusive and so positive, we have to ask ourselves how is it possible that monsters such as Adolf Hitler and others had such love for music? How do we explain that? How to explain the fact that Hitler was able to send millions of people to the gas chamber and would be moved to tears listening to music? How? How was Wagner able to write music of such nobility and also write his monstrous anti-Semitic pamphlet? I believe people don't think about music, they just let it wash over them, and operate on them in an almost animal way. Music to me is sound with thought, and as Spinoza believed that rationality was the saving grace of the human being, then we must learn to look at music like this too.

This is why music in the end is so powerful, because it speaks to all parts of the

human being, all sides - the animal, the emotional, the intellectual, and the spiritual. How often in life we think that personal, social and political issues are independent, without influencing each other. From music we see that this cannot occur, it is an objective impossibility, because in music there are no independent elements. Logical thought and intuitive emotions are permanently united. Music teaches us that everything is connected.

Throughout these lectures I have been attempting to draw parallels between the inexpressible content of music and the inexpressible content of life. We have talked about the phenomenon of sound, about the distinction between hearing and listening, about the need for having a point of view, both in music and in life, and we have spoken about how music can bring people together, how music itself can be a great connector. As I conclude these lectures here in Jerusalem today, we have come full circle. This too, ladies and gentlemen, I learned from music, because when you perform a piece of music you have to be able to hear the last note before you play the first. Thank you very much.

(APPLAUSE and CHEERS)

SUE LAWLEY:

Daniel Barenboim, thank you very much indeed. Um let me remind our listeners that we are in Jerusalem, and our audience is made up of, largely of Jewish Israelis - the mirror image of last week's mainly Palestinian audience in another part of this city. We have several people er ready with questions here on the front row, and I want to invite comments from the rest of the audience here as we go on. But let's begin with a question from Rita Janssen, who is Belgian. She's an economist who's lived and worked in both Jerusalem and Ramallah for some years now. Mrs Yansen, your question please?

RITA JANSEN:

Thank you. I always had a keen interest in the Middle East. My focus was Israel, and I had a great admiration for its achievement in creating a state. This admiration was founded by association on my deep feeling for the Jewish people and their achievements in the arts, in science, in education, and most of all the humanistic and philosophical values which are at the basis of Jewish society. For the past three years I have been living and working in Palestine, where I witness on a daily basis blatant injustice, and the dehumanisation and despair of the Palestinian people, for whom I feel the highest respect, for whom they are and what they are fighting for. And I sadly have to admit that my love affair with Israel has gone sour. Mr Barenboim, can you identify with my experience? And have you gone through a similar process of re-thinking over the past years?

DANIEL BARENBOIM:

I had, if you want, the good fortune to come to this country as a little boy, when to me it was a completely different country. I think that we have to divide the history of modern Israel into two periods - from 1948 to 1967, and everything that's happened from 1967 until today. I will not go in this particular case into the problems of dispossession - this is a subject for another discussion - but the transition from being a minority for so many years to being a nation was done in my view in a very very positive way. This for nineteen years, and only nineteen years. Suddenly we found

ourselves, after the war in 1967, in a situation that Israel was controlling another minority. I have more and more the feeling that after the war in 1967 this country went drunk, but the hangover is still felt today. Unless we are in a position that we can examine this, in my view there is no way that you will be able to recapture your love affair with this country, because your love affair with this country is precisely what draws you now to Ramallah. This is one of the reasons why I feel it is not my duty but it is my privilege to bring whatever I can to the Palestinian people.

(APPLAUSE)

SUE LAWLEY:

Let me call er Yisrel Medad (?) - he's Vice Chairman of Israel Media Watch, an organisation set up to provide a critical voice on radio and television reporting here. Mr Medad?

YISRAEL MEDAD:

Mr Barenboim, you have been described as a courageous idealist to believe that symphonic music can heal human conflict. And during a visit to Ramallah August 2003 you said of the Israel/Arab conflict that there is no military solution either morally or strategically. And just recently, even today, you said that there's a very major difference between power and strength, that if you attack a chord with more power than you are going to sustain it, it has no strength. But is it not possible that you are simply fiddling away - to misappropriate the metaphor - extending succour to a terrorist entity, now supported by a popular vote, while Israel's security is endangered by the sounds of Qassam rockets, this despite the withdrawal from Gaza, as well as the loud bangs of suicide bombers who continue to kill its citizens and tourists. Perhaps it is the Arabs now who are mistakenly using too much force.

DANIEL BARENBOIM:

Well, mm hm...

The whole idea of unilateral action is something completely foreign to me, because I know that unilateral action can only be short-term. And just remember, the war ended in 1967. A unilateral action in 1970, 71, 82, 83, 94, 96, 2001, 2002, may have had a certain element even of generosity to it, but now it is only being done by force. And I don't see what there is to congratulate ourselves for a pull back from a place where we should have never been. Sorry.

SUE LAWLEY:

But Daniel, just... (DURING APPLAUSE) The, the, the, the, sub...

YISRAEL MEDAD:

Mr Barenboim...

SUE LAWLEY:

Hang on, hang on...

YISRAEL MEDAD:

In other words we will not merit to hear any condemnation of terror from you?

DANIEL BARENBOIM:

But of course.

YISRAEL MEDAD:

Okay. Without any moral strings attached?

DANIEL BARENBOIM:

No.

YISRAEL MEDAD:

You oppose the use of terror...

DANIEL BARENBOIM:

Absolutely.

YISRAEL MEDAD:

...of... Thank you.

DANIEL BARENBOIM:

And I'll tell you something else. As you know perfectly well, probably better than I, many Israeli politicians have said not only in private but in public that if they had been Palestinians they would also be terrorists and they would also be using violence. I don't think I would, I think the most useful way for Palestinians today would be to have non-violent resistance. That would give them... That in my view would give them not only the admiration of the world, but in the long-term would achieve for them many better results.

SUE LAWLEY:

But it just seemed to me, and correct me if I'm misunderstanding you, that the substance of that question was a suggestion, putting it bluntly, Daniel, that you might just be making music in Ramallah with people who, or the relatives of people who may have it in mind to kill Israelis.

DANIEL BARENBOIM:

When I went to Ramallah with the West Eastern Divan, er last August, I felt, and it was clearly felt by everybody there, that we were coming with a message saying look how it works in music. If we were able to create conditions in life, conditions of equality and acceptance, we would get further. And this is what I say to all the Palestinians, friend and foes alike, who say to me we cannot listen as long as the Israelis tanks and er army here, and I say to then the same thing - I expect everybody to do as I have said earlier in the lecture, sensitive talking and painful listening, because the Israeli narrative is no less painful to the Palestinians as the Palestinian narrative might be to many people in Israel.

SUE LAWLEY:

Daniel we're coming towards the end and nobody's asked you so far about the Arab Study Centre that you announced you're setting up. You have Israelis and Palestinians who don't like the idea of it being set up, the Israelis because they don't want Arab culture in their midst here in Jerusalem and Palestinians because as one put it, er to me, and I wrote it down after you said...

DANIEL BARENBOIM:

I've always worked on the assumption that if I am criticised with the same vehemence by both sides I must be right.

(LAUGHTER)

SUE LAWLEY:

You, you sound rather like the BBC! Um...

(LAUGHTER and APPLAUSE)

SUE LAWLEY:

As this person put it, you know, a Palestinian - 'The Israelis have taken our land, occupied our territory, and now they want to hi-jack our culture'. That's the kind of thing you're up against, when it's a... you know your cultural gestures become seen as fiercely political. How does it make you feel? Does it make you want to turn away and say I give up?

DANIEL BARENBOIM:

No. I believe that if the State of Israel is not to be just a short episode in the long Jewish history, then it must vehemently change its education and its way of looking at culture. Otherwise it will never be free from the criticism that this is a colonial power. It starts with the culture. And we have to stop relying always, politically, morally and culturally on the United States of America. I am sorry.

(APPLAUSE)

Wait I minute, I have to finish, no no no.

SUE LAWLEY:

Let me just give...

DANIEL BARENBOIM:

Let me finish. I, I am not finished. (LAUGHTER) When, when Yasha Heifetz came here in 1953, he was asked by the taxi driver that took him to the concert hall, 'Mr Halfitz, what cadenza do you play in the Beethoven concerto?' You know, this was a European heritage that was alive here, and this is what made musical life here in the fifties and in the sixties so extraordinary. Why do we on the one hand not take into account our neighbours - very important culturally - and why do we stop the contact, both culturally and politically, with Europe that has given us so much? And why is it that automatically every single Israeli government does not want the Europeans to have anything to say in here, because they don't think that they will be pro-Israeli enough? I am sorry, I am not getting polemic, and this is the only polemic sentence I'm going to say. How long are we going to look for Jewish lobbies to defend our situation here? You know, the Jewish intelligence, for which we are so famous, should really help us do that, and look for a Middle East that is a strong, intelligent, secular force on this corner of the Mediterranean.

(APPLAUSE)

SUE LAWLEY:

I am on a promise to take one more very brief comment here.

MAN:

You get to say something of what's going on in Israel, which you don't disagree, but it certainly has a goal of er improving the situation, of changing it. And to compare it to music, isn't a matter of if something doesn't go well in a concert, isn't it a matter of the members of the orchestra or is it the conductor? Thank you.

(V.BRIEF APPLAUSE)

DANIEL BARENBOIM:

No. You know first of all, you cannot separate the leaders from the people. If we have in Israel the leaders we have here, this is the result of fifty years of half truths, straight out lies, and lots of actions which have nothing to do with the situation in general. And you cannot only criticise the leaders. You know, the same thing in the orchestra. I will give you the answer. You know, I mean of course many times I make mistakes, I make mistakes when I conduct. You know, you'll be surprised - when I make mistakes the musicians usually cover up for me. They are very nice, they are very good. And so I think we have to, we have to really ask ourselves, I didn't come here to criticise,

(SOMEONE STARTS SPEAKING)

I didn't come here to criticise the State of Israel.

(MAN STILL TRYING TO SPEAK)

Let me just finish. Please, I listened to you to the end. I didn't come here to criticise the State of Israel, I came here basically, as far as this part of the lecture is concerned, to ask a simple question. We see now for so many years, at least since 1967, that the situation does not get better. It is getting worse. The more the physical strength of the state, the less the moral strength. How come so few people ask themselves the real questions of how we got there? Thirty-nine years of occupation. I am sorry, when you are the occupier and the others are occupied and things are not right, you cannot really continue living more or less in the same ways. For your own survival you have to ask yourself the question, why, and what for? And I am sorry but this, I don't believe that we are asking ourselves these questions, at least not with enough vehemence. Thank you very much.

(APPLAUSE)

SUE LAWLEY:

I'm sure there are more hands waving at us, but um I have to say thank you to our audience here in Jerusalem, indeed thank you to all of our audiences over the past five weeks, in London, Chicago and Berlin too. Daniel Barenboim set out in these lectures to draw on his lifetime of musical experience to demonstrate that music is a way of making sense of the world, and like his musical performances it's been an illuminating, a provocative and an entertaining journey. And like them, as he's often reminded us in his lectures along the way, it returns for now, but only for now I suspect, to silence. Daniel Barenboim, Reith lecturer 2006, thank you very much indeed, and goodbye from Jerusalem.