

Neoclassical

Let me begin with this remarkable question that I once read on the internet:

"I would like to compose neoclassical music, but I have no idea what is required for my music to be considered neoclassical. Does it have to do with form and structure? Changes of key? Instrumentation? Rhythm? Harmony? Texture? Or something else?"

At present, the piano music of Ludovico Einaudi is enjoying enormous popularity. After his avant-garde period, he began composing clear and accessible piano works, and this music has found a particular audience in the yoga and healing community. At the same time, concert halls around the world attract large numbers of listeners who appreciate his work. I myself attended an Einaudi concert in Madrid (a city trip gifted to me by my son Werner), and I must admit that I found it quite charming and worthy of admiration. The atmosphere was intimate, and as the concert progressed, it even put me in a pleasant state of mind.

Today, this music (along with ambient soundscapes) is often grouped under the label "Neoclassical." An interesting fact: in the 1970s and 1980s, music of this kind was often referred to as "elevator music" or "muzak."

But why "Neo"? Perhaps what is meant is "new classical music"? There is often some confusion surrounding this term. Is it *Neoclassical* or *Neoclassicist*?

Classical music as we know it is generally considered to run from Bach up to the present day. This tradition has never disappeared. There is a continuous musical line from Bach, through Mozart, Brahms, Stravinsky, and Henri Dutilleux, to contemporary composers such as Thomas Adès. The term *neoclassicism* emerged in the 1930s as a reaction against the excesses of Romanticism. Composers deliberately returned to the clarity and formal balance of the Classical period, from figures such as C.P.E. Bach to Mozart. In that context, neoclassicism was a well-founded musical and aesthetic designation.

No, the term *Neoclassical* as it is used today strikes me as a pleasant-sounding label employed primarily as a marketing tool. (And with so many followers, it can hardly still be called "neo.") It is more accurately described as calming music for meditation and other forms of relaxation. *Canto Ostinato* by Simeon ten Holt, or a piece by John Cage, has never, as far as I know, been called neoclassical, even though such works also contain many elements of meditative music. Relaxing? Certainly. Yet in classical music, true repose—moments with very few notes, silence, nothing sounding at all—is also an important component.

Still, it is a good thing, if not encouraging, that this music attracts new listeners. Not everyone visits a concert hall every week or every month, and if "neoclassical music" encourages people to listen, enjoy, and perhaps even discover the classical canon, then so much the better. Musical movements do not have to compete with one another; they can simply complement each other or coexist side by side.

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