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PRAGMATICS OF CLASSICAL MUSIC MEMES

The paper discusses the pragmatical aspects of memes related to classical music. In the introductory section, it deals with the key concepts of memes, internet memes, multimodality, pragmatics, internet pragmatics and speech acts, and gives an overview of previous and current research in the field. The central section of the paper starts with the description of the corpus used for the research. After that, the concept of classical music memes is defined and the memes are classified into types, on the basis of their structure and content. In the subsection that follows, each of the types is presented through examples and pragmatically analysed. The final section of the paper contains conclusions based on the research results.

Key words: memes, classical music memes, pragmatics, speech acts, internet pragmatics, multimodality, analysis, humour, classical music

1. Introduction

In recent years, internet memes have emerged as a ubiquitous form of digital communication, shaping discourse across various domains, including politics, education, culture, and art. In the same process, memes have gained scholarly attention for their complex and nuanced role in conveying meaning. That positioned them at the intersection of digital culture and linguistics, so that their study from a pragmatic perspective has become a significant issue, as memes often rely on shared social, cultural, and contextual knowledge to communicate effectively. As a distinct form of online culture, memes serve as a language of their own, adhering to specific principles that govern how meaning is constructed and understood.

Among the multitude of memes related to all possible topics and areas, classical music memes have emerged as a specific "register-based genre" (Kovačević, 2019: 274), juxtaposing the "serious" nature of classical music with humour, irony, or sarcasm. It can be said that the entire existence, presence and availability of classical music in the world of today, both in real world and through the Internet has influenced the need for creation and generation of such memes, involving different artists, notions, phenomena, knowledge and stereotypes on

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classical music, as well as musical works themselves. Although they are primarily oriented towards the discourse communities of people actively involved in classical music, they still contain numerous notions from general culture and education, and that mostly makes them clearly understandable for the ordinary, non-musician audience.

Before discussing the pragmatic features of internet memes on classical music, general concepts of memes and internet memes should be elaborated, as well as the notions of pragmatics and internet pragmatics.

1.1. Memes and Internet Memes

The initial use of the term "meme" is connected with the biologist Richard Dawkins and his book The Selfish Gene (1976, 30th anniversary edition 2006), who defines them as "small cultural units of transmission, analogous to genes, that spread from person to person by copying or imitation" (Shifman, 2014: 10). It includes various cultural items such as melodies, catchphrases, clothing fashions and abstract beliefs. On the other hand, "the term "Internet meme" has been commonly applied to describe the propagation of items such as jokes, rumours, videos, and websites from person to person via the Internet" (Shifman, 2014: 2). Another definition observes it as a "piece of culture, typically a joke, which gains influence through online transmission" (Davison, 2012: 122). Milner (2012: iii) defines internet memes as "amateur media artifacts, extensively remixed and recirculated by different participants on social media networks." Wiggins (2022: 69) gives another definition, together with additional elaboration, stating that: "the internet meme is a remixed, iterated message that is rapidly diffused by members of participatory digital culture for the purpose of satire, parody, critique, or other discursive activity. An internet meme is a more specific term for the various iterations it represents, such as image macro memes, GIFs, hashtags, video memes, and more. Its function is to posit an argument, visually, in order to commence, extend, counter, or influence a discourse."

A significant feature of memes is that they propagate from person to person, while, at the same time, they shape, depict, and reflect general opinions, attitudes, trends and other issues relating to different topics within the society, both in local and global terms (Shifman, 2014: 4). At the same time, there is a constant cultural reproduction of memes within the online environment, performed by different means of imitation, simulation and copying available to their users and creators (Kovačević,

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2019: 271). Shifman (2014: 18) assigns three attributes to memes, observing them as "particularly relevant to the analysis of contemporary digital culture: (1) a gradual propagation from individuals to society, (2) reproduction via copying and imitation, and (3) diffusion through competition and selection." In that sense, the following definition can be applied: "memes are remixed, iterated messages which are rapidly spread by members of participatory digital culture for the purpose of continuing a conversation" (Wiggins & Bowers, 2015: 1886).

A significant component of internet memes is multimodality. Essentially, "multimodality is the coexistence of multiple modes within any given context", where "mode is a socio-culturally specific semiotic resource used in meaning making such as images, writing, layout, music, gesture, speech, moving image, and so on" (Gibbons & Whitelay, 2018: 249). It is also defined by Jewitt (2013: 250) as "an interdisciplinary approach drawn from social semiotics that understands communication and representation as more than language and attends systematically to the social interpretation of a range of forms of making meaning." As such it provides frameworks, concepts, and methods that may help in the collection and analysis of visual, aural, embodied, and spatial aspects of interactions and environments, challenging the prior predominance of spoken and written language in research (Grundlingh, 2017: 3). In the context of multimodality, the following definition of internet memes can be given: Internet memes are multimodal artifacts that encapsulate messages through a combination of text, images, and sometimes video or audio elements.

Within the constantly growing body of internet memes, there are various classifications (such as content, form, replicability etc.) which identify different meme types or genres (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007; Shifman, 2014; Wiggins & Bowers, 2015; Miltner, 2018; Wiggins, 2019; Baurecht, 2020; Thakur et al., 2022) based on the selected criteria. However, the most suitable classification for this research is given by Milner (2012: 85), who identifies thirteen types of memes, divided into remixed images and stable images. Additionally, the remixed images are separated into single images and stacked images (Figure 1).
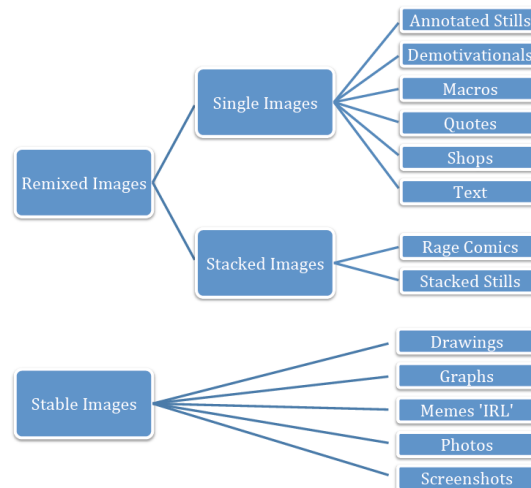
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Figure 1: Milner's classification of memes (Milner, 2012: 85)

Among the stated meme types, image macros represent one of the most common and available types. Milner (2012: 89) states that image macros represent not only the most common genre of memes, but also stand as "one of the clearest examples of interplay of imitation and transformation in the process that guides the construction of memes".

De la Rosa-Carrillo (2015: 18) describes image macros as "captioned images that typically consist of a picture and a witty message or a catchphrase. The structure of an image macro usually consists of a picture with text above and below the image in the macro". Davison defines image macro as "a set of stylistic rules for adding text to images" (2012: 123), adding that, "what is replicated from instance to instance is the set of formal characteristics" (2012: 130). In other words, it implies a meme made up of a combination of text and image(s) which provides some pragmatic implications.

The basic model of these memes is a two-component text with a photograph/drawing in the middle. Variations of the model can also occur, and such image macros, characterized by structural variations or existing without text are typically referred to as reaction shots (Grundlingh, 2017: 9). Observed from the communicative purpose perspective, stacked images, created by blending several single images/photographs into a new set in a comic strip structure to create a more complex meme can also be treated as a complex and extended variation of image macros. For the purpose of this research, these three meme types will be used, and the corpus of classical music memes used for the research consists of memes belonging to this type.

1.2. Pragmatics and Internet Pragmatics

In the pragmatic approach to the study of language, the fundamental structural unit is the utterance (Brown & Yule, 1988: 27) instead of the sentence. Meyer (2009: 233) defines pragmatics as the study of the principles indicating how language is used, governed by norms or rules that are not related to grammar but rather to conventions on how specific forms should be used. Yule (1996: 112) describes pragmatics as the study of "what speakers mean" and emphasises that communication depends on "not only recognizing the meaning of words in an utterance, but recognizing what speakers mean by their utterances." He also observes it through four areas it addresses: the study of speaker meaning, the study of contextual meaning, the study of how more gets communicated than is said, and the study of the expression of relative distance (Yule, 1997: 3). On the other hand, McCarthy (2000: 2) views pragmatics in only one of these segments, as "the study of how meaning is created in context". Such a study implies "analyzing parts of meaning that can be explained by knowledge of the physical and social world, the socio-psychological factors influencing communication, as well as the knowledge of the time and place in which the words are uttered or written" (Cutting, 2002: 2).

Within the research field of pragmatics, speech acts are very important, because when the meaning of a written or spoken text is interpreted, not only the words or utterances used to communicate the message are considered, but also the idea on what the writer or speaker intended to communicate. McCarthy defines a speech act as what a specific segment of language performs or how the listener/reader is expected to respond (McCarthy, 2000: 9). The theory of speech acts was developed by Austin (1975) and Searle (1969, 1979), and according to Brown and Yule, it provides insight into how some seemingly unrelated utterances function together in discourse to form a coherent sequence (Brown $ Yule, 1988: 232-233). Yule emphasises that an act performed by producing an utterance consists of three related acts. These acts are:

- Locutionary act, the basic act of producing a linguistic expression that has meaning;

- Illocutionary act, performed with the communicative force of the utterance; and

- Perlocutionary act, based on the assumption that the listener/reader will recognize the effect the speaker/writer intended to produce (Yule, 1997: 47-48).

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Regarding the function of speech acts, Yule (1997) and Meyer (2009) identify five types of speech acts:

- Representatives, statements conveying information that can be verified as true or false (Meyer, 2009: 50), or types of speech acts that the speaker/writer believes to be true or false (Yule, 1997: 53);

- Directives, utterances intended to prompt someone to do something (Meyer, 2009: 50, Yule, 1997: 54);

- Commissives, utterances in which someone commits to doing something (Meyer, 2009: 50), or types of speech acts used by speakers to commit to some future action (Yule, 1997: 54);

- Declarations, utterances that cause a change in the situation (Meyer, 2009: 50), or types of speech acts that change the world by being said (Yule, 1997: 53); and

- Expressives, utterances that express the speaker's/writer's attitudes (Meyer, 2009: 50), or what the speaker/writer feels (Yule, 1997: 53).

According to Xie (2022: 1) it is possible to observe pragmatics broadly as a functional perspective on every aspect of linguistic, visual, and/or multimodal behaviour. In the same context, "internet pragmatics can be viewed as a branch of pragmatics and is, simply put, mainly concerned with the pragmatics of internet-mediated interaction" (Xie, 2022: 1). In other words, it depends on the internet and "technologically-mediated affordances" (Xie, 2022: 1). Xie (2022: 2) also sees internet pragmatics as a "way with language online, a way with life on social media and, a way with the online world" while, at the same time, it is a way of seeing the life, seeing the (inter)action, seeing self and the other, seeing both the bright and black sides of human nature, seeing the truth, post-truth and/or untruth of the life-world, online and offline". He also sees internet pragmatics as a valuable and promising area of inquiry, stating that there is a growing list of research publications on the topic.

1.3. Pragmatics of Internet Memes

The global everyday use of the internet has greatly contributed to the creation, transformation and distribution of internet memes, and, due to that, their understanding and interpretation in various social fields and scenarios attracted academic attention in the field of pragmatics and such attention resulted in numerous articles and papers on the topic.

Thus Grundlingh (2012) states that memes are successfully used for communication purposes because certain memes (specifically image macros) are essentially speech acts and are also understood as being speech acts by internet users. Wiggins & Bowers (2015) try to assist in understanding how memes as artifacts of participatory digital culture are created, by introducing a genre development of memes which demonstrates the generative capacity for continued memetic transformation and for participation among members of digital culture. Within the framework of cyberpragmatics (which "analyses communicative exchanges that take place among Internet users using the different cyber-media available" (Yus, 2011: 14)). Yus (2019) discusses the assumption that different text-picture combinations will have an impact on eventual relevance by yielding different balances of cognitive effects and mental effort, where the latter might sometimes be compensated for by an offset of additional cognitive effects in the shape of implications. Lugea (2019) provides a pragma-stylistic analysis of five of the most popular image macro families, as well as their most liked and disliked iterations. Piata's research deals with 'Classical Art Memes', as a category of internet memes which derives its visual input from classical and medieval art, demonstrating that humour in such memes arises from incongruity which exists among different stylistic varieties, "namely a colloquial linguistic expression in the text and a classical-style artwork in the image" (2019: 36). Nita et al. (2021) explored how the memes were created with multimodal elements that could make meaning to create a humorous sense and function as speech acts and showed in their study that the integration of semiotic resources such as mode, media, and meaning potentials in memes aided the readers to understand the background knowledge of memes. At the same time, they found two types of communicative illocutionary acts: representatives (constatives) and directives, which function to express emotions or opinions and question something, and noticed that the effects of using internet memes could be seen through verbal and non-verbal perlocutionary acts which showed an agreement and had the same feeling as in the memes. The conclusion of their work is that the memes containing multimodal components composed of semiotic resources interacted creatively to make humorous sense, making it possible for readers to communicate online. Diedrichsen (2022) notices that memes establish usage conventions, so that their distribution and reception bears aspects of communicative interaction. Identifying that flexibility, novelty and originality are driving forces in meme culture, his article investigates how traditional pragmatic

notions like recipient design and common ground can be said to apply for the interaction with memes. Finally, Henn (2024) evaluates the role of memes as cultural symbols of online communities and their diffusion across community boundaries.

2. Classical Music Memes

The corpus of classical music memes used in this research consists of 169 selected memes found on Google Images (with "classical music memes" as the key words for search) and in Facebook groups "Classical Music Humor" and "Musicnotes". All the memes included in the research are in the form of image macro or its variants. No memes were created, adjusted or repacked just for the purpose of the research.

The key feature common for all the memes from the corpus is that they are, in one way or another, humorous. For the understanding of such humour, sometimes only general education and knowledge is necessary, while in some other situations, musical knowledge is required, including, but not limited to musical instruments, composers, genres, periods, sheet music reading, Theory of Music, Musical Forms, Harmony and Counterpoint, conducting, composition, performance, orchestra etc.

A great deal of the memes from the corpus are based on generally known portrait images of famous classical music composers, such as Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Handel, Debussy or Vivaldi, with a single-line or two-component text whose humour is based on general education and knowledge, attitudes, opinions and beliefs (**Composer Memes**). There are also structurally identical memes where the text is in the form of puns, exploiting the different possible meanings of a word or the fact that there are words that sound alike but have different meanings (**Composer Memes with Puns**). Many memes of this type achieve the humorous effect through the phonetic translation of misheard words and the statements which occur in that process, and to understand them, some knowledge in classical music is often required. Finally, there are also the puns where the faces/figures of different popular culture characters are photoshopped to the faces/figures of classical music composers and musicians, and that is accompanied with textual remarks which are related both to the "source" person on the meme and the character photoshopped onto it (**Photoshopped Composer Memes with Puns**).

Another group of classical music memes is based on different real-life photographs or images from various musical situations (**Musical Situation Memes**), with the single-line or two-component text whose humorous effect is exclusively

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achieved through the combination of the photograph/image and usually requires musical knowledge. There are also memes of this type in which an excerpt of sheet music occurs instead of a photograph/image, typically positioned between the two components of text, so that the reading of sheet music is essential for the understanding of a meme (***Sheet Music Memes***).

A significant group of classical music memes are the ones based on movie, TV show or cartoon screenshots of characters' facial expressions (***Screenshot Memes***), or on characteristic photographs of different popular culture characters (celebrities), such as musicians, politicians or writers (***Celebrity Memes***). Being, essentially, reaction shots which depict characteristic facial expression(s) in correlation with classical music related humorous remarks or puns, they mostly require some knowledge and familiarity with classical music issues. They occur as simple image macros or as stacked images, i.e. more complex variations with more than one photograph and/or more than two textual components).

A specific type are the classical music memes in which a text stands alone, without any photograph or image (***Text Memes***). It is typically given in the form of a dialogue, or as a screenshot of a written (digital) conversation. The humorous effect in such memes is usually achieved through irony and paradox and/or the exploration of various prejudices or stereotypes related to classical music, by means of the punch line occurring in the second part of the text, usually understandable within strictly classical music context and knowledge. In a large group of memes similar to the previous ones, the two-part form of the contents is achieved so that the first part is the text while the other part contains a fragment of musical notation instead of text, which acts as a sort of punch line, on the basis of different humorous effects achieved through the (assigned or real) meaning, phonetic representation or context of the sheet music or symbols (***Text and Musical Notation Memes***).

A very common type of memes from the genre are the "what people think I do" memes in the form of stacked images occurring as a comic strip structure. They depict different phenomena and professions related to classical music in the sequence of six photos with appropriate, often ironic or exaggerated "what" descriptions, relating to the comparison of opinions based on expectation, prejudice, and stereotypes with the actual state. Such memes might often require musical knowledge to be understood properly (***"What People Think I Do" Memes***).

Finally, the last group of classical music memes identified within the corpus are the stacked images consisting of different mutually connected graphical elements

and texts presented in the form of comic strip structures which create the humorous effect both individually and as a whole (***Comic Strip Memes***).

The number of memes belonging to each of the mentioned groups within the corpus can be seen in Table 1.

Composer Memes	*Composer Memes with Puns*	*Photoshopped Composer Memes with Puns*	*Musical Situation Memes*
29	20	18	14
Sheet Music Memes	*Screenshot Memes*	*Celebrity Memes*	*Text Memes*
13	21	17	11
Text and Musical Notation Memes	*"What People Think I Do" Memes*	*Comic Strip Memes*	
7	11	8	

Table 1: The number of memes from the corpus belonging to each group

2.1. Classical Music Memes as Speech Acts

Speech acts have traditionally been used in describing spoken and/ written communication. However, according to Grundlingh (2017: 162) speech acts can also be applied to memes, because they, although different from traditional written communication and often humorous, still make use of a creator and a receiver (instead of a writer-/-reader or speaker-/-hearer) and can communicate important information and opinions. Also, similar to speech acts, the context and intent of the creator are also very important in the understanding of memes.

What follows is the presentation of each identified meme type, with individual examples selected on the basis of their effective display of pragmatic features that characterise a specific meme group, and the blend and balance of elements through which their communicative purposes are achieved, both in terms of visual appearance and the embedded ideas, concepts, and knowledge (general and/or related to classical music).

In all the analysed memes, the creation of a combination of text (what is written/said) and visual cues (photos, images, drawings, sheet music, dialogue form, etc.) acts as the locutionary act. However, different types of illocutionary speech acts can be found in each of the identified meme types, and their perlocutionary effects also differ.

Thus, ***Composer Memes*** (as well as their variants*, **Composer Memes with Puns*** and ***Photoshopped Composer Memes with Puns***) typically occur as expressives or directives. As expressives, they typically convey emotions related to

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performances, practice, composers, and the overall musician experience, and often express humour, joy, admiration or frustration. On the other hand, as directives, they serve to encourage, instruct, command, appeal or request specific actions, often in a humorous or exaggerated way. Numerous memes of this type are the combination of expressives and directives.
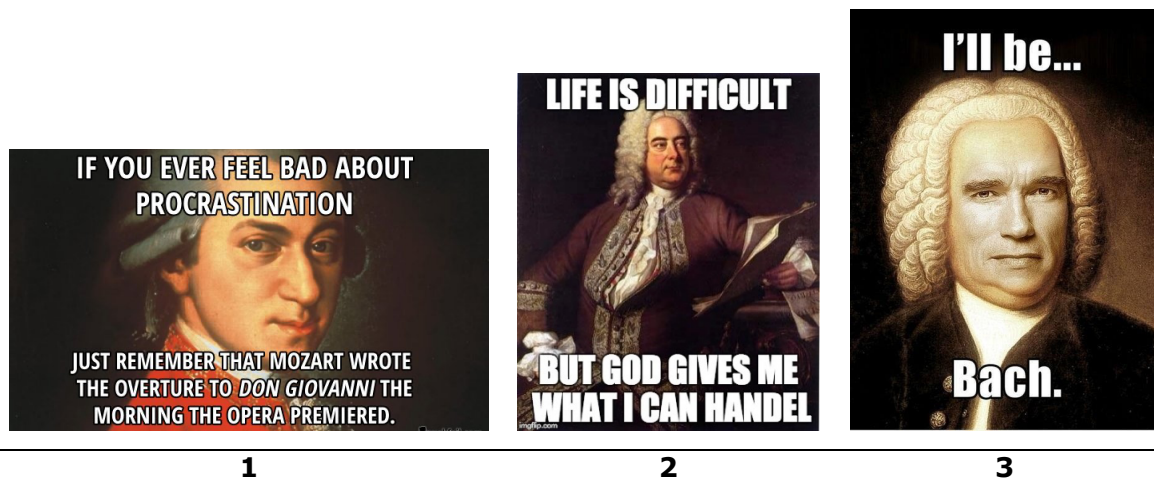

| 1 | 2 | 3 |

Figure 2: Composer Memes

In Figure 2, there are three examples of *Composer Memes*. In the first of them (1), illocutionary speech act occurs in the form of an expressive, in a statement attempting to offer reassurance or comfort to people who procrastinate by pointing out a historical, generally known example where procrastination still resulted in success. The intent is to make the audience feel better about their own procrastination by comparing it to the genius of Mozart. At the same time, its perlocutionary effect is for the audience to find humour and relief in the comparison. By humorously juxtaposing their own procrastination with Mozart's, the meme downplays the negativity associated with putting things off until the last minute, reassuring the viewer that procrastination is not always catastrophic. Such humour is ironic because Mozart is widely considered one of the greatest composers, yet even he procrastinated, finishing a major piece the morning it was to be performed. This contrasts with the typical expectation that greatness requires discipline and planning, making the comparison funny and comforting.

In the second example (2) there is a pun occurring when the word "handle" (as in, to manage) is replaced with "Handel," referring to the famous composer George Frideric Handel, whose image is displayed in the meme. Two illocutionary acts can be found in it: an expressive, and possibly a directive (in a suggestive manner).

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Namely, the textual component of the meme expresses a positive attitude or reassurance about life's difficulties, by using the pun to introduce humour. The intent is to lighten the emotional load of the statement by turning it into a playful wordplay involving the composer Handel. At the same time, it acts as a directive, suggesting or motivating the audience to be courageous enough and try to deal with (handle) all life's difficulties. The perlocutionary effect of the meme is humour, with the wordplay that makes the meme witty while also providing a sense of resilience in the face of hardship, thus adding a layer of light-heartedness to what might otherwise be a sombre or motivational statement about dealing with difficulties. The phrase "God gives me what I can handle" is a common expression of resilience, but swapping "handle" for "Handel" both introduces humour and references classical music culture, which adds a cultural twist to the meme.

Finally, in the third example (3), the phrase "I'll be Bach" acts a play on the well-known line "I'll be back" from the movie Terminator, substituting the word "back" with "Bach", the surname of the famous Baroque composer. Same in the previous example, the meme predominantly presents an expressive. Its primary intent is to entertain or amuse the audience by making clever wordplay. However, it might also be expressing knowledge of classical music in a way that signals cultural sophistication or humorously downplaying the seriousness of both The Terminator and classical music. The perlocutionary effect of this meme is the humour, based on the pun. For those familiar with both the movie reference and the composer, the humour comes from the unexpected combination of two very different cultural icons, one from action cinema and the other from classical music, appealing to people with an interest in both pop culture and classical music. The contrast between the serious and dramatic tone of the original line in the movie and the relatively formal and intellectual association with Bach adds an additional layer of humour. There is also some irony in the meme juxtaposing the iconic Baroque composer with a futuristic cyborg assassin from an action movie and blending their two images in the meme.

Musical Situation Memes and ***Sheet Music Memes*** mostly occur as expressives, but with the elements of directives. The stated types of speech acts essentially perform the same functions as in *Composer Memes* and their variations. Here are the two examples:
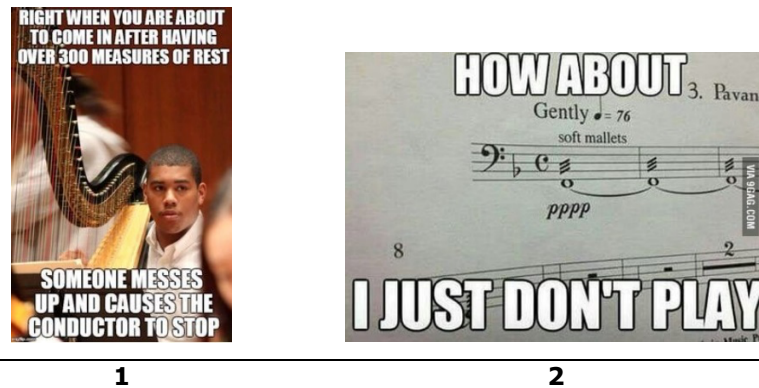
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Figure 3: Musical Situation Meme and Sheet Music Meme

In the first meme (1), there is a humorous complaint about the frustration of preparing to play after a long period of rest in a musical score, only for someone else to mess up and force the conductor to stop the orchestra. It is expressed through the text and the photograph of facial expression from an authentic musical (orchestral) situation. As such, the meme primarily functions as an expressive, conveying frustration and disappointment and highlighting a common experience for orchestral or ensemble musicians. However, there is also a directive, containing an implicit appeal to ensemble and orchestral musicians, especially those who play in large settings, to practice their parts and thus avoid the situation in which the ones waiting for their moment to play are prevented to do that by someone else's mistake. Consequently, the perlocutionary effect of the meme assumes that ensemble or orchestral musicians, particularly those who play instruments with long sections of rest, would likely feel understood and amused by the shared experience. At the same time, its humour comes from shared experience and frustration, as well as from irony.

In the second example (2), the meme depicts a short excerpt of sheet music where an instrument is required to play one tone very fast through several bars, in sustained manner and in a very silent dynamic (pppp - pianississississimo), and that causes the ironical question asked in the text which humorously suggests that the musician might as well not play at all. As such, the meme primarily acts as an expressive, sarcastically suggesting that the dynamic marking is so quiet that it is almost pointless to even play the notes. Simultaneously it expresses the possible musician's disbelief or frustration at how softly they are expected to play. At the same time, the meme also acts as a directive speech act suggests an alternative

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solution: not playing at all, with a sarcastic implication that the musical marking is unreasonable.

The perlocutionary effect of this meme is the invocation of shared humour about the impracticality of certain musical instructions, particularly among musicians. It pokes fun at the occasional absurdity of dynamic markings, which can sometimes seem impractical, and it is achieved through irony and exaggeration of the effect of the dynamic marking.

Screenshot Memes and **Celebrity Memes** are also mostly expressives and/or directives, with the same functions as in the previously mentioned meme types. However, they may also occur as commissives, expressing the (real or satirical) commitment to perform actions related to different fields of classical music, and as representatives, asserting that something said or stated is true. In Figure X, there are four examples of such memes.

| 1 | 2 | 3 |

Figure 4: Screenshot Memes and Celebrity Meme

In the first example (1), based on the screenshot of Gene Wilder as Willy Wonka, there is a challenge in the text aimed at mocking those who claim to enjoy classical music but may only be familiar with the most famous composers, such as Beethoven and Mozart. The act of asking the reader (audience) to name a composer represents a directive because it prompts action or, at least, contemplation. At the same time, there is an implicit expressive act, as the meme's tone and facial expression shown in the photo convey condescension or scepticism about the audience's knowledge of classical music. The perlocutionary effect of this meme is to make the audience laugh at its gatekeeping nature, simultaneously acknowledging that many people may actually know only these two composers, and a few more equally famous ones.

The second meme (2) uses three stacked screenshots from the scene in the movie *Inception* where Leonardo DiCaprio's character is engaged in conversation with Cillian Murphy's. The text is divided into two parts, where the first statement is a representation of a claim, while the second statement responds to the first with a literal interpretation. The phrase "to hear by ear" is typically used to describe the ability to play music without sheet music, but the response creates humorous effect by interpreting it literally and sarcastically, subtly implying that the phrase is redundant or unnecessary. It may also be pointing out the absurdity of some classical music-related jargon, questioning the idea that "hearing by ear" is a special talent. In that sense, the first statement stands as a representative illocutionary act because it asserts or reports a statement of fact or belief related to the existence of someone's musical ability. However, the response presents an expressive, demonstrating the feeling of mockery or disbelief and signalling a reaction to the first statement by pointing out the literal absurdity of the phrase. It could also be interpreted as a directive (though more subtly), as the second statement implicitly corrects the first by forcing the reconsideration of the wording or the significance of the claim.

The expected perlocutionary effect of the meme is to find humour in the mockery. The second statement intentionally takes a common idiom too literally, which creates an absurd contrast between what the phrase means in musical jargon and the basic function of ears in hearing. The humour appeals to those familiar with musical language and the comedic value of literalism. There is also situational irony in the meme because the second statement points out something so obvious ("we all hear by our ears") in response to what is meant to be a special claim or ability. The irony stems from how the initial statement is meant to convey a talent, but the response downplays it by framing the ability as something everyone possesses.

The third meme (3), as the example of **Celebrity Memes**, features a photoshopped image of Kim Jong-Un holding a double bass, with the caption suggesting that Americans use the instrument to "control their drummers". It plays on the stereotype that drummers are difficult to control or unruly in an ensemble setting and intends to amuse through absurdity and exaggeration. In that sense, the meme is, primarily, a commissive, humorously committing to the idea of such a "control". However, the consequential implication that drummers might be difficult to manage (or control) in a group-playing environment makes it an expressive as well. Its intended perlocutionary effect is for the audience to laugh at the absurdity of the

statement and the juxtaposition of a political figure from a serious context with a specific musical joke, adding a layer of satire that pokes fun at both authoritarian control and musical environment.

Text Memes and **Text and Musical Notation Memes** are generally representatives, directives, expressives, or the combination of them. It is illustrated through three examples in Figure 5.
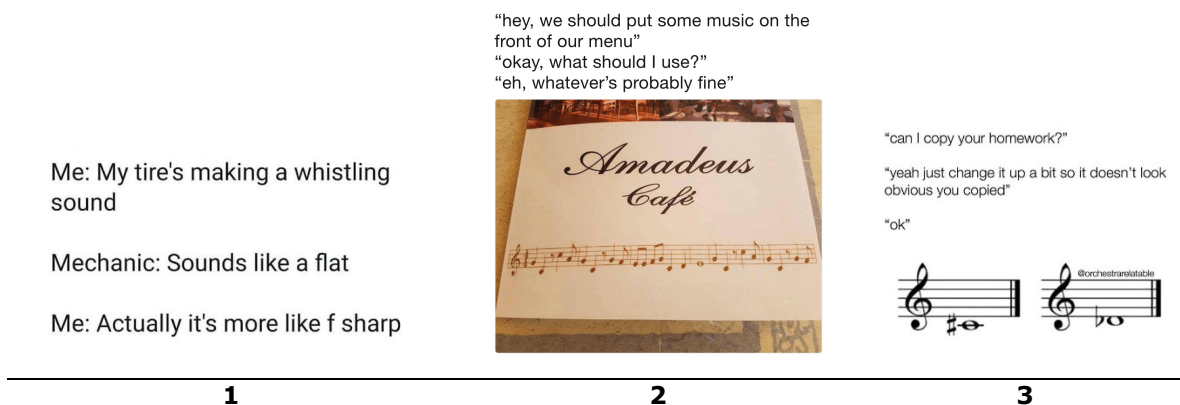

Figure 5: Text Meme and Text and Musical Notation Memes

In the first example (1), there is a *Text Meme* with a dialogue between the speaker and the mechanic. Initially, the speaker asks for help, describes a problem, and expects a diagnosis, and this acts as a representative speech act. The mechanic makes a suggestion or diagnosis based on the speaker's description, with the intention to offer a solution, and it acts as a directive. However, in the third statement the speaker shifts from a serious diagnostic conversation to a humorous one, referencing musical notes and pitches (A flat (Ab) and F sharp (F#) instead of actual car issues, and this is an expressive act, introducing a joke or non-literal response, likely aiming to entertain or amuse, i.e. to achieve the humorous effect as a perlocutionary speech act. The humour arises from the clash of expectations: the mechanic expects the speaker to engage in a serious conversation about car issues, but instead, the speaker introduces a musical term that would not typically apply to a car problem. The intended effect is to surprise or make the audience laugh, relying on its cultural knowledge and familiarity with both car maintenance (the concept of a "flat tire") and musical terminology (the notes and pitches "A flat" and "F sharp").

The second example (2) is based on the image of a menu of café named "Amadeus Café", which contains the musical score of a melody, which should probably fit the theme of classical music, possibly to honour Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. However, the melodic line is not even close to that: it is the main theme

from the Flintstones. The image is preceded by a dialogue suggesting the decision to place this musical score on the menu was hasty or thoughtless. The dialogue (textual part of the meme) contains two directives (The first speaker gives a suggestion or recommendation, then the second speaker requests information about what music to use) and a representative, with the first speaker giving a comment or observation that conveys carelessness. However, the image of sheet music (melody) acts as a punchline and an expressive speech act indirectly stating that "whatever is not fine" and that the process of sheet music selection for the menu should have been performed with more care. In a more general sense, it asserts that it is always important to pay attention to details. In that sense, the perlocutionary effect of the meme is to demonstrate humorously the importance of details and, even more important, that it is necessary to know how to read sheet music if there is an intention to use it. Of course, the same knowledge is required to understand the meme properly.

In the third example, two musical notations are shown side by side, showing two notes (C# and Db) which visually seem different, because they are written at different position within the stave and with different accidentals, but actually (enharmonically) sound the same. The dialogue that precedes it consists of two directive speech acts (request to copy homework and suggestion how to do that), while the notation itself acts as a representative of the minimal or no effort made to disguise the copied work, signalling the speaker's belief about what constitutes "to change something up".

Finally, due to their nature and structure, ***"What People Think I Do" Memes*** and **Comic Strip Memes** are predominantly representatives, as it can be seen from the analysis of three examples shown in Figure 6 that follows.
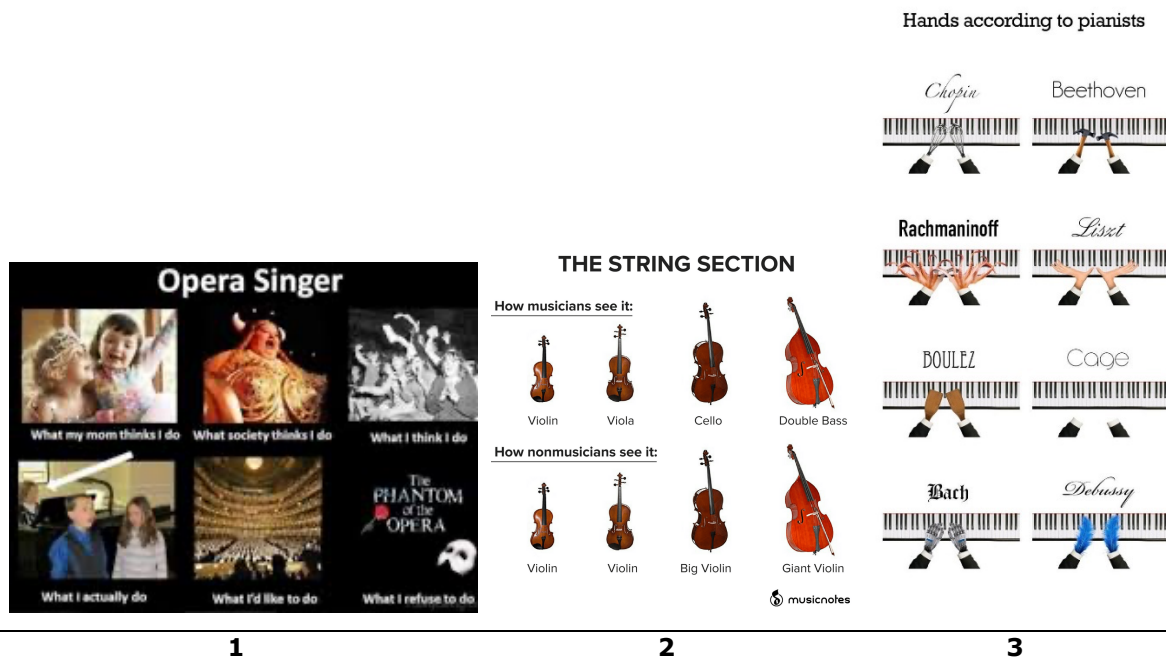
Figure 6: "What People Think I Do" Meme and Comic Strip Memes

In the first example (1), the meme contrasts how different people or groups perceive the profession of an opera singer, by using different frames to show various expectations. Each frame presents a simple declarative sentence, where the locutionary act is the statement showing perceptions of the opera singers' professional roles, duties, and activities. In terms of illocutionary acts, the meme communicates an intention to highlight the disparity between perceptions and reality, so that each statement serves as a commentary on how misunderstood the profession is and presents a representative. The perlocutionary effect of the meme is to provoke thought, humour, and possibly empathy for the misconceptions related to the profession.

The meme seen in the second example (2) compares how musicians see the various instruments in the string section versus how non-musicians perceive them, emphasizing the difference in understanding and presenting two contrasting perspectives on string instruments. In that, the textual descriptions of the instruments shown in images serve as labels. Both sections of the meme function as representatives, with humorous illocutionary force. In terms of the perlocutionary act, the meme fosters a humorous connection between different levels of musical expertise (knowledge of musical instruments).

In the third meme (3) there is a humorous attribution of different hand styles and types to various famous composers, exaggerating their stylistic qualities as pianists or composers. The text describes the types of hands associated with various composers and pairs these labels in frames with humorous visual representations of their supposed hand types (e.g., whisk hands for Chopin, hammer hands for Beethoven, octopus hands for Rachmaninoff etc.). Each frame describes the supposed hand style of a composer, using hyperboles for their playing styles, acting as a representative. The perlocutionary effect of the meme relies on stereotypical exaggerations and the intention to amuse by reducing complex musical styles into funny, exaggerated hand hyperboles, inviting the audience to think about the uniqueness of each composer's work.

3. Conclusions

Observed in terms of pragmatics, classical music memes serve as more than just humorous images: they act as complex speech acts, where both text and visual elements perform communicative functions similar to spoken or written language, blending humour, cultural commentary, and musical expertise. Their effectiveness depends on the audience's level of familiarity with classical music, as many memes require a shared knowledge or understanding of musical terminology, history, and culture. Through the combination of different illocutionary speech acts, these memes create a humorous space where classical music meets the digital world, inviting audiences to both laugh and reflect on their relationship with the music. The integration of text, visual content, and context allows these memes to communicate in different ways, where humour is not only a source of entertainment but also a means of conveying deeper messages about the world of classical music.

Expressive acts dominate many meme types, particularly those that convey emotions such as joy, frustration, admiration, or irony, often reflecting the personal experiences of musicians or music enthusiasts. Directives, on the other hand, occur in memes that humorously encourage or prompt action, often exaggerated for comedic effect. They often serve dual purposes: to instruct or command in a light-hearted manner, while simultaneously generating humour through wordplay and cultural references. In commissive speech acts, the meme's creator humorously commits to a position or action, often leveraging exaggeration to explore the different aspects of musical life.

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Finally, representatives, which assert beliefs or describe realities, provide commentary on how classical musicians, instruments, concepts or musical professions are perceived both within and outside the musical community.

The perlocutionary effect of classical music memes, i.e. how they impact the audience, relies heavily on shared cultural and musical knowledge. For those with a deep understanding of classical music, these memes provoke laughter through their clever juxtapositions, puns, or references to composers, instruments, and musical theory. Similarly, memes that juxtapose classical music with popular culture characters or tropes often add an additional layer of irony or satire, which can appeal to audiences who appreciate both worlds. Also, in addition to humour, many classical music memes carry some sort of subtle cultural commentary and may provide insight into the traditions, practices, hierarchies, and challenges within the world of classical music and everything that surrounds it.

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