The Pizzicato Effect

Brendan Hughes

Japanese calligraphy, when people are learning it, they have to copy all characters - right?, but what theyâ€™re taught is not to copy the ink but to make the whitespace look the same and the ink takes care of itself, and in Japan they have a word for this - Ma (é–“) which is when the negative space surrounding something helps to define its shape and make it what it is. Here in the west we have no such word, empty space - put an office park in it, letâ€™s build a tribute to financial success; whereas there they have all the rock gardens so you can look and see the emptiness and commune with the word lack and find that itâ€™s not so terrifying, which is wonderful, itâ€™s a fabulous thing. Artists have known about this for a very very long time, Miles Davis said jazz is about the notes left unplayed, my undoing as a stage director was the fact that directing is about the guidance you donâ€™t provide. Thatâ€™s a mindfuck because after awhile if you work with the same people enough eventually you have to say like one meaningful thing a week.

Mozart caught onto this really really early, his dad taught him how to play piano; and so the way it would go at night they would have dinner and then Mozart would start practicing and his dad would retire, and Mozart when heâ€™s a kid would like get to the end of a concerto that they both knew, and would be like, *meow mee mee-oow oow!*, and then close the lid and go to bed, and his dad in bed would be like god damn it, and come downstairs and be like, *meeeeooowwwww!* and finish the job. So it was like what he was doing was crashing space into his father's listening experience. And it turn out this is a very high form of art audiences eat it - in fact in the Marriage of Figaro he deployed this, to great effect.

It is my opinion or theory that pizzicato, the muted plucking of violin strings, I think that, or Brendialites think that, the plucked note indicates the note that your heart should play - so it is an appeal to your hearts to fill in the rest. And when he was working on the Marriage of Figaro weâ€™re all supposed to fall in love with the servants, the Count and the Countess come in with a very melodramatic scraping of bows, but Susanna who we all fall in love with, we all watch. Especially in act 4 thereâ€™s a scene where Figaro is watch her, she knows heâ€™s watching he doesnâ€™t know she knows, sheâ€™s waiting for the count, but she wants to win his love back and itâ€™s filled dramatic irony - which is its own negative space. And knowing this he put in a bunch of pizzicato and it unlocks the tumblers around our heart and so we sort of like reach out with our souls to help her.

I directed one opera, and it was an incredible experience, itâ€™s hallucinogenic that art form, itâ€™s the only one that I I directed that one actually and Cherubino had a orange safety cone as a codpiece - this was very unpopular with opera lovers. It was my one try, that I did my best, oh and that was a striptease, that was terrible, real terrible. This also occurs in the social realm when youâ€™re having a conversation with somebody you can create negative space thru deadpan - which is the greatest anti reaction you could ever have. If someone says something asinine you just go deadpan and it forces them to examine the context of what they just said and figure out what was asinine about it. You can try it at home the secret to deadpan is relax all four cheeks.

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