# TRANSPARENCY, CONTEXT AND MEANING – ABOUT MAKING MUSIC FOR STAGE PERFORMANCES

*by Niklas Rydén*

*Niklas Rydén presents a list of thoughts and questions that are worthy to consider in connection with creating music for dance performances.*

**What we actually want to tell:**
- Content, meaning. What do we (choreographers, composers, etc) want to say, to express.
- We must, in some sense, have a common goal. Work in the same direction, together.
- The musical part of the expression must always take into account the whole expression, how it all works together.
- As I see it: This means that music for stage performances needs to be communicative, or at least those involved must be very aware of how it actually communicates.

*Problems*:
- Composers are driven by a need to express their own skill and ego in the piece or to defend the right of the music to be an independent entity. Which, in my opinion, is a misunderstanding of the scenic reality, where the various expressions cooperate to create a total – a shared or unified language?

**Contextuality**
- How meaning in expressions come to exist only by their contextual appearance.
- In the small perspective: Melody tones, intervals, harmonies, rhythms, and timbre always exist in relation to each other.
- Between different parts of a composition.
- Between different languages, expressions of a performance.
- By how the performance is presented to an audience.
- By where it is presented, in which art and societal context it is played.

**Dramaturgy**
- Music as a dramatic means, a dramaturgic tool.
- To maintain energy, to hold interest, to keep the audience present.
- The big form, the overall form. Ways of thinking.
- The composer actually becomes a kind of a director.

**Music & Room, Sound & Space**
- About the inner room of music. The room/time phenomena.
- About how music influences the scenic (and other) rooms/spaces. Open/close.
- How rhythmic music creates rooms. (More body, more movement.)
- How more phrase-based or ambient music create rooms.
- About the sound's own spatiality.

**Genre Music**
- How genre music like hip hop, salsa, etc carry so much meaning and associations, so much party, dance etc. This can be used very cleverly, but there is also a risk involved.

- The striving, the aim to create a personal sound, which becomes the sound of this unique performance.
- The need to understand the different functions of different kinds of music.

*Problems:*
- How genre music aiming to fit in with to current hit-list music risks drowning in its own banal, simple expression of teenage love. (Like some djtechno used in dance performances).

**Transparency, translucency**
- The music must be transparent, must be able to give room for other expressions. To make them strong, not drown them.
- Think about simpleness/complexity. Is it possible to do it simpler?
- Look at the dance/play: Does it work or not? Change music to help. Most often: A question of cleaning, simplifying, diminishing – to make it stronger.
- Is transparency actually a question of the amount of structured musical events over time?

*Problems:*
- The desire of the composer to show their skills and abilities in complex music.
- To follow or to go in the opposite direction. To break away.
- The risk of being overly explicit. To say something in one single way, and far too often.
- Emotions can be pretentious and even corny, if over-explicitly expressed.
- As is it with movement. Degrees of movement. Sometimes slow moves are best to more aggressive music. And the opposite.
- The same thing goes for strong/quiet, high/low, vivid/still, fast/slow etc.

*Problems:*
- There are no cut-and-dried rules. You have to figure out what works.

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