



Psychological Perspectives

A Quarterly Journal of Jungian Thought

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/upyp20>

Music, Image, and Archetype: Connecting with the Musical Myth of Our Time

Alexander T. Sill

To cite this article: Alexander T. Sill (2022) Music, Image, and Archetype: Connecting with the Musical Myth of Our Time, *Psychological Perspectives*, 65:2, 225-238, DOI: [10.1080/00332925.2022.2119762](https://doi.org/10.1080/00332925.2022.2119762)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00332925.2022.2119762>



Published online: 14 Nov 2022.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 23



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Music, Image, and Archetype: Connecting with the Musical Myth of Our Time

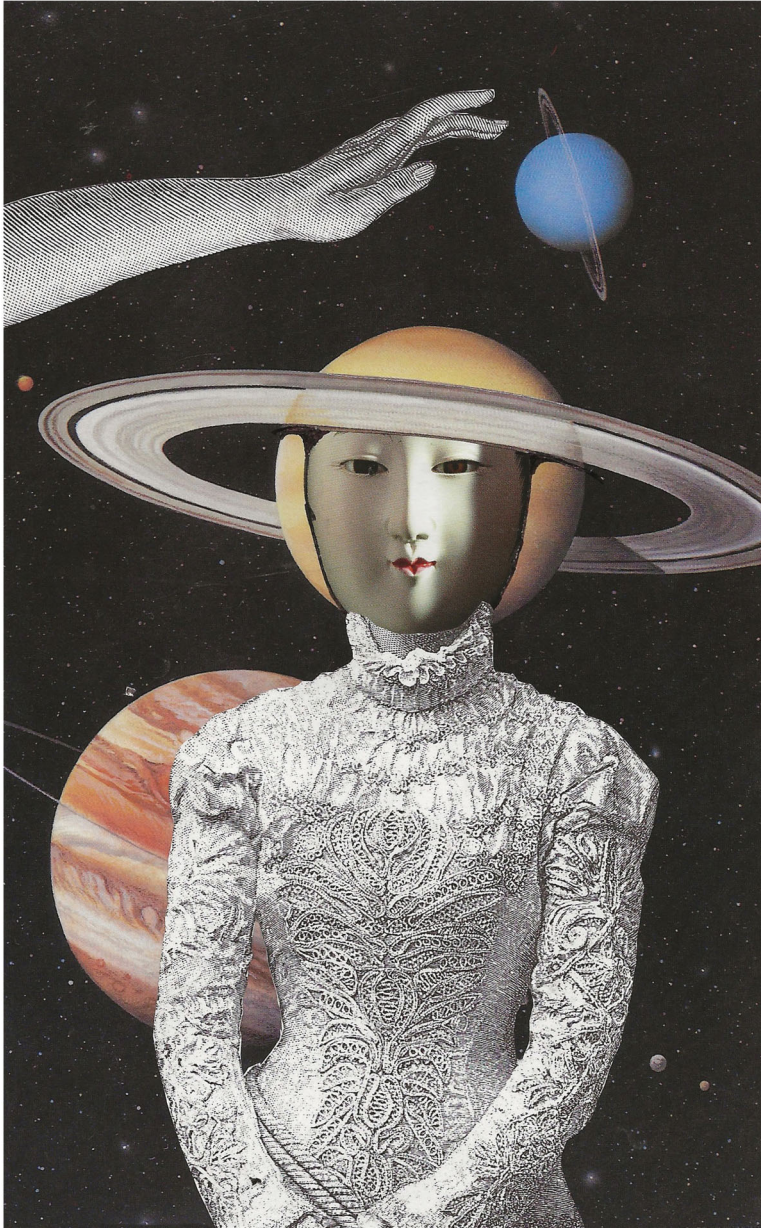
Alexander T. Sill

This treatise aims to highlight the connection between music and archetypal behavior, and ask what implications this connection holds when it comes to the modern human condition. With references to work including that of C. G. Jung, Nietzsche, Panksepp, modern studies of acoustics, the music of the author, alchemical concepts, and more, the following questions/topics are addressed: What are some demonstrable connections between music and archetypes, sound, and image, and how do these things relate to humankind's proclivity toward story telling/mythology? Additionally, how could said topics relate to the necessary search for meaning in today's crisis-filled world?

Having grown up in a household with two parents from musical lineages, it seemed only natural that I would gravitate toward a life of music. My father, Lonnie, a long-time figurehead in the music publishing and film music worlds, played saxophone when I was younger, and, along with his friends, introduced me to everything from Steely Dan to John Coltrane; to Pat Metheny; to the Beatles. His father, Lester, was a lifelong record executive and vanguard force behind West Coast Rock 'n' Roll and R&B, dating back to the 1940s. My mother, Nicci, a gifted singer from London, came out to the States for singing work on television and the like, and grew up in a Welsh-Italian household where music was of prime importance. Her father, Tony, sang doo-wop during the war years and onward.

By the time I gravitated to the guitar at age 12, I was already fascinated with the way certain long-form compositions, such as Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells* (1973), excited so many different emotions in me, and how those same listening experiences were often interlinked with a propensity for imagistic association and storytelling. Music seemed to endow experiences—both real and imaginary—with significance. This seemed only natural to me, but toward the end of my high school years I began to wonder why. I wondered whether my inclination of associating music with image was particular to certain types of personalities, or whether there was a more universal phenomenon at play. My high school senior year thesis explored possible answers to this question. I conducted research into the field of psychoacoustics and the subconscious role of film scores in telling a story, but on some level did not feel my explorations encompassed a broad enough scope.

A year later, while attending college at Cal Arts, I was introduced to the work of C. G. Jung and was intrigued by his thoughts on life after death. During my junior year I came across an interview with the late legendary pianist and composer Lyle Mays in



Sandra Vigon, *Saturn Spin Over Jupiter*, collage, 5 × 8 inches.

which he cited Jung as a major influence and revealed that he had read *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (Jung, 1961/1989). As a musician, Lyle has been a huge influence on my life and, synchronistically, ended up mentoring me soon after I recognized our Jungian connection. With my interest in Jung piqued further, I picked up a copy of *The Portable Jung* and became intrigued by his writing on “feeling tones” and the emotional charge a mental image can carry (Jung, 1976, p. 25). After researching further and immersing myself in Jung’s theory of archetypes, a new, more expansive path opened up in my quest for answers regarding the images that accompanied the music I created and listened to. Although I did not initially come across any research of Jung’s regarding music, I sensed I was onto something.

Around this same time, a peculiar set of words popped into my head on a drive home: 21st century alchemy. I was intrigued, and thought the phrase could serve as a nice song title. As I pondered the words, I realized I had come to think of music as a form of alchemy in that it combined our physical and psychological experiences into a sort of gestalt; into gold, as it were. All the while I had yet to realize how deeply Jung investigated alchemy and its connections to analytical psychology, or the broader implications of how music plays a role in this field. Coming to terms with the archetypes as inborn, unconscious behavior patterns that are expressed in affectual image form made sense when seen in connection with the arresting influence music had on me, and so I continued to dig more deeply.

Now that I’m 29, I’ve had many years to ponder these questions and to consider whether I still find them relevant or not. I’ve traveled around the world, played music on multiple continents, performed countless shows, collaborated with heroes of mine on many occasions, crafted compositions for various albums, performed music that places modern, intellectual demands on the performer, and that also requires a particularly sharpened instinct to spontaneously create in the present moment. But far from serving as a distraction, these ever-accumulating modern experiences have made my longstanding questions—questions concerning ancient tendencies of human nature—feel more relevant than ever.

As we know, evidence of the archetypes can be found in the recurring motifs of literature, art, dream imagery, cinema, and the like throughout the history of humankind. Music in particular uses motifs in a sonic way. Musical themes, or “cells” of notes, can be transformed and recontextualized throughout the course of a composition to describe a journey with a goal of transformation (telos). The archetypal nature of music can be demonstrated on micro and macro levels: The movements of a piece can be related to sonic chapters; melodies and motifs act like characters in a story as they enter and depart various harmonic backgrounds during their variations and transformations. Certain chords/sonorities in themselves can trigger particular feeling tones or other typical associative and emotive descriptions. A minor chord usually inspires darker associations while a major sonority often holds brighter implications. The lush sounds of an orchestra reverberating through a concert hall or movie theater cast a sonic spell and we suddenly find ourselves in the grip of an archetype—melancholy or ecstasy wash over us; feelings of liberation or horror enrapture and ensnare us; tears are shed and a motivating force moves through our souls, giving us glimpses into the divine—all out of our conscious control.

Through its interaction with the psyche, music can touch and express the innermost, sacred, and precious parts of ourselves. It provides a mystic language for the soul, encapsulating the most poignant aspects of human existence in a way nothing else can. I believe, similar to the way in which Jung described the importance of painting

one's visions into a book, that music can play just as important a role. He observed that when one's paintings "are in some precious book you can go to the book & turn over the pages & for you it will be your church—your cathedral—the silent places of your spirit where you will find renewal." This is the renewal many of us feel as we listen to music when it likewise touches "the silent places of [our] spirit." Jung also warned, "If anyone tells you that [this practice] is morbid or neurotic and you listen to them—then you will lose your soul—for in that book is your soul." For our purposes, I would paraphrase Jung to say that in that song, that composition which touches you so deeply, is your soul (Jung, 2012, p. 77).

More easily describable emotions often bubble to the surface when we truly connect with music—ecstasy, happiness, fear, wonder—but there is potential for an even more ineffable, "numinous" feeling that underlies a music listening experience. This numinosity can bring physical sensations like goose bumps along with it, and make us feel that something otherworldly is taking place; that we've set foot into sacred territory. It could be said that music opens a sort of doorway into the unconscious and allows a space for usually inaccessible contents beyond the purview of the ego to make themselves known. While we can try to codify the music listening experience using terms like "ecstasy" and "sorrow," words often seem to fail, and it may be more appropriate to speak generally by acknowledging that music, at its best, excites a numinous atmosphere where meaning may be derived subjectively. It could even be said that music creates a sort of hyper- or supra-reality alembic in which the unconscious has ample opportunity to communicate with the ego, creating that gestalt union of opposites.

Hand-in-hand with these phenomena is the implied imagistic aspect of the archetype brought about by said sounds. Sometimes music serves to make an already extant image more resonant. Other times, images are newly formed, possibly having no basis in one's physical, personal experience. This brings to mind a sort of sliding scale as to how obviously archetypal the images are. Case in point: music has a way of latching onto our memory banks and forging strong associations with certain moments or periods in our life. A song comes on the radio and the listener is transported back to the time they first heard it. This is interesting in and of itself, but there's another related internal process that is even more curious to me. Oftentimes I've noticed the strong emotional reactions music generates in correspondence with particular mental imagery that does not necessarily bear direct resemblance to actual memories of mine. Music recently listened to or created may even dredge up imagery related to past experiences that occurred long before that music was created. This has left me to ponder not only the personally associative aspects of music and memory, but also the typical *types* of imagery or reactions certain music instills, and whether these phenomena are relating to something which, at its core, is unconscious and being constellated in typical kinds of scenarios, both real and imagined. For beneath the surface of our personal experiences, memories, and the music we've associated with them is an archetype(s) imparting an "otherworldliness" of an ancient, inherent past to our present lives.

From a Jungian perspective, it might be said that the personally associative aspect of music eliciting strong emotional memories is dealing with the psyche's layer of the personal unconscious. Speaking to these things additionally, and beyond the surface level of the personal unconscious, is the deeper collective unconscious that is relating those personal experiences, places, people, and things to a transpersonal realm of myth—to an archetypal world. This may account for what I've come to call a "dream residue" feeling that's brought about by certain musical experiences. This dream residue follows particularly powerful dreams which trigger feelings strongly enough to the

point where they linger in conscious experience the following day(s). It could be said that the bridge between the conscious and unconscious is more fluid in this state. One foot resides in unconscious territory more than usual. This ineffable, numinous feeling that arises and can't be fully described by the conscious mind is, to me, a hint that the unconscious is imparting its influence and endowing situations with significance.

Jungian analyst, musician, and music therapist Joel Kroeker (DA Psych) holds a similar view. In a recent interview he stated, "A lot of what happens when we are dreaming is also onboard when we are in a musical environment" (Kroeker, 2022). I see music as a catalyst for these archetypal responses—a sort of snake charmer for the unconscious—and it deserves more research in connection with the psychoanalytic field. Friedrich Nietzsche (1888/2007), stated that "without music, life would be a mistake" (p. 9). Jung (1940/1969) paraphrased Nietzsche, writing:

In sleep and in dreams we pass through the whole thought of earlier humanity. ... I mean, as a man now reasons in dreams, so humanity also reasoned for many thousands of years ... Dreams carry us back to remote conditions of human culture and afford us a ready means of understanding it better. (p. 51)

Like many of Nietzsche's insights, this statement is remarkably intuitive and ahead of its time. We can almost trace a through line from Nietzsche, to Jung, and all the way to more modern scientific explorations of the unconscious. To cite the research of Jaak Panksepp, "What we now know as REM sleep may have originally been a form of waking consciousness, in a world where 'emotionality was more important than reason in competition for resources'" (Panksepp, as cited in Haule, 2011, p. 111).

The otherworldly, unknown emotional regions that music and dreams inhabit bring to mind Jung's words from *The Archetypes and The Collective Unconscious*:

[The archetypes] evidently live and function in the deeper layers of the unconscious, especially in that phylogenetic substratum which I have called the collective unconscious. This localization explains a good deal of their strangeness: they bring into our ephemeral consciousness an unknown psychic life belonging to a remote past. It is the mind of our unknown ancestors, their way of thinking and feeling, their way of experiencing life and the world, gods and men. (Jung, 1968, p. 286)

Looked at from this standpoint, music has collective power over all of us, not simply because it elicits emotions involving our personal memories, but because it also reaches into the inherited, ritualistic, and ancient parts of ourselves that bear their roots thousands of years back in cave-dwelling times, times in which mythology originated and played an obvious role in imbuing human life with meaning. Music is, in a sense, summoning a "ghost in our genes"—reverberations of the cave that imprinted itself on the collective human psyche eons ago, and which can be felt still to this day via our own individual experience. In my opinion, music is one of, if not *the* most powerful and commonplace connections we have to ritualistic behavior and reactions, the kinds of ecstatic responses experienced by our ancestors during contact with the gods residing in the unconscious.

I think it is no coincidence that ritualistic behaviors dating back thousands, or even tens of thousands of years, often involved music as an integral element. Locations in certain caves that were of spiritual importance have been found to be adorned not only with paintings, but also happen to be situated in particularly resonant and

reverberantly rich sonic environments. David Lubman, an expert in the field of acoustics, has studied these caves, and even went so far as to hypothesize that all of today's music could have its origins in the ingrained, repeated experiences of the human psyche involving the acoustical characteristics of caves (Lubman, as cited in Viegas, 2008). I am reminded of Jung's analogy of the formation of archetypal patterns in the psyche being akin to riverbeds that have been impressed upon repeatedly in the same way for eons. The archetypal form lies dormant before being filled in or constellated by a similar and individual experience.

It has been posited in recent years that a sort of synesthesia occurs within the brain when one listens to music in which the regions of the brain that relate to sound are firing in overlapping tandem along with other brain regions that relate to color, image, and other sense perceptions. People with pronounced synesthesia often describe how their sense perceptions overlap. For instance, they "hear" colors. Interestingly, researchers have noted that synesthesia is "not a conscious decision or a rational manifestation. Synesthesia is a passive, non-suppressible experience, although it is aroused by an easily identifiable stimulus" (Bragança et al., 2015, p. 17). Although this concept of multi-region brain integration is fascinating and bears a striking resemblance to Jung's idea of the conscious and unconscious functions of the psyche working together, I don't believe it can claim to represent a full picture. Questions about what regions of the brain are triggered and how vibrations may trigger the release of endorphins are getting at the mechanical apparatus of what allows such things to take place, but don't go far enough to explain the "why" and "what" purpose that music and its related effects serve relative to the human condition. In this respect, we may not have all the tools we need in order to properly analyze these phenomena and are seeing the trees rather than the forest. I am reminded of the Zen saying, "Don't confuse the finger pointing at the moon for the moon itself" (Sean, 2021, p. 19).

As a musician whose creative process routinely revolves around improvisation, I am particularly fascinated by the act of music-making as an integrative practice. I dare say one of the reasons that playing a musical instrument—especially the act of high-level improvisation—is so valuable and ecstatic is because it offers integration of the dialectical functions of the psyche in a manner rarely achieved by other practices. All pistons of the psyche fire in cooperation and are exercised.

Playing music requires overlapping use of psychic functions: our intellect (thinking) to deal with, for example, decisions regarding rhythm, or what kind of scales pertain to certain chords; our hearing and touch (sensation) are used to play and interact with the instrument and music. Our sensing faculties come further into play when we process other incoming musical information in a given moment, such as the harmonic information or the movements of other performers. The thinking function allows our subjective judgment in terms of what meaning we associate with the sounds in question; and our feeling function comes into play when it mediates how the music resonates (or not) with us—whether we enjoy the sounds or not; or how we as musicians feel when it comes to connecting with our fellow musicians or even audience members. Especially in an improvisational context, our intuition presents us with possibilities of what we could potentially play next, often utilizing—on a millisecond-by-millisecond basis—knowledge we accrued during practice which has been percolating in our unconscious. Here we have an intellectual, physical, spiritual (nonphysical), and instinctual melding par excellence. Playing a musical instrument particularly encourages this holistic stimulation and balance of the psyche, a beautiful economization of our mind and being; the integration of ourselves—intellect and instinct, thinking and feeling, light

and dark, conscious and unconscious, Apollonian and Dionysian, all included in a whole—a practice striving toward individuation.

Speaking further to the role psychological typology may play in relationship to music, I am curious as to how much my own personality type, which falls somewhere on the spectrum between introverted intuition and introverted thinking, lends bias when attempting to describe how we as a collective relate to music. The following passage from *Psychological Types* is particularly relevant:

[Introverted feeling's] aim is not to adjust itself to the object, but to subordinate it in an unconscious effort to realize the underlying images. It is continually seeking an image which has no existence in reality, but which it has seen in a kind of vision. It glides unheedingly over all objects that do not fit in with its aim. It strives after inner intensity, for which the objects serve at most as a stimulus. The depth of this feeling can only be guessed—it can never be clearly grasped. (Jung, 1921/1971, p. 387)

Whether one is a musician or not, I think many—perhaps all of us—share a mythic proclivity when it comes to relating to music, although we may not always pay attention to it. There may be no better way to demonstrate this archetypal connection between music and image than with cinema and film scores. In a similar, or maybe even more potent way than watching movies, music triggers emotional states not easily accessible by the ego which serve, potentially, to make us more well-rounded emotionally, empathetically, even intellectually. This speaks to the ability of music to cull out and crystallize emotions into knowable realms rather than only being hinted at or lying dormant in the unconscious. The “as if” aspect of psyche is on display here. Through the music, you feel *as if* something of importance has happened in physical reality, *as if* you've experienced sorrow, *as if* you had been taken on a great adventure or become heroic. Music allows for all of these feelings to be made sense of and—more than any other art Form—is the most universal in eliciting an archetypal reaction from the subject.

The effect music has in “driving” an emotional point home within a story, such as in a movie, or on an implicit level within one's own unconscious, separate from any external visual cues, is clear. By these means, a film composer is pulling on our subconscious heartstrings, so to speak, by trying to instill or drive home a specific reaction during the moviegoing experience. If a scene of heartbreak is being depicted, certain instinctually confirmed sonic colors, sonorities, or other elements of a sonic palette predictably evoke such a response. No one really teaches us how to respond to these inter-related phenomena, but rather it seems to be an inherent reaction. But when an audio accompaniment to an image is off base, the visual isn't as impactful, or the filmmakers are intentionally trying to create dissonance for comedic purposes, or other reasons. Of course, tropes and clichés have a role to play as they relate to the learned (nurtured) behaviors within us, but this is certainly not the full picture—an inborn set of proclivities (the nature aspect) play a large role as well. No one teaches one how to respond to a moviegoing experience or pure music experience, or instructs that certain sounds go along with certain images, and only then will they have an emotional impact.

More specifically speaking, film composers often use musical themes to describe a character, situation, or even location. These particular themes are referred to as *leit-motifs*. Some well-known examples include John Williams' (1980) *Imperial March*, written for Darth Vader, Monty Norman's and John Barry's theme for James Bond (Norman & Barry, 1962), and Hans Zimmer's sonic palette tailored for Heath Ledger's

Joker in *The Dark Knight* (Zimmer & Howard, 2008). I have even found that working backwards, so to speak, meditating on a particular image before composing music, can lead to impactful results. Painting musical portraits in this way can lead to a focused result as it limits the compositional decisions and options based on what a certain character or thing certainly does *not* sound like.

Given how the first eight tracks I had written for my debut album, *Experiences: Real and Imaginary* (Sill, 2019), were so deeply inspired by this imagistic, storytelling approach, I wondered how I could properly end the album in a related and satisfying way. I pondered how the great John Williams seamlessly and trenchantly scored the end credits to the films in the *Star Wars* saga. Themes from various parts of a given score were harkened back to in a context that exudes finality and provides a sense of homecoming, essentially distilling core elements of the story into condensed sonic form. I was inspired to see whether I could elicit the same feelings within myself that an impactful film score could by taking the basic tenets of sonic storytelling outlined by the likes of Williams but using them in the context of a multipart composition written for jazz quintet. Essentially, the idea was to write music for a sort of imagined film or story template. This concept allowed me to view the other pieces of music on the album within a larger context: as a journey with certain interrelated elements rather than simply separate, individual stories. Knowing that the start of the album was going to be “21st Century Alchemy” (which I considered the album’s main theme), I had the end of the album already in mind, and decided to utilize this main theme in the transfigured context of the album’s denouement to see whether it would suitably represent the sonic adventure I aspired to create.

The final result was a three-movement piece entitled “To a Theater Near You.” The idea was—along with aspiring to a cinematic aesthetic—to conjure the idea of an internal cinema we can inhabit in our own minds when listening to music. For experiment’s sake, and so as not to instill preconceived notions, I think it would be interesting for the reader (if possible) to listen to “21st Century Alchemy” and “To a Theater Near You” before reading further, making note of what comes to mind and then comparing those notes with the ideas that follow. Both tracks can be found on my YouTube channel (Sill, 2022). “To a Theater Near You” even has a corresponding music video that can be watched if the reader feels so inclined. With “Theater Near You,” I originally intended to end my album with a piece that encapsulated the way I felt after watching a great movie with an impactful score. Only afterwards did I realize the nearly a priori, “built-in” or unconscious connections I had made to elements of the Hero’s Journey and alchemy.

Split into three movements, the entire piece begins with a movement subtitled “Find Yourself, Alone.” A creepy and atmospheric piano motif and responding sounds set the mood for the journey and thereby introduce one of the main themes of the composition. The call to adventure in this piece begins in a strangely alluring darkness, in mystery, and in a dark forest of sound. Images come to mind of wandering alone in darkened streets, being isolated in a wooded area by night, wandering the empty hallways of an ancient building, or gazing out onto a misty, dark expanse of the sea. After composing “Theater Near You,” I realized this movement represented an initiation, the *nekylia* “night sea journey” or katabasis, as it has been referred to in mythology: a journey into the netherworld—a descent into the unconscious. There are moments of levity, as if to hint at what may lie beyond, but there is also the impression that unknown things could be lurking around any corner. Hints of the main theme from “21st Century Alchemy” intermingle with new material as if to serve as a hopeful reminder of where

we've come from and where the journey could lead, but nothing seems to be resolved yet. Even in moments of chord progressions providing the end to certain musical statements, there's often a lingering sense of trepidation.

With a restatement of one of the piece's main themes in a new key at the 3:40 mark, it feels like we may be reaching a clearing in the fog, but darkness lingers as the sound of the piano tapers off and we hold our breath. With this, the second movement starts, and the piano launches into a new theme. Gone is the irregular pushing and pulling of the tempo or rubato nature of the first movement as a more regular and faster pace is established. "The fate of the soul changes, the hour hand moves, and tragedy begins" (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 62). The chase is on, and the rising action of the story kicks into higher gear. Storms rage and battles ensue, with brief heroic moments interspersed. Glimpses of excitement and terror intermingle as earlier musical themes are played inside this new context, and the piano emerges as the lead storyteller for its solo. We have a moment of temporary reprieve as this new subchapter begins, before the brilliant improvisational and technical work of pianist Vardan Ovsepien crafts an action-packed story. Tension continues to build throughout the solo as flashes of light and dark move past. Darker themes from earlier in the piece orchestrate the surroundings and transform ever so slightly, as if to give rays of hope, before the solo ends in a series of turbulent, almost evil, clustered sonorities.

The role of the narrator's voice is transferred to the guitar, whose timbre offers a different perspective on how we can regain our footing after the tumultuousness of the moment we left behind. The intensity of the conflict during the piano solo diminishes, but the harmonic background is similar, and we aren't out of the woods yet. But as the guitar solo continues, a change in character begins to emerge around the 8:27 mark. A transformation becomes apparent, and we spot a clearing in the distance. It looks as though we could be headed toward the top of a brighter mountain, and that a treasure is within reach. The piano reemerges by itself in a new role and signals the promising possibility of what lies ahead of us before the rest of the band joins in a dramatic moment of liberation and sense of overcoming.

Themes from the beginning of the album's story reestablish themselves in this new environment along with once darker themes from earlier in "To a Theater Near You" in order to confirm this important metamorphosis. The characters that are these melodies have made the journey and come into their own. We have reached the destination—the top of the mountain—and as we go to look over the edge at 9:52, we are nearly blinded by the enormity of what we've overcome and what might be waiting as salvation. As the smoke clears and the third movement begins, a moment of saintly stillness is ushered in by the piano. The guitar gently enters to describe the denouement, and the main themes from "21st Century Alchemy" and "To a Theater Near You" find their rightful places home. The whole story and everything we've been through makes sense now.

After composing this section, an image came to mind of my closed fist slowly opening to reveal a small and precious stone lying in the center of my palm. There was the impression of something precious that had been there the whole time, of a higher wisdom and beauty that accepted everything in realization of itself. Upon playing this section on piano on one occasion I became emotional, and a voice in my head stated, "Don't touch it!" as if to relish the full paradoxical beauty of what the stone implied. The whole journey is conveyed in an ineffable flash: the ecstasy, the sorrow, the darkness, majesty, and beauty—paradoxical, but all necessary. Many months later, I found resonance between this and James Hillman's talks on alchemy. Hillman spoke of the

importance of allowing proper germination in the alchemical process, to not disturb the “seeds” of what’s necessary for one’s journey, and for transformation to take place—a full acceptance of the opposites and the inner guiding instinct to play some role in life (Hillman, 2015).

As the piece reaches its end, the main theme from “21st Century Alchemy” is played one last time, but with a beautiful melancholy, ultimately resolving into a sonority that signifies we’re finally home—a home that’s been with us all along. This has a connection with a storytelling device some have called an *anamnesis*. It’s Dorothy clicking her heels that she wore during her entire adventure; it’s the treasure lurking underneath the hero’s feet from the moment they set off on their journey; it’s the philosopher’s stone inside Harry Potter’s pocket that reveals itself when he has proven himself worthy of its intimations. These archetypal patterns reveal themselves in story and sound alike.

As the music begins to fade, the piano quietly utters two final, sustained statements, as if to say the journey is ongoing; there’s more to come. The last cluster chord in particular held particular fascination for me in retrospect. It leaves a mysteriously beautiful wake, and was born out of the idea of taking notes from the main melody of “21st Century Alchemy,” the album’s main theme, and playing them simultaneously in one chord, as if to declare the whole story was implied in, and erupted from, a singularity. Several years later, I realized the relation this concept and sonority had to alchemy in the *massa confusa* or the *prima materia*, the undifferentiated mass and starting point that is there at the beginning of the alchemical work, and through which the opus exists *in potentia*.

For the alchemists the process of individuation represented by the *opus* was an analogy of the creation of the world. ... Man was seen as a microcosm, a complete equivalent of the world in miniature. In our picture, we see what it is in man that corresponds to the cosmos, and what kind of evolutionary process is compared with the creation of the world and the heavenly bodies: it is the *birth of the self*. (Jung, 1968, p. 308)

These are excerpts from my personal story, my musical myth. But what can be said about our collective myth and the important role music plays in it, especially in today’s technologically advanced yet often spiritually bereft world? I am reminded of another quote from Jung:

Not for a moment dare we succumb to the illusion that an archetype can be finally explained and disposed of. ... The most we can do is to *dream the myth onwards* and give it a modern dress. And whatever explanation or interpretation does to it, we do to our own souls as well, with corresponding results for our own well-being. (Jung, 1968, p. 160)

To connect with the musical myth of our time and give our archetypal roots a modern dress: if we were to try and describe this on a particular and not instinctual level, what would it mean?

The answer requires a subjective interpretation unique to each individual. But I think it’s safe to *objectively* say this: every one of us has connected with music in some deep way and realizes its importance. It could be described as the most universally impactful art form. But is this reflected in the way society as a whole seems to value the musical experience? Music has become utilitarian in the way it is treated, and the

way we consume music now is anathema to the nature of the art itself. It is now commonplace for people to treat music like a sort of sonic wallpaper or quick fix, to be disregarded within seconds if one loses patience. In cases such as these, the reverential aspect that used to be inherent in a musical experience is taken for granted or given little attention. Furthermore, the idea of development and telos being expressed in sound, which, by its very nature, relies on extended listening periods, is now rendered null and void by a dwindling allowance of attention toward such art. We don't listen to seven seconds of a Beethoven symphony and say, "Okay, I get the picture. Next!" In one of his few documented statements regarding music, Jung described how this reverence toward music was lacking even during his era, and said to pianist Margaret Tilly: "music is dealing with such deep archetypal material and those who play don't realize this" (Jung, 1977, p. 274).

The human condition benefits greatly from these types of ecstatic experiences. Religion or not, ritual or not, many of us disregard the correlation between the sacred vigil of music—live or otherwise—and how the venerated precedent set by generations past is often diminished. We cannot rest on our laurels and see our advanced human consciousness as the sole locus of our creativity and airily dismiss the unconscious psyche as if it does not exist at all or holds no value. The ancient parts of the psyche can be used for good rather than merely being viewed as a repository for animalistic tendencies we as modern humans have no use for integrating. These archetypal patterns lurking in the unconscious are more than merely a set of psychological wisdom teeth that need to be extracted. Whether the masses recognize it or not, the unconscious demands recognition, and failing to give it could prove detrimental. Our intellectual advancements alone offer only a myopic view forward.

So is that our collective musical myth? To prioritize more than ever the arts—music in particular—as a prelude to further come into contact, and thereby avoid a collision course, with the unconscious. If not expressed creatively, it comes back in less welcome ways, as we've begun to see. Can we find purpose in music and allow it, in our individual ways, to color our lives with meaning, to help us relate our lives to a unique individual story? Or perhaps this speaks to something else: recognizing the "longer game" when it comes to our spiritual needs—of allowing more intellectually and emotionally challenging music to demand our attention rather than the continuing trend toward quicker, instant gratification vices that muddy the artistic waters. We should be after the treasure and the stone "common to all man" yet hard to attain rather than chasing fool's gold. A concern about the value of music lingers: how demanding of us is the music we listen to? To what extent are the opposites within us allowed to integrate—within any given musical setting—our hearts, minds, bodies, and souls?

Perhaps it might be said that music has a way of tapping into the inherent healing and mythic functions of the psyche, which imbues a heightened sense of purpose to life. The question of how or why the psyche naturally endows life with meaning—even more so in the presence of music—is interesting to ponder from an evolutionary standpoint. As consciousness has evolved to become aware of the burdens humankind faces in a lonely and godless universe, it could be reasoned that the psyche's proclivity to relate life to mythic levels of meaning is inborn and helpful for the continuance of human existence. This is not to say the meaning is endowed by anything other than psyche itself, but that it is simply so. This brings to mind Jung's assertion that "man cannot stand a meaningless life" (Jung, 1977, p. 439).

In this era of great scientific advancement, we "know better" than to believe that the figures of fantasy tales, horror stories, or sci-fi programs actually exist in physical

reality. Nonetheless, we are still affected by pondering these same things, fascinated by the unknown that dwells in the unconscious. Music in its most powerful incarnations has the power to excite these types of contents. Can we say that we “know better” than to call music anything more than a sonic stimulator for endorphins and other neurochemicals? Of course not. Unless placed into the most reductionist categorization or utilitarian form, music provides not only meaning but spiritual experience in the most immediately knowable sense. As Jung observed:

Because of its numinosity the myth has a direct effect on the unconscious, no matter whether it is understood or not. The fact that its repeated telling has not long since become obsolete can, I believe, be explained by its usefulness. The explanation is rather difficult because two contrary tendencies are at work: the desire on the one hand to get out of the earlier condition and on the other hand not to forget it. Apparently Radin has also felt this difficulty, for he says: “Viewed psychologically, it might be contended that the history of civilization is largely the account of the attempts of man to forget his transformation from an animal into a human being. ... So stubborn a refusal to forget is not an accident.” (Jung, 1968, p. 268)

Today’s political climate demonstrates psychohistorical parallels when observing lack of meaning in people’s lives and the resultant danger; namely, what happens when internal and spiritual needs are projected outwards? Life’s meaning can become conflated with mass political movements and figureheads endowed with prerogative. Like Jung, and prior to him, Nietzsche recognized the coming nihilism that would follow the end of the Western world’s predominantly Christian millennia, or—as it has been referred to by Jung—the “Christian aeon.”

With the “death of God” came the Enlightenment, and advances in reason, science, and technology that have done—and continue to do—wonders for human civilization. But can the same be said about man’s *psychological* well-being? Without a religious myth, what will be done with our psychologically existential dilemmas? Setting the orthodox customs of religion aside, myth is essential to human existence according to both Nietzsche and Jung. Without the meaning and telos of a self-actualized life, a lack of faith leaves many to worship and find meaning in nothing, or to worship and find meaning in the State, typically through nihilism and totalitarianism respectively (Academy of Ideas, 2021).

One of Nietzsche’s recommendations for a godless world was to fill the vacuum with arts and culture. Now, in the midst of global society attempting to break free from an outer world crisis, a looming specter of totalitarianism and the questioning of life’s meaning moving forward, we are all facing our own internal worlds more than many have ever been accustomed to, and a collective call for transformation beckons. Perhaps decades ago Jung and Nietzsche foresaw one of the current defining predicaments of the modern world: the disintegration of the role of myth and corresponding arts in regular human life, and through—or perhaps in parallel with—the potential loss of meaning, the possible loss of integrating our instinctual selves with our advanced intellectual and rational sides in order to become more consciously integrated and evolved individuals. This, perhaps, represents our collective call to adventure—the story of our time.

Alex Sill is a Los Angeles based guitarist/composer and graduate of the Cal Arts Jazz Program. Playing guitar and piano from the age of 12, he progressed

briskly, garnering prestigious awards and acclaim from mentors over the following decade, including Steve Vai, who said, “Alex Sill is one of those rare talented individuals that has all the elements in place.” Alex has worked and performed with many other elite musicians and bands including Dave Grusin, Virgil Donati, Vince Mendoza, and the official Allan Holdsworth tribute band. He is also a member of Simon Phillips’ Grammy-nominated group, “Protocol.”

FURTHER READING

- Academy of Ideas. (2021, January 6). Nietzsche and Jung: Myth and the age of the hero. *Academy of Ideas: Free Minds for a Free Society*. <https://academyofideas.com/2018/11/nietzsche-jung-myth-age-of-the-hero/>
- Bragança, G., Fonseca, J., & Caramelli, P. (2015). Synesthesia and music perception. *Dementia & Neuropsychologia*, 9(1), 16–23. <http://doi.org/10.1590/S1980-57642015DN91000004>
- Haule, J. R. (2011). *Jung in the 21st century, volume one: Evolution and archetype*. Routledge.
- Hillman, J. (2015). *The alchemy of psychology* [Audio recording]. BetterListen! LLC.
- Jung, C. G. (1968). *The archetypes and the collective unconscious* (R. F. C. Hull, Trans., W. McGuire, G. Adler, M. Fordham, & H. Read, Eds.). Princeton University Press.
- Jung, C. G. (1969). Psychology and Religion (The Terry Lectures). In H. Read, M. Fordham, G. Adler, & W. McGuire (Eds.), *The collected works of C. G. Jung* (R. F. C. Hull, Trans.; Vol. 11, pp. 3–106). Princeton University Press. (Original work published 1940)
- Jung, C. G. (1971). *Psychological types* (H. G. Baynes, Trans., R. F. C. Hull, H. Read, M. Fordham, & G. Adler, Eds.). Princeton University Press. (Original work published 1921)
- Jung, C. G. (1976). Psychology and religion. Letter to Pere Lachat (R. F. C. Hull, Trans.). In H. Read, M. Fordham, G. Adler, & W. McGuire (Eds.), *The collected works of C. G. Jung* (Vol. 18, pp. 679–691). Princeton University Press.
- Jung, C. G. (1976). *The portable Jung* (R. F. C. Hull, Trans., J. Campbell, Ed.). Penguin Publishing Group.
- Jung, C. G. (1977). *C. G. Jung speaking: Interviews and encounters* (W. McGuire & R. F. C. Hull, Eds.). Princeton University Press.
- Jung, C. G. (1989). *Memories, dreams, reflections* (A. Jaffé, Ed., C. Winston & R. Winston, Trans.). Random House. (Original work published 1961)
- Jung, C. G. (2012). *The red book: A reader’s edition* (S. Shamdasani, Ed., M. Kyburz, J. Peck, & S. Shamdasani, Trans.). W. W. Norton & Company.
- Kroeker, J. (2022, January 29). Episode 63: Joel Kroeker. *Speaking of Jung: Interviews with Jungian Analysts*. <https://speakingofjung.com/podcast/2020/5/28/episode-63-joel-kroeker>
- Nietzsche, F. (2006). *Ecce homo*. Barnes & Noble.
- Nietzsche, F. (2007). *Twilight of the idols* (A. M. Ludovici, Trans.). Wordsworth Classics. (Original work published 1888)
- Norman, M., & Barry, J. (1962). James Bond Theme [Song]. On *Dr. No*. EMI
- Oldfield, M. (1973). *Tubular bells [Album]*. Virgin.
- Sean, H. (2021). *Satori*. Partridge Publishing.
- Sill, A. (2019). *Experiences: Real and imaginary* [Album]. Amazon Music. <https://amazon.co.uk/music/player/albums/B07QZGZSLJ>
- Sill, A. (2022). *Experiences: Real and imaginary* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/c/alexsill>

Viegas, J. (2008, July 3). Music and art mixed in the Stone Age. *ABC Science*. <http://www.abc.net.au/science/articles/2008/07/03/2293114.htm>

Williams, J. (1980). The Imperial March (Darth Vader's Theme) [Song]. On *Star wars: The empire strikes back*. Disney.

Zimmer, H., & Howard, J. N. (2008). Why So Serious? [Song]. On *The dark knight*. Warner.