Nostalgic Potentiality in Western Art Music Discourse: From Wagner to the Spectralists

20 March 2006, rev. 7 May 2007

For such a widely used discursive tool, there is surprisingly little musicological literature expressly devoted to the subject of nostalgia. What does exist comes to us either in the form of neuropsychological studies or as analyses of works by nostalgically predisposed composers. As useful as are these areas of study, music discourse *in general* can be considered to have nostalgic underpinnings, and this is a connection that is rarely explored. Perhaps the principal reason for this lies in the problem of finding a workable definition—like expression, art, or good taste, nostalgia can hold a wide range of often contradictory implications based on the biases of the author. Writers such as Leon Botstein and Stuart Feder have tried to develop somewhat narrower definitions, but instead of clarifying the word nostalgia, this specific usage often only serves to eliminate certain categories of examples without providing any convincing rationale. Regardless of the individual definition, we are left with a problematic corpus of texts that nonetheless employ something related to nostalgia but that remain undiscussed.

It is for this reason that I am interested in describing and discussing a kind of *nostalgic potentiality*, as opposed to nostalgia itself. By nostalgic potentiality, I mean any mode of discourse which could, if taken to sufficient extremes, produce one or more varieties of what some people consider to be nostalgia. Nostalgic potentiality is therefore a loosely memory- or past-related discursive device, or family of interconnected devices, that is well suited to music discourse. Furthermore, it may appear in varying degrees of purity, for various reasons,

and in combination with various other devices. Nostalgic potentiality will not likely lead to an archetypal nostalgia in most cases, and this is not the goal—the goal is to better understand the authorities present in musicological literature. It is furthermore very interesting to me that this kind of discursive device can be identified in almost any music-related text, ranging from history to theory, and from lay criticism to psychoanalysis. Perhaps, with a large enough body of examples, we might eventually, through empirical means, be able to propose a narrower, more exclusive definition than what I have suggested above, but the danger of arbitrary categorization always remains. For the time being, I believe it is better to leave the definition of nostalgic potentiality as open-ended as possible, with the only requisite being that under the right circumstances, the discursive tool in question *could* be used to create something that might be considered nostalgic by certain readers.

A useful starting point in examining this device is the admittedly small body of secondary literature on musical nostalgia. As this literature must by its nature deal with what certain readers consider nostalgic, we can work backwards from its definitions and deduce a few applications of nostalgic potentiality. Two prominent examples are "Memory and Nostalgia as Music-Historical Categories" by Leon Botstein and "The Nostalgia of Charles Ives" by Stuart Feder. These two authors define nostalgia from different perspectives (and Feder also cites definitions by several other researchers working outside of music), although they do share the assumption that musical nostalgia is fundamentally similar to general nostalgia.

Botstein is not directly interesting in nostalgia per se, but in the ways that music can be used as a primary source in historical studies of memory. However, according to Botstein, one of music's ideal uses in historical studies is its ability to encapsulate nostalgia.[1] He supports this hypothesis with references to the vague emotional feelings that certain listeners might feel after hearing Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, as well as by citing Debussy's rejection of the idea that the ideal listener should be highly educated (Debussy preferred that his listeners bring a more intuitive, perhaps somehow nostalgic, reaction to his music).[2] Unfortunately, this

[1] Botstein, "Memory and Nostalgia," 533–534.
[2] Ibid., 534–5.

approach requires a universal or quasi-universal hearing of music, if it is to be taken as a useful historical tool in the assessment of musical memory in the past. True, Botstein's approach can provide certain insights into the workings of Debussy's musical memory, and of the ideas that he held regarding the musical memories of his contemporaries. However, such an approach still relies predominantly on Debussy's written statements, not on the music itself, and Botstein is primarily interested in the ways that the music itself can inform historical studies. Even if we take his assertion that composers like Ives or Schnittke used a common musical-cultural heritage to create nostalgia in their works,[3] the usability of this music as a historical tool is limited to the extent that we can prove such a common heritage really existed. And that, once again, requires non-musical sources.

Nevertheless, by exploring these issues, Botstein places nostalgia itself under closer scrutiny, and he provides two useful definitions. One is what he calls the *ideology of nostalgia*: a kind of longing for "better days long gone whose status is largely mythological."[4] The other is an evocation of "a sensibility of loss for a past that neither listener nor composer could have experienced or known."[5] Both of these definitions are historically grounded—the first in the rise of nineteenth-century neoclassicism, the second in Martin Jay's concept of *Erlebnis*, or experience—however, there is no attempt to demonstrate any wider applicability for these definitions. Botstein stops just short of this by claiming that "we also know intuitively that listening to music, precisely because it is a medium in time functioning in some manner apart from verbal signifiers or even visual correspondences, seems to evoke in a Proustian manner the sensibility of past experience."[6] However, the argument immediately becomes problematic with his claim that this is a nostalgic effect unique to music. I disagree, and there is no evidence to suggest that Botstein's definitions of nostalgia can in any sense be considered exclusive or definitive.

Feder, working from a psychoanalytical perspective, defines nostalgia as "the longing for

[3]Ibid., 533.
[4]Ibid.
[5]Ibid., 534.
[6]Ibid.

a past forever lost" while at the same time recognizing that "the wish [to return to the past] may persist with considerable intensity despite the fact that few would want it realized even if it were possible."[7] Thus he is writing from a specific definition that is aptly suited to describing the music of Charles Ives, his main subject. In fact, Feder quotes a biography (he does not share Botstein's ideal of relying on purely musical sources) in which Ives displays great reluctance to visit his beloved childhood town of Danbury precisely because he does not want his nostalgic illusion to be ruined. Feder's definition is useful in describing how nostalgia may have influenced Charles Ives' music, and it is further useful to us because it provides an extreme application of nostalgic potentiality, the "longing for a past forever lost." However, no evidence is provided to suggest that this definition has any wider application, although Feder does make this assumption in his writing.

It is puzzling that Feder would propose such a singular definition of nostalgia, considering the fact that he discusses several contrasting non-musical definitions of nostalgia by other authors. Briefly, some of these are: "the wish to return to the preoedipal mother," "a wish to return to an idealized past," "an 'ambivalently felt, affective-cognitive experience'... [that Werman distinguishes] from fantasy in that it is not a substitution for a wish but is valued as an experience in itself," and "a regressive state and a form of depression."[8] He also contrasts this with regret.[9] Feder notably points out that all of these definitions are useful in certain contexts and may describe certain individuals. What is most enlightening in this discussion, however, is the wide range of opinion on what constitutes nostalgia, even among experts in this field of psychological affect. The narrow definitions of individual researchers seem unable to describe more than one or two particular aspects of this phenomenon.

Finally, it is also worth noting that both Botstein and Feder give Marcel Proust's work as an example of highly nostalgic writing. They use his *Remembrance of Things Past* as a kind of literary textbook on nostalgia, and Feder notes that this text has served as a starting point for many psychoanalytical studies on the subject. A short Proust example will suffice for our

[7] Feder, "Charles Ives," 236–7.
[8] Ibid., 240, 242, 244.
[9] Ibid., 241.

purposes:

> As I played the passage, and although Vinteuil had been trying to express in it a fancy which would have been wholly foreign to Wagner, I could not help murmuring "*Tristan*," with the smile of an old family friend discovering a trace of the grandfather in an intonation, a gesture of the grandson who had never set eyes on him.[10]

Here we have an example of what is perhaps one of the most overtly nostalgic kinds of music discourse.[11] The association of Vinteuil's piece with Wagner is enjoyed precisely *because* it was not intended by the composer. Proust's character validates the newer piece because it cannot avoid referring to the work of a great master of the past, in this case Wagner. Nostalgia is used as an authority in defining good taste.

Proust stands in useful contrast to the Botstein and Feder articles. However, interestingly enough, part of the reason for the difficulties encountered by the latter two authors may stem from a similar source: Botstein and Feder both use nostalgic potentiality as an authority in their writings. This is especially true when the authors tackle the more subjective areas of musical value. As in the Proust, there is a desire to justify the more ethereal aspects of musical experience through an appeal to nostalgic potentiality, although not to the same overtly nostalgic extremes.

For example, in the midst of his otherwise psychoanalytical study of Ives' nostalgia, Feder devotes an entire section to an analysis of Ives' song, "The Things Our Fathers Loved." He does this with the assumption that a classic music-theoretical analysis of form, material, and music–text relations will allow him in some sense to demonstrate that Ives' song is nostalgically composed.[12] The following are examples from the text of the article:

> One is suddenly aware of the significance of the immediately preceding words which may have seemed somewhat loose logically or of a different, more metaphorical and poetic nature from the earlier concrete images: "The town's Red, White and Blue, all Red, White and Blue—." Packed into this revealing musical moment are multisensory allusions to experiences that include the physical congruities of the tricolor and the American flag, the visual as well as auditory features of the

[10] Proust, *Remembrance*, 155.

[11] It is also, incidentally, an example of the type of nostalgic musical affect that Botstein claims is only possible in the medium of music, although he uses Debussy and not Wagner in his example.

[12] This usage is especially ironic given the contempt Debussy showed toward such formalist approaches (as cited by Botstein) and the fact that Debussy's approach is put forward as quintessentially nostalgic by Botstein ("Memory and Nostalgia," 535).

> "the [sic] village cornet band playing in the square," and associated affects of a rather complex nature. . . [13]

> This device [contrary motion] bears mention in that the "opening" and "quickening" quality which may be thus achieved is one that Ives had often used with texts associated with fervent hopefulness and with an image of the future that touches on personal eternal life or social utopias.[14]

These two passages and others assume a clear objective musical meaning that is perceivable to the general listener. Such a universalist attitude is incongruent with the specific nature of the rest of the study; for example, the various definitions of nostalgia that he lists at the outset. Why would Feder feel the need to include such an analysis? It is likely that he may have done so because this is a model often used by music theorists working in their own context; or in other words, he may have done this because there is a tradition of this kind of discourse. While reliance on tradition for its own sake is not necessarily nostalgic, it does exhibit a form of nostalgic potentiality: tradition inherently values the past over the present, and it is quite plausible that this attitude could form the basis for what many people consider nostalgia. An appeal to tradition need not be yearning in the sense typically associated with nostalgia, but the ideas of yearning for the past and using the past as a justification or an authority are connected at some level. In this sense, Feder's recourse to a traditional music-theoretical analysis displays a degree of the nostalgic potentiality without being overtly nostalgic.

On the other hand, Botstein, in his justification of "Memory and Nostalgia," presents us with a reversal of Feder's use of nostalgic potentiality. He is still appealing to a tradition for its own sake, but not to the music-theoretical one. Instead, he appeals to the psychoanalytical tradition. Botstein's study is made relevant, in his eyes, by the suggestion that work on musical nostalgia will help us to understand nostalgia in general.[15] While this may be true, Botstein's discussion does not provide compelling evidence one way or the other; at best, he has managed to describe how certain composers have attempted to employ nostalgia in their work. Furthermore, he does not present a rigorous definition of nostalgia in the way that Feder does, and this makes

[13] Feder, "Charles Ives," 254.
[14] Ibid., 255.
[15] Botstein, "Memory and Nostalgia," 535.

it difficult to see how his work would be useful for a scientific or psychoanalytical understanding of nostalgia, except perhaps in the inspirational sense. Again, this use of nostalgic potentiality is largely non-nostalgic, but because Botstein relies on tradition for its own sake—in this case, the modernist tradition of associating advances in music with what may be considered scientific or pseudo-scientific goals—his motives are connected with the nostalgic potentiality of tradition.

Admittedly, these are not especially breath-taking examples; almost any piece of writing could be said to display nostalgic potentiality in this sense, since almost all writing connects itself, whether consciously or not, with some kind of tradition. However, neither Botstein nor Feder *had* to make recourse to nostalgic potentiality to validate their arguments. Botstein could have simply stated that nostalgia is a common element in music, that it thus deserves to be better understood, and that such an understanding might potentially help to inform our historical understanding of memory. Equally, Feder could have painted a convincing picture of Ives as a nostalgic composer without recourse to any kind of music–text analysis. Nostalgic potentiality is present in both of these arguments, yet it is not necessary for the success of either of them. For both Botstein and Feder, this is not a particularly consequential usage—their arguments still stand without nostalgic potentiality. In the Proust, however, this is not the case. The validation of Vinteuil's piece is entirely founded on a nostalgic feeling for *Tristan und Isolde*: remove the nostalgic potentiality and the argument is destroyed.

Given these extreme limits, we can move on to examples that fall in the middleground. I will discuss two aspects of nostalgic potentiality which, to me, seem particularly interesting or unusual. The first of these is nostalgic potentiality used to justify progress or a forward-looking attitude, and the second is the role of nostalgic potentiality in anti-nostalgic sentiments. This is not meant to be an exhaustive survey, but it should help to demonstrate the pervasiveness of this mode of discourse.

On first glance, it would be difficult to see how the same discursive tool that is the root of backward-looking nostalgia could be used to justify forward-looking, progress-oriented convictions. In one sense, a reactionary nostalgic might justify a certain course of action based on his/her veneration of the past, but this is not forward-looking. Such an attitude simply tries

to make the present as closely resemble the past as possible. There are many examples, however, of nostalgic potentiality being used to bolster the claim that a certain new course of action will have a positive effect on the future.

A very clear example of this can be found in Stockhausen's *Towards a Cosmic Music.* In the following passage, he argues for the preservation of non-notated, non-Western music:

> Why should the preservation of as many of the world's musical forms as possible be supported?. . . The decisive issue is that creative forces in every culture grow beyond the restrictions of their own tradition, developing all those aspects within themselves which come to life when they look into the mirror of other cultures.[16]

Stockhausen's belief has two components. First of all, he holds that the preservation of a wide variety of musics is extremely important, because as different cultures interact, they will necessarily borrow from each other and change into something else. This attitude has strong roots in nostalgic potentiality; he would have no interest in preserving the original state of these various musics if he did not feel that their original isolated forms had some kind of value that the blended forms did not. Secondly, Stockhausen believes that a better understanding of the diversity of musical creation will lead to a new "cosmic music" (this is the focus of the article as a whole)—something as yet non-existent that will be greater than the sum of its parts. Together, these two aspects show us how nostalgic potentiality can be used to justify a kind of progress-oriented attitude. Stockhausen is not being directly nostalgic—his primary interest is in the cosmic music of the future—but because his vision requires the preservation of musical diversity, he uses nostalgic potentiality as an authority.

To be clear, I do not see this as a problematic usage. Whether or not we agree with Stockhausen's evaluations of music today or its future trajectory, his claims can only adequately be supported by the responsible use of nostalgic potentiality. He recognizes the need for authority in the statement *We should preserve as many kinds of music as possible.* He then goes on to provide a reasonable authority: *The past will inform what we do in the future.* This does not mean his predictions for the future will be necessarily correct, but he is conscious of the authority he is calling upon.

[16]Stockhausen, *Cosmic Music*, 30.

Another forward-looking use of nostalgic potentiality can be found in the writings of certain composers who call themselves spectralists. Working with timbre in non-traditional ways, some of these composers look for an authority to justify their methods and the resulting music. This is nothing new; Webern did the same thing to justify the twelve-tone technique,[17] and composers reaching back to Palestrina and beyond have attempted to find authorities that support their new and often controversial methods of composing. For Palestrina, it was the sanction of the Church; for Webern, it was the overtone series. In the following quotation by Kaija Saariaho, the authority is tonality:

> A system of modulation in tonal music could be the example of a dynamic musical transition creating a sense of movement. When one begins to modulate, to alter the state of stasis created by the dominant tonality and to advance towards a new, still foreign tonality, the music is then characterized by a more powerful sense of movement, which can be reinforced still more by the use of other parameters. The same model can be applied universally and is adaptable to every kind of transition in which the condition of stasis is represented by a familiar and recognizable state.[18]

Saariaho is discussing the complex system of timbral modifications used in her pieces *Im Traume* and *Sah den Vögeln*. She justifies her techniques by relating what she does on the timbral level with what earlier composers did on the harmonic level. This is not directly nostalgic, but there is a strong element of nostalgic potentiality—Kaariaho would like to be able to tie her work to an authority with the historical strength of Western Tonality. While this does not imply that she is necessarily right or wrong in drawing these parallels, nostalgic potentiality plays a role in her decision to propose the tonal metaphor in the first place and is important in that respect.

Another example is in order, this time by a spectralist who takes a highly nostalgic position. Livia Teodorescu-Ciocanea writes:

> Spectralism as an archetypal approach is an attempt to retrieve the magic dimension of music and its lost signification. It proposes a consciousness of cosmic integration, music being a vehicle that connects us to the primordial vibrations of the universe.[19]

[17]See, for example, Webern, *New Music*, 12.
[18]Saariaho, "Timbre and harmony," 104.
[19]Teodorescu-Ciocanea, "Timbre Versus Spectralism," 90.

The nostalgic potentiality in this case is closely tied to a variant of nostalgia proper. There is no attempt to hide the idea that some aspect of music was preferable in the past, and that the goal of advances in timbre manipulation should be the recapturing of these kinds of "primordial" musical affects. In this last example, the claim to the nostalgic-potential authority is less justified than in the preceding Kaariaho example. To be fair, there are problematic aspects in both: Kaariaho, most notably, assumes that because she can make a metaphorical connection between tonal function and her timbral manipulations that there is a corresponding relationship in perception. However, this is a minor and largely understandable oversight when compared to the claim that a certain technique will lead, in the simplest terms, to an absolute musical truth that we have lost touch with. This is at odds with Stockhausen's more grounded use of nostalgic potentiality and contrasts in degree with the minor assumptions in the Kaariaho example. Nevertheless, this uncritical use of nostalgic potentiality does not invalidate Teodorescu-Ciocanea's claims; it simply stands in where she might have inserted a more convincing argument.

The following examples deal with the relationship between nostalgic potentiality and anti-nostalgia. The pervasiveness of nostalgic potentiality, and the wide range of forms that it can take in music discourse, allow for a reactionary anti-nostalgia even though its opposite, nostalgia proper, is difficult to define. If we accept that a reaction need not react against a single source but may be inspired by a broad or unfocused range of causes, then the generally non-critical use of nostalgic potentiality in music discourse can function as a target for anti-nostalgia. This definition has the effect of imposing a self-conscious character on musical anti-nostalgia, which is in keeping with the examples I have come across. After all, if the use of nostalgic potentiality in musicological discourse is as common as I claim, then it only makes sense that an anti-nostalgic attitude would develop as a reaction. If nostalgic potentiality were uncommon, we would expect simply to see indifference to the phenomenon instead.

Berio provides an excellent example. In the following passage, he discusses schism within the musical community at large:

> For my own part, I hope that my work is one possible reply to the various fractures that exist within musical work; *fractures that fascinate rather than worry me* (emphasis added), because they oblige me to explore terrain that is

> creatively uninhabited as far as music is concerned, to move beyond antinomies of a moralistic type where there are good guys on one side and bad guys on the other.[20]

There are two aspects of Berio's statement that make it strongly anti-nostalgic. First of all, he claims that fundamental changes in musical culture are positive and exciting, even though he does not know where these changes will lead. No particular value is assigned to the past, although a strong positive value is assigned to the future. However, it is important to note that he does not say something along the lines of, "I think the changes in our musical community will have a positive effect on the long run." As opposed to simply presenting his perspective on new musical work, Berio feels obliged to contrast it with its antithesis ("fascinate rather than worry," and so forth). Furthermore, the care in his wording exposes that he must perceive this antithesis as a common-enough attitude. This self-conscious wording is the second and determining factor in making this passage anti-nostalgic. Had Berio not couched his comments in a reaction against another perceived attitude, his position would still have been forward-looking and non-nostalgic, but it would not have been anti-nostalgic and would definitely not have had as strong a connection to nostalgic potentiality.

Similarly, Botstein provides a good example of self-conscious anti-nostalgia among germanic musicians fleeing the Third Reich. He discusses the way in which the events leading up to World War II caused these musicians to want to "de-historicize" their ideas:

> The curious fact is that the émigrés themselves, not only their students, pioneered the post-emigration de-historicizing and recasting [of their musical ideas]. There seems to have been some understandable compulsion to detach from the past and reinvent.[21]

Political events in this case led to anti-nostalgic sentiments, but as with Berio, this desire to be anti-nostalgic was a break from the norm. Botstein even cites Felix Galimir, who says that the ultra-precise American interpretations championed by Schoenberg and other emigrant musicians of his ilk had gone too far—the removal of nostalgic potentiality had come "at the expense of the music's humanity."[22] However, for these musicians, the nostalgic potentiality inherent in certain

[20] Berio, *Two Interviews*, 31.
[21] Botstein, "Schenker the Regressive," 240.
[22] Ibid., 241.

musical practices had become associated with the atrocities of the Nazis, and anti-nostalgia arose as a reaction to this.

One final example of anti-nostalgia comes from Wagner's anti-semitic "Judaism in Music." The following quotation uses anti-nostalgia to try to discredit the work of Jewish composers of the time. Wagner believes that a nostalgic connection to a composer's folk roots is important to the creation of good art. However, because the Jewish folk tradition has been invalidated in his eyes, Jewish composers are forced to unsuccessfully imitate the German tradition, which he claims leads to stilted art:

> However sublime and noble we may be minded to picture to ourselves this musical Service of God [in the Synagogue] in its pristine purity, all the more plainly must we perceive that that purity has been most terribly sullied before it came down to us: here for thousands of years has nothing unfolded itself through an inner life-fill, but, just as with Judaism at large, everything has kept its fixity of form and substance. But a form which is never quickened through renewal of substance, must fall to pieces in the end; an expression whose content has long-since ceased to be the breath of Feeling, grows senseless and distorted.[23]

The unabashed bigotry of this passage aside, Wagner draws his authority from a selective rejection of certain types of nostalgic potentiality. He proposes that all good art draws upon its folk roots; a strongly nostalgic statement. He then needs to rely on this same principle to defend his claim that Jewish art is bad. Within the framework he has laid out, the best solution is to propose that art periodically requires renewal, but that the sources of nostalgic potentiality within Jewish music have been corrupted, making this impossible for Jewish musicians. This sets up the form of anti-nostalgia—a foward-looking reaction against a perceived uncritical use of nostalgic potentiality—although the premises of Wagner's claims are more than questionable.

Interestingly enough, the non-Jewish aspects of Wagner's argument display a level of nostalgic potentiality on par with Proust, as demonstrated in the following example. It is only when he wants to decry what he perceives as the perils of Jewish music that he is forced into anti-nostalgia.

> The speech of Beethoven can be spoken only by a whole, entire, warm-breathed human being; since it was just the speech of a music-man so perfect, that with

[23]Wagner, "Judaism in Music," 90.

> the force of Necessity he thrust beyond Absolute Music—whose dominion he had measured and fulfilled unto its utmost frontiers—and shewed to us the pathway to the fecundation of every art through Music, as her only salutary broadening.[24]

Taken within the context of nostalgic potentiality, the fallacies in Wagner's tirade against Jewish music are made all the more clear. If we contrast his appeal to nostalgic potentiality in Beethoven with his rejection of this same potentiality in the music of Jewish composers like Mendelssohn, Wagner's position is reduced to the argument that Jewish art is bad because he prefers Beethoven. Anti-nostalgia is used as a convenient discursive tool, but instead of elucidating the issue it confuses it.

In this discussion of nostalgic potentiality there are of course countless other examples that could have been brought forward, both in the categories above and in several not yet considered. One additional area that shows particular promise is the way in which nostalgic potentiality might conflict on different levels of an argument. We have already seen a suggestion of this in Wagner's writing: on the one hand, he appeals to anti-nostalgia, and on the other, to a Proust-like Beethoven worship. But it also exists in more subtle forms. For example, Botstein's article on the historical Schenker demonstrates how Schenker's use of nostalgic potentiality was affected by political events related to the Third Reich. However, the underlying idea behind Botstein's article itself has a nostalgic-potential undercurrent: he is making the assumption that our understanding of a person's work should be informed by his/her biography. I do not necessarily disagree, but this is problematic in the case of Schenkerian analysis, as the method has evolved considerably away from Schenker's original ideas through the work of Carl Schachter, Oswald Jonas, and others. Botstein acknowledges this; nevertheless, his article is based on a backward-looking valuation of the founder of a discipline that retains the founder's name more than ideas. Therefore, there are at least two independent levels of nostalgic potentiality active in Botstein's article: the historical factors that affected Schenker's usage and the underpinnings of the article itself. How these might interact to influence the progression of ideas in Botstein's writing would be an interesting study.

However, an exhaustive survey of the forms of nostalgic potentiality is beyond the scope

[24]Ibid., 95.

of this endeavour and would not, quite frankly, be particularly useful. What is useful is an appreciation of how this discursive mode affects our writing, our arguments, and our thoughts. The purpose of this paper has been both to demonstrate the extent that nostalgic potentiality appears in music discourse and to give the reader an idea of some of the forms that it takes. A conscious appreciation of this powerful discursive tool can only be beneficial when formulating our arguments, because it allows us to use (or to avoid) nostalgic potentiality in a consistent and responsible manner. My intent has been neither to claim that we should or should not use this discursive mode, or that it is essentially beneficial or harmful, useful or disruptive. Rather I have tried to highlight its complexities, by giving examples of nostalgic potentiality being used in different ways and with varying levels of success across a wide range of musical discourses and time periods.

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