Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online
Steve Reich
Minimalism

SECRETS OF STRUCTURE

Chapter: CHAPTER 8 A Harmonious Avant-Garde?
Source: MUSIC IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Like Cage (and like the Dadaists before him), Reich proposed a limit case to test his theory to a logical extreme: a composition called *Pendulum Music*, composed (or more precisely, conceived of) in 1968, the same year as the manifesto. It was first performed at the university of Colorado–Boulder and repeated at the first all-Reich concert, which took place at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York on 27 May 1969. Scored for "three or more microphones, amplifiers and loudspeakers," it is as close a musical analogue to the three ordinary process-experiences described in the manifesto (watching the swing, watching the hourglass, burying one's feet) as he could devise.

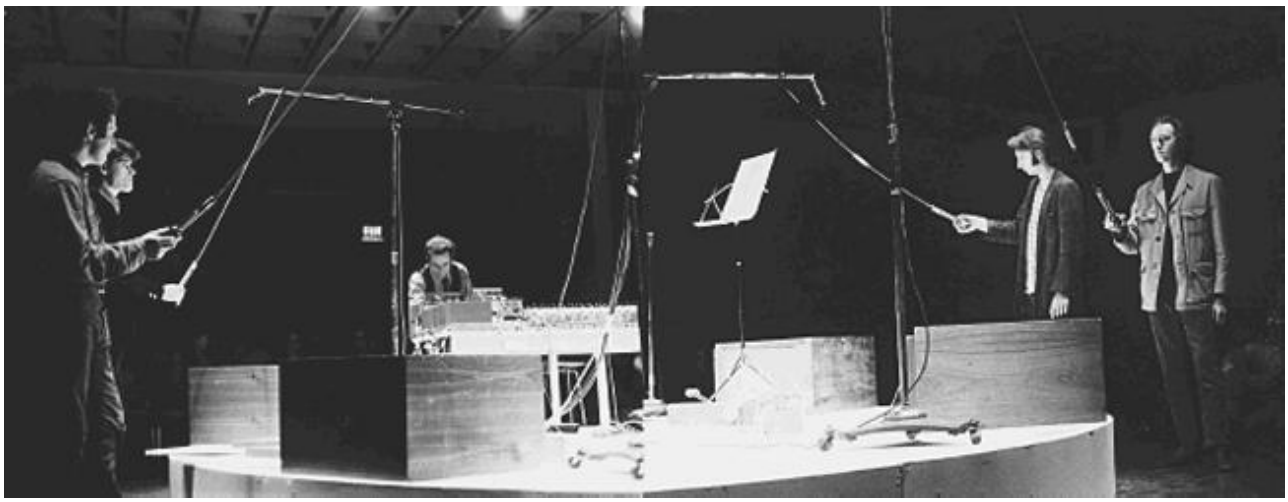


fig. 8-3 New York premiere of Steve Reich's *Pendulum Music*, 27 May 1969.

According to the "score" (actually just a verbal instruction or "algorithm"), the microphones are "suspended from the ceiling or from microphone boom stands by their cables so that they all hang the same distance from the floor and are all free to swing with a pendular motion." Loudspeakers are positioned under the microphones face upward, so that they will produce feedback noise when the microphones are directly above them. Then the microphones are pulled back and released. As they swing like pendulums over the loudspeakers, they produce a series of feedback pulses that will inevitably go out of phase as the pendulums, gradually coming to rest, slow down. Having released the mike-pendulums, the score specifies, "the performers then sit down to watch and listen to this process along with the rest of the audience." What makes the music, then, is not the composer, not the performer, but *it* (call it the force of gravity).

In concept, Reich's *Pendulum Music* is virtually a duplicate of György Ligeti's notorious *Poème symphonique* for 100 metronomes of 1962 (see chapter 3). The difference is that the earlier piece was at least partly meant as a

spoof, while Reich's was meant in deadly earnest—and also, taking far less time to unfold, makes a reasonable rather than comically preposterous demand on the listener's attention. *Pendulum Music* is the conceptual paradigm or limit-case to which all of Reich's early works for conventional performing forces can be meaningfully related.

But it does not require musicians for its performance. It often provided background music at exhibitions of "minimal" art, with the artists, or museum staff, doing the "performing." As "furniture music," it hardly fulfilled the composer's intention of providing a focus of close attention. That role was accomplished much more significantly, and with far greater impact, by Reich's "phase" compositions for pianos, violins, and log drums, composed between 1967 and 1969. Virtuoso pieces in their way, they were responses to the same impulse that motivated Riley's *In C*: the need to apply techniques first discovered in the realm of tape music to standard vocal and instrumental media.

But where Riley deliberately kept things easy, Reich's phase pieces can be arduous to execute with the required precision. It seems that he considered not only the back-transfer from tape to live music making itself but also the effort and the arduousness to be necessary if the product was to be effectively "humanized" and rendered communicative. The difficulty of his music, requiring skilled professionals for its performance and thereby satisfying a traditional elite modernist criterion, has made Reich, of all the composers who inhabit this chapter, the most academically acceptable. He has enjoyed far greater respect than the others among "uptown" musicians and "mainstream" critics.

Piano Phase (1967) is a three-part composition for two pianos, with each major section consisting of a one-measure diatonic or pentatonic module (or "basic unit" in Reich's terminology) that is subjected to the same phase process that Reich first achieved by retarding the turning of a tape reel. The first basic unit is shown in Ex. 8-4. It is an elusively complex rhythmic construction in its own right, a melody that emerges as a composite of two rhythmic figures in a hemiola relationship: the right hand plays three repetitions of the two-note group F♯-C♯ while the left plays two repetitions of the three-note group E-B-D. The interaction of patterns between the two hands is subtly complicated (or contradicted) by the differently patterned interaction of two distinct registers, E-F♯ and B-C♯-D, conjunct scale segments separated by a skip of a fourth.

ex. 8-4 Steve Reich, *Piano Phase*, first "basic unit"

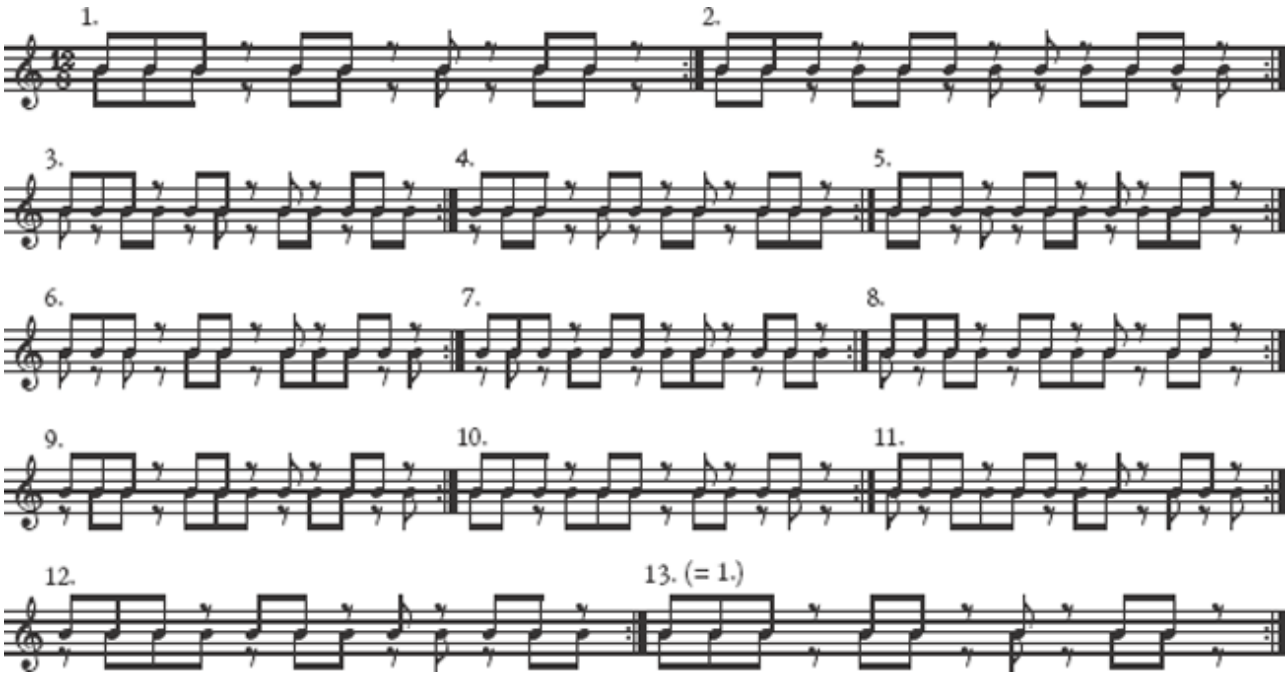
The two pianos begin by playing the figure in unison, the way the two tape recorders had begun in *Come Out*. While one pianist holds the tempo steady, the other very gradually gains on it, producing at first an enhanced resonance as the parts go slightly out of phase; then a kind of hocket, with the second piano playing on the "off thirty-seconds." Finally, after another resonant blur, the second piano will be one sixteenth-note ahead of the first; here the two pianists are instructed to lock into the same tempo again, producing a sort of canon at the sixteenth-note which establishes a new point of departure for the next phasing process. After twelve such processes, the original unison is regained.

What is curious, and somewhat ironic given the premises of the "Gradual Process" manifesto, is the ambiguity of the overall structure. Listeners are normally aware only of the steady progress toward the goal of regained unison. According to the terms of the manifesto, that is exactly what the composer intended. But the manifesto contained an interesting escape clause: "Even when all the cards are on the table and everyone hears what is

gradually happening in a musical process, there are still enough mysteries to satisfy all."[27] And indeed, there is a mysterious corollary to this or any other strict phase process: as a moment's reflection will confirm, its second half is (and must be) automatically the retrograde of the first half, with the relationship between the two players reversed. So, is the process a single linear gesture or a double, out-and-back trajectory like so much Western classical music?

This ambiguity was first pointed out by Paul Epstein, a music theorist on the faculty of Temple University, in an article of 1986, more than two decades after the piece was written.[28] It turned out that, in seeming contradiction of Reich's manifesto, there was after all a "secret of structure" in *Piano Phase* that listeners did not know. But if, as seems likely, the composer himself was unaware of (or did not envision) the retrograde, which was irrelevant to his purpose in composing the piece, then his famous maxim—"I don't know any secrets of structure that you can't hear"—remains literally true. (Of course, the last three words of the maxim are another escape clause, since—exactly as Milton Babbitt has always argued—once anything has been pointed out and conceptualized, it *can* be heard.) Nothing, it turns out, not even a minimalist structure, is ever devoid of ambiguity.

Reich's last strict, if somewhat simplified, phase composition took the minimalist ideal to another sort of limit. *Clapping Music* (1972) is instrumental music without instruments, or rather, percussion music made with the body alone. Two performers begin in unison, clapping a simple riff that one of them will maintain unchanged throughout the piece. As in *Piano Phase*, the riff contains twelve subtactile pulses. The other player, skipping the gradual speedup, jumps to the second "phase," in which the pattern is rendered as a canon at an interval of one pulse. After a while, a similar jump extends the canon to an interval of two pulses, then three, and so on until unison is regained. All the notation that is needed to perform this or any other algorithmic composition is the basic unit, plus instructions for permuting it. Nevertheless, Ex. 8-5 shows all the permutations so as to make all the resulting hockets and syncopations scannable at a glance.



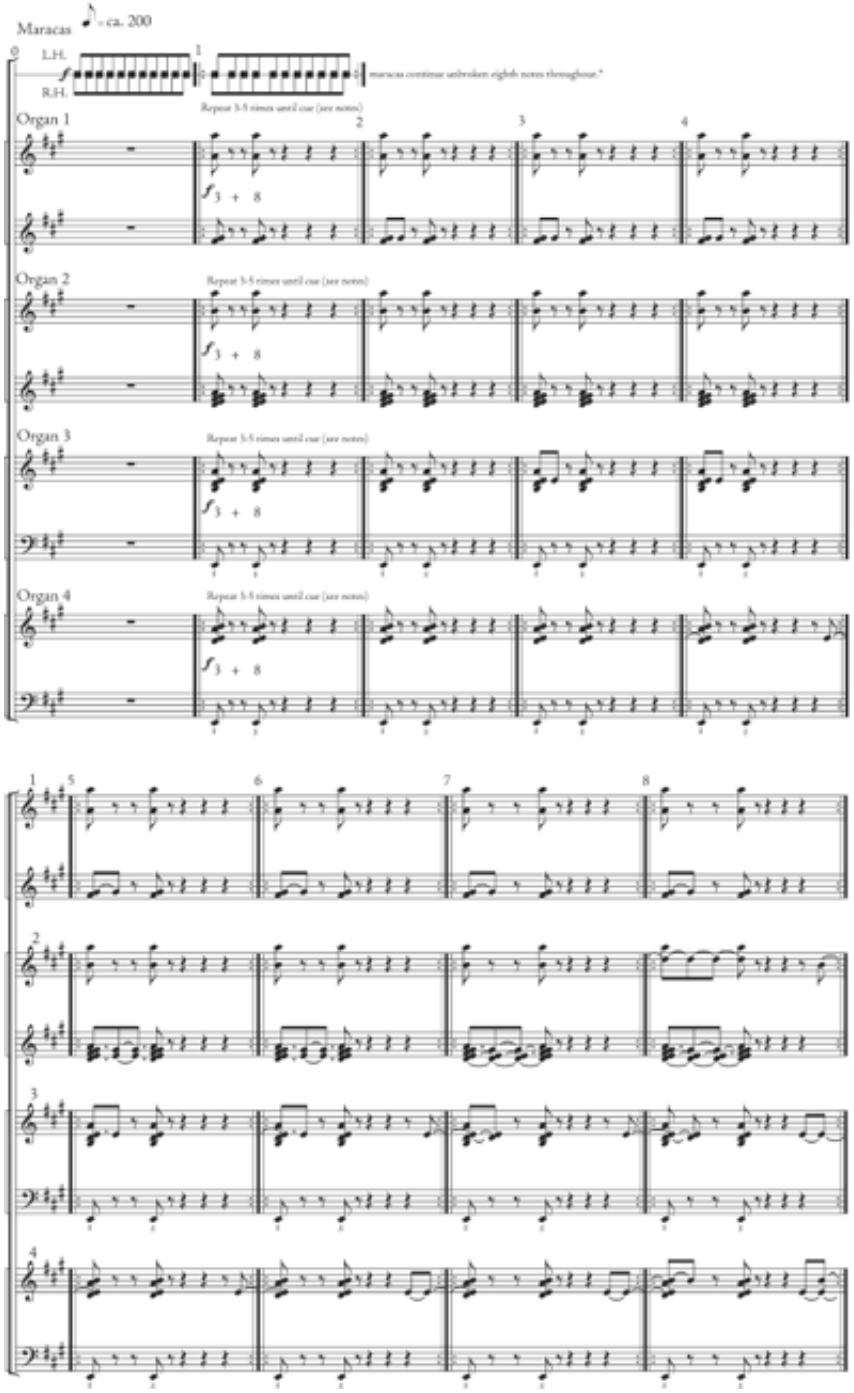
ex. 8-5 Steve Reich, *Clapping Music*

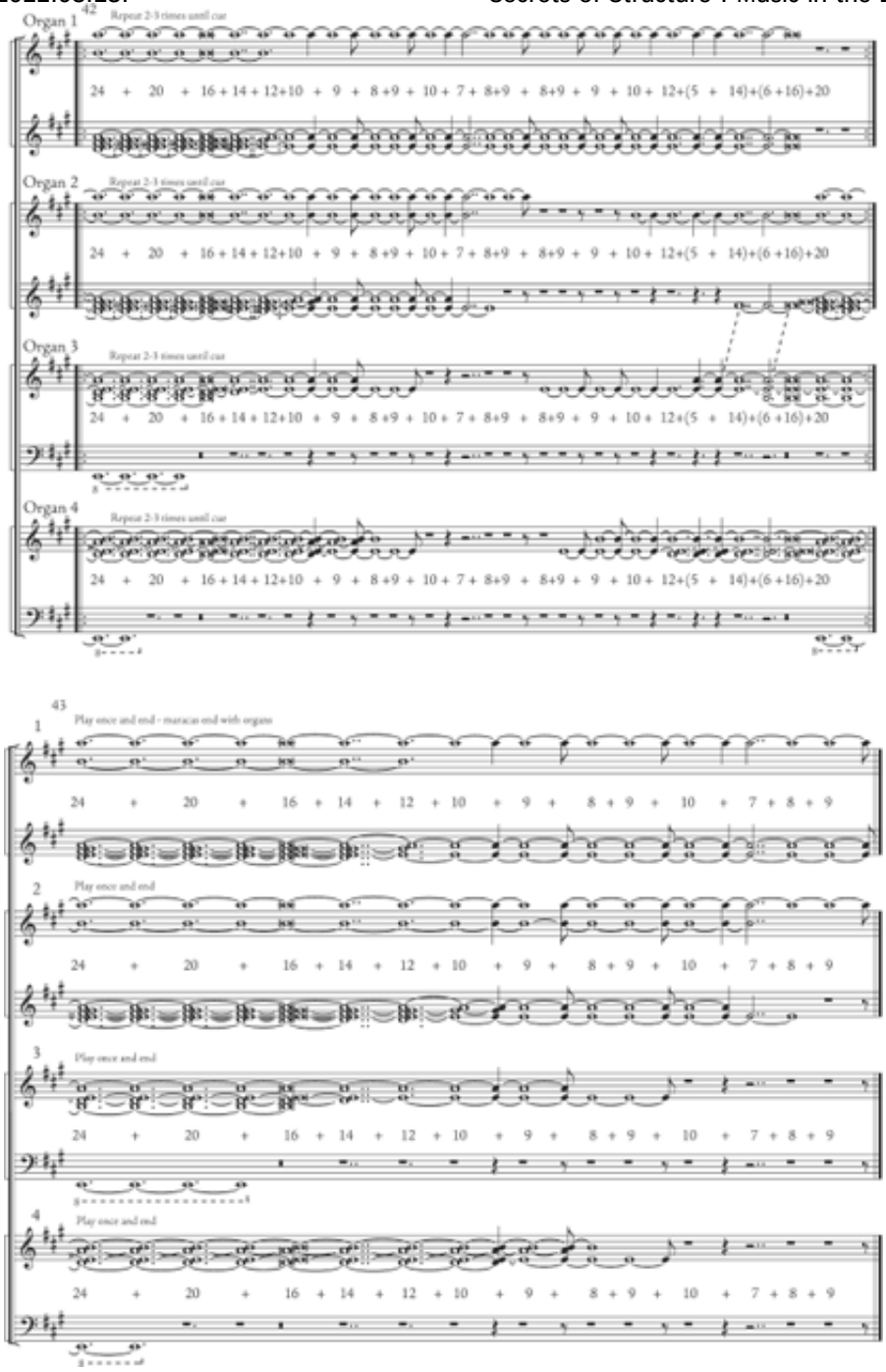
Comparing the unison rests in the thirteen modules will bring the palindrome effect easily into view. Nos. 1 and 13, of course, are identical. Nos. 2, 7 (the midpoint), and 12 are also identical: they are the ones without any unison rests. Nos. 3 and 11 each have one unison rest. If you scan no. 3 beginning at the rest from left to right,

and no. 11 beginning at the rest from right to left, they will match. Nos. 4 and 10 have two unison rests. Scan no. 4 from left to right beginning at its first unison rest, and no. 10 from right to left beginning at its second unison rest, and they will match. Nos. 5 and 9, with one unison rest, will match if scanned the way 3 and 11 were scanned. Nos. 6 and 8 have two unison rests. Scan them the way nos. 4 and 10 were scanned, and they too will match. None of this will be obvious to a casual listener; this piece, too, has its "secret structure."

Clapping Music was written for the road, when the ensemble known as Steve Reich and Musicians began touring. ("Hands," Reich drily explained, "are easy to transport.") It was used as an introductory piece, to give the audience an instant grasp of what "gradual process" meant. By then, however, having laid his conceptual foundation with a manifesto ("Music as Gradual Process"), a limit piece (*Pendulum Music*), and various strict phase exercises for tape and live performers, Reich had somewhat relaxed the rigor of his procedures. On the model of the African and Indonesian musics he was learning, he began experimenting with patterned processes that were less predictable than the "pure" phase pieces with which he had found his voice. But even if less predictable, they remained just as inexorable.

The work that really showed the possibilities of Reichian minimalism was *Four Organs* (1970). The small and relatively inexpensive electric organs for which the piece is scored, called Farfisas, were a staple of rock bands. The very necessary accompaniment was provided by a pair of maracas, which provide a constant subtactile pulse against which the gradually unfolding structural process could be precisely measured. That new process was the gradual filling of the available sound-space within the basic unit. Ex. 8-6 shows the beginning of the process, and the end.


Maracas
= ca. 200
L.H.
R.H.
Organ 1
Organ 2
Organ 3
Organ 4



ex. 8-6 Steve Reich, *Four Organs*, beginning (figs. 1–8) and end (last two figures)

At the outset, the available space is measured out by the maracas with eleven pulses. For minimalist purposes that is a magic number, because it is a prime number. Divisible neither by two nor by three, it remains always subtactile; it cannot be grouped mentally into a regular *tactus* or felt beat. In practice, the eleven is subdivided into 3 + 8, as established by the basic unit, which consists simply of two identical chords that fall on the first and fourth pulse of each measure. The process that governs the entire piece, while unrelated to "phasing," was similarly systematic and rigorous. It consists of a single "rhythmic construction" (Reich's term) that gradually replaces the rests in the basic unit with notes, as shown in Ex. 8-6.

Once the basic unit has been filled—or as Keith Potter nicely puts it, once "the original pairs of irregularly pulsing chords have silted up into a continuous sound"[29] —the unit begins to lengthen, eventually expanding to a

gargantuan 265 measures of held-out but internally fluctuating harmony that reminds many listeners (including Reich, who claimed to have been inspired by it) of Perotin's late twelfth-century *organa quadrupla* for the Cathedral of Notre Dame—another remote yet direct influence, this one collapsing more than seven centuries of historical time, made possible by recordings. The held-out chord is one often described by jazz musicians as a "dominant eleventh," in which an extra pair of thirds is stacked on top of a dominant seventh built on E, thus: E-G♯-B-D-F♯-A. In practice, since the top A is sounded during the early stages of the piece only on the first and fourth eighths, it seems to resolve like an appoggiatura to the held-over G♯, the first alteration to the basic unit.

That impression of resolution is confirmed by the way in which *Four Organs* comes to an end. Unlike Reich's phase pieces, it neither comes full circle nor reaches a saturation point. Instead, the low E and its doublings are filtered out of the last sustained chord, followed very slowly by the remaining notes one by one, until the piece finally comes to an end, somewhat surprisingly, on the two highest pitches, the fourth E-A. The fact that this ending takes listeners by surprise belies Reich's semifacetious contention that all that *Four Organs* comes down to, finally, is a single, enormously slowed and sustained V–I cadence in A major. The experience of listening to it should be enough to convince anyone that functional harmony is as much a function of rhythm as it is of pitch relations; distend the former enough and you dissolve the latter. But *Four Organs* does signal a new (or revived) interest in harmonic progression and voice leading, and does return pitch to a position of significance, if not primacy, in the articulation of musical shape.

Notes:

(27) *Ibid.*

(28) Paul Epstein, "Pattern Structure and Process in Steve Reich's *Piano Phase*," *Musical Quarterly* LXXII (1986): 146–77.

(29) Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, p. 201.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online

Reich: Orchestras and other ensembles, 1972–87

Ethnomusicology: Post-1945 developments

"ALL MUSIC IS FOLK MUSIC"

Chapter: CHAPTER 8 A Harmonious Avant-Garde?
Source: MUSIC IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Four Organs marks a divide in Reich's output between the rigorously experimental works of the sixties and what proved to be the more immediately appealing works that followed. The piece is still sufficiently uncompromising in its minimalist approach to serve as a litmus test dividing "mainstream" listeners from the coterie of its devotees. The latter notice, and become fascinated by, the gradual processes; the former mainly notice, and become irritated by, the repetitions. This became clear in January 1973 when the young conductor Michael Tilson Thomas (b. 1944) offered the piece to a Boston Symphony subscription audience in New York's Carnegie Hall, and elicited perhaps the last memorable twentieth-century succès de scandale. (Among the uncorroborated details that went from mouth to mouth was a woman shouting, "All right, I'll confess!") For the next decade, Reich's primary venues would remain the art museums and downtown halls where various "alternative" musics rubbed shoulders, and his principal means of disseminating his work remained his own touring group. Further exposure to concert audiences would wait. But in the meantime, Reich's style underwent a change.

His output in the 1970s was dominated by two hour-long works. *Drumming* (1971), which can last up to eighty-six minutes depending on how many times the basic units are repeated, is scored for a nine-piece percussion band plus a piccolo player and two women vocalists singing "vocables" (nonmeaningful syllables). Both the rhythmic patterning of the piece and the integration of voices into the ensemble were influenced directly by the African music Reich had studied on location in 1970. The rhythmic unit is expanded from the eleven pulses of *Four Organs* to twelve. The addition of that extra eighth-note makes a huge difference, of course, because it allows the exploitation of hemiola effects by grouping the subtactile eighths, variously and/or simultaneously, into tactile pulses—"felt" beats—of varying length: two (six to a bar), three (four to a bar) and four (three to a bar).

The unfolding process is complex, combining the older phase technique with the "rhythmic construction" (or gradual fill-in) of *Four Organs*, now balanced against its opposite, "rhythmic reduction" (the gradual replacement of notes with rests). The piece achieves its grandiose length through contrasts of tone color. The first of its four large sections is scored for tuned bongo drums; the second, for marimbas and voices; the third, moving into an unsingably high register, uses glockenspiels, with whistling and piccolo piping replacing the voices; the fourth combines all forces. As a result of all of these interacting factors, *Drumming* was a technical tour de force, creating (in John Adams's words) "an interesting large-scale musical structure without recourse to harmony."[30] It served for several years as the staple of Reich's touring group, greatly increasing the size of his coterie of devotees to the point where he began filling large halls (mainly on college campuses) and attracting imitators.

Perhaps more noteworthy than its structural principles, of interest primarily to other composers, was the effect that *Drumming* had on audiences. Its complexity notwithstanding, the euphoria it produced in receptive listeners (so much more typical of pop than of contemporary classical composition) made it newsworthy and, of

course, controversial, not only because it challenged the basic definition of avant-garde art, but also because listeners were obviously responding to more than just the beguiling sound patterns. There was also the unstated but strongly implied (or metaphorical) social meaning that arose directly from its African antecedents. When witnessed live, Adams noted,

> performances of *Drumming* have the flavor of a ceremony, with the performers uniformly clad in white cotton shirts and dark pants, moving gradually during the course of the work from the bongos, to the marimbas, to the glockenspiels, and finally to all the instruments for the finale. The sense of ritualistic precision and unity is furthered by performers playing from memory and by their performing face-to-face, two on a single instrument.[31]

To put it another way, the work presented a model of harmonious social interaction that bore interesting comparison with theories just then being advanced about the primary value of music. In an influential book ambitiously titled *How Musical Is Man?* (1973), based on lectures delivered in 1969–1970 at the University of Washington, the English ethnomusicologist John Blacking (1928–90), then occupying the chair of social anthropology at Queen's University, Belfast, presented a thesis that argued that “humanly organized sound” was a necessary precondition to “soundly organized humanity,” from which it followed that music could—should?—be valued according to the degree to which it reflected that reciprocity and furthered the implied objective of social harmony.

Blacking in effect renewed (or modernized) a position that went all the way back to Plato (at least), and that had Count Leo Tolstoy as its most prominent recent exponent in Europe. Though venerable, it had been much weakened in the West by cold-war suspicion of the social as a criterion of artistic value. It was indeed obvious that social criteria of artistic value had been tyrannically abused under totalitarian regimes. But Blacking, who in addition to being an anthropologist was a trained classical pianist, argued that the opposite tendency—toward individualism and the competitive display of skill and originality—had reached a similar, no less deplorable condition of abuse in the highly developed technological societies of postwar Western Europe and America.

fig. 8-4 Steve Reich and Musicians performing *Drumming*.

Basing his thesis on observations made during two years of fieldwork among the Venda, a South African tribe, Blacking noted that among his informants, and in most sub-Saharan African societies, all members are considered to be "musical" in that they are "able to perform and listen intelligently to their own indigenous music,"[32] while in his own British society only a few specially gifted people are credited with "musicality." "Must a majority be made 'unmusical,'" he asked, "so that a few may become more 'musical'?" Did that heightened and exclusive conception of musicality lead to the creation of a better or more valuable music than is available in societies where everyone is considered musical? Or did the concept of musicality with which he was brought up reflect a more general abuse of technology to further the social hierarchies and exclusions on which the British class system depended?

Those technologies began with notation, by means of which "music could be handed down by a hereditary elite without any need for listeners." They included complex machines, like the piano, which relatively few could afford, and to operate which required years of training. By the modern period they entailed advanced and esoteric techniques for encoding sound, the products of which were indecipherable except to those trained in producing them. The difficulties of such procedures, and the special qualifications they called for, were habitually taken in advanced societies as evidence of their value. But what did such values say about such societies?

Ethnomusicology, Blacking asserted, was the discipline best suited—indeed, created—to answer such questions. It was a new discipline, named (by the Dutch music scholar Jaap Kunst) as recently as 1950. It was often thought of by "Westerners" as the study of "non-Western" musics, or "oral" musics, or "folk" or "traditional" musics, and when defined in this way it could be seen as the continuation of an older tradition in musicology, sometimes

called "comparative musicology" or "musical ethnology," that took as its subject matter anything that was not "urban European art music"[33] (to quote the definition of ethnomusicology given in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*). That was the view of the field from within academic musicology, as laid out by the German founders of the discipline in the 1880s.

Blacking, following an alternative model proposed by anthropologists like Alan Merriam (1923–80), granted ethnomusicology a much wider purview. Merriam called it "the study of music in culture,"[34] and Blacking went so far as to declare it to be the only truly universal musicological method. The first chapter of *How Musical Is Man?* ends with a ringing manifesto:

> Functional analyses of musical structure cannot be detached from structural analyses of its social function: the function of tones in relation to each other cannot be explained adequately as part of a closed system without reference to the structures of the sociocultural system of which the musical system is a part, and to the biological system to which all music makers belong. Ethnomusicology is not only an area study concerned with exotic music, nor a musicology of the ethnic—it is a discipline that holds out hope for a deeper understanding of all music. If some music can be analyzed and understood as tonal expressions of human experience in the context of different kinds of social and cultural organization, I see no reason why all music should not be analyzed in the same way.[35]

It is not difficult to discern the political subtext that undergirded these opposing views of ethnomusicology, the one arising out of musicology and the other out of anthropology. The first kept "urban European art music"—a genre traditionally studied through its outstanding individual practitioners, the great composers—front and center. The methods it employed were analysis and style criticism, the first showing how "the music works" as an autonomous structure and the second "how the composer worked" as an autonomous individual.

That approach was often justified by calling on a distinction that anthropologically inclined ethnomusicologists themselves had coined: *etic* versus *emic*. "Etic" was short for phonetic, a kind of linguistic (or, by extension, musical) transcription that sought to record everything heard by the transcriber, without any consideration of its significance. "Emic," short for phonemic, was a transcription that sought to reflect what was of significance to the informants (that is, the speakers whose language was being transcribed). A phonetic transcription, for example, would include every tiny variant in vowel sounds made by the utterer of a sentence, and every tiny variation in pitch produced by the singer of a melody. A phonemic transcription would exclude chance variations (slurred speech, singing out of tune) that did not affect meaning as perceived by the informants. Since only an insider to a language or a musical system (whether native or "acculturated") can apply the latter criterion, *etic* and *emic* are anthropologists' shorthand for "outsider's perspective" and "insider's perspective."

It is natural, according to the older view of both musicology and ethnomusicology, that Western musicians will study the music of "their own tradition" (that is, the music to which they are insiders) differently, both as to approach and as to method, from music of traditions to which they are outsiders. The one is central to their experience and interests, the other peripheral. Ethnomusicology, in this view, is by definition an etic discipline, suitable only for "other" music, or else, exceptionally, to music within the Western tradition about which "little or no historical information is available and no body of music theory exists"[36] (to quote again from the *New Grove Dictionary*), and where, therefore, scholars must proceed entirely by inference (that is, "etically").

The newer, more inclusive view of ethnomusicology, as expressed most militantly by Blacking, refuses to recognize the special position of urban European art music or its special relationship to the musicologists who study it. Those special privileges maintain an unjustifiable status quo in support of a socially destructive value system. Rather, by stripping the products of European art music of its privileges and studying it "etically" alongside the other musics of the world, one can bring to light that overly individualistic and socially exploitative value system, and possibly find within scholarship the means toward social betterment. To say, with Blacking, that "all music is folk music,"[37] enabled one to expose and counter the ways in which the seemingly

innocent study of music, by endorsing a hierarchy that places the great composers (all white, male, and of European stock) at the incontestable top, has lent support to imperialism and racism and sexism. Adopting an openly and actively political stance, the new ethnomusicology (and the "new musicology" that emerged in response to it) refused to allow that there is any nonpolitical alternative; there are only covertly political ones.

As the next chapter will make plainer, these principles are among the ways of late-twentieth-century thinking that have been collectively labeled "postmodernist." The way in which they oppose some of the basic tenets of modernism should already be plain. The way in which Blacking's ethnomusicological position and its social implications parallel the development of Steve Reich's compositional practice (and *its* social implications) should also be clear, even though there is no evidence that Reich studied Blacking (or even heard of him) despite the fact that they often echo one another's words. Reich, equally unbeknownst to Blacking, had written in 1968 that "all music turns out to be ethnic music."[38] Both Reich and Blacking were part of a growing wave of "sixties" skepticism that had ample repercussions, beginning in the 1970s, both in scholarship and in the arts.

Reich has often said that he is interested not in imitating the sounds of African or Asian musics (mere "chinoiserie," as he calls such imitations) but rather in adapting their structural principles in order to achieve similar effects. "The pleasure I get from playing," he wrote, regardless of whether the music played is Balinese, African, or his own, "is not the pleasure of expressing myself but of subjugating myself to the music and experiencing the ecstasy that comes from being a part of it."[39] His aim in composing—that is, setting up musical processes—was to provide himself and his audience with something to which they could subjugate themselves together.

Now compare Blacking:

> Performances by combinations of two or three players of rhythms that can in fact be played by one are not musical gimmicks: they express concepts of individuality in community, and of social, temporal, and spatial balance, which are found in other features of Venda culture and other types of Venda music. Rhythms such as these cannot be performed correctly unless the players are their own conductors and yet at the same time submit to the rhythm of an invisible conductor. This is the kind of shared experience which the Venda seek and express in their music making.[40]

Blacking was describing the way in which Venda musicians perform intricate complexes of hemiola patterns that together cooperate to produce a series of equal subtactile pulses at the heard surface. He could just as well have been describing Reich's *Drumming*. The crucial difference, however, was that Reich sought not to express concepts found in other features of his own culture, or other types of "urban European art music" (especially the types written by his established contemporaries), but to propose an alternative to them that implied both a musical contrast and a social critique. That critical perspective, hostile to existing institutions and established social relations and even threatening them, makes it not only possible but essential to regard *Drumming* as being, within its own context (and despite its mounting popularity), an avant-garde composition. It produced historical change.

Notes:

(30) Adams, "Reich," in *New Grove Dictionary of American Music*, Vol. IV, p. 25.

(31) *Ibid*.

(32) John Blacking, *How Musical Is Man?* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973), p. 4.

(33) Barbara Krader, "Ethnomusicology," in *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Vol. VI (London:

Macmillan, 1980), p. 275.

(34) Alan P. Merriam, "Definitions of 'Comparative Musicology' and 'Ethnomusicology': An Historical-Theoretical Perspective" (quoting Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music* [1964]), *Ethnomusicology* XXI (1977): 202.

(35) Blacking, *How Musical Is Man?*, pp. 30–31.

(36) Vincent Duckles, "Musicology," in *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (1980 ed.), Vol. XII, p. 836.

(37) Blacking, *How Musical Is Man?*, p. x.

(38) Reich, "Music as a Gradual Process," in *Writings on Music*, p. 35.

(39) Steve Reich, *Writings about Music* (Halifax: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1974), p. 44.

(40) Blacking, *How Musical Is Man?* p. 30.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online
Postmodernism

Reich: Orchestras and other ensembles, 1972–87

A POSTMODERNIST MASTERWORK?

Chapter: CHAPTER 8 A Harmonious Avant-Garde?
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Author(s): Richard Taruskin

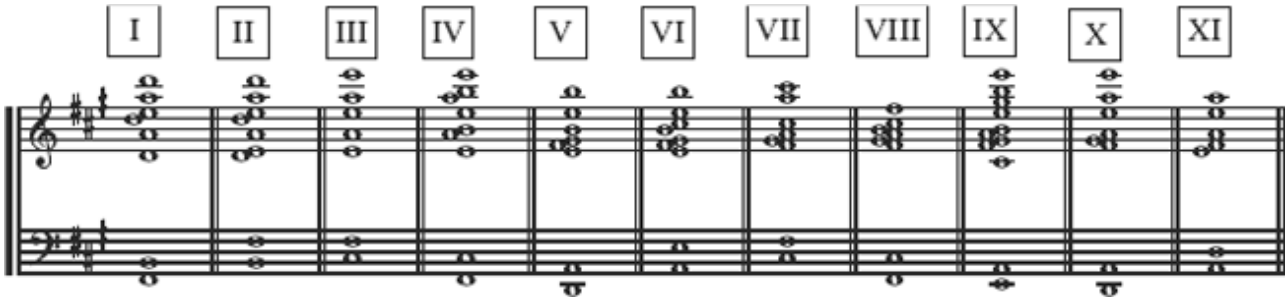
Reich's other large work of the 1970s, *Music for 18 Musicians* (composed between 1974 and 1976), has acquired emblematic status. Far less immediately evocative than *Drumming* of exotic musics, it represents a synthesis of all the techniques Reich had developed over the preceding decade; and in its use of electronically amplified solo strings, winds, and voices in counterpoint with the ever-present Reichian percussion and keyboards it proposed an alternative, increasingly normative orchestral sound for the late twentieth century. Perhaps the most influential fully notated composition of the decade, it is often described as the first postmodernist masterwork. Although calling it that may be yet another contradiction in terms, the phrase does call attention to the important role it played in renovating the terms on which music was composed and evaluated.

Basically an expansive synthesis of the harmonic structure of *Four Organs* with the rhythmic design *of Drumming*, Reich's *Music for 18 Musicians* unfolds a kaleidoscope of evolving and interacting melodic patterns, all controlled by a common measure of twelve quick-moving subtactile pulses, over a majestically slow-moving chord progression that pulses through the ensemble at the outset at a rate of fifteen to thirty seconds per chord, and is then repeated at the rate of four to six minutes per chord, with the string instruments playing long sustained tones. Each of these long spans provides the background for a “small piece,” as Reich calls his closed rhythmic constructions, mostly cast in simple, easily perceived ABA forms. The composition in its totality is a chain of eleven of these small pieces, which, because it recapitulates a previously heard harmonic progression, achieves a preordained closure of its own, reinforced by a final, relatively rapid cruise through the eleven chords at the end.

The most significant resemblance between *Music for 18 Musicians* and *Drumming* is in the manner of its performance. It, too, embodies a highly ritualized set of prescribed actions, in which players (including the composer, when the piece is performed—as it almost always is—by his own ensemble) move from place to place on the stage, their physical movements and resulting sound-output regulated not by a conductor but by the vibraphone player, whose prescribed actions signal the end of each “small piece” and cue the next with a special recurrent tune reserved for the instrument's distinctive timbre. The vibraphone thus impersonally embodies the role of the master drummer in an African ensemble, the “invisible conductor” to which all the players, the composer included, impersonally submit, sacrificing their individual freedom not to a specially empowered individual who alone is free, but to a collective and transcendent ideal of ecstasy-producing accuracy.

The whole hour-long piece, although it has a meticulously notated score and parts, can be followed from the harmonic skeleton given in Ex. 8-7, which shows the eleven-chord progression whose triple cursus provides the composition with its structure. While entirely diatonic, requiring not a single accidental, it is obviously no functional progression. Roots are often equivocal (as is especially obvious in the first chord); the spacing, with wide gaps between the bass dyad and the rest, is eccentric; there is no strong cadence or even any pure consonant triad. Most of the harmonies are of the kind jazz musicians call “added-note chords.” One cannot even confidently assign the progression to the A-major or the F♯-minor reading of the key signature. The most one

can say, perhaps, is that by choosing a strictly diatonic but weakly articulated pitch field and (relatively) consonant harmonies the composer has made the pitch domain relatively unobtrusive, the better to focus listeners' attention on the rhythmic processes. The change of harmony every five minutes or so amounts to a cleansing of the palate rather than a dramatic event.



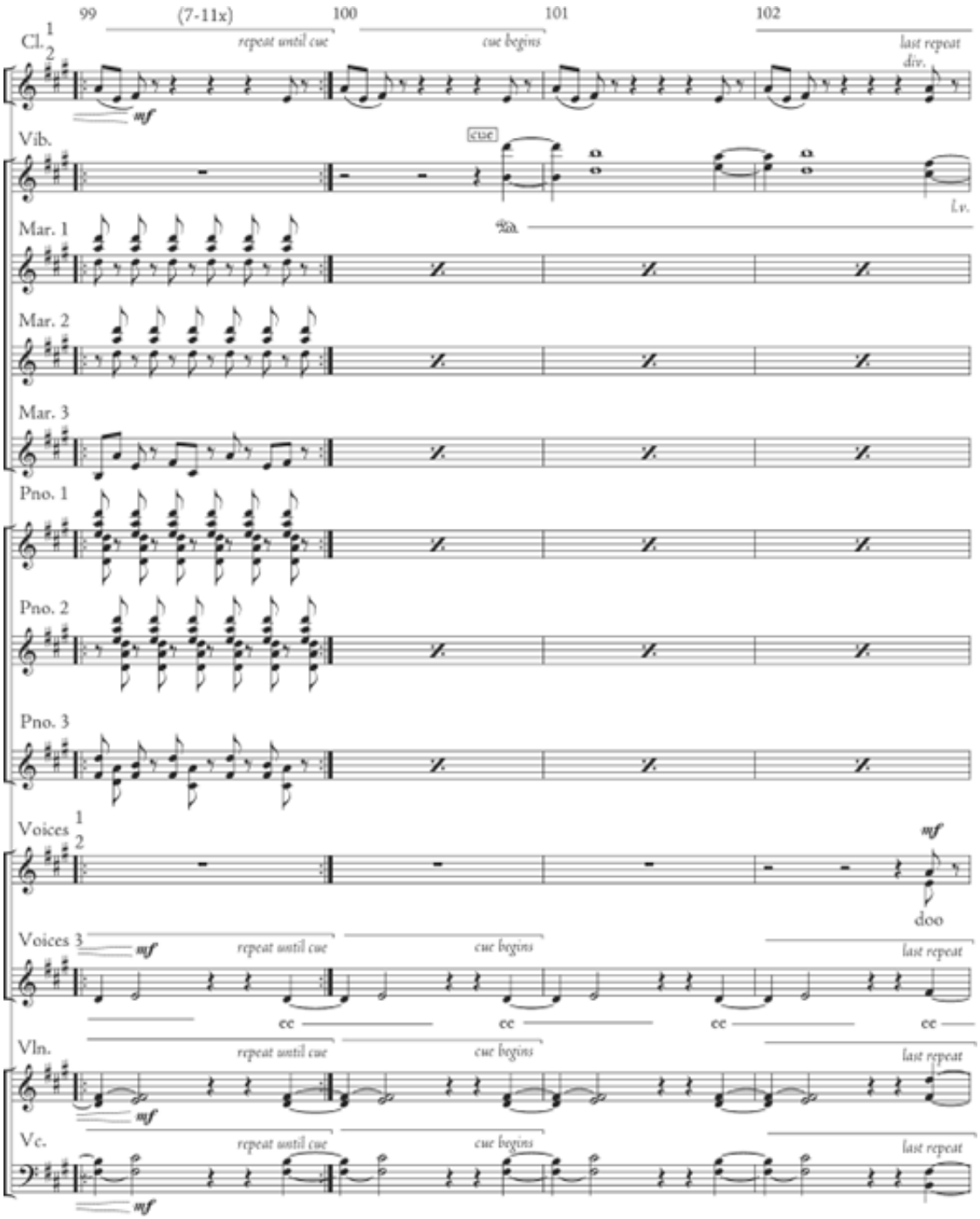
ex. 8-7 Steve Reich, *Music for 18 Musicians*, "cycle of chords"

The "opening chorale," or rapid harmonic traversal, unfolds through "hairpin" (crescendo-decrescendo) dynamics corresponding to the length of a wind-player's breath. The bass and treble instruments come separately to the fore, thus further attenuating any sense of harmonic function or progression. During the slow-motion progression that makes up the body of the work, most of the interacting rhythmic/melodic cells are based on the pattern already familiar from *Clapping Music*. These cells occasionally introduce pitches foreign to the sustained harmony, and even the bass occasionally uses foreign and even chromatic pitches as embellishments (yet further lessening its structural role). All of this may be observed in the first "small piece," based on the first chord, as sampled in Ex. 8-8. Despite these liberties, or even because of them, there is always a very firm distinction between what is structural (i.e., related to the basic progression) and what is decorative. It is the stringently limited and static nature of the structural material that maintains the tie between this very elaborate and colorful composition and the reductive minimalist ideal. Gone, however, is the ascetic atmosphere of early minimalism. Compared with the monochromatic schemes of Reich's previous music, the variegated timbres of *Music for 18 Musicians* are extravagant, even voluptuous.

Reich acknowledged the change in a 1977 interview with Michael Nyman. The all-important process, he now allowed, was more his business than his audience's:

> I'm not as concerned that one hears how the music is made as I was in the past. If some people hear exactly what's going on, good for them, and if other people don't but they still like the piece, then that's OK too.... There was a didactic quality to the early pieces, and looking back I'd say that, when you discover a new idea, it's very important to present that idea in a very forceful and clear and pared-down way.... But once you've done that, what do you do? What I was really concerned with in *Music for 18 Musicians* was making beautiful music above everything else.[41]

These are no longer the words of an avant-gardist, but those of an artist who feels his battle has been won. That may account for the sense of celebration that fills *Music for 18 Musicians*. Over its course distinctive features of Reich's previous work pass in review: the glockenspiels from *Drumming*, the maracas from *Four Organs*, the pentatonic patterns from the early phase pieces. By the time the ninth "small piece" is reached, the texture—combining the expanding "rhythmic construction" idea of *Drumming* with the progressive canons of *Clapping Music*—has become very laden and intricate, but also euphoric.


99
(7-11x)
100
101
102
Cl. 1 2
repeat until cue
cue begins
last repeat
div.
mf
Vib.
cue
l.v.
Mar. 1
Mar. 2
Mar. 3
Pno. 1
Pno. 2
Pno. 3
Voices 1 2
mf
doo
Voices 3
mf
repeat until cue
cue begins
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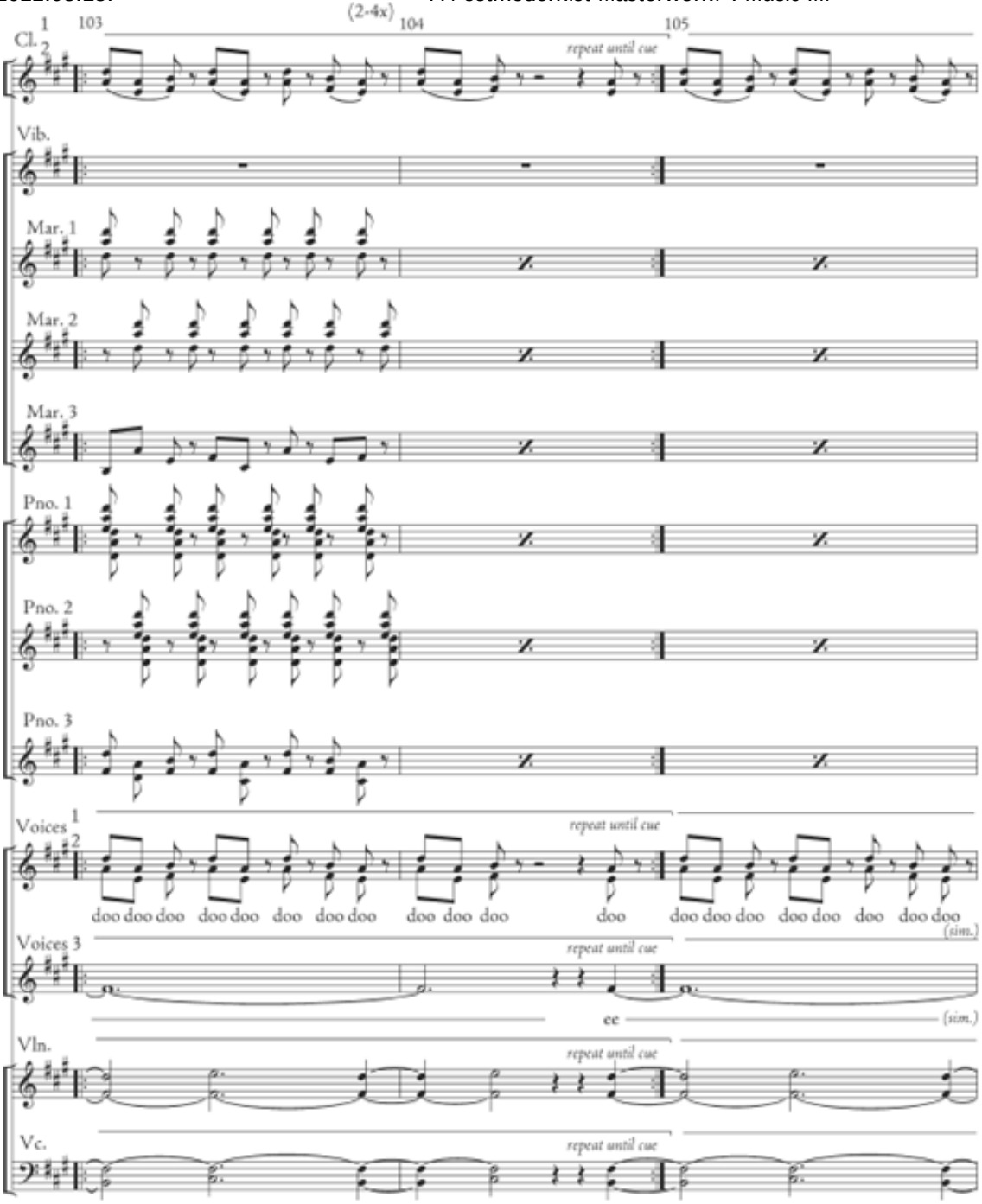


ex. 8-8 Steve Reich, *Music for 18 Musicians*, mm. 99–105

Even within the minimalist purview, it now appeared, it was possible to achieve "maximum complexity under maximum control," and beginning with *Music for 18 Musicians* Reich began to command the full respect of some influential mainstream or academic critics. But at the same time Reich's music broadened its appeal to what became known as the "crossover" audience. Reich's ensemble gave the premiere of *Music for 18 Musicians* at New York's Town Hall, a classical venue, in April 1976. Two years later, his recording of the piece for ECM, a small German label that specialized in avant-garde jazz, sold 100,000 copies—obviously not just to the avant-garde audience—and the ensemble performed the piece before a sell-out audience at the Bottom Line, one of New York's most famous rock clubs. Add another two years and Steve Reich and Musicians would be filling Carnegie Hall.

Reich began to receive commissions from major orchestras (New York Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony), which led him for a time to modify his style considerably. That was "rather fortunate," said Brian Eno, "because that meant I could carry on with it,"[42] meaning the earlier, more ascetic and rigorous minimalist manner that now went over quite decisively into art-rock. There was no longer any point even in attempting to draw the line, formerly so sharp and well patrolled, between the high and low genres of music, at least where the impact of minimalism was concerned; nor was there any way of telling where the movement's impact had been greater. Minimalism turned out to be for music a great leveler, for which reason traditional modernists regarded it as the direst of threats. And that made it the most easily cited, if not necessarily the most representative or significant, embodiment of "postmodernism."

Notes:

(41) Steve Reich, interviewed by Michael Nyman, *Studio International, November/December 1976*; quoted in Schwarz, *Minimalists*, p. 80.

(42) Quoted in Tamm, *Brian Eno*, p. 24.

See also from Grove Music Online
Philip Glass
Ravi Shankar

"CROSSOVER": WHO'S ON TOP?

Chapter: CHAPTER 8 A Harmonious Avant-Garde?
Source: MUSIC IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

fig. 8-5 Scene from *Einstein on the Beach* by Philip Glass and Robert Wilson.

Yet not even *Music for 18 Musicians* marked the crest of the minimalist wave. That decisive moment came on Sunday, 21 November 1976, seven months after the premiere of *18*, when *Einstein on the Beach*, a four-act opera by Philip Glass (b. 1937), composed in collaboration with the avant-garde theater director and stage designer Robert Wilson (b. 1941), played to a packed Metropolitan Opera House in New York. The wildly enthusiastic audience, perhaps needless to say, did not consist of Met subscribers. Instead, it was as if the "downtown" New York arts scene—painters, conceptual artists, experimental theater hands, art-rockers and their fans, along with a scattering of curious "classical" musicians who felt distinctly like onlookers—had migrated northward and invaded the precincts of high art for a night. "Who are these people?"[43] one of the opera house administrators supposedly asked Glass. "I've never seen them here before." As Glass tells the story,

"I remember replying very candidly, 'Well, you'd better find out who they are, because if this place expects to be running in twenty-five years, that's your audience out there.'"

It has not turned out that way. As of the year 2000, the Metropolitan Opera was still running on its traditional repertoire, leavened by only the occasional premiere, and was still supported by its traditional, if noticeably aging, audience. If anything, the crossover phenomenon has worked the other way over the long haul; the one Glass opera to play the Met since *Einstein on the Beach* (*The Voyage*, an actual Metropolitan Opera commission performed in 1992 to commemorate the five-hundredth anniversary of Columbus's voyage to the New World) is decidedly tamer, more "mainstream" than his works of the seventies. Like Reich, and like many musical radicals, Glass has been mellowed by success. But the *Einstein* performance was nonetheless a watershed.

Glass's development paralleled Reich's in many ways, though with some significant variations. His early training in his native Baltimore was entirely conventional, as were his fledgling years as a composer. Unlike Reich, Glass majored in music at the University of Chicago, where he matriculated at the precocious age of fifteen. He then went on to Juilliard and studied with the same teachers, Bergsma and Persichetti, as Reich. They were initially more successful in instilling in Glass the neoclassical and public-spirited values of the preserial American academy. On his graduation with a master's degree in 1961, Glass received a Ford Foundation grant to become composer-in-residence to the Pittsburgh public schools, for which he turned out a quantity of simple functional music, some of it (including choral settings of poetry by Walt Whitman and Carl Sandburg) in a somewhat "Americanist" idiom. Glass's music of this early period, almost all of it subsequently withdrawn by the composer, has been compared to the work of Hindemith and Copland.

In 1963, Glass applied for a Fulbright Fellowship to follow in Copland's footsteps as a pupil of Nadia Boulanger, then still teaching at the American Academy at Fontainebleau near Paris. He spent two years in France, and this is where he had his musical epiphany. It did not come from Boulanger; like Reich, Glass found his voice as a result of an unforeseen brush with non-European music. He took a job with the famous Indian musician Ravi Shankar (b. 1920), notating from recordings the music Shankar had composed at his sitar to accompany a documentary film. From this task Glass learned, as he put it, "how music may be structured by rhythmic patterning rather than by harmonic progression." From Paris he went to India to study at its source the music by which he now wanted to be influenced.

fig. 8-6 Ravi Shankar performing on the sitar.

Like Reich, who had learned similar lessons from African and Indonesian musics, Glass quickly realized that he would have to make his own performance opportunities. He thus joined in what, in retrospect at least, seems the signal "convergence" in the mid-to-late 1960s between rock performers who, unusually, wrote their own material and classically trained composers who, unusually, performed their own material. Like Reich, Glass adopted the amplified instruments of rock, putting the electric organ at the center of his sound world, and in 1968 he formed the Philip Glass Ensemble to perform the works he was composing in a style he initially referred to as "music with repetitive structures."[44] For a while Reich and Glass, who had known each other slightly at Juilliard, were eager collaborators. Glass reencountered his old acquaintance shortly after his return from India, at a gallery concert in March 1967 at which Reich's *Piano Phase* was performed in a luxurious four-piano

arrangement, and was immediately moved to emulate it by stripping down his style even further. He rigorously excreted the last trappings of dissonance and chromaticism from his music, these being the badges of Western harmonically driven modernism, and rid his textures of all reference to conservatory-style counterpoint or part-writing. Like Reich, he explored subtactile pulses at fast tempos and steady loud volumes. For two years each performed in the other's ensemble, and each egged the other on toward ever more rigorous systematization of the single musical dimension—rhythm and duration—they now thought worthy of development. For a while their creative exchange resembled the one a few years earlier between Riley and Reich on the opposite coast. They even collaborated for a while on a subsistence occupation: Chelsea Light Moving, consisting of two composers with strong backs and a van.

But their partnership quickly became a purist rivalry, as each tried to outstrip the other's commitment to rigor and system, showing that the competitive modernist spirit, though under challenge, was still alive and well. To match Reich's achievement yet maintain his creative individuality, Glass came up with a processual method, distinct from Reich's "phase" procedure, that reflected his involvement with Indian classical music. In place of Reich's progressive canons, which introduced a form of "Western" contrapuntal complexity into the texture, Glass concentrated on what he called "additive structure" (shrewdly rechristened "additive and subtractive"[45] by the critic K. Robert Schwarz), which could be applied to single musical lines played by solo instruments or by ensembles employing unison doubling or rudimentary homorhythmic textures in parallel or similar motion, something prohibited by the conservatory rulebook and therefore that much more radical in concept.

As usual, the first embodiment of the process, *Strung Out* (1967) for solo amplified violin, was the most rigorous and radical. A twenty-minute barrage of relentless eighth-notes employing only five pitches, it consisted of a pentatonic module that was subjected to variations by increasing or decreasing its length by one note at a time. Each modification became a repetitive module in turn, so that the overall impression was one of constantly expanding and contracting phrases, a rigorously maintained undifferentiated (isochronous) rhythm that was continually and subtly reinterpreted metrically. Even further reduced was *1 + 1* (1968), in which the sound was produced not by a standard instrument, but by tapping a tabletop—an anticipation of Reich's *Clapping Music*.

Two Pages for Steve Reich (1968) was the first piece composed for the Philip Glass Ensemble. It applies the additive-subtractive technique at its purest and most radical to a variable unison ensemble of electric keyboards and amplified wind instruments. Its 107 modules are each repeated an indefinite number of times, so that the piece is of variable duration. The rigorous process that relates each module to its predecessor and successor is self-evident to anyone glancing at the score. Like Reich, Glass did not keep any secrets of structure. On the contrary, he delighted in calling attention to the process, equating it with the musical content. Long stretches of vocal music in *Einstein on the Beach* have no other text than the counting of the notes in the modules.

In 1969, the title of *Two Pages for Steve Reich* became *Two Pages*. The rivalry had turned unfriendly, and remained so. Reich has attributed the falling-out to Glass's unwillingness to acknowledge his creative debts, but the younger composer's attraction to the theater and his greater affinity for the rock scene were bound to separate them eventually, leading Glass out of Reich's immediate orbit and ultimately toward the operas that made him famous. Those operas, in turn, had a strong and openly acknowledged influence on the art-rock of the 1970s and 1980s.

Less openly acknowledged, indeed often finessed or even deliberately clouded, is the question of rock's influence on the development of Glass's music. That Glass, of all the pioneering minimalists, had the strongest ties to Anglo-American pop music has always been clear. His music, while it avoids the most obvious rock instruments (electric guitars and trap-set percussion), is often amplified to the earsplitting level typical of rock bands. It is far more often played in rock clubs than Reich's. Beginning in 1977, recordings of Glass's music were issued by rock labels, and he began writing pieces that conformed in length and shape to the specifications of a rock single. By the 1980s he was collaborating as closely with rock musicians like David Byrne (of the Talking Heads) and Paul Simon as he ever had collaborated with Reich. He even served for a while as producer for a rock band. And

beginning in 1970, one of the regular members of his ensemble, along with the actual singers and players, has been a "sound designer" (audio engineer and mixer) named Kurt Munkacsi, who had started his career as an electric bass player in a rock band and had previously worked alongside George Martin for the Beatles, and whose key role in producing (or "cranking up") the Philip Glass sound was standard in pop but unprecedented in classical music. By the 1990s, Glass was repaying the compliment rock musicians had paid him with works like his *Low Symphony* (1992), based on thematic material derived from a rock album, *Low* (1977), by Brian Eno and David Bowie—"symphonic rock" to recall or parallel the "symphonic jazz" of the 1920s.

But was there a rock input in Glass's style, beyond mere "sonic" or technological matters like instrumentation and amplification, to counterbalance the later influence and homage? Glass himself has been coy when asked. In an interview with the rock and jazz critic Robert Palmer (1945–97) following the spectacular Met performance of *Einstein on the Beach*, Glass responded to a question about "crossover" in a way that surprised his interlocutor. Though willing to be described as a standard-bearer for "the era of the serious composer as performing musician and pop hero,"[46] Glass insisted that there was still "one important distinction between pop and concert music," adding, "I think it's the only important distinction." Asked to elaborate, he continued:

> When you talk about concert musicians, you're talking about people who actually invent language. They create values, a value being a unit of meaning that is new and different. Pop musicians package language. I don't think there's anything *wrong* with packaging language; some of that can be very good music. I realized long ago that people were going to make money off my ideas in a way that I'm not capable of or interested in doing. It doesn't bother me; the two kinds of music are just different. One thing these English and German groups *have* done, though, they've taken the language of our music and made it much more accessible. It's been helpful. If people had heard only Fleetwood Mac [i.e., an "ordinary" American rock group] this music would sound like music from outer space.[47]

These are precisely the "late, late romantic" distinctions—between creator and disseminator, innovator and imitator, art and commerce (or "culture industry")—that had stood previously in the way of "crossover" by denying its possibility, or at least its legitimacy. Glass had effectively reinstated the old hierarchy of high and low. Within such a model influence can flow only one way (since if it flowed the other way it would be not influence but debasement). The only concession Glass is willing to make beyond what Schoenberg or Adorno would have allowed is that "packaged language" is not intrinsically corrupt or dehumanizing. But the squeamishness is palpable; to admit to an influence from popular culture beyond the borrowing of its hardware would have compromised Glass's status as a serious artist—in his own eyes.

Notes:

(43) Philip Glass, *Music by Philip Glass*, ed. Robert T. Jones (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), p. 53.

(44) Quoted in Schwarz, *Minimalists*, p. 107.

(45) Schwarz, *Minimalists*, p. 120.

(46) Robert Palmer, liner note to Glass, *Einstein on the Beach* (Tomato Records TOM-4-2901 [1976]), p. 5.

(47) Philip Glass, quoted in *Ibid*.

See also from Grove Music Online
Philip Glass

Disco

DISCO AT THE MET

Chapter: CHAPTER 8 A Harmonious Avant-Garde?
Source: MUSIC IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Rock critics have understandably been quicker to call attention to the stylistic affinities between Glass's music (or minimalism generally) and pop, although few have put the matter bluntly in terms of influence. Michael Walsh, writing in *Time* magazine, was content to observe that "rock and minimalism share obvious characteristics, including a steady beat, limited harmonies and hypnotic repetition."[48] Robert Coe, in the *New York Times* magazine, credited the Philip Glass Ensemble with providing the means "to place new experimental music on a continuum ranging from academic modernism to progressive rock and jazz,"[49] and noted particularly Glass's apparent influence on disco, the 1970s commercial genre with which Terry Riley had also been associated. But the chronology of Glass's relationship with rock does not necessarily support the one-way model; and one young critic, Gregory Bloch, has dared suggest that disco, that most commercial (and therefore disdained) of rock genres, may have been among the elements that conjoined to produce Glass's "operatic" style.[50]

As noted above, the word "disco" is short for *discothèque*, a nightclub where people danced to recorded music. The disc jockeys who played the records were skilled artists who sequenced and remixed a multitude of short individual tracks into all-night marathons, a technique already reminiscent of Glass's "module" procedure, which was about to take its own quantum leap into marathon length just as disco was becoming fashionable. By the middle of the decade, disco had become not just a performance practice but a compositional genre that produced single "tracks" of previously unheard-of length, in which the vocal lines, to quote the rock historian Joe Stuessy, were "more like repeating patterns than melodies in the traditional sense."[51]

The first disco "classic," Donna Summer's *Love to Love You Baby* (1975), blew a single song up to seventeen minutes' duration (requiring an entire 12″ LP side) by a succession of swirling riffs performed on electric keyboards and synthesizers, supported by a percussion track that divides an insistent four-beat-to-a-bar pulsation into subtactile eighths and sixteenths. Compare *Einstein on the Beach*, also composed in 1975, which though cast in four acts (each containing two or three scenes about the length of *Love to Love You Baby*, connected by musical joints that Robert Wilson called "knee plays"), was performed in a single five-and-one-half-hour bout, without intermission. The program displayed a note, "the audience is invited to leave and reenter the auditorium quietly, as necessary,"[52] just as the dancers at a discothèque left and reentered the dance floor as the spirit moved them.

While suggestive, these parallels are inconclusive as historical evidence. But Glass's rock appeal, his success in drawing on the huge rock audience, and the status of his music as a meeting ground for fans of many kinds of music (hence an auspicious or ominous breaker-down of categories), are established facts. John Rockwell's review of *Einstein on the Beach* in *Rolling Stone*, by then the principal American rock magazine, emphasized the last point, hailing Glass's work as "genuine fusion music that can appeal effortlessly to fans of progressive rock, jazz, and even disco."[53] And with that appeal came a financial success that undermined one of the chief distinctions Glass had previously drawn between his activity and that of the "packagers."

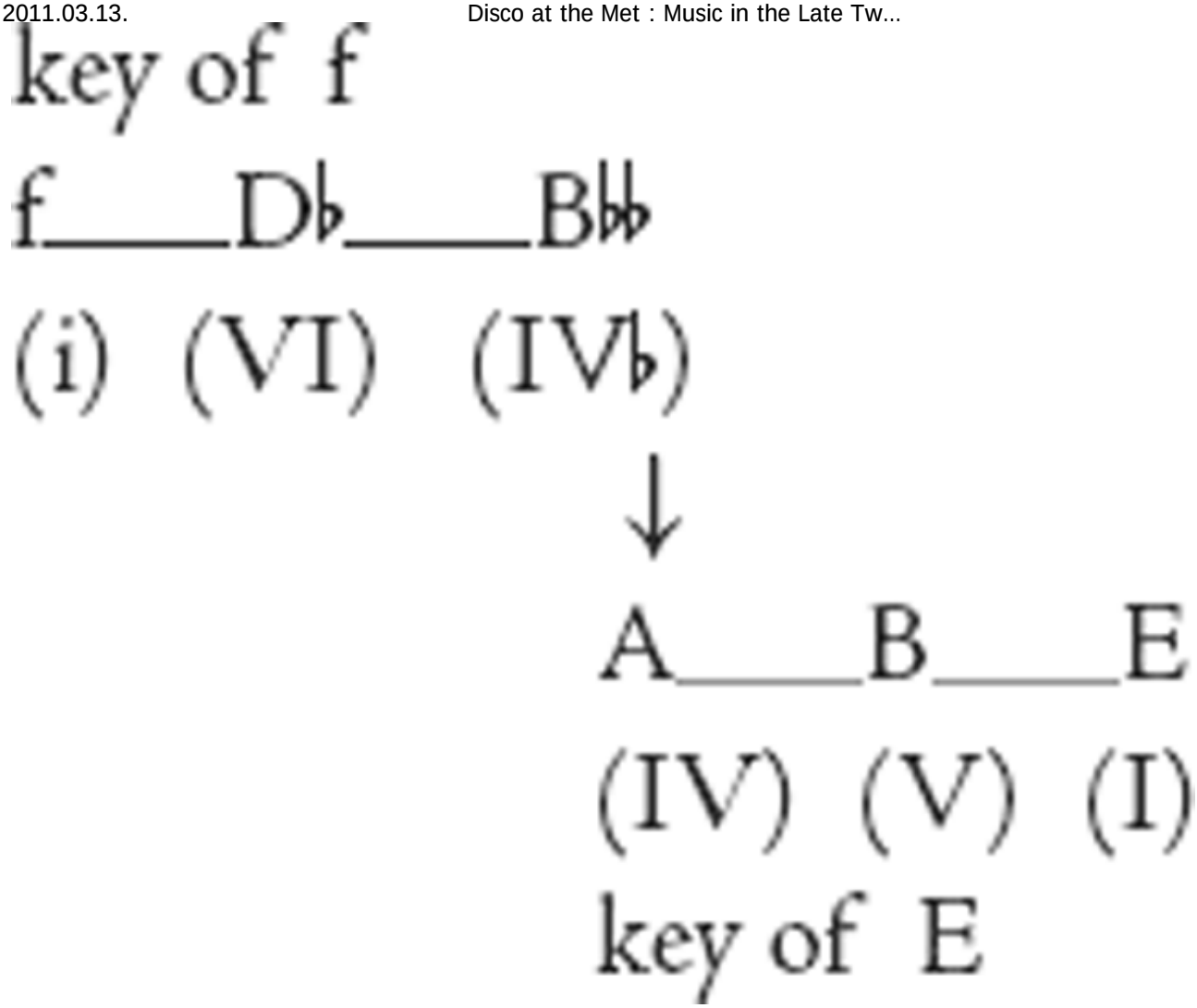
Whatever its relationship to disco, Glass was also led to his operatic conception and its majestic sense of scale by his collaborator. *Einstein on the Beach* was far from Robert Wilson's longest theatrical marathon. *The Life and Times of Joseph Stalin* (1973) lasted twelve uninterrupted hours. A series of static tableaux with a stage-filling cast of nonprofessional extras, it was already called an opera even though there was no musical score. For Wilson, opera was a sort of visual term connoting monumental pageantry. His attraction to larger-than-life, fetishized historical figures or "icons" as nominal subject matter (Freud and Queen Victoria as well as Stalin and Einstein) was the consequence of this massive, virtually immobilized theatrical conception, which, as Robert Palmer writes, "one ends up wandering within rather than watching."[54] Glass's music with its endless modules seemed its predestined sonic clothing.

The scenario and music of *Einstein on the Beach* were planned on the basis of a set of drawings by Wilson, and revolve around three recurrent images: a train, a courtroom scene (that includes a bed), and a spaceship. (The relevance of the second image to Einstein is never explained.) The title character occasionally wanders onstage as an onlooker, playing the violin. (At the Met and on the original recording Einstein was played by Paul Zukofsky, a well-known new-music specialist.) There is no summarizable plot, nor is there a libretto. Actors engage in mumbled monologues and the singers either count their eighth notes or sing solfège syllables (according to the French conservatory or "fixed-doh" method that Glass learned in his student years).

"When numbers are used," Glass has written, "they represent the rhythmic structure of the music. When solfège is used, the syllables represent the pitch structure of the music. In either case, the text is not secondary or supplementary, but is a description of the music itself."[55] What lends coherence to the whole is the patterned coordination of what Glass calls "visual themes and musical themes." At the opera's slowed-down time-scale, the images became mandalas or focal points for meditation, and the musical modules resembled mantras, the endlessly repeated passivity-inducing vocables of tantric Buddhism. Many viewers compared their experience of the opera to a dream.

All of this recalls surrealism. Most early viewers with a modernist frame of reference compared *Einstein on the Beach* to the Gertrude Stein–Virgil Thomson *Four Saints in Three Acts* of forty years before—another nonlinear, nonnarrative theatrical presentation in which the verbal component posed deliberate enigmas that listeners were invited to invest with mystical significance. The difference was that Thomson's ingratiating music, with its obvious references to folk and vernacular styles, made a far less overtly avant-garde impression than Glass's resolutely abstract modules in their raw, rocklike timbres. The fact that Glass's music was consonant and intermittently "tonal" did nothing to lessen that impression of aggressive stylistic novelty.

The extreme musical unity of the work is suggested in Ex. 8-9, which shows the basic musical stuff of two whole scenes. Act II, sc. 2 accompanies the recurrent train imagery (here titled "Night Train"); the concluding act IV, sc. 3 (plus Knee Play 5) accompanies the final apparition of the spaceship. The module on which the "Night Train" episode is based consists of a pentatonic hemiola idea (Ex. 8-9a), whereas the concluding scene is based on a harmonic module (Ex. 8-9b) that provides thematic material for several other scenes and "knee plays" as well. Glass describes it as "a progression of five chords," and represents it as follows—



—commenting that it "combines both a familiar cadence and a modulation in one formula."[56] He analyzes the half-step descent between the roots of the first and last chords as motion to the leading tone, demanding resolution. "As it is a formula which invites repetition," he notes, "it is particularly suited to my kind of musical thinking."[57] It crops up throughout *Einstein on the Beach* in many figurations and voicings, many if not most of them "incorrect" according to textbook rules of voice-leading.

The rigor with which the minimal material shown in Ex. 8-9 was expanded to form the respective scenes impressed all listeners, both those who regarded Glass's technique as impressively single-minded and those who thought it woefully simpleminded. What was most extraordinary was the visceral response that the music elicited, especially the Spaceship finale—extraordinary, at any rate, to the "classical" musicians in attendance, who associated the visceral with the popular, and therefore distrusted it. The response was calculated. As Glass told an interviewer:

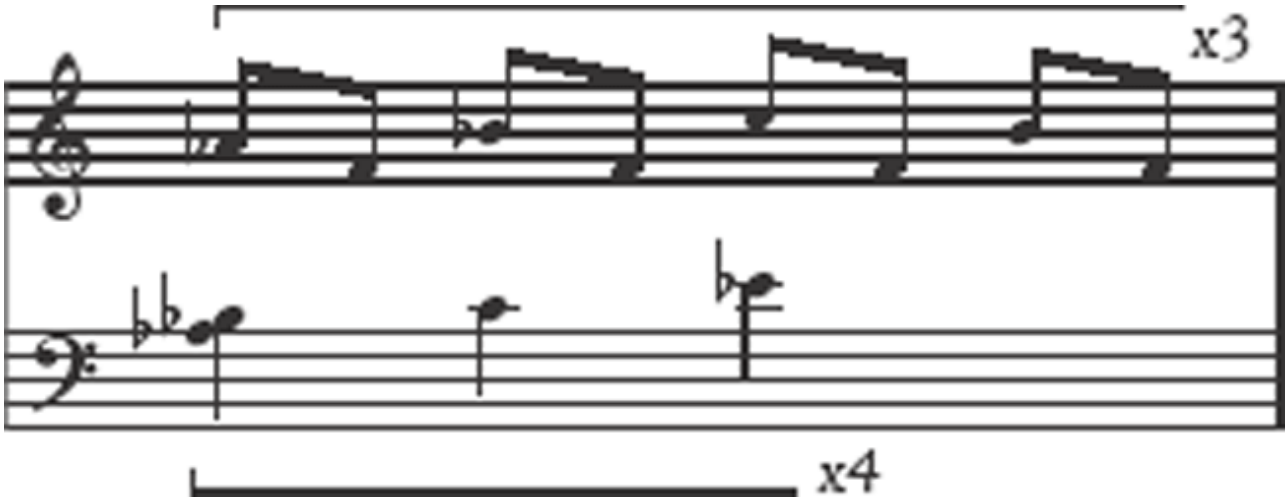
> I decided that I would try to write a piece that left the audience standing, and I've almost never played that music without seeing everyone leave his seat; it's the strangest thing, almost biological. In fact, sometimes I've done concerts where I've played the Spaceship, and then as an encore played the last part of the Spaceship, and the same thing happens again.[58]

The effect was polarizing, to say the least. At the enthusiastic extreme was the response of Ransom Wilson (b. 1951), a flutist and conductor who attended the Metropolitan Opera performance. He was completely won over to the cause of minimalist music and has since become one of its leading exponents. "There were no

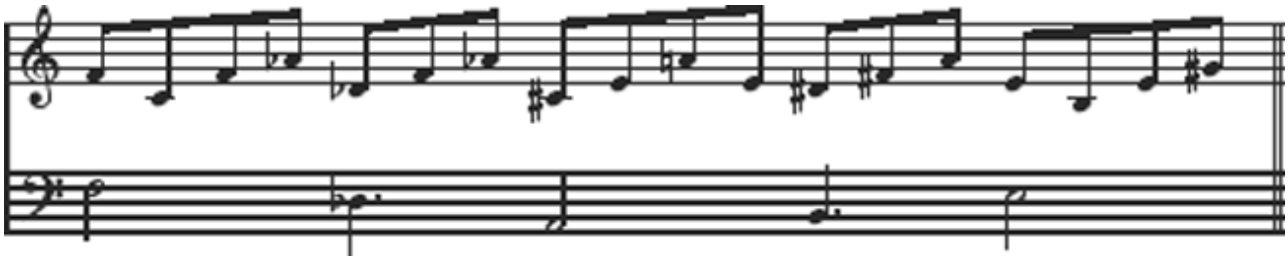
intermissions," he marveled:

> The work continued relentlessly in its grip on all of us in that packed house. Suddenly, at a point some four [actually five] hours into the opera there occurred a completely unexpected harmonic and rhythmic modulation, coupled with a huge jump in the decibel level. People in the audience began to scream with delight and I remember well that my entire body was covered with goose bumps.[59]

"So much," a less enthusiastic critic observed, "one may elicit from a pithed frog."[60] And indeed, there were many who worried at the music's brute "biological" manipulativeness, even as they acknowledged the rarity of gooseflesh at a new music event. There were mutterings about behavior-modification therapy and authoritarian control. Elliott Carter, who did not attend the performance but read about it, sounded an alarm worthy of Cassandra (or at least Adorno). Minimalists, he warned, "are not aware of the larger dimensions of life. One also hears constant repetition in the speeches of Hitler, and in advertising. It has its dangerous aspects."[61]



ex. 8-9a Philip Glass, *Einstein on the Beach*, "Night Train" module ("first theme" in Glass's analysis)



ex. 8-9b Philip Glass, *Einstein on the Beach*, "Spaceship" module ("third theme")

Minus the animus and alarm, some music historians have tended to agree. One historian, Robert Fink, has associated the rise of minimalism with "Madison Avenue" (i.e., the advertising industry) and claimed that the key text for understanding its appeal is *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957), a best-seller by the American social critic Vance Packard (1914–1996), who popularized—and thus helped reinforce—the perception that American society consisted of a mass of consumers constantly subjected to manipulation by corporate schemers who created in them previously unsuspected (and to that extent "unreal") desire.[62] Such an observation about music was not in itself anything new. Manipulation of desire had been the business of music (some would say the chief business) since at least the time of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. What was new in advertising (according to

Packard) and in music (according to Fink) was the insidious, "subliminal" nature of the pitch.

Notes:

(48) Michael Walsh, "The Heart Is Back in the Game," *Time*, 20 September 1982; quoted in Gregory Bloch, "Philip Glass and Popular Music: Influence and Representation," University of California at Berkeley seminar paper, spring 2000.

(49) Robert Coe, "Philip Glass Breaks Through," *New York Times Magazine*, 25 October 1981, p. 72.

(50) Bloch, "Philip Glass and Popular Music."

(51) Joe Stuessy, *Rock and Roll: Its History and Stylistic Development* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1994), p. 349.

(52) Metropolitan Opera House program, 21 November 1976; reproduced in booklet accompanying Tomato Records, TOM-4-2901 (1977), p. 6.

(53) John Rockwell, "Steve Reich and Philip Glass Find a New Way," *Rolling Stone*, 19 April 1979; quoted in Bloch, "Philip Glass and Popular Music."

(54) Palmer, liner note to *Einstein on the Beach*, p. 7.

(55) Philip Glass, "Notes on *Einstein on the Beach*," booklet accompanying Tomato Records, TOM-4-2901 (1977), p. 10.

(56) Philip Glass, "Notes on *Einstein on the Beach*," p. 11.

(57) Quoted in Potter, *Four Musical Minimalists*, p. 330.

(58) Cole Gagne and Tracy Caras, *Soundpieces: Interviews with American Composers* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1987), p. 216.

(59) Ransom Wilson, liner note to EMI Angel Records DS-37340 (1982).

(60) R. Taruskin, "Et in Arcadia Ego; or, I Had No Idea I Was Such a Pessimist until I Wrote This Thing," lecture delivered to the Seminar on the Future of the Arts (Chicago Seminars on the Future, forum on Aesthetics), 13 April 1989; rpt. in R. Taruskin, The Danger of Music and Other Anti-Utopian Essays (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009), p. 14.

(61) Quoted in Walsh, "The Heart Is Back in the Game," *Time*, 20 September 1982, p. 60, col. 3.

(62) Robert Fink, *Repeating Ourselves* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005).

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online
Minimalism

Louis Andriessen

AMERICANIZATION

Chapter: CHAPTER 8 A Harmonious Avant-Garde?
Source: MUSIC IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Whether or not the means employed by minimalist composers were insidious, they were surely the (inevitable?) product of the society in which all of the composers considered in this chapter had grown up. Reich has not only recognized but celebrated this fact, justifying his rejection of European modernist styles by remarking that whereas "Stockhausen, Berio and Boulez were portraying in very honest terms what it was like to pick up the pieces of a bombed-out continent after World War II," the American experience had been different, and demanded a different medium of expression. "For some Americans in 1948 or 1958 or 1968—in the real context of tail-fins, [the rock 'n' roll singer] Chuck Berry and millions of burgers sold—to pretend that instead we're really going to have the dark-brown angst of Vienna is a lie, a musical lie."[63]

In its seemingly indiscriminate, insatiable, world-devouring eclecticism, its live adaptation of musical techniques originating in the hardware-driven tape studio, and its tendency toward a kind of factory standardization ("mass-production" of repeated modules, equal pulses, terraced dynamics with sometimes only one terrace), minimalism exemplified—and was the (only?) honest product of—the commodification, objectification, and exteriorization of the affluent postwar American consumer society, hailed by many as the economic salvation of the world and decried by just as many as the ultimate dehumanization of humanity.

And as the values of American society spread, so did its musical embodiment. Minimalism has unquestionably been the most influential, worldwide, of any musical movement born since the Second World War. It is the first (and so far the only) literate musical style born in the New World to have exerted a decisive influence on the Old. It is the musical incarnation of "the American century." No wonder it has been controversial. The seemingly paradoxical fact, moreover, that many who have succumbed to its influence have been consciously opposed to "Americanization" (whether defined as materialism, as "economic imperialism," or as "globalization") can be interpreted either as another proof that musical technique as such is politically and culturally neutral, or as another proof that practice reveals a truth that theory denies in vain—a fancy way of saying that actions speak louder than words.

Consider the Dutch composer Louis Andriessen (b. 1939). Like most of his contemporaries, he went through a serial period at school, and then a "sixties" phase in which he took inspiration from Cage. His New Left sympathies eventually caused him to mistrust the elitism of the avant-garde, but to regard the Soviet model of musical populism as equally tainted. What was left was minimalism, a style that has been embraced as "democratic" by many Europeans—and particularly, it seems, in the Low Countries, where in 1980 the Belgian composer Wim Mertens published the first book anywhere on the subject (*Amerikaanse repetitieve muziek*, issued three years later in English translation), and where in the same year Philip Glass's second opera, *Satyagraha*, commissioned by the city of Rotterdam, had its world premiere. (The opera, far more conventional in conception and in musical style than *Einstein on the Beach*, concerned the life and influence of Mahatma Gandhi; the title is Sanskrit for "truth-force.") Like Reich and Glass, Andriessen founded his own performing ensemble, De Volharding (Perseverance), composed mainly of musicians with jazz backgrounds. The reasons he

gave for doing so were more overtly political than those offered by his predecessors. Where Reich and Glass spoke of making their own performance opportunities rather than waiting for mainstream recognition that might never come, Andriessen declared that "orchestras are only important for the capitalists and the record companies," while the people demanded a music that "brought highbrow and lowbrow together."[64] The first model for such a music was Riley's *In C*, which Andriessen first heard in 1971. Quickly, however, his attention turned to Reich, whose music he admired above all for its inclusivity: "The music was open to many different kinds of influences from all over the world," he told an interviewer, "and I recognized very many open doors for the future"[65] at a time when modernism seemed to be at an academic dead end.

For De Volharding and its more rock-oriented successor band, Hoketus, Andriessen wrote a series of cantatas in which the pulsing minimalist style was applied to texts purporting to espouse political activism. One of them, *De Staat* ("The State"), composed between 1972 and 1976, is a raucously repetitive score, quite Glassian at times in its additive processes. It employs women's voices, violas, oboes, horns, trumpets, and trombones, all in groups of four, plus a pair of electric guitars, a bass guitar, two pianos, and two harps to accompany—or rather, confront—the famous passages from Plato's *Republic* that deal with musical ethos, the power of music to influence character and affect behavior, and the necessity for political censorship and prescription. The exuberant music and the repressive text seem to be at odds until one looks more closely at the words and realizes that Andriessen's bellicose sonorities do in fact conform to Plato's prescription for a music that will inspire warriors. Is he for censorship, then, or against it? The composer makes the most of the ambiguity, as if to dramatize his own ambivalence toward the place of music in contemporary society. On the one hand, he has written, "everybody sees the absurdity of Plato's statement that the Mixolydian mode should be banned because of its damaging effect on the development of character, ... something similar to the 'demoralizing nature' of the Rolling Stones' concerts." But on the other, "perhaps I regret the fact that Plato was wrong: if only it were true that musical innovation represented a danger to the State!"[66]

Andriessen described his cantata frankly as "a contribution to the discussion about the place of music in politics." In notes accompanying its first recording, he outlined a theory of musical sociology:

> To keep the issues straight it is necessary to differentiate between three aspects of the social phenomenon called music: 1. its conception (devising and planning by the composer), 2. its production (performance) and 3. its consumption. Production and consumption are by definition if not political then at least social. The situation is more intricate when it comes to the actual composing. Many composers feel that the act of composing is "suprasocial." I don't agree. How you arrange your musical material, what you do with it, the techniques you use, the instruments you score for, all of this is determined to a large extent by your own social circumstances, your education, environment and listening experience, and the availability—or non-availability—of symphony orchestras and government grants. The only point on which I agree with the liberal idealists is that abstract musical material—pitch, duration and rhythm—is suprasocial: it is part of nature. There is no such thing as a fascist dominant seventh. The moment the musical material is ordered, however, it becomes culture and, as such, a given social fact.[67]

It was presumably this last factor, the political implications of musical ordering (i.e., style), that impelled Andriessen to fashion his minimalist structures out of harmonies so much more dissonant than those used by his American counterparts. (See Ex. 8-10, which shows the end of the repressive Platonic dialogue and the orgy of orchestral self-congratulation that follows it.) According to the age-old European modernist conceit, it is dissonance that creates a political edge—an edge of resistance. The same dissonance, however, has always most dependably alienated the very audience which politically activist or populist composers claim to address. And, following another well-established catch-22, Andriessen's efforts to maintain a maverick position have been frustrated by official recognition.

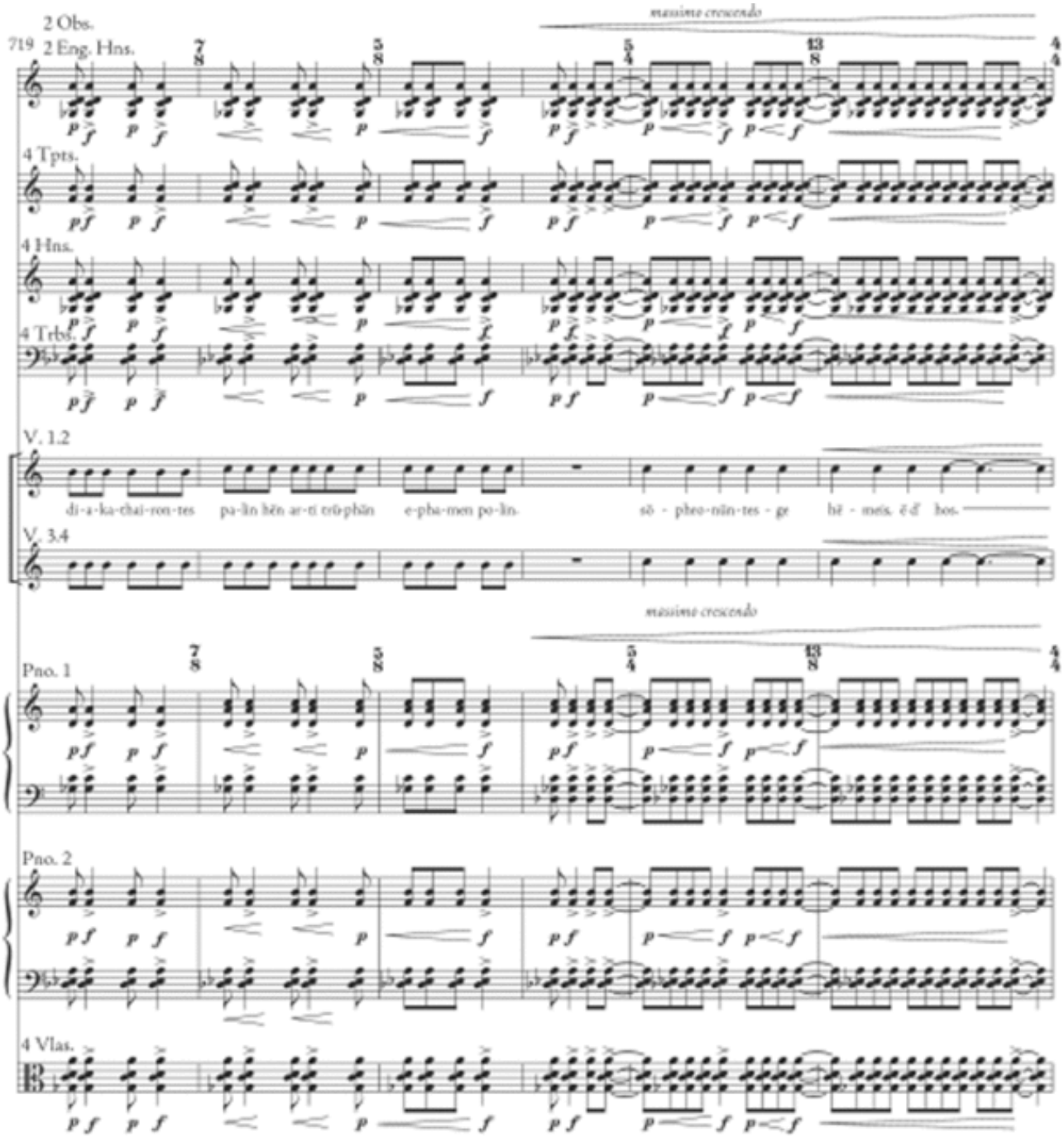
He has occupied a prominent teaching post at the government-supported Hague Conservatory since even before

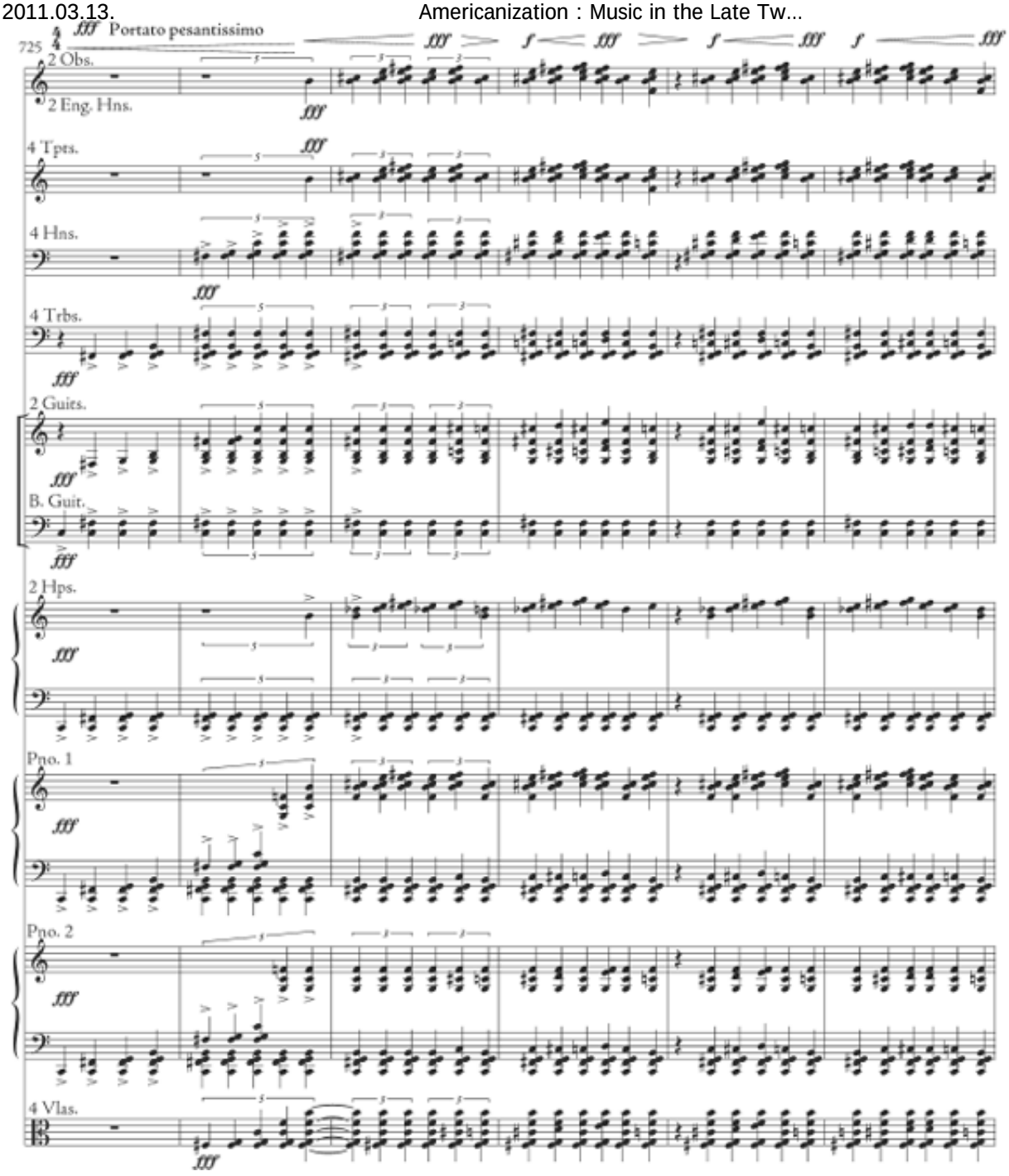
De Staat. The supposedly subversive cantata was awarded two prestigious prizes in 1977, including one from the Dutch government; and its first recording was issued by the Composers' Voice label, a noncommercial enterprise underwritten by the same government that has awarded the composer prizes and pays his salary. The indulgent treatment Andriessen has received (and accepted) from the state his music ostensibly challenges has cast his musicopolitical agenda in an equivocal light: is it genuine activism, or is it just another show of radical chic?

It is a dilemma from which escape is virtually impossible. In a later cantata, *De Stijl* (1985), scored for an ensemble of amplified winds, electric keyboards and guitars, and crashing "heavy metal" percussion (what Andriessen, echoing Reich, calls "the terrifying twenty-first-century orchestra"[68]), the composer paid far more explicit tribute to the "countercultural" sources of his inspiration in an effort to obliterate once and for all the social barriers between styles. "I think it's very good to do that," he says:

> I would again use the word democratic, the desire to break down those borders. I think it's almost a duty, and not only for composers. I hope that the future will bring us a better world in which the difference between high and low, and rich and poor, is smaller than it is now.[69]

Andriessen has also made a point of preferring African-American to Anglo-American pop as a stylistic model, and he has wholeheartedly embraced disco in defiance of its low critical standing. And yet *De Stijl*, which has since been incorporated into a huge four-act opera directed by Robert Wilson (*De Materie* or "Matter," 1989), calls for resources that put it out of reach to all but the most elite performance venues. It has so far been performed only for "high" (that is, according to the composer's equation, rich as well as white) audiences, and appreciated mainly by professionals.


719
2 Obs.
2 Eng. Hns.
massimo crescendo
4 Tpts.
4 Hns.
4 Trbs.
V. 1.2
di-a-ka-thai-ron-tes pa-lin hēn ar-ti trō-phōn e-pha-men po-lin. sō - pheo-nīn-tes - ge hē - meis. ē-d' hos.
V. 3.4
massimo crescendo
Pno. 1
Pno. 2
4 Vlas.



ex. 8-10 Louis Andriessen, *De Staat*, mm. 719–734

Andriessen's greatest contribution, perhaps, has been as a teacher. Alone among the major minimalists, he occupies a distinguished academic chair, and he has been a magnet to composers from many countries, including England and the United States, where the musico-social boundaries have been more fluid than on the European continent, but where minimalism has yet to make comparable academic inroads. His American disciples have gone on to form groups of their own. Their names—Bang on a Can and Common Sense Composers Collective, to mention two—are political statements in themselves, showing a determination to keep the elusive dream of "sociostylistic" integration on minimalist principles alive into the twenty-first century.

Notes:

(63) Edward Strickland, *American Composers: Dialogues on Contemporary Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 46.

(64) Quoted in Schwarz, *Minimalists*, p. 205.

(65) *Ibid*., p. 206.

(66) Liner note to Composers' Voice CV 7702/c (Amsterdam: Donemus, 1978).

(67) *Ibid*.

(68) Quoted in Schwarz, *Minimalists*, p. 207.

(69) *Ibid*., p. 208

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online

Arvo Pärt

Minimalism

Henryk Gorecki

New Age

John Tavener

CLOSING THE SPIRITUAL CIRCLE

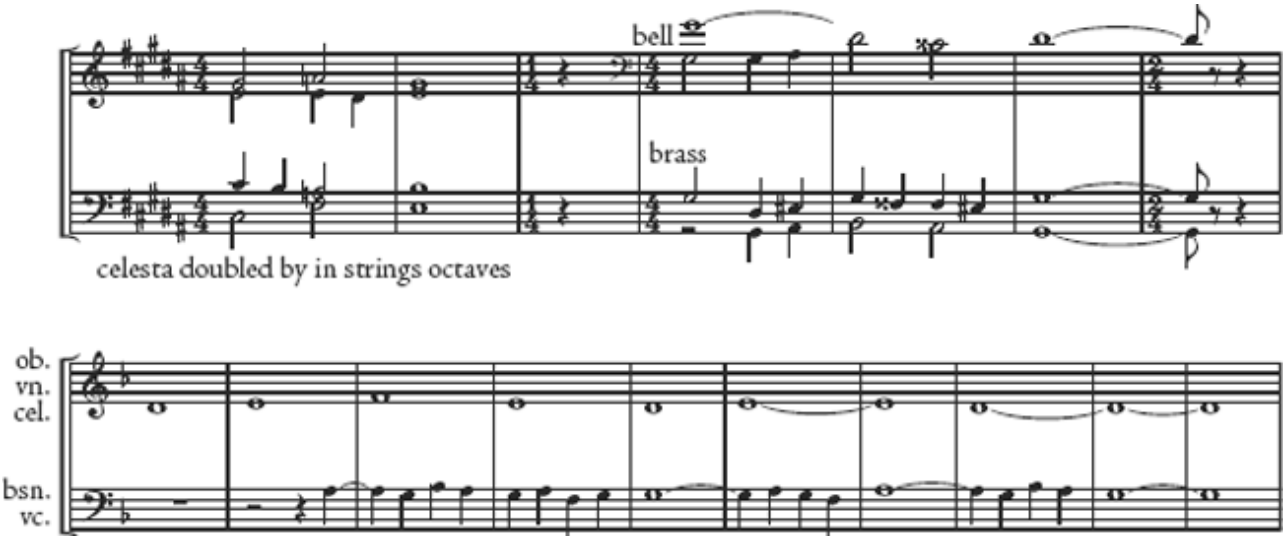
Chapter: CHAPTER 8 A Harmonious Avant-Garde?
Source: MUSIC IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The ethical sensibility that informs Andriessen's intentions (as, to a more or less declared extent, it does the music of all the minimalists) is the link between his openly declared political activism and its seeming antithesis, exemplified by a group of composers who use minimalist techniques to evoke or induce a state of passive spiritual contemplation. The pioneer figure here is the Estonian-born Arvo Pärt (b. 1935), whose turn toward spirituality was especially self-conscious, since it took place in a country that, as a consequence of the 1939 Hitler-Stalin pact, had been incorporated into the militantly atheistic Soviet Union. (Estonia regained its independence in 1991, but by then Pärt had been living abroad for more than a decade.)

Educated to compose first in a neo-Romantic, then a neoclassic manner, Pärt (like a number of other young Soviet composers) rebelled against Socialist Realism in the 1960s by embracing serialism, its cold-war antithesis. Not finding in serialism a congenial alternative, he experienced a prolonged creative block which he managed to overcome thanks in part to his discovery of medieval and Renaissance music, to which he was exposed as a result of the belated spread into the Soviet Union of the “early music” movement, long established in the concert life of Western Europe and America.

Early music performers revived ancient repertoires, and also experimented with “period” performance of the more standard eighteenth- and nineteenth-century repertoire. Many impulses fed the movement. Besides the historicist emphasis on “authenticity” that the movement advertised and actively propagated, there was always a seemingly contradictory tendency to look for novelty—as well as refuge—in the more or less distant past. For Soviet musicians of the 1960s, early music offered a back door to religious experience, since so many ancient musical repertoires were associated with ancient rituals and liturgies. One could treat religious themes in code (or, to use the Russian term, in “Aesopian” language) by making stylistic reference to those repertoires.

Pärt's Symphony no. 3 (1971), the only composition he finished between 1968 and 1976, is full of echoes of the medieval music he was discovering together with his friend Andres Mustonen, who the next year founded Hortus Musicus, Estonia's first professional early-music ensemble. Ex. 8-11 shows a couple of themes from that work. The first embodies a fourteenth-century double-leading-tone cadence decorated with a “Landini sixth.” The other is a plainchant-derived melody treated as a cantus firmus against a pure diatonic “discant.”

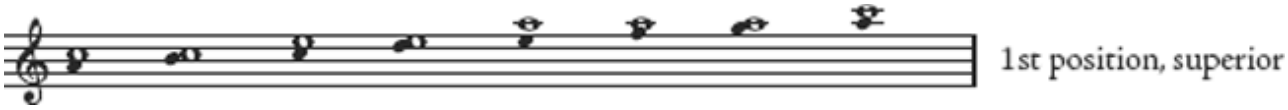


ex. 8-11 Two themes from Arvo Pärt, Symphony no. 3: "Doubled leading-tone" cadence, and chantlike cantus firmus

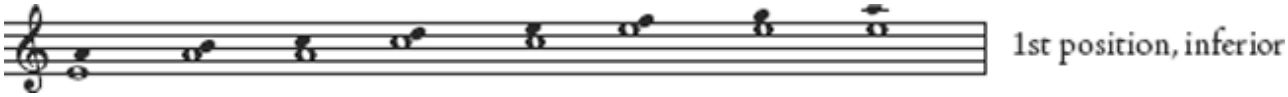
By 1976, Pärt had managed to excrete obvious archaisms like these from his style while retaining the pure diatonic idiom of Ex. 8-11b. Thus he had found an independent route to the austerely reduced tonal vocabulary then being adopted, unbeknownst to him, by Reich and Glass. His next step, paradoxically, was one that could have occurred only to a composer brought up with the creative precepts of socialist realism and its principle of *obraznost'* or "imagery," which encouraged composers to convey specific ideas in music by imitating and adapting the sounds (including the music) of surrounding reality. Applying this highly materialistic stylistic principle to the task of conveying impressions of spirituality and sublimity, Pärt fastened on the sound of bells—a sonic component of religious rituals in many traditions, but particularly in that of the Russian Orthodox Church. The evocation of bell sounds became for Pärt the sonic equivalent of an icon: a holy image that embodied mystical belief in material form.

Pärt's bell-imagery ranged from obvious onomatopoeia—bell imitations, often achieved by using a prepared piano (already freighted with "countercultural" associations courtesy of John Cage)—to a unique harmonic idiom that Pärt worked out during the early 1970s and that he called his "tintinnabular" style. A pitch produced by a tuned bell is an exceptionally rich composite of overtones, in which the fundamental can be all but overwhelmed by dissonant partials. To achieve a comparable sonic aura, Pärt accompanied the notes of a diatonic melody with "overtones" produced by the notes of an arpeggiated tonic triad in some fixed relationship to the melody notes. The English early-music singer and choral director Paul Hillier, who has become Pärt's most devoted exponent both in performance and in print, has attempted a theoretical elucidation, based in part on extensive interviews with the composer, of Pärt's tintinnabular style.[70] The analytical examples that follow are his.

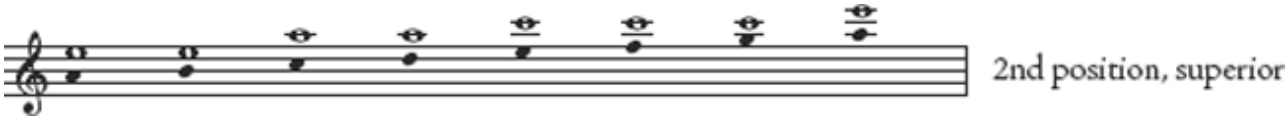
In each of them, an ascending A-minor scale is harmonized according to a particular application of the method. In Ex. 8-12a, the scale or melody-voice (M-voice) is harmonized by a "tintinnabuli"-voice (T-voice) that consists of the next higher pitch in the A-minor triad. Hillier calls this "1st position, superior." Ex. 8-12b shows the "1st position, inferior," in which the notes of the M-voice are accompanied by the next lower pitch of the triad. Exx. 8-12c and 8-12d show the "2nd position," in which the T-voice pitch is the next but one in the triad. In Ex. 8-12e, the T-voice from Ex. 8-12b is transposed up an octave, so that all the intervals are inverted: fourths become fifths, thirds become sixths, seconds become sevenths. Such transpositions can be applied to any of the other positions. Finally, Ex. 8-12f shows the M-voice accompanied by an "alternating" T-voice in which the 1st position superior alternates with the 1st position inferior. This technique, too, can be applied to any position.



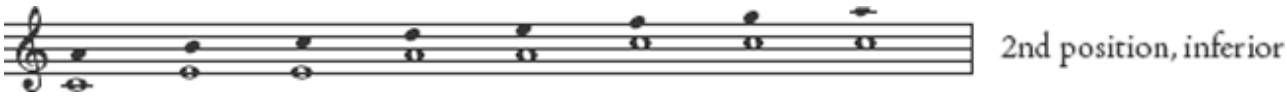
ex. 8-12a Arvo Pärt, "tintinnabulation," 1st position, superior



ex. 8-12b Arvo Pärt, "tintinnabulation," 1st position, inferior

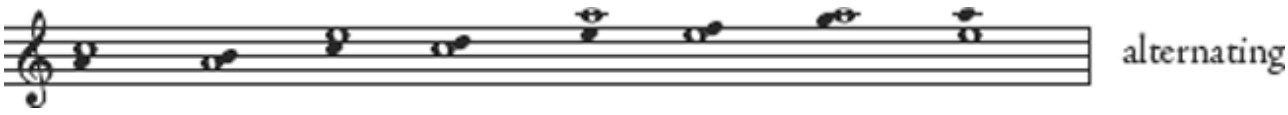


ex. 8-12c Arvo Pärt, "tintinnabulation," 2nd position, superior



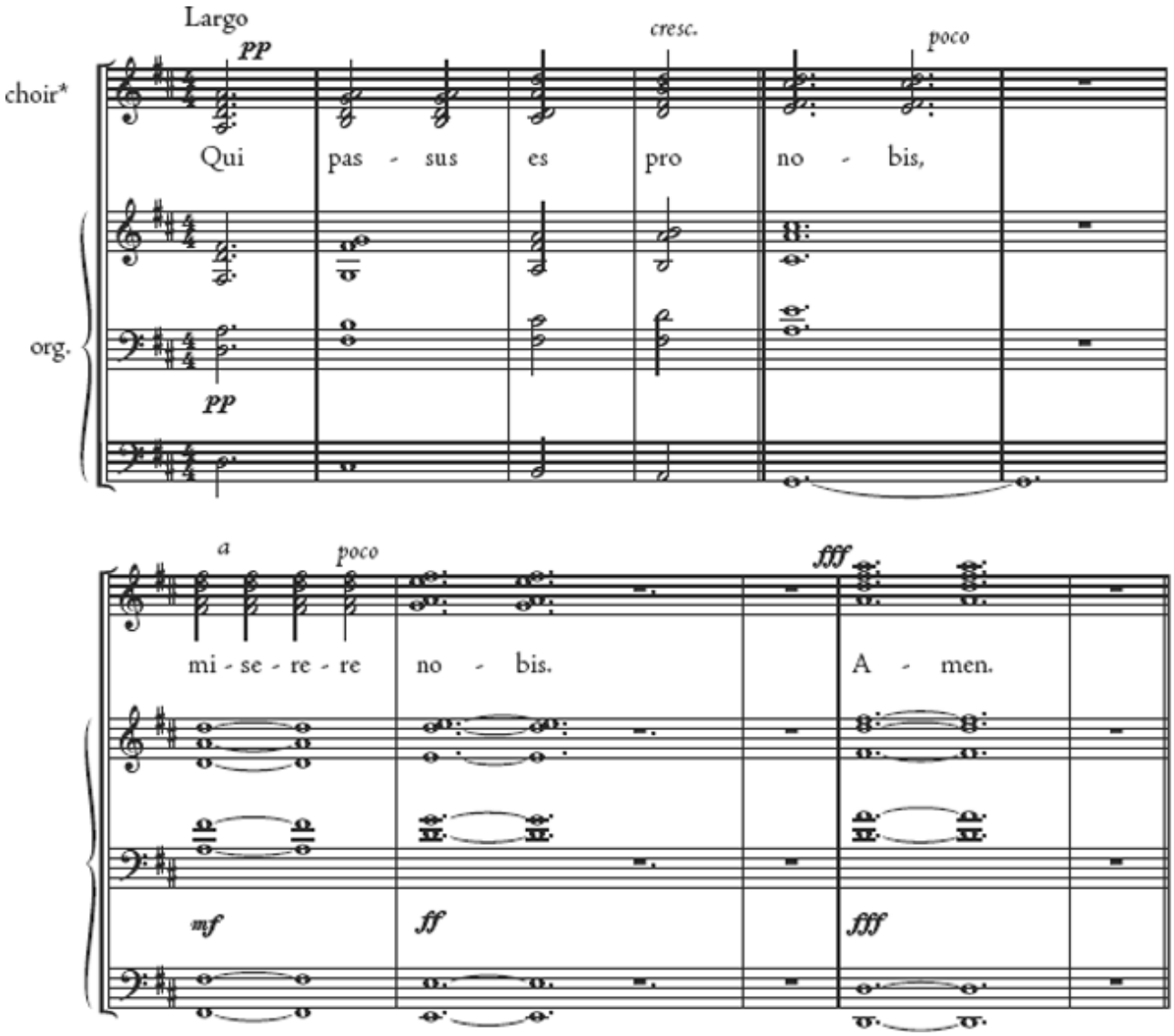
ex. 8-12d Arvo Pärt, "tintinnabulation," 2nd position, inferior

ex. 8-12e Arvo Pärt, "tintinnabulation," T-voice from Ex. 67-12b transposed up an octave



ex. 8-12f Arvo Pärt, "tintinnabulation," M-voice accompanied by "alternating" T-voice

The product is a sort of oblique organum, comparable (but far from identical) to the kinds of chant-harmonizations that were practiced as early as the ninth century. When two or more M-voices are treated in counterpoint, each will carry a T-voice (or, alternatively, a single T-voice can be shadowed both above and below by M-voices moving in parallel). The point is that an M-voice plus a T-voice is conceived as an indissoluble unit. In compound textures, the result is a modern harmonic idiom, not by any means free of dissonance (unless the second and seventh are conceived, as Pärt's quasi-Pythagorean usage suggests, as consonances). Its relationship to medieval harmonic idioms is demonstrable, but it is not in itself a historical pastiche.



ex. 8-13 Arvo Pärt, St. John Passion, *Conclusio*

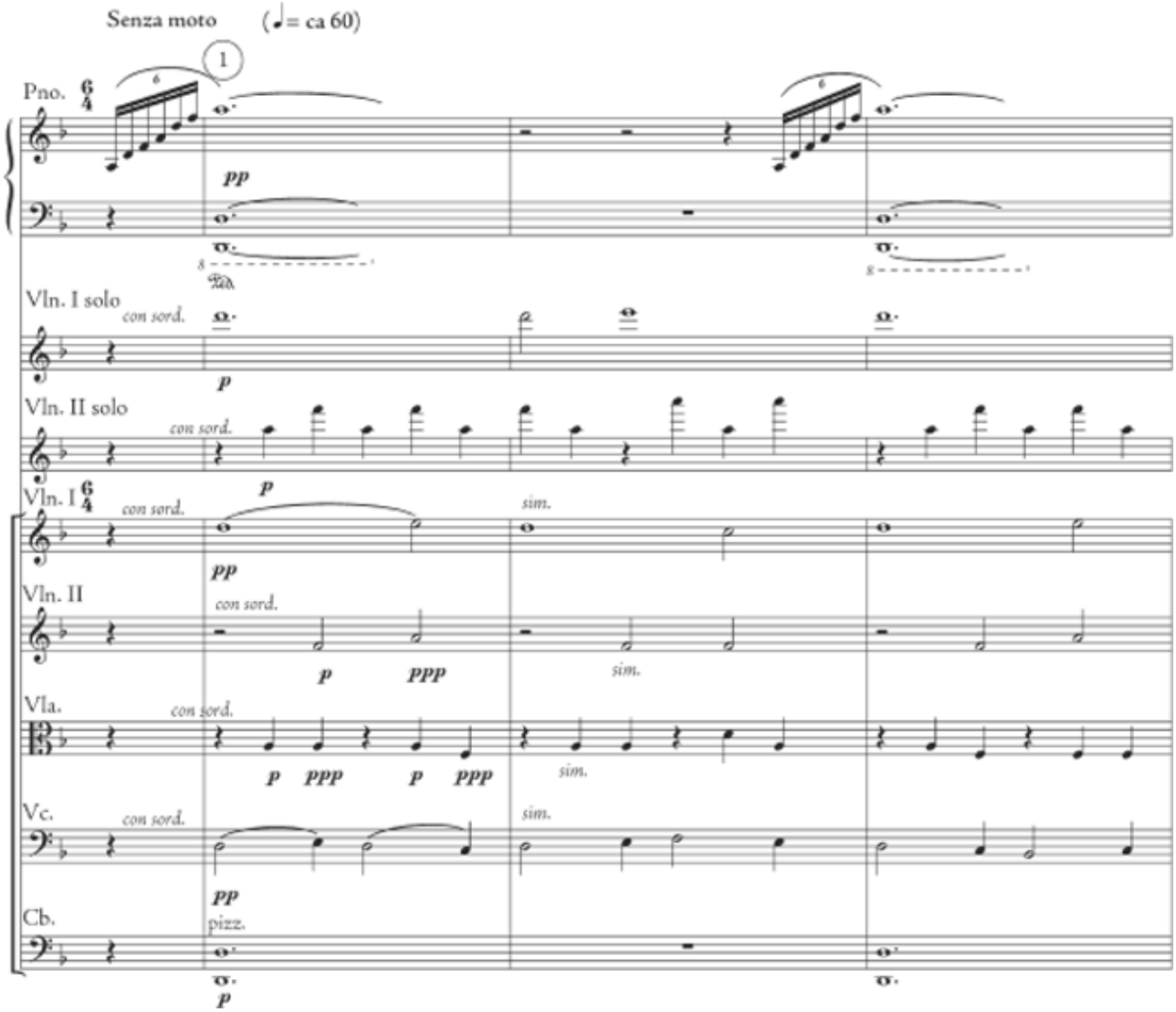
Since 1982, Pärt has employed the tintinnabular style almost exclusively in vocal works with Latin sacred texts. They are concert works rather than works meant for actual liturgical use; but their purpose, as the composer envisions it, is sacred. The tintinnabular style is frankly meant, by virtue of the constant presence (thanks to the T-voice) of the major or minor triad, as a manifestation of the eternal presence of God. “Such a sacralizing view of music,” Hillier comments, “is neither unique nor eccentric; it has correspondences thoughout music history, and is found in abundance in non-Western musics—moreover, without the self-consciousness forced upon it by a secular and materialistic society.”[71] A good practical example is the conclusion of Pärt's setting of the St. John Passion (1982), composed shortly after the composer's emigration from the Soviet Union. Each four-note chord sung by the chorus consists of two M-voices (alto and bass) moving in parallel sixths, accompanied by T-voices in 1st position, superior (Ex. 8-13).

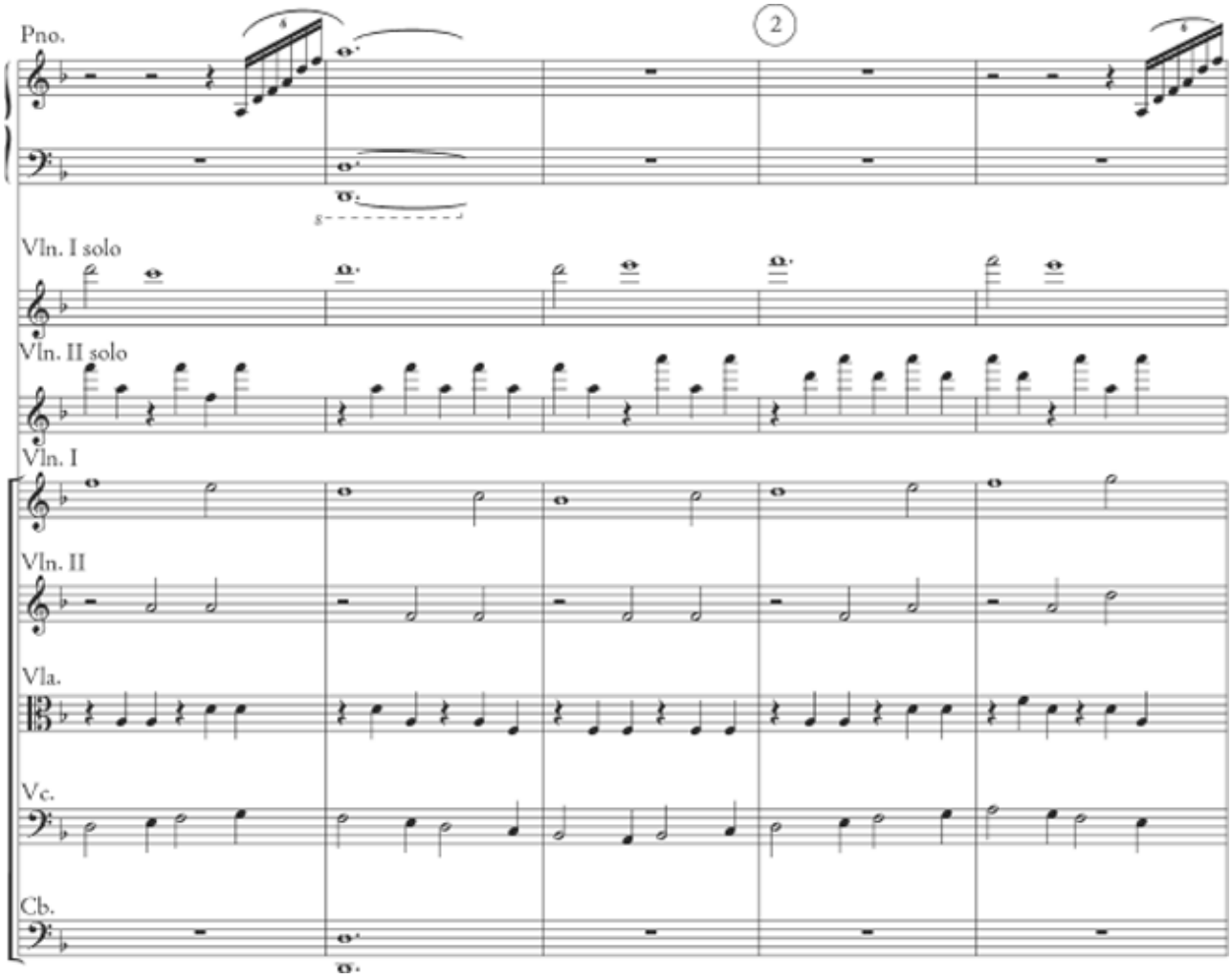
Pärt's best-known works are a trio of instrumental compositions written in Estonia in 1977. *Fratres* (“Brethren”), a sort of wordless chorale in irregular meter accompanied by a steady drone fifth and interspersed with a rhythmic percussion, exists in numerous arrangements: for violin and piano, for string quartet, for twelve cellos, for large chamber ensemble, and so on. *Cantus in memoriam Benjamin Britten*, for string orchestra and bell, is strikingly “minimal” in conception. It consists of a repetitively descending A-minor scale that gradually

unfolds by the progressive addition of a note to each repetition (A, A-G, A-G-F, A-G-F-E, A-G-F-E-D, etc.). The scale is treated as a mensuration canon for five composite voices (each an M plus a T) entering one by one, each in a lower octave than the last, and moving at a rate twice as slow. When the process has played itself out, the last and slowest voice completing the scale, the piece ends.

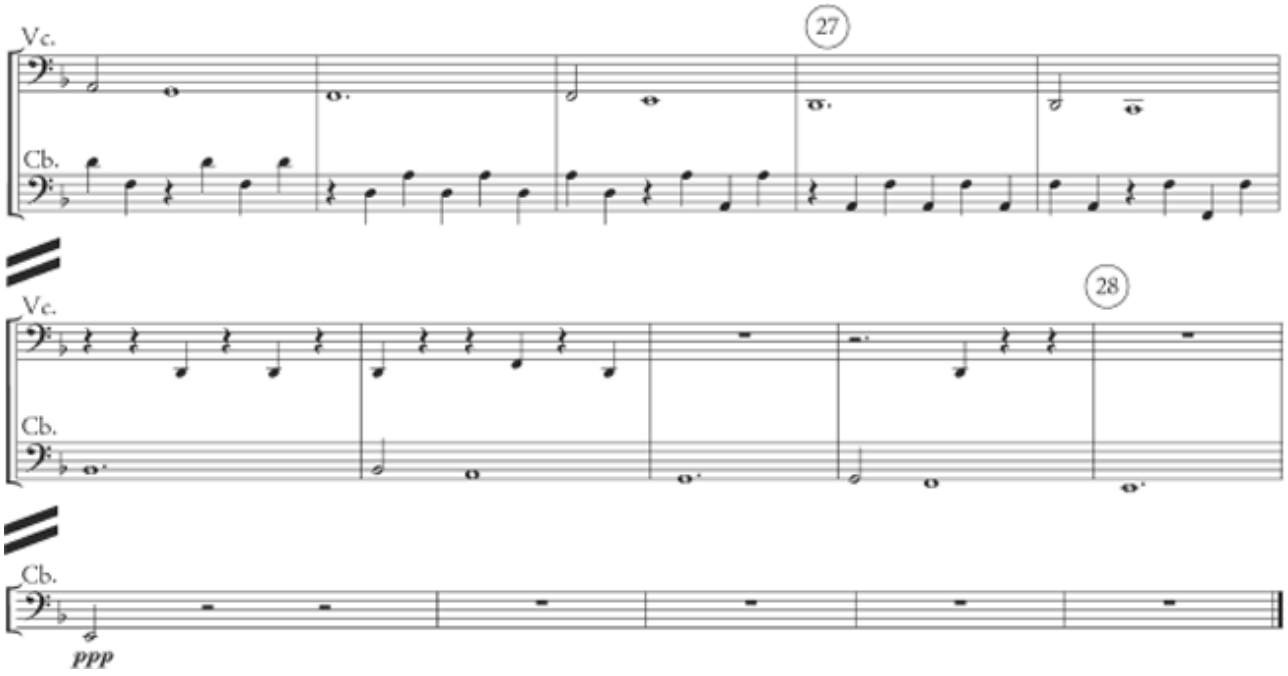
The most extended work of Pärt's early tintinnabular period, and perhaps the most representative, is a two-movement concerto grosso for two violins, string orchestra, and prepared piano, emblematically titled *Tabula rasa* ("clean slate") to celebrate the composer's fresh start. The first movement, called *Ludus* ("game," or "play") is marked "con moto," and consists of progressively lengthening and loudening bouts of fiddling activity. The second movement is called *Silentium* ("silence") and is marked "Senza moto." Its beats, at M.M.= 60, conform to the ticking seconds on the clock. Its musical substance consists of a three-part lengthening mensuration canon for the cellos playing halves and quarters, the tutti first violins playing wholes and halves, and the solo violin playing breves and wholes. Ex. 8-14a shows the beginning.

The other string instruments, except the basses, are occupied with shadowing the canonic voices with tintinnabuli derived from the D-minor triad. The violas accompany the cellos at the second position above; the second violins of the tutti accompany the first at the second position below; and the second soloist surrounds the notes played by the first soloist with quarter-notes in alternating first position, the rests on each first-violin attack ensuring that each note of the solo line is accompanied by a tintinnabulation that reverses the order of the preceding one (first low-high, then high-low). Whenever the first soloist returns to the starting D, the prepared piano and the pizzicato basses reinforce it with an evocation of a tolling bell.





ex. 8-14a Arvo Pärt, *Tabula rasa*, II (*Silentium*), mm. 1–8



ex. 8-14b Arvo Pärt, *Tabula rasa*, II (*Silentium*), end

ex. 8-14b Arvo Pärt, *Tabula rasa*, II (*Silentium*), end

The main canonic theme describes a series of widening gyres, making the soloist's returns to the tonic pitch increasingly infrequent (hence increasingly significant in effect). The final arc goes out of the cello range, and the double basses join in to complete the last phrase (Ex. 8-14b). They stop one note short of completion, as they must (E being their lowest note). But that failure to complete dramatically emphasizes the ensuing silence, to which the whole movement is cast retrospectively as an elaborate prelude. Wholly without chromaticism, infused with a steady pulse and a single omnipresent harmony, and played at a single subdued dynamic, the movement is a startlingly successful evocation of stillness, very easily (some would say all too easily) read as religious quietism.

The relationship between radical reduction of means and wholeness of spirit is an ancient religious truth (the basis, to begin with, of monasticism), and also the basis of twentieth-century neoprimitivism. Pärt has knowingly drawn on both of these traditions in conversation with Hillier, describing his gradual arrival at tintinnabular music as a spiritual quest:

> In my dark hours, I have the certain feeling that everything outside this one thing has no meaning. The complex and many-faceted only confuses me, and I must search for unity. What is it, this one thing, and how do I find my way to it? Traces of this perfect thing appear in many guises—and everything that is unimportant falls away. Tintinnabulation is like this.... I work with very few elements—with one voice, with two voices. I build with the most primitive materials—with the triad, with one specific tonality.[72]

It is noteworthy that every one of the composers associated with radically reductive styles in the 1960s and 1970s (save only Andriessen, who has committed himself to another sort of faith) has found his way to religious belief, and has regarded his musical and spiritual quests as dual manifestations of a single impulse. Young, Riley, and Glass have all embraced some version of Asian religion: Young and Riley practice Yogic meditation and Glass has been a devotee of Tibetan Buddhism since the mid-sixties. Reich, brought up in an agnostic household, found his way back to orthodox Judaism in the 1970s.

In addition to Pärt, several other European composers have associated reductive musical styles with resurgent Christianity in the 1970s. Henryk Gorecki (b. 1933), who first achieved recognition as a member of the Polish "sonorist" avant-garde alongside Penderecki, reembraced the Roman Catholic faith (partly, as with Pärt, as an act of political resistance) and also reembraced a simple, consonant style of writing that might otherwise have been taken as evidence of cooperation with the Soviet-dominated cultural politics of his homeland—where he was in fact, as director of the Conservatory in the industrial city of Katowice, a musical politician; he resigned the post in 1979, after composing a number of Latin choral pieces in honor of the newly elected Polish pope, John Paul II.

One of the early fruits of his new style, the Third Symphony (1976), consists of three movements, each a slow threnody, or song of lamentation, for soprano soloist and orchestra. The second movement, a setting of a prayer scrawled on the wall of a cell at one of the Gestapo's detention headquarters in Nazi-occupied Poland, and the third, a setting of a folk song, were the kind of composition expected of a Polish adherent of socialist realism. The first movement, however, longer than the other two combined, was a setting of the Lament of the Holy Cross, a fifteenth-century Polish prayer.

Strictly diatonic and highly repetitive, Gorecki's setting was indeed akin to the music then being composed by Pärt and the western minimalists. The composer did not know their work at the time, nor did anyone seem to draw the connection in the years that followed. But in 1991, fifteen years after its first performance in Katowice, a New York record executive heard a Polish recording of the work and realized its potential for capitalizing on the popularity that Pärt's "holy minimalism" was generating, partly on the coattails of the "New Age" style of soothing popular music, marketed to people experimenting with relaxation techniques like the "transcendental

meditation" popularized by the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, who had become famous as the Beatles' guru in the late 1960s.

The new recording, issued in 1992 and heavily plugged on radio stations normally devoted to pop music, sold over a million copies within three years' time, making it one of the best-selling classical albums ever, and Gorecki was assimilated retroactively to the ranks of the "holy" or "mystical" minimalists—a marketing term eagerly appropriated in derision by modernist skeptics, wary as ever of the affinities between minimalism and pop, and eager to write the new phenomenon off as a fad manipulated by the record industry.

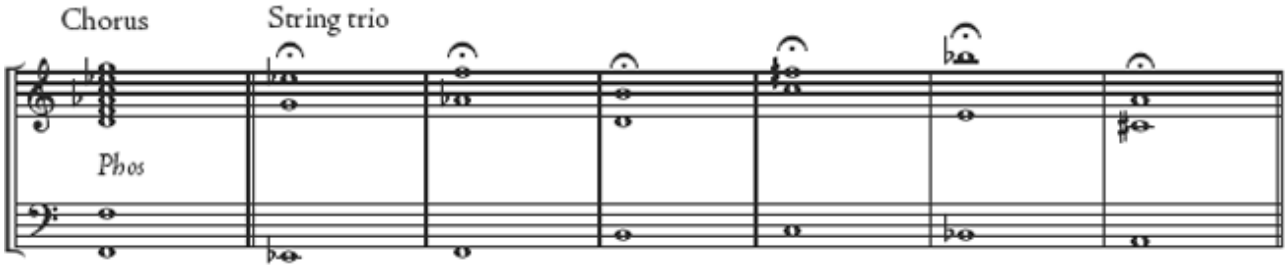
But it has continued to make inroads among serious professionals as well as consumers. The English composer John Tavener (b. 1944) is one. He had a conventional academic education in music, which left him a fluent serialist with expert electronic studio skills. *The Whale*, a dramatic cantata on the biblical story of Jonah, scored such a sensational success after its premiere in 1968 that it was noticed by John Lennon and his wife Yoko Ono and recorded in 1970 by Apple Records, the company formed by the Beatles to issue their own work. For a while, Tavener was the poster boy for the much-touted convergence of the classical and pop avant-gardes.

Another work issued on the Apple label, *Nomine Jesu* (1970), was the first of Tavener's to show a minimalist tendency. The name of Jesus is chorally intoned throughout on a single harmony (a half-diminished seventh, a.k.a. the "Tristan chord") as a background for a collage of singing and speaking solo voices and atonal passages for a pair of alto flutes, harpsichord, and organ. An increasingly reductive tendency in his musical style accompanied an increasing preoccupation with mystical subject matter until, having previously inclined from the Presbyterian church of his upbringing toward Roman Catholicism, Tavener formally converted in 1977 to the Russian Orthodox faith—an unusual choice for an Englishman, but already associated, through Pärt, with austerely religious minimalism. (Tavener was actually introduced to Eastern Orthodox Christianity by his first wife, a Greek ballerina.)

Tavener has echoed Pärt's devotion to the concept of a musical artifact that can function as a "sounding icon." That meant ridding his work of any sense of development: "Any idea that is worked out in a human way does not exist,"[73] he tells interviewers. Above all, there must be no sense of structural dualism or opposition (hence no "functional harmony"). Instead there should be a sense of "habitation," a listening environment evoked by sounds, particularly drones, that do not change over the course of the work, as in performances of Byzantine chant, which is always accompanied by a steady bass drone on the final of the mode known as the *ison*. Like Pärt, Tavener uses bells (in his case English handbells) to evoke an appropriately iconic atmosphere, and composes in a manner inspired by Byzantine hymnody, which uses a system of eight modes, distinguished from one another not by scales or finals but by a repertoire of characteristic melodic turns.

Tavener's *Ikon of Light* (1983), a setting of a tenth-century Greek hymn for chorus and string trio, can furnish a useful test of the composer's unusually explicit claim (one that is more or less implicit in the work of other minimalists as well) that his work is founded on a rejection of the "Western tradition" in which he was brought up, and which in the name of humanism had driven the spiritual out of art. "The whole western idea of man-made techniques, like sonata form, fugue, canon," he insists, has been rendered "useless" by the catastrophic history of the twentieth century: "I don't see what purpose it has in the world today."[74] Instead, his hymn celebrates what is eternal and indestructible.

The opening section, the text of which consists entirely of repetitions of the single word *phos* (light), projects a "sonic icon" in a manner quite similar to Pärt's. It pits the chorus, which sings a single unchanging chord, against the strings, which play a series of six dyads (thirds and tritones) that together exhaust the twelve pitch-classes of the chromatic scale (Ex. 8-15). The juxtaposition of constancy and flux is a fairly transparent metaphor for the opposition of the human and divine, while the eventually (and intentionally) predictable sequence of events turns the musical unfolding into a ritual game (*ludus*).



ex. 8-15 John Tavener, *Ikon of Light,* opening section in analytical reduction

Constructing a four-minute span of music out of twelve chords, six of them identical, takes reduction to a La Monte Youngian extreme, an impression made all the more vivid by the coincidental use of a string trio drawing its sonorities out to extraordinary lengths (to represent, as Tavener puts it, "the soul yearning for God"). The rest of the setting proceeds as a palindrome. Its seven sections are disposed symmetrically around the fourth and longest one, at the center. This central section is itself a palindrome in which the last part is a rough retrograde inversion of the first (thus reversed in two dimensions). Palindromes achieve completion by returning to their starting point: here to here, rather than here to there. For "Western" teleology they substitute a circular temporality, and have been a metaphor of timelessness in music at least since the fourteenth century, as Tavener has recognized by titling a choral work of 1972, *Ma fin est mon commencement* ("My end is my beginning"), after the famous palindromic rondeau by Guillaume de Machaut.

But of course Machaut, palindromes and all, is just as much a part of the "Western" tradition as sonata form, fugue, and canon. Tavener's acceptance (and exploitation) of the tempered chromatic scale for purposes of metaphor and imagery also puts him within, rather than outside, the body of "man-made techniques" that he regards with suspicion. Perhaps, then, the minimalist impulse, despite its compelling affinity for everything remote in time and place, and despite its angry negation of some conspicuous features of the immediate musical past, is (like so many other avant-gardes) an outgrowth of tendencies inherent within the capacious tradition it has claimed, one-sidedly, to reject.

Notes:

(70) Paul Hillier, *Arvo Pärt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

(71) Hillier, *Arvo Pärt*, p. 92.

(72) Liner note to ECM Records New Series 1275 (1984).

(73) "John Tavener and Paul Goodwin talk to Martin Anderson," *Fanfare* XXII, no. 4 (March/April 1999): 28.

(74) *Ibid*.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

CHAPTER 9 After Everything

Postmodernism: Rochberg, Crumb, Lerdahl, Schnittke

Chapter: CHAPTER 9 After Everything
Source: MUSIC IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

POST MODERNISM?

> *The Modern Age, which sounds as if it would last forever, is fast becoming a thing of the past.*[1]
>
> —Charles Jencks, *What is Post-Modernism?* (1986)
>
> *...we realize that only the present is really real... because it is all we have ... but in the end it, too, is shadow and dream ... and disappears ... into what?*[2]
>
> —George Rochberg, epigraph to act 3 of *Music for the Magic Theater* (1965)
>
> *Where does all this lead us? Quite appropriately, nowhere.*[3]
>
> —Leonard B. Meyer, "Future Tense: Music, Ideology, and Culture" (1994)
>
> *What it does do, I think, is threaten the mind-set of modernists who believe that the artist is a high priest who breaks laws and creates new ones that advance civilization.*[4]
>
> —Fred Lerdahl, "Composing and Listening: A Reply to Nattiez" (1994)

Because it was often relatively consonant in harmony and employed ordinary diatonic scales, minimalist music was frequently attacked as "conservative" by academic modernists, for whom the term was the deadliest of slurs. But the charge was unconvincing. The contexts in which familiar sounds appeared in minimalist music, and the uses to which they were put, were too obviously novel, and the effect the music produced was too obviously of the present. Besides, "progressive" music, against which minimalism was being implicitly measured in such a comparison, was following a technical and expressive agenda that had been set at least a quarter of a century, even half a century, before. It no longer seemed quite immune to the epithet it habitually hurled.

It was this very confusion (at least in rhetoric) between what was progressive and what was conservative, and an attendant loss of interest in making the distinction, that seemed to signal a fundamental ideological change in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Even if it could not be dismissed as conservative, the music of the minimalists did affront and threaten progressive musicians of the older generation in some fundamental way. And that way had to do with another, older, less overtly politicized sense of the word "progressive."

Describing the intended effect of his pattern-and-process compositions, and the sort of listening approach that it required, Philip Glass warned that he aimed for a musical experience that "neither memory nor anticipation," those most basic cognitive tools, "has a place in sustaining."[5] Here was the threat: as Leonard Meyer pointed out in the article from which this chapter's third epigraph was drawn, "if musical experience does not involve development or remembrance, expectancy or anticipation, then many of the ideas and values that until recently

informed the aesthetics of music become either untenable or irrelevant."[6]

Meyer called these threatened values "Romantic." But since (as Meyer himself liked to say) what we usually call modernism is really "late, late Romanticism,"[7] it was modernist values that were under threat of being supplanted. What do you call the ism that supplants modernism? Why, postmodernism, obviously (if you're in a hurry); and so a term was coined that gained considerable currency in the mid-to-late 1970s, and that by the middle of the 1980s had become a cliché. Like many terms coined in periods of uncertainty, it was a notorious catchall. Defining it is a notorious fool's errand. But it is an errand we have to at least try running.

The field in which the term was first applied, or in which it first cropped up, was architecture. That might have been expected, since architecture was the field in which the "modern" had (or seemed to have) the most stable definition, and it was also a field from which utilitarian concerns could never be entirely eliminated. Modern architecture was associated with abstraction, functionalism, streamlining, and economy. It sought to embody the universal values of an industrial age, and express them in the "pure," nonrepresentational terms of its media —glass, reinforced concrete, steel.

Postmodern architecture made a somewhat ironic peace with ornament, with representation, with pluralities of taste and, above all, with convention. Its motivation, frankly asserted by Charles Jencks, both a practitioner and a historian of the trend, was "the social failure of Modern architecture," its inadequacy to "communicate effectively with its ultimate users."[8] It did not make people feel at home. Used extensively in public housing projects, it amounted, in the eventual view of many disillusioned architects and disgusted urban planners, to an insult delivered by well-fed snobs who could afford comfort on their own terms to people forced to inhabit inhospitable buildings that gratified the builders' romantically "disinterested," purely "esthetic"—that is, dehumanized—tastes and their infatuation with science and technology, epitomized by Le Corbusier's definition of a house as a "machine for living."[9] But postmodern architecture, Jencks pointed out, was no simple rejection of the modern style. Rather than mere "revivalism" or "traditionalism," it was a compromise solution that tried to balance ideals and social realities by means of what Jencks called "double coding,"[10] a strategy of communicating on various levels at once. To put it oxymoronically (hence postmodernly), postmodern architecture was "essentially hybrid." The only exclusive "ism" postmodernism upheld, Jencks insisted with a twinkle, was pluralism.

Jencks's discussion raised familiar issues. We have encountered a similarly unhappy split between aesthetic and social values in modernist music, and have heard grumbling about its elitism and inhospitality. But the social issues can never be as acutely drawn in music as they can in architecture, since nobody is forced to live in a musical composition. A building can be, both literally and figuratively, a prison; and that is why architecture became the bellwether of the reaction against the oppressive effects of modernism and the oppressive values they were seen to embody. But while (to risk a pun) the musical situation was less concrete, there is ample evidence that musical postmodernism (or, more cautiously, the music associated by commentators with postmodernism) arose in comparable reaction against a perceived aesthetic oppression, and that the move led to a comparable outcome. A condition formerly considered necessary was eventually judged to be both unnecessary and undesirable, and was accordingly overthrown.

Among the Romantic (modernist) values Meyer saw threatened by the attitude that Philip Glass expressed was that of organicism, the belief that "all relationships in a work of art should be the result of a gradual growth," a "process of development ... governed by an inner necessity and an economy of means such that nothing in the work is either accidental or superfluous."[11] This ascetic ideal, reminiscent of the strict functionalism of much modern architecture, was what caused so many to reject the repetitiveness of minimalist music (and notice nothing else about it). It violated what Meyer calls the "almost religious reverence for the values of necessity, economy and unity."[12]

Whatever unity repetition conferred on a minimalist composition was more than outweighed by its sinful

superfluity. And because minimalist repetitions, unlike Wagnerian sequences, did not quicken desire in anticipation of a goal, they lacked “inner necessity”—or, in the more damning variant hurled abusively by offended modernists, they lacked “inner life.” In a word, although they were obviously processual, minimalist repetitions were not “progressive” in that older meaning of the word. They did not progress to a determinate end.

That lack of “progressiveness” or goal-oriented purposiveness implied an even greater threat to the values modernism had inherited from Romanticism. For, ever since the middle of the nineteenth century, the ideal of goal-oriented purposiveness provided Romantics and their modernist progeny with their theory of history as well, and all its attendant obligations. Historicism was an even more fundamental modernist drive than organicism. It was historicism—belief in what the postmodernist theorist Jean-François Lyotard called the “master narrative”[13] that defined values and imposed obligations—that convinced so many artists that the austerities of modernism were necessary whether one liked them or not.

But in the shadow of nuclear holocaust and threatened environmental disaster, even natural scientists—the very ones who first infected Romantic artists with ideas about organicism and historical determinism, the very ones whose values had been so aggressively appropriated by academic modernists—were abandoning their previously unquestioned faith in the desirability of continuing growth and innovation. The march of knowledge and technology was not a value in itself, some scientists began to argue, and the purportedly “objective” or value-free ideology that underwrote scientific advances (and, for modernists, artistic ones as well) was not blameless when it produced harmful or inhumane effects. Progress, it was increasingly recognized, came at a price. It did not lead inevitably to utopia; it could just as well lead to disaster. In any case, it could no longer proceed without a moral reckoning.

Taking these “dystopian” rumblings into account as early as 1961, the political scientist Robert Heilbroner wrote presciently about the loss of what he called “historic optimism—that is, a belief in the imminence and immanence of change for the better in man's estate, the advent of which can be left to the quiet work of history.”[14] By 1994 it was easy enough for Leonard Meyer to connect the dots and conclude in retrospect that “the end of historic optimism marks the beginning of postmodernism.”[15] This suggests a connection between postmodernism and the “Green” movements that emerged in the politics of Europe and America in the 1970s in opposition to continued industrial expansion—economic modernism—in the name of “timeless” human and environmental values. And that is perhaps as close to a general definition of postmodernism as we are likely to get.

The “postmodernism” that became a subject of angry academic—and to a limited extent, political—debate in the 1980s and 1990s was the extension of this loss of faith to nihilistic extremes like radical skepticism or radical relativism. The first was the refusal to regard any proposition as inherently true or definitively proven; the second was the refusal to accept any hierarchy of values at all. One could regard these extensions as abuses—intellectual or moral aberrations all too easily exploited by cynics like “Holocaust deniers”—without necessarily opposing the original postmodernist impulse.

Notes:

(1) Charles Jencks, *What Is Post-Modernism?* (London: Academy Editions, 1986), p. 7.

(2) George Rochberg, epigraph to Act 3 of *Music for the Magic Theater* (Bryn Mawr, Pa.: Theodore Presser, 1965).

(3) Leonard B. Meyer, “Future Tense: Music, Ideology and Culture,” postlude to *Music, The Arts, and Ideas* (2nd ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 349.

(4) Fred Lerdahl, “Composing and Listening: A Reply to Nattiez,” in I. Deliège and J. Sloboda, *Perception and Cognition of Music* (Hove, East Sussex: Psychology Press, 1997); quoted from prepublication typescript (1994), p. 4.

(5) Philip Glass, quoted in Wem Mertens, *American Minimal Music*, trans. J. Hautekiet (New York: Alexander Broude, 1983), p. 79.

(6) Meyer, “Future Tense,” p. 327.

(7) Leonard B. Meyer, “A Pride of Prejudices; or, Delight in Diversity,” *Music Theory Spectrum* XIII (1991): 241.

(8) Jencks, *What Is Post-Modernism?*, p. 14.

(9) Cf. Le Corbusier, *Vers une Architecture* (1923): “A house is a machine for living in. Baths, sun, hot-water, cold-water, warmth at will, conservation of food, hygiene, beauty in a sense of good proportion. An armchair is a machine for sitting in and so on.”

(10) Jencks, *What Is Post-Modernism?*, p. 14 (Jencks dates his coinage to the year 1978).

(11) Meyer, “Future Tense,” p. 327.

(12) *Ibid.*

(13) Jean-François Lyotard, *La condition postmoderne: Rapport sur le savoir* (Paris: Éditions de minuit, 1979), p. 2. The English term “master narrative” was coined by Frederic Jameson in his foreword to the English translation of the book (Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984], p. xii) as a rendering of Lyotard's term *grand récit*, of which, according to Lyotard, there are two basic strains: the master narrative of emancipation, which governed modernist theories of history, and that of speculation, which underlay modernist theories of science.

(14) Robert L. Heilbroner, *The Future as History* (New York: Grove Press, 1961), pp. 47–48.

(15) Meyer, “Future Tense,” p. 331.

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See also from Grove Music Online
George Rochberg
String quartet: 1940–75

ITS BEGINNINGS FOR MUSIC

Chapter: CHAPTER 9 After Everything
Source: MUSIC IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The most direct evidence of a postmodernist turn in music came right alongside the Green challenge to the idea of progress. The big story of the 1950s, we may recall, had been the "conversion" to serialism of figures like Copland and Stravinsky—a story that paid the highest tribute to, and considerably strengthened, the master narrative. Two decades later, the big story and the most convincing evidence that the master narrative was losing its grip were the almost equally conspicuous conversions that took place in the opposite direction.

That story begins (or we can begin effectively to tell it) with the first performance, on 15 May 1972, of the String Quartet no. 3 by George Rochberg (1918–2005). Until then, Rochberg had seemed an untroubled academic modernist—and a distinguished one whose works had been honored with many coveted awards. He was not only a prominent exponent of serial composition, but a noted theorist of serialism as well. In 1955 he published a small book called *The Hexachord and Its Relation to the Twelve-Tone Row*. Based on a thorough study of some of the late works of Schoenberg, it was a pioneering investigation of the technique that Milton Babbitt would later christen "combinatoriality". Like Babbitt, Rochberg applied his theoretical inquiries directly to his compositions, for example in a much-played and much-studied *Duo concertante* for violin and cello (1953), a work whose performance medium was particularly well suited (and probably chosen) to display the contrapuntal possibilities of hexachordal combinatoriality. The composer of such a work was obviously, and fruitfully, committed to the ideal of perpetual technical advance. That commitment found reflection in Rochberg's appointment in 1960 as the chairman of a major American music department, at the University of Pennsylvania.

Rochberg's String Quartet no. 2 (1961) attracted wide attention precisely on account of its advanced technique. Like Schoenberg's Quartet no. 2, which evidently inspired it, Rochberg's quartet incorporated a part for a soprano soloist in addition to the four strings. She sings (in English translation) the opening and closing stanzas of one of the "Duino Elegies" by the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke (1875–1926). The poem is a meditation on the passage of time and the transience of life, in response to which Rochberg devised a complex scheme of superimposed tempos to call attention, as the poem is sung, to the temporal matters it treats. Rochberg named Ives as the progenitor of his technique of "tempo simultaneity"; but of course the most conspicuous recent embodiment of the idea had been Elliott Carter's String Quartet no. 1 (which, as it happens, had been issued on a recording in 1958, the year before Rochberg started work on his Quartet no. 2). It is hard not to see Rochberg's Quartet as vying with Carter's, applying the most advanced contemporary rhythmic style to an equally advanced hexachordal-combinatorial organization of pitch.

In any case, Rochberg identified himself through this work as a composer interested in exploring and extending the latest techniques of his craft, thinking that to be the best way of achieving a truly contemporary intensity of expression. In a program note he wrote to accompany the first recording of the Quartet no. 2, Rochberg justified his rather detailed description of his innovative technique with the comment that "it is impossible to separate the 'what' of a work from its 'how.' "[16] That could stand as a singularly concise précis of modernist principles.

In the decade that followed the Second Quartet, possibly again inspired by Ives, Rochberg experimented with collage techniques. *In Contra mortem et tempus* (1965)—a quartet for violin, flute, clarinet, and piano, whose title (Against Death and Time) again evokes Rilke — he wove a densely expressionistic contrapuntal fabric out of lines extracted from various atonal or twelve-tone works by Ives, Alban Berg, Edgard Varèse, Pierre Boulez, Luciano Berio, and himself. In keeping with so much modernist music, the collage was a "secret structure." The works on which it drew were unlikely to be recognized by most listeners, especially as the reweaving emphasized (to quote a critique by the musicologist Alexander Ringer, a friend of the composer) "the fundamental sameness of so many pitch successions in panchromatic music."[17] Rochberg's next collage piece, *Music for the Magic Theater* (also composed in 1965), took a somewhat more daring step, juxtaposing source material distinguished not by "fundamental sameness" but by extravagant dissimilarity: a divertimento by Mozart; a symphony by Mahler; the "Cavatina" from Beethoven's Quartet in B♭, op. 130; the famous beginning of Webern's *Concerto*, op. 24; Stockhausen's *Zeitmässe* for wind quintet (itself a famous study in rhythmic and textural complexity); Varèse's *Déserts*; "Stella by Starlight" (a transcribed Miles Davis recording); and several works by Rochberg himself, including the String Quartet no. 2. What all of these source-works had in common was a descending chromatic motif that gave the work a hidden unity — another "secret structure."

The title of the composition is a reference to the final section of Hermann Hesse's novel *Steppenwolf* (1927), one of many modern novels to explore the theme, derived from Nietzsche by way of Freud, of contradiction between the demands of social harmony and the untamed beast of man's inner spirit. In the Magic Theater (i.e., the mirror of the mind), the title character—outwardly an ordinary middle-class citizen named Harry Haller, but on the inside a raging wolf of the steppes—comes face to face with Mozart, the paragon of benign detachment and spiritual wholeness: in other words, everything that modern man lacks.

Mozart, at first unrecognizable in modern dress and wigless, leads Haller to a primitive "wireless receiver" (radio), which is playing a Concerto Grosso by Handel. The music comes through the static woefully distorted. Haller protests, but Mozart cautions that it does not matter. Here is an excerpt from his sermon:

> You hear not only a Handel who, disfigured by wireless, is, all the same, in this most ghastly of disguises still divine; you hear as well and you observe, most worthy sir, a most admirable symbol of all life. When you listen to wireless you are a witness of the everlasting war between idea and appearance, between time and eternity, between the human and the divine. Exactly, my dear sir, as the wireless for ten minutes together projects the most lovely music without regard into the most impossible places, into snug drawing-rooms and attics and into the midst of chattering, guzzling, yawning and sleeping listeners, and exactly as it strips this music of its sensuous beauty, spoils and scratches and beslimes it and yet cannot altogether destroy its spirit, just so does life, the so-called reality, deal with the sublime picture-play of the world and make a hurley-burley of it. It makes its unappetizing tone-slime of the most magic orchestral music. Everywhere it obtrudes its mechanism, its activity, its dreary exigencies and vanity between the ideal and the real, between orchestra and ear. All life is so, my child, and we must let it be so; and, if we are not asses, laugh at it. It little becomes people like you to be critics of wireless or of life either. Better learn to listen first! Learn what is to be taken seriously and laugh at the rest.[18]

Just so, the middle section (act II) of Rochberg's *Music for the Magic Theater* subjects the "sublime, divine" Adagio movement from Mozart's Divertimento, K. 287, to the hurly-burly of modernity. At first, Mozart's music is merely rescored from the original string quartet to an ensemble of fifteen players (roughly the "orchestra" of Schoenberg's Chamber Symphony, op. 9). The piano, in a concertante role, sometimes takes over the original inner parts, at other times adds "graffiti" of its own in a Mozartean style. The first violin part is transposed up an octave, where it acquires an ethereal tone color that sounds (according to the composer's program note) "as though it were coming from a great distance."

At the close, Mozart indicates a cadenza by placing a fermata over the last chord. At this point, all sorts of music

composed since Mozart's time come piling on, “besliming” its sensuous beauty according to Hesse's prescription (Ex. 9-1). The chord is never resolved. But the last movement (act III) enacts the acceptance of modernity that Hesse's Mozart recommends: as the work continues, Mozart's music becomes less a contrasting ground, but is instead drawn into dialogue and eventual harmony with the modern “graffiti” until the interrupted cadence from the previous movement is resumed and completed. As Ringer puts it, the jarring interjections eventually “manage to make music with Mozart.”[19]

There is always a strict demarcation in *Music for the Magic Theater* between “then” and “now.” The chasm between past and present is not really bridged, since “tonality” is still marked as meaning “the past,” which (according to an epigraph in the score) “haunts us with its nostalgic beauty.” Ultimately, then, Rochberg's quotation of “tonal” music alongside “atonal” in *Music for the Magic Theater* does not (yet) imply rejection of modernism. Symbolically acknowledging the distance between past and present affirms our sense of living in a contemporary world that is marked off by a barrier from what has gone before, thus affirming the essential “truth” of modernism.

Notes:

(16) Liner note to Composers Recordings CRI 164 (1964).

(17) Alexander Ringer, “The Music of George Rochberg,” *Musical Quarterly* LII (1966): 424.

(18) Hermann Hesse, *Steppenwolf*, trans. Basil Creighton (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1957), pp. 301–2.

(19) Ringer, “The Music of George Rochberg,” p. 426.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online

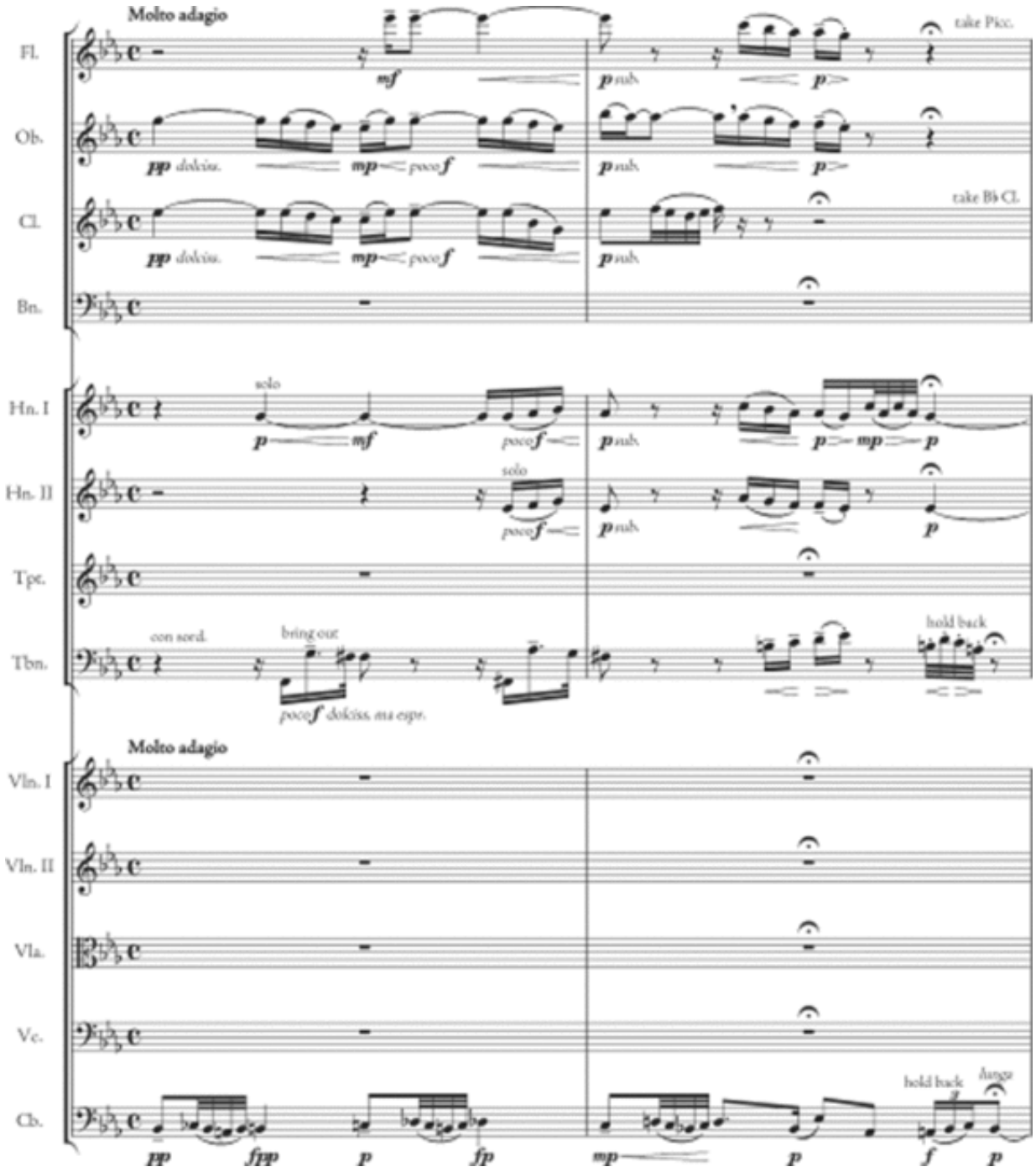
Collage

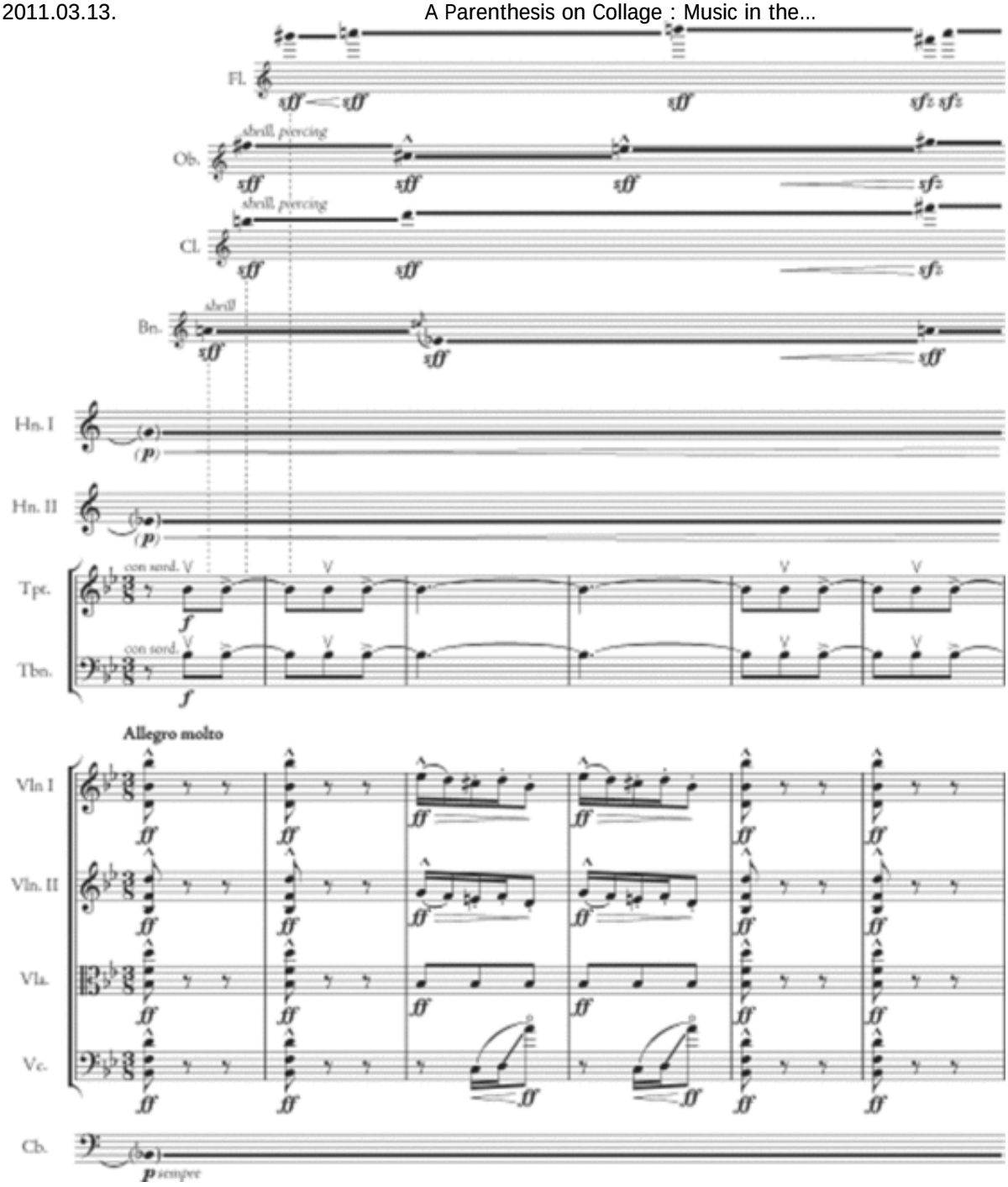
Bernd Alois Zimmermann

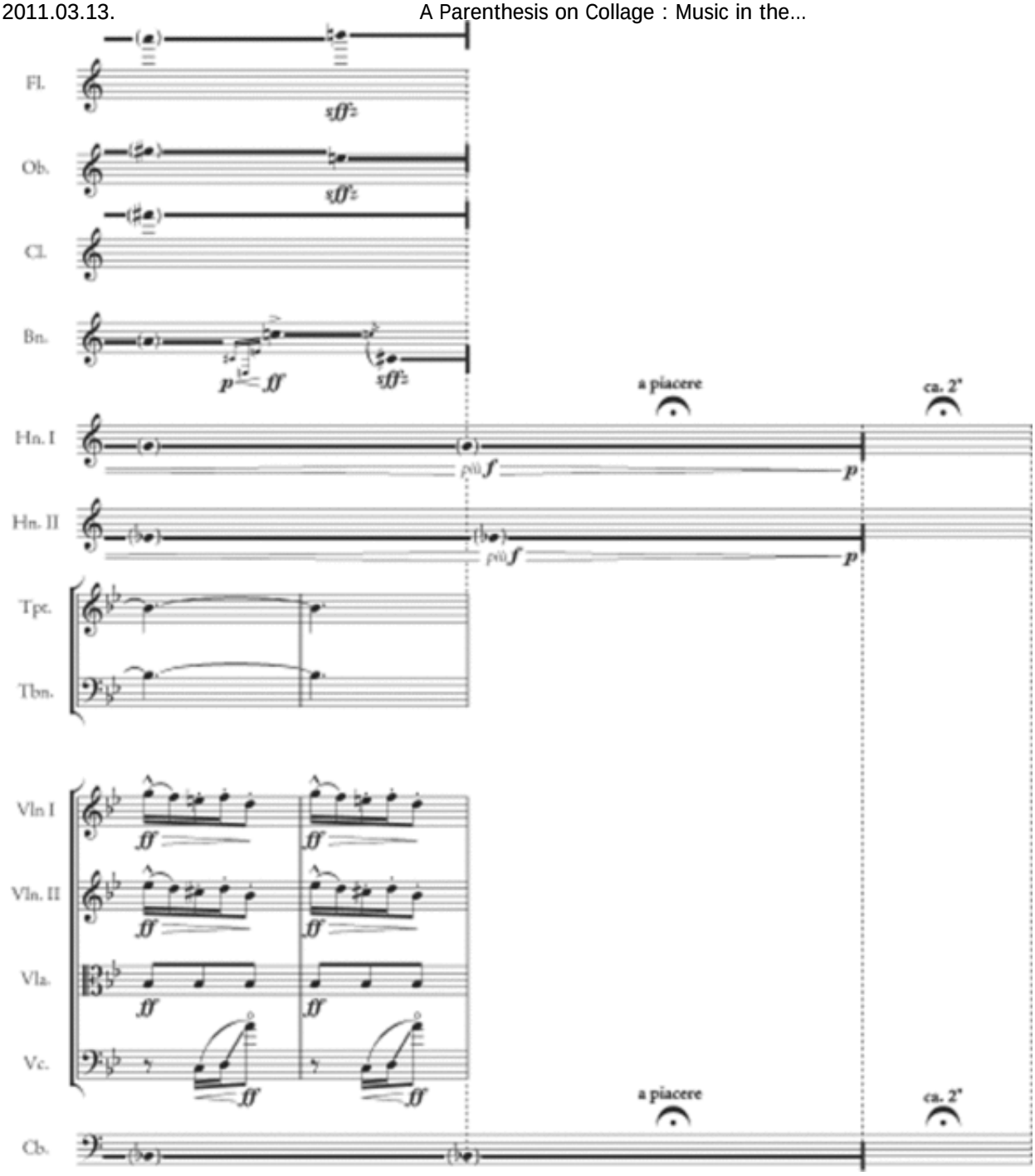
Henry Brant

A PARENTHESIS ON COLLAGE

Chapter: CHAPTER 9 After Everything
Source: MUSIC IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin


Molto adagio
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Bn.
take Picc.
take B♭ Cl.
Hn. I
Hn. II
Tpt.
Tbn.
solo
con sord.
bring out
hold back
Molto adagio
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
hold back
dange


Fl.
shrill, piercing
Ob.
shrill, piercing
Cl.
shrill
Bn.
Hn. I
Hn. II
con sord.
Tpt.
con sord.
Tbn.
Allegro molto
Vln I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
p sempre

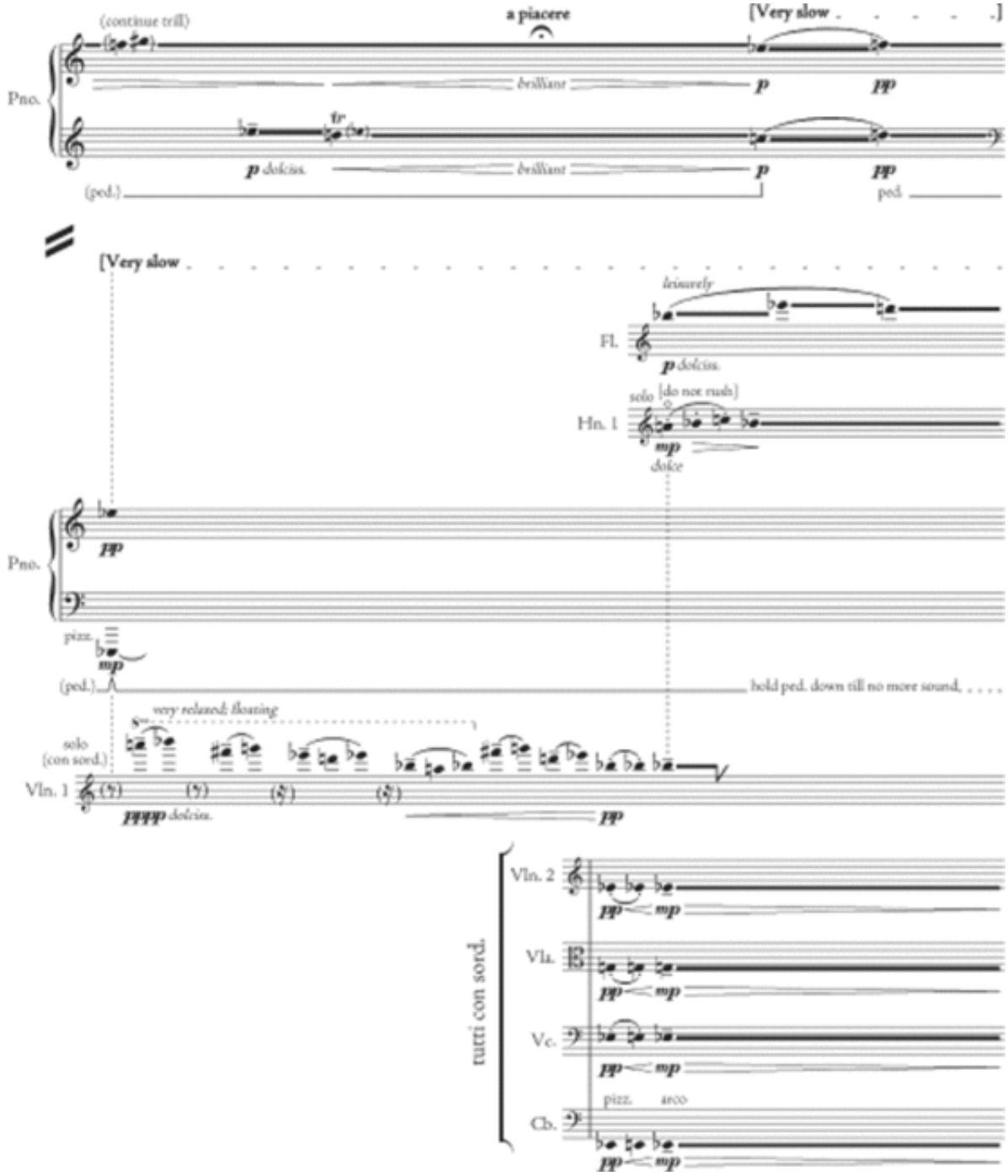


ex. 9-1a George Rochberg, *Music for the Magic Theater*, II, end

In any case, the use of collage to represent the hurly-burly of the modern age was hardly unprecedented in 1965 (even if its most widely played example, Berio's *Sinfonia*, still lay three years in the future). Not to mention Ives, or even the French surrealist music of the 1920s, at least two prominent composers had by then made collage their main expressive vehicle. One was Bernd Alois Zimmermann (1918–70), a German composer whose opera *Die Soldaten* ("The soldiers"), composed over a six-year period from 1958 to 1964, is a multidimensional collage in which split-level dramaturgy allows as many as seven scenes to play simultaneously, sometimes further augmented by the use of film and slide projections. Each scene, while coordinated with the rest, has a distinctive musical profile that often features quotations from the music of the past (Bach chorales, the *Dies Irae*, etc.) alongside Zimmermann's own serial constructions.

Some of Zimmermann's scores, like the riotous *Musique pour les soupers du Roi Ubu* ("Music for King Ubu's repasts," 1962–66), consist of nothing but a tissue of promiscuous quotation. Zimmermann's collages expressed his conviction that the modern concept of time necessarily embodied a simultaneous awareness of past, present, and future, and that music, being "an experience which occurs both in time while also embodying time within itself," should consist of symbolic "orderings of progressions of time"[20] in the fullness of its modern conception.

His reliance on preexisting materials made Zimmermann suspect in the eyes of some of his contemporaries, who insisted on traditional modernist values of novelty, originality, and, above all, autonomy. Stockhausen insulted him with the dread term *Gebrauchsmusiker* (maker of music that is not for its own sake), associated with the discredited Hindemith. But by 1966 Stockhausen was making collages himself: first *Telemusik*, an ecumenical "world music" mix that celebrated technology's potential for bringing people and cultures together, then *Hymnen* (1967), a collage of national anthems distorted as if by a short-wave radio tuner. The influence of the despised Zimmermann is noticeable not only in the genre to which these pieces belonged, but also in their obvious "message-mongering."



ex. 9-1b George Rochberg, *Music for the Magic Theater*, III, resumption and completion of the cadence

By 1969, a year before his death by suicide, Zimmermann was prepared (in his *Requiem for a Young Poet*, an elegy for three poet friends who had killed themselves) to pile Beatles songs on top of Beethoven's Ninth, while simultaneously piping in the recorded voices of Churchill, Stalin, Joseph Goebbels (Hitler's propaganda minister) and Joachim von Ribbentrop (Hitler's foreign minister), plus the noise of a political demonstration, all to be cut off abruptly by the sound of a lone poet's voice (one of the dedicatees) begging for peace.

The other master *collageur* was the Canadian-born Henry Brant (1913–2008), who had concluded as early as 1950 that "single-style music, no matter how experimental or full of variety, could no longer evoke the new stresses, layered insanities and multi-directional assaults of contemporary life on the spirit."[21] He developed a

modus operandi that added spatial separation to the recipe, specifying his new technique in the form of four "rules": compositions must comprise a multiplicity of "distinct ensemble groups, each of which keeps to its own style, highly contrasted to the styles of the other groups"; they must be as widely dispersed as possible "throughout the hall (not merely upon the stage)"; they should be independent in rhythm and tempo; and they ought to contain a degree of "controlled improvisation or what I call 'instant composing,' " to ensure "spontaneous caprice and individual complexity of material quickly available," and the "instant playability of technically difficult passages."

Brant loved to point out that his first composition written to this prescription—*Antiphony I* (1953), for five separated and independent orchestral groups—predated Stockhausen's celebrated *Gruppen* for four orchestras by three years. But while the groups in *Gruppen* all pass around the same serially-constructed material, the groups in *Antiphony I*, each requiring its own conductor, all play in highly contrasting styles. A hearty maximalist, Brant traced his own development in terms of ever-expanding media and ever-increasing density of information:

> *Millennium 2* (1954) surrounds the audience on three sides with an unbroken wall of brass and percussion, and introduces cumulative 20-voice jazz linear heterophony pitted against a controlled 6-voice polyphony. In *Grand Universal Circus* (1956), contrasted dramatic situations, each based on a different creation myth with its own independent musical setting, are simultaneously enacted in widely separated locations in the theater. In *Concerto with Lights* (1961), a small (audible) orchestra occupies the stage while another ensemble of musicians, working light switches from musical notation, project visual images on the ceiling in exact but silent rhythms contrasted to those sounding from the stage. In *Voyage Four* (1963), the entire wall space of the hall is occupied by banks of instruments, as is the area under the orchestra floor, producing at times an almost total directional immersion of the hearer in sound.[22]

Brant's *Kingdom Come* (1970) pits a full symphony orchestra on stage against a circus band in the balcony. The former "plays at a strident forte throughout, in its highest-tension registers, and expresses its anxieties in long, frenzied phrases, celebrating life in the human pressure cooker."[23] The latter plays music suggesting "the bashed-up ruins of rusty calliopes still screeching; at other times a kind of computerized purgatory, all wires crossed, circuits blown to Kingdom Come, still grinding out the answers to its mispunched programs." It includes a soprano "who impersonates a psychotic Valkyrie." The two orchestras "engage in head-on collisions ... culminating in a final array of smash-ups which leaves the contradictory premises of the piece unreconciled." By the next decade Brant was ready to trump this dystopic vision with a more optimistic image of harmonized human diversity: *Meteor Farm* (1982), the grandest spatial piece of all, combines a symphony orchestra with a jazz band, an Indonesian gamelan ensemble, African drummers, and classical Indian soloists, all ranged around and above the audience.

A Brantian assemblage is a collage of characteristic media rather than of quotations from preexisting music à la Zimmermann or Rochberg, but it aims similarly to evoke modern life in its irreducible heterogeneity. Although these composers were all of them certifiably of the avant-garde, the collage style began in the 1960s to seep into the work of "mainstream" artists as well. We have already observed the way media and style collages helped express the ironies and pathos of Britten's *War Requiem* (chapter 5). Even Shostakovich, in his last symphony, the Fifteenth (1971), made recourse to enigmatically emblematic quotations. The first movement incorporates an unmissable phrase from Rossini's *William Tell* Overture, and the finale opens with (and returns to) the "Fate" leitmotif from Wagner's *Die Walküre*. The nature of Shostakovich's sources (solid "bourgeois classics" as Steve Reich would say) and the obviously portentous function of the quotes serve to domesticate the technique, draining it (freeing it?) of its avant-garde associations.

But, as all of these examples have shown, as an expressive resource collage remained well within the accepted

boundaries of modernist practice, in no way contradicting or threatening its premises. Brant's progressively more ambitious collages subscribe fully to the modernist "onward and upward" project—ever grander, ever bigger, ever more omnivorous. Like other modernist devices that became conventional, collage was easily absorbed, in moderate doses, into the mainstream concert repertoire. There is no reason to apply a term like "postmodernism" to it.

Notes:

(20) Andres D. McCredie (with Marion Rothärmel), "Zimmermann, Bernd Alois," in *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (2nd ed.), Vol. XXVII, p. 837.

(21) Liner note to Desto Records, DC-7108 (Henry Brant: Music 1970 [*Kingdom Come* and *Machinations*]).

(22) *Ibid*.

(23) *Ibid*.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online

Collage

George Crumb

Quotation

Peter Maxwell Davies

COLLAGE AS THEATER

Chapter: CHAPTER 9 After Everything
Source: MUSIC IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Two *collageurs* of the 1960s did begin to prefigure postmodernist ideas and values, however. One was George Crumb (b. 1929), a colleague of Rochberg's (from 1965) at the University of Pennsylvania, who between 1963 and 1970 composed eight works to texts by the Spanish surrealist poet Federico García Lorca (1898–1936): *Night Music* (1963); four books of madrigals (actually settings for solo soprano and chamber ensemble, composed between 1965 and 1969); *Songs, Drones, and Refrains of Death* (1968); *Night of the Four Moons* (1969, inspired by the Apollo 11 moon landing that year); and *Ancient Voices of Children* (1970).

fig. 9-1 George Crumb in his garden, 1987.

Like almost all American composers of his generation, Crumb was trained in the academic modernist styles of the time. One of his early works, *Variazioni per orchestra* (1959), contains an homage-quotation from Berg's *Lyric Suite* (as the *Lyric Suite* had contained one from *Tristan und Isolde*), and his Sonata for solo cello (1955), one of his most widely performed compositions, is much indebted to Bartók. Dealing with Lorca's shocking imagery, full of nightmare visions and wild contrasts, aroused in Crumb "an urge to fuse various unrelated stylistic elements" so as to achieve similarly incongruous juxtapositions in his music.

Quotation of existing music was only one of the means Crumb employed to gain this breadth of reference. Strains of Bach and Chopin, particularly, waft through some of these pieces. Often, like Rochberg's quotations, they are etherealized: in *Ancient Voices of Children* the pianist plays an excerpt from Bach's "Notebook for Anna Magdalena" on a toy piano, and at the very end the oboist wanders slowly offstage while playing the "Farewell" motif from Mahler's *Song of the Earth*. But a more frequent source of disorienting imagery comes from the use of incongruously mixed timbres, often altered after the fashion of Cage's prepared piano.

A native of West Virginia, Crumb drew on youthful memories for some of these effects: banjo in *Night of the Four Moons*; electric guitar played "bottle-neck style" by sliding a glass rod over the frets hillbilly-fashion in *Songs, Drones, and Refrains of Death*; mandolin, harmonica, and "musical saw" (a carpenter's saw set in vibration by a violin bow while being bent against the player's knee) in *Ancient Voices of Children*. These sounds of the American countryside are regularly combined with those of recognizably Asian percussion instruments like Tibetan tuned "prayer stones," or Japanese "temple bells." Altered timbres are obtained by sliding a chisel on piano strings, threading paper between the strings of a harp, fingering a violin or cello tremolo while wearing thimbles, tuning the unison strings on a mandolin a quarter tone apart, blowing into a flute while also singing, dipping a gong into a tub of water. Instrumentalists are required to sing, singers to play instruments.

Crumb's eclecticism was far more extreme than Rochberg's or Zimmermann's; but the difference was not just quantitative. It was different in quality as well, because its heterogeneous sources were not implicitly arranged in a time continuum. The ingredients in Crumb's collages were chosen not as representatives of styles but as expressive symbols of "timeless" content. Quoting Bach and Mahler in the context of Lorca was not an exercise in incongruity, but an affirmation of the relevance of all to all. There is no need for the sort of harmonizing or reconciling gestures Rochberg employed in *Music for the Magic Theater*, because the quotations were not jarring intrusions to begin with.

Nor were the heterogeneous timbres necessarily evocative of their specific origins. Nor were they mere atmospheric colors. Crumb was one of the first composers (in the 1980s their number would multiply) to make timbre his primary creative preoccupation, varying and nuancing it with great subtlety and resourcefulness while reducing the music's formal structure to simple repetitive or strophic designs and stripping its sound surface down to bare monodic or heterophonic textures. Critics marveled at the way in which timbre, often thought a decorative "nonessential," could successfully replace the more "substantial" elements of music—the elements out of which most of the standard techniques in the modernist arsenal were assembled. Where the music of Rochberg, Zimmermann, and Brant seemed as much burdened by a sense of history as that of any modernist, Crumb's seemed virtually amnesiac, drawing on the music of all times and places as if it were all part of one undifferentiated "now" (as, thanks to recording technology, it had in fact become).

On top of this, Crumb joined with other composers of the 1960s and 1970s in introducing elements of theater or ritualized movement not only into vocal but even into instrumental compositions. As a result, his music became something of a fad with choreographers, whose efforts popularized it far beyond the usual reach of avant-garde music. *Ancient Voices of Children* joined the repertoires of four ballet companies—three in America, one in Lisbon—during the first two years of its existence. By 1985, Crumb's works had received more than fifty choreographic treatments.

Black Angels (1970) for amplified string quartet, in which the players wear masks and are asked to chant

meaningless syllables and numbers in various languages and lend a hand as percussionists on maracas, tam-tam, and tuned water goblets, was the most celebrated instance of Crumb's instrumental theatrics and became perhaps the most imitated composition of its decade. It was composed at the height of the Vietnam war and its rituals—including a snatch of Schubert's “Death and the Maiden” Quartet played with a bizarre technique (bowing above the left hand with reversed fingering) that produces a weirdly strangled timbre—enact a kind of surrealistic funeral to protest the killing.

“Dance of the Sacred Life-Cycle,” the third movement of *Ancient Voices of Children* (Fig. 9-2), embodies most of Crumb's distinctive gestures. The music is scored for a soprano or mezzo-soprano, an offstage boy soprano, an oboist, a harpist, an amplified pianist, a mandolinist, and three percussionists. It unfolds in two notated systems. The first consists entirely of an introduction for the woman singer, vocalizing into the piano to produce an eerie resonance. Her cry, “Mi niño!” sets the Dance, entirely notated on the second system, in motion.

The percussionists, notated across the bottom of the page, now enter, performing an ostinato pattern borrowed from Ravel's 1928 ballet, *Boléro*. Their crescendo-decrescendo pattern lends to the music whatever overall shape it possesses. Meanwhile, the setting of the poem, a question-and-answer dialogue between a mother and her unborn child, is notated in a literally circular form to symbolize the “life cycle” which birth initiates. The basic dialogue of mother and child, represented by the letter A, is performed by the two singers using Schoenberg's “sprechstimme” technique. The chief dance melody, for oboe, is represented by the letter B. The mother's refrain, “Let the branches ruffle in the sun and the fountains leap all around,” sung in a wild melisma by the soprano accompanied by a jangle of papered harp and quarter-toned mandolin, is represented by the letter C. Letter D denotes the two longest speeches in the poem, one for the child and one for the mother, unset by the composer, but to be performed with the same kind of exaggerated contour as the *Sprechstimme*; and E is a closing phrase for the electric piano.

The parts so designated overlap in a threefold cursus, A^1-B^1-C^1-D^1-E^1 ||A^2-B^2-C^2-D^2-E^2 ||A^3-B^3-C^3, followed by a “cadence” (notated at the lower right), consisting of a shriek (or the instrumental equivalent) for all participants.

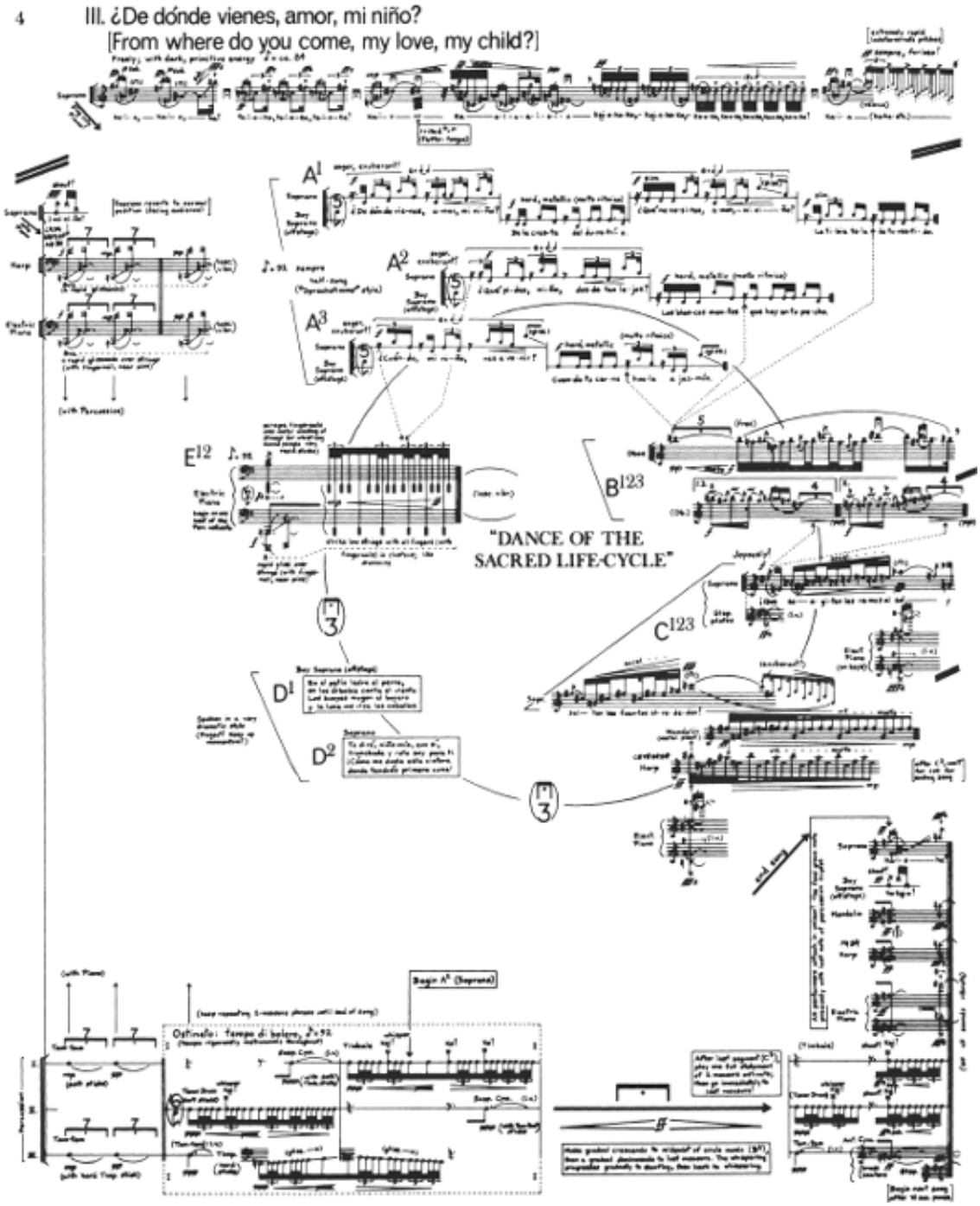


fig. 9-2 Crumb, *Ancient Voices of Children* (1970): no. 3, "Dance of the Sacred Life-Cycle."

Unusual layouts and graphics, like the circular notation of the Dance, were another of Crumb's signature devices. Some works of his are notated on circular staves, others on spirals, still others in the shape of crosses. But the intention, as Crumb has explained it, is not only symbolic (as in the *Augenmusik* or "eye music" of old). Circular staves can represent all kinds of mystical notions, it is true, but they are also the most efficient way of notating a *moto perpetuo* (and were used for that purpose since the early fifteenth century). The look of the page in Fig. 9-2, reminiscent of the old choir-book format, visually reinforces the idea of collage—an assemblage rather than an organic unity. Layouts that avoid the usual alignment of parts have the further advantage of freeing performers from their habits: "I suppose I could have written it out straight," Crumb told an interviewer, "but I wanted to

get the performers away from thinking vertically—I didn't want them too conscious of the vertical relationship of the parts,"[24] which would have led (he feared) to a too-literal coordination with the incessant metrical pulse.

The striking thing about Crumb's collages is their uncomplicated form and spare texture—utterly unlike Brant's or Zimmermann's saturated glut and clutter—and the loving way in which they gather up so much that had been expressly targeted for modernist exclusion. There is considerable sentimentality and nostalgia in the music: not so much a nostalgia for familiar or comforting music as a longing for a lost directness of expression. That directness could be disconcerting. Reviewing *Ancient Voices of Children*, Andrew Porter (Carter's advocate) admitted good-naturedly that "any tough, suspicious old critic thinks that he is being got at, and worked over emotionally by a battery of tearjerking devices such as Puccini himself might envy."[25] But Puccini-loving audiences responded to it without distrust, placing Crumb's output in the same paradoxical category as the minimalists': certifiably avant-garde-sounding music that (for a while, anyway) attracted a genuine popular following. During a rough decade from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, Crumb was the most frequently and widely performed of living American composers.

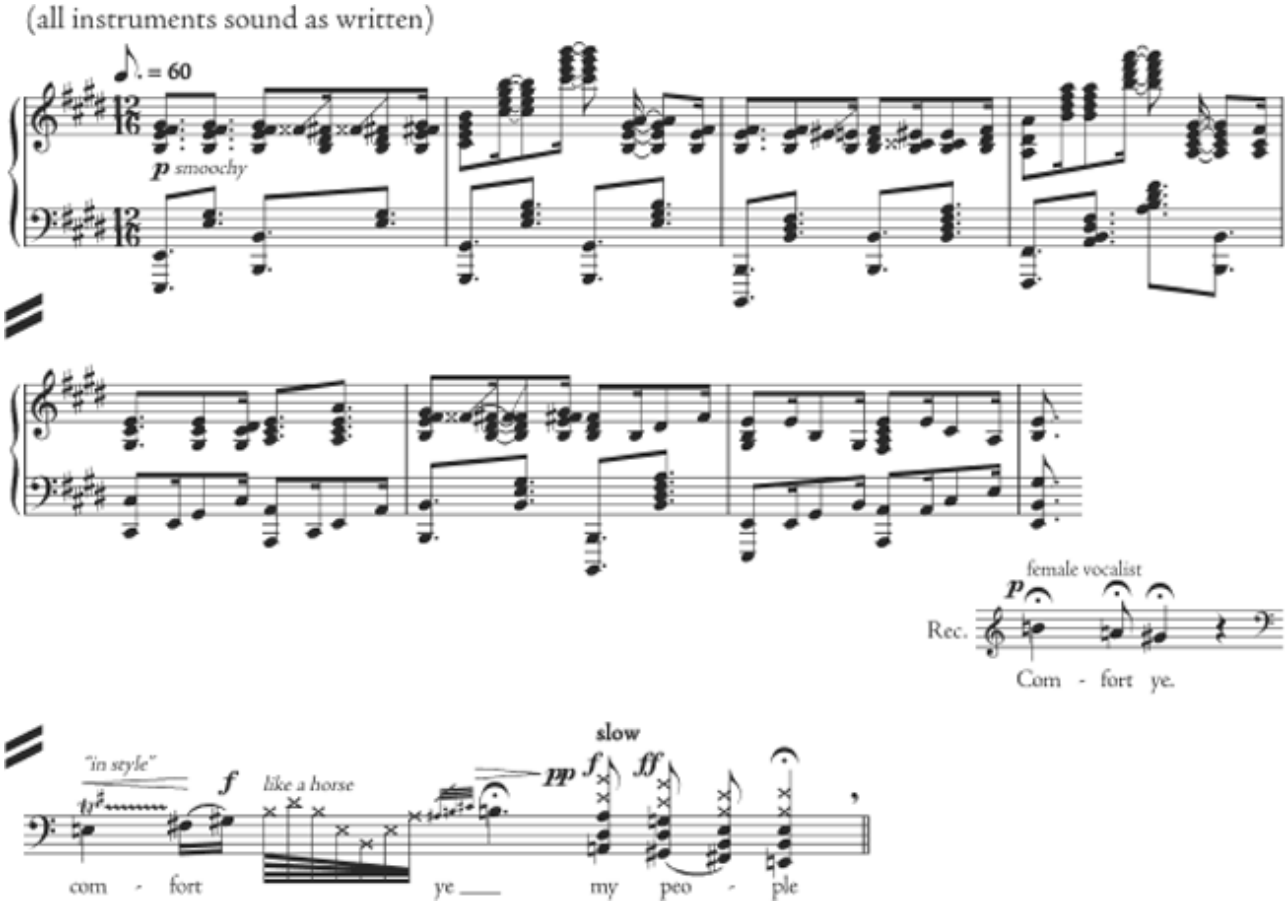
But possibly because Crumb's gestures and sound-shapes were closer than the minimalists' to the going avant-garde styles of the time, his music has not worn as well as theirs. Some of his onetime promoters have looked back on the Crumb-boom with a certain squeamishness. "The rituals were always a little silly—earnest academics wearing party masks and parading about solemnly while whacking percussion,"[26] John Rockwell wrote in perhaps not altogether candid retrospect. "The drama was a little shallow; the succession of spooky motives led to a patchy continuity, the chanting of numbers and foreign words was meaninglessly portentous, and much of the interest relied on timbres whose novelty did not last long,"[27] wrote Kyle Gann from an end-of-century vantage point. That Crumb retained a modernist addiction to novelty may have exacted another sort of price as well. In the mid-1980s he fell silent, unable to keep the new timbres coming.

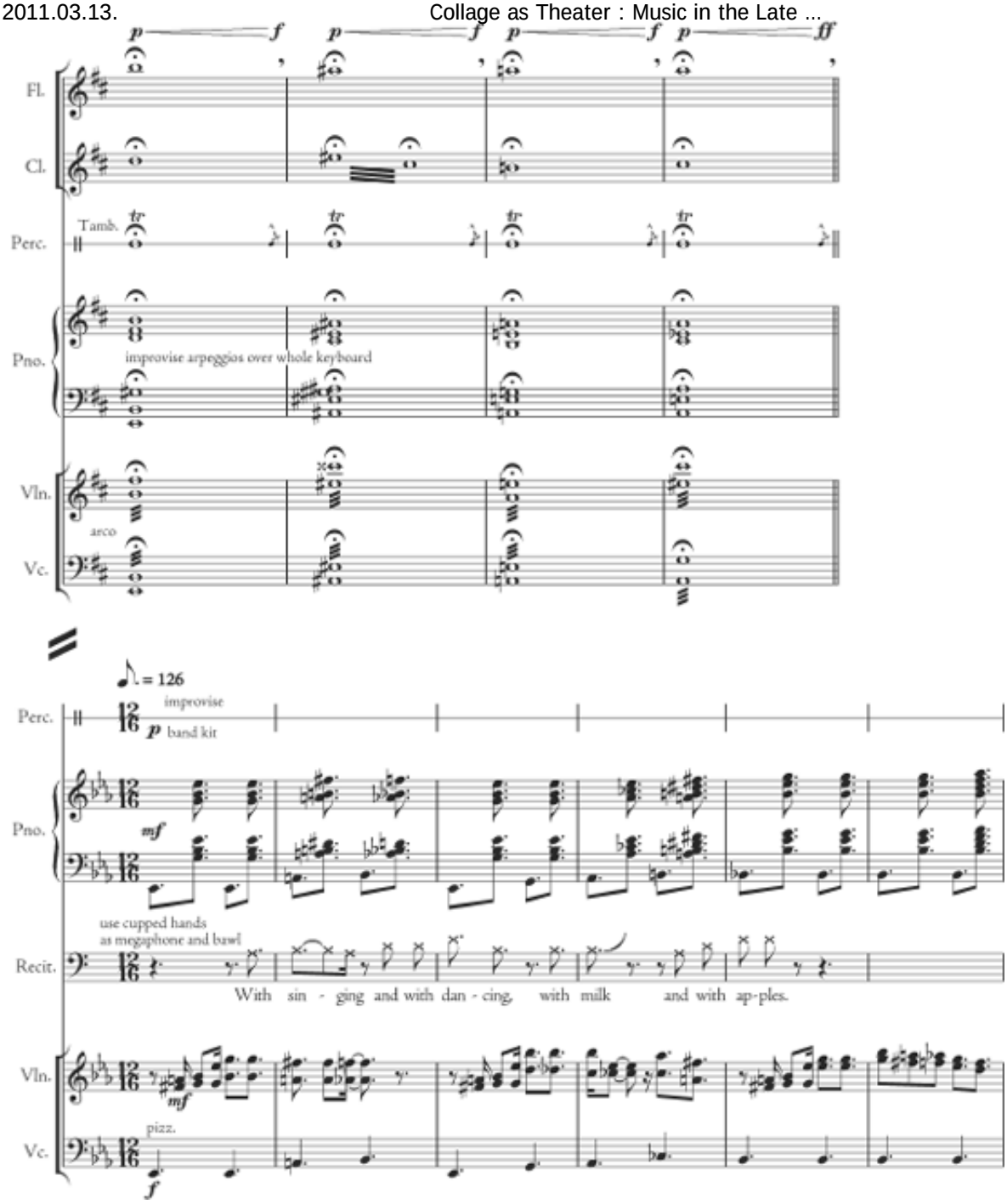
Quite a different trajectory was set in motion by *Eight Songs for a Mad King* (1969), a piece of angry chamber music–theater by the English composer Peter Maxwell Davies (b. 1934) that had a lot outwardly in common with the gentler work Crumb was doing at about the same time. It was composed for a group called the Pierrot Players, which had been cofounded in 1967 by Davies and his friend Harrison Birtwistle (b. 1934). The two had been fellow students at the University of Manchester; Davies had gone on from there to Princeton, where from 1962 to 1965 he received a thorough grounding in academic modernism, American style. The Pierrot Players, as the name advertised, was founded in tribute to Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire*. The membership consisted of virtuoso performers on the instruments required by the Schoenberg composition, plus a percussionist. Their concerts featured performances of *Pierrot lunaire* that sought to re-create its original character as a piece of outlandish music theater, with a singer costumed as a commedia dell'arte character and the instrumentalists concealed behind a screen, followed by similarly theatrical chamber works by the group's founders.

Eight Songs for a Mad King was the fourth of five resolutely shocking Davies compositions first performed by the Pierrot Players that sought to revive the effects, and to an extent the techniques, of German expressionism. In the first, *Revelation and Fall*, a nun in a blood-red habit shouted obscenities through a public-address system. In the second, *L'homme armé* (based on Davies's completion of an anonymous fragmentary fifteenth-century Mass), a female singer dressed as a Catholic priest enthusiastically orates in Latin St. Luke's account of Judas's betrayal of Christ. The third, *Vesalii icones* (named after the anatomical drawings of the sixteenth-century physician Andreas Vesalius), featured a naked dancer who sits at an out-of-tune piano and plays a staid Victorian anthem before gyrating lewdly about a cellist clad in a choirboy robe.

Composed to a text by the Australian poet Randolph Stow based on contemporary memoirs of King George III of England, *Eight Songs for a Mad King* draws on the old convention of the "mad scene," an operatic mainstay since the seventeenth century, to depict the mental agonies of the unfortunate monarch who in the years following the ruinous American Revolution succumbed to raving fits. The dramatic premise was supplied by an old anecdote according to which the mad old king spent endless days seated at a little mechanical organ teaching his pet

bullfinches to sing. Four members of the Pierrot Players—the flutist, clarinetist, violinist, and cellist—performed inside big plastic "birdcages," while the singer-actor playing the king ran amok in their midst. Since depicting madness can "rationalize" any irrationality, it served here to justify bizarre parodies of old music. In the seventh song, "Country Dance (Scotch Bonnett)," the ironic object of the farce is "Comfort Ye, My People," the opening tenor recitative in Handel's *Messiah* (Ex. 9-2).





ex. 9-2 Peter Maxwell Davies, *Eight Songs for a Mad King*, VII ("Country Dance")

Defacing old music venerated by tradition with incongruous performance styles (here, "smoochy" ragtime and Victorian hymnody) and "extended" vocal technique was nothing new, but in this case the avant-garde elements seem to be as much the butt of the unfriendly humor as the hallowed original. One critic, David Paul, has suggested that in the context of the 1960s, the figure of the mad king, a once-powerful figure rendered impotent, might stand not only (a bit wishfully, perhaps) for the period's social upheavals, but might also be a metaphor for the dogmatic inelasticity of modernism, rendered impotent and irrelevant in the face of the egalitarian plurality of styles that was ineluctably emerging in the wake of the sixties.[28]

Whether or not that was Maxwell Davies's intention, he received a lesson in the impotence of modernism when the piece was performed, and its final gesture—the smashing of the violinist's instrument by the singer-actor

portraying the deranged king—failed to shock the royally entertained audience, long inured to whatever jolts a modernist might try to administer. In any case, *Eight Songs* and *Vesalii icones* were a turning point for the composer, who turned his back on avant-gardism, embraced an increasingly non- or pre- if not postmodernist approach, and embarked on a career path increasingly reminiscent of Benjamin Britten's: residence in the country (in Maxwell Davies's case, the Orkney Islands), engagement with the surrounding community, composition of "useful" music including operas and concertos for young performers, unironic rapprochement with traditional genres and conventional styles.

Nobody could have foreseen in 1969 that between 1975 and 1996 this composer, of all people, would write six proper symphonies cast deliberately in a line with those of Sibelius, long a favorite with British audiences. The only shocking aspect of Maxwell Davies's later career was his defection from the company of shockers (and his severing of ties to his former modernist comrades, including the unreformed Birtwistle).

Notes:

(24) Donal Henahan, "Crumb, the Tone Poet," *New York Times Magazine*, 11 May 1975, p. 50.

(25) Andrew Porter, *A Musical Season* (New York: The Viking Press, 1974), p. 125.

(26) John Rockwell, *All American Music: Composition in the Late Twentieth Century* (New York: Knopf, 1983), p. 78.

(27) Kyle Gann, *American Music in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Schirmer, 1997), p. 226.

(28) David Paul, "Three Critics and a Mad King," University of California at Berkeley seminar paper, December 2000.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online

George Rochberg

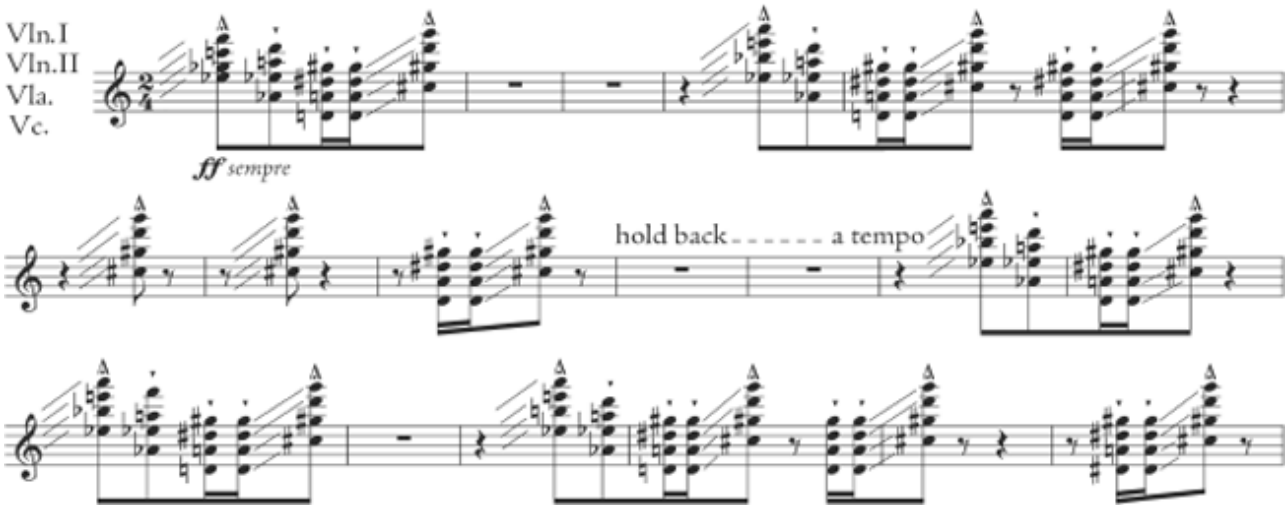
String quartet: 1940–75

Leonard Bernstein

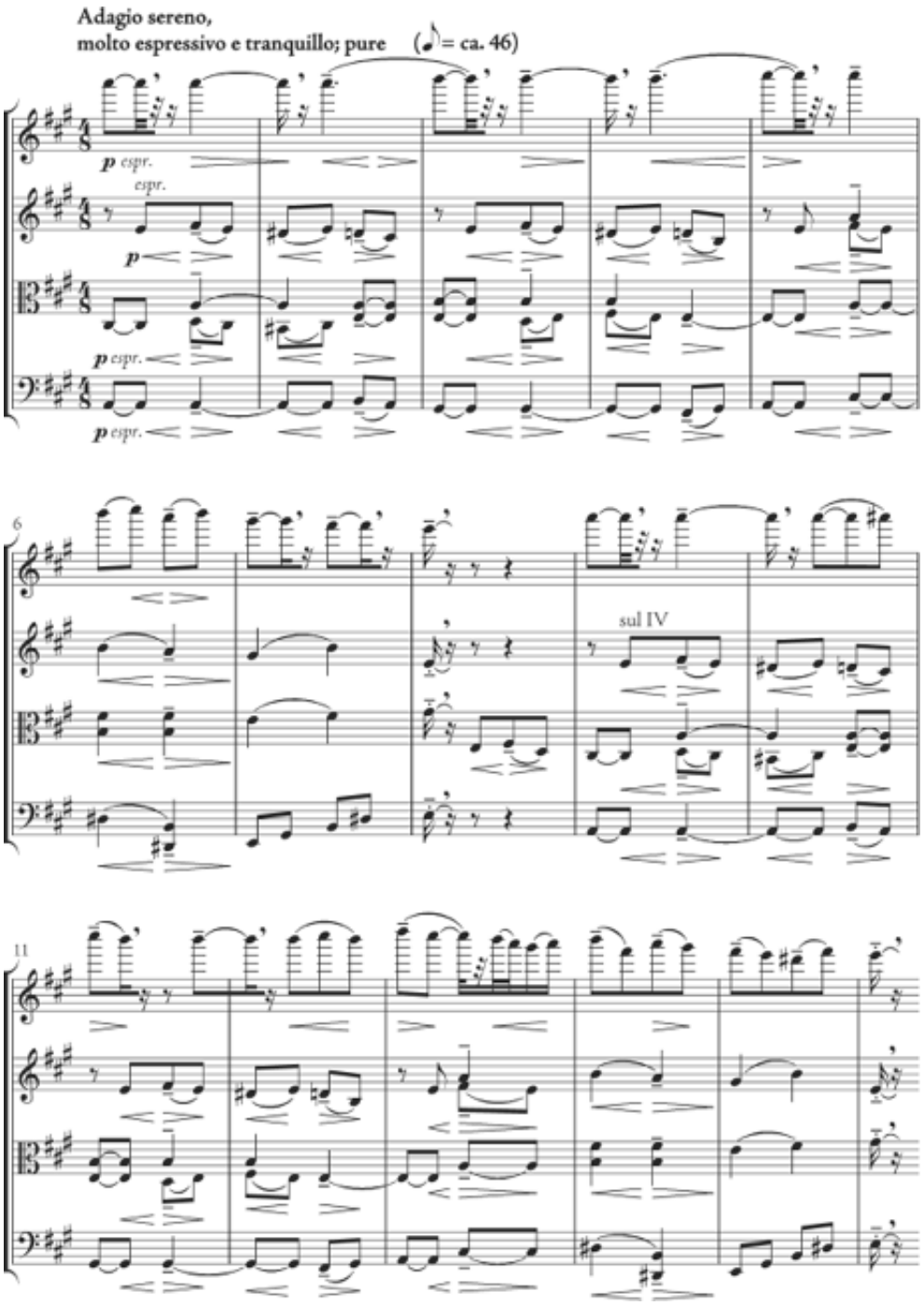
APOSTASY

Chapter: CHAPTER 9 After Everything
Source: MUSIC IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

It was still possible to shock, however, and Rochberg proved it. Nothing in the work of previous *collageurs*, including Rochberg himself, prepared audiences or critics for his Third Quartet, even though its continuity with his previous works is obvious in retrospect. Its first movement, marked *Allegro fantastico; violente; furioso*, raised no eyebrows. Fantastic violence and fury were the modernist stock in trade, and the music was based on harmonies that, while suitably dissonant, were altogether familiar: every chord in Ex. 9-3a is a composite "atonal triad" plus inversion, a harmony of stacked fourths and tritones that had been in widespread use since the early years of the century, and the melodic motive is an arpeggiation of the same harmony, equalizing the "vertical" and "horizontal" dimensions in a manner long associated with Schoenberg and Bartók. This was a time-tested, everyday—hence conservative—"new music" gambit.



ex. 9-3a George Rochberg, Quartet no. 3, I, beginning



ex. 9-3b George Rochberg, Quartet no. 3, III, mm. 1-32

The shock of the new came in the third movement, a set of variations marked *Adagio sereno, molto espressivo e tranquillo; pure* (Ex. 9-3b). Its three-sharp key signature means what it says: this is a work in a fully functional A major, confined to a style that (according to one baffled critic) "César Franck would have deemed harmonically unadventurous."[29] So he would; for the style (not only as regards harmony but as regards the treatment of the instruments) is identifiably that of Beethoven's late quartets, and in affect the movement alludes specifically to the Cavatina from op. 130 and the "Heilige Dankgesang" ("Hymn of Thanksgiving") from op. 132.

Coming as it does after two movements in unspectacular (and anonymous) but nevertheless solidly identifiable twentieth-century style, the stylistic contrast is obviously related to the collage techniques Rochberg had been employing for nearly a decade. But for its duration, the Adagio was not a collage but a pastiche—something that

had no modernist credentials at all. (Later, Rochberg extracted it from its original context and reissued it in an arrangement for string orchestra called “Transcendental Variations,” in which ingenuous pastiche completely supplants ironic collage.) It actually sounded like Beethoven, and—as the author of this book can attest—the 1973 Nonesuch recording by the Concord Quartet (the group that had commissioned the piece) quickly became a favorite item for “guess the composer” games.

A composition like this broke all the rules. There was little or no “distancing.” The impression was one not of sophisticated irony, but (as with Crumb) of disconcerting sincerity. Unlike the neoclassicism of the 1920s, in which aspects of the morphology and phonology of obsolete styles were revived amid a syntax that was wholly contemporary, Rochberg's Adagio revived the syntax as well, treating Beethoven's style as if it were not obsolete at all. To write in an obsolete style as if it were not obsolete was to challenge the whole idea of stylistic obsolescence. And to challenge that idea was to put in question the “necessity” of the twentieth century's stylistic revolutions—the most sacred of all modernist dogmas.

Of course there were many composers, especially in America, who had come of age in Stravinsky's “neoclassical” (or Copland's “Americanist”) orbit, and who wrote in more or less conventional “tonal” idioms all through the period of stylistic revolution. They included celebrities like the charismatic, photogenic Leonard Bernstein, one of the most prominent conductors of the period, who led the New York Philharmonic from 1957 to 1969 (and was thereafter “conductor laureate” for life). Television had made him by the 1960s probably the most famous classical musician in the world. Nearly a decade before Rochberg made headlines with his Third Quartet, Bernstein wrote *Chichester Psalms* (1965), a euphonious choral composition in B♭ major that rode the coattails of his personal fame to a popularity that, it is safe to say, no other classical composition of the decade ever approached. But it was not perceived as making (or challenging) history; quite the contrary.

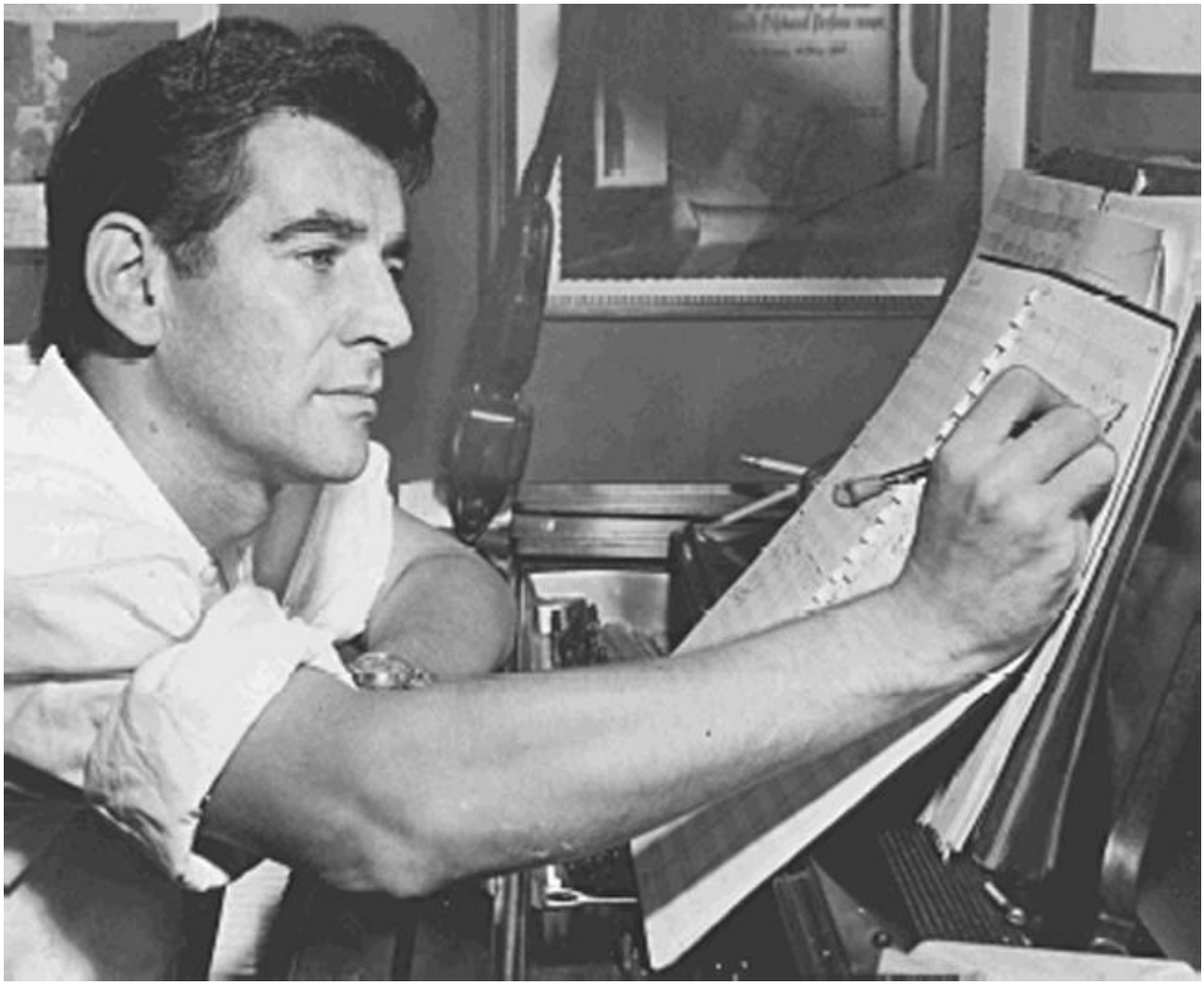


fig. 9-3 Leonard Bernstein, photographed by Al Ravenna in 1955.

Ned Rorem, another American traditionalist, familiar to us for his showy tribute to the Beatles (chapter 7), wryly observed of the stir that Rochberg's Quartet was making that people who quit smoking gain a sort of praise that people who never smoked at all never get, even though the latter are the more virtuous. And while it was not exactly praise that Rochberg was getting (although traditional antimodernists and other lapsed or lapsing modernists did greet the Third Quartet with some enthusiasm), the point hit home. Within the view of history that supported modernism, "tonal" composers in the twentieth century, no matter how famous or successful, were historically insignificant—and the relative lack of attention that they are paid in narrative histories, even this one, shows how influential the modernist "master narrative" has been on historical writing.

But nobody could write Rochberg off that way. "Once one of the foremost serial composers"[30] (in the words of a younger colleague), he had done the unthinkable: he had been at the vanguard and quit. His significance as an academic modernist had been universally acknowledged, so he could not now be ignored. Regarded as an apostate, he was hailed and reviled in equal measure for the act he had committed rather than the music he produced. In similar fashion, when three years later a "neotonal" piece (Sonata for Solo Violin by Hans Jürgen von Bose) was finally performed at Darmstadt, the audience erupted in protests and catcalls reminiscent of the *Rite of Spring* premiere sixty years before. Unlike the latter, however, the performance was literally drowned out and the performer was forced to stop. Because it took place in Germany, where artists had been regularly shouted down by politicians within living memory, the protest begot more protests.

Whether in New York or Darmstadt, the initial reaction was provoked entirely by the style of the music rather than its specific content or expressive effect, which only corroborated the pattern of reception that had always attended twentieth-century music, *The Rite* and all. But rather than glorying in a succès de scandale, which would have confirmed him (however perversely) as a modernist, Rochberg decried the pattern and set out to demolish it. No other century had been as style-conscious as the twentieth, he complained. In no other century did each and every composer feel such a compulsion to "view his situation in terms of where he's been, where he is now, and where he must go."[31] These were the bedrock tenets of modernism, so deeply ingrained that most composers were not even aware of alternatives.

In part Rochberg himself was responsible for the polarized way in which his quartet was received, for he did everything he could to provoke it. In a program note that accompanied the 1973 recording, he preempted the debate he knew was coming with a searching discussion that must count among the earliest self-conscious proclamations of a postmodern sensibility in—and for—music. (It was the first of many increasingly acid musicopolitical polemics that he would write over the next two decades.) The quotation in the preceding paragraph about twentieth-century composers' need to, so to speak, take their historical temperature comes from this essay. Rochberg strongly implied that this compulsion, in which he had shared as much as anyone, amounted to a neurosis, and that the place to attack the disease and cure it—its root cause, so to speak—was the modern Western unidirectional concept of time itself. "Current biological research," he declared,

> corroborates Darwin: we bear the past in us. We do not, cannot begin all over again in each generation, because the past is indelibly printed on our central nervous systems. Each of us is part of a vast physical-mental-spiritual web of previous lives, existences, modes of thought, behavior, and perception; of actions and feelings reaching much further back than what we call "history." We are filaments of a universal mind, we dream each others' dreams and those of our ancestors. Time, thus, is not linear, but radial.[32]

The scientific "evidence" the composer adduced may be written off as puffing; but the belief it supported was real, and there for all to hear in the music. It was born, Rochberg said, of an honest reappraisal of the old paradox that bedeviled all composers in the twentieth century: "the music of the 'old masters' was a living presence; its spiritual values had not been displaced or destroyed by the new music."[33] There was an inherent and unhealthy contradiction in a philosophy of history that compelled one to reject earlier styles, when the persistence of those same styles was a fact of every musician's daily life. Rochberg began to suspect that he, like every other committed modernist composer, had cut himself off from the expressive possibilities that enabled the older music to survive. That renunciation, he feared, probably doomed his music and that of his contemporaries to oblivion.

Rejecting the modernist imperative, Rochberg wrote, was something he could not do "without great discomfort and difficulty, because I had acquired it, along with a number of similar notions, as a seemingly inevitable condition of the twentieth-century culture in which I had grown up."[34] Virtually every aspect of his unconscious heritage had to be brought to consciousness and jettisoned (a process that sounds very much like Freud's description of psychoanalysis) if he was to compose a movement like the Third Quartet's Adagio and mean it:

> I have had to abandon the notion of "originality," in which the personal style of the artist and his ego are the supreme values; the pursuit of the one-idea, uni-dimensional work and gesture which seems to have dominated the esthetics of art in the 20th century; and the received idea that it is necessary to divorce oneself from the past, to eschew the taint of association with those great masters who not only preceded us but (let it not be forgotten) created the art of music itself. In these ways I am turning away from what I consider the cultural pathology of my own time toward what can only be called a *possibility*: that music can be renewed by regaining contact with the tradition and means of the past, to re-emerge as a spiritual force with reactivated powers of melodic thought, rhythmic pulse, and large-scale structure.[35]

It was the last of these considerations, large-scale structure, that made the return to tonality necessary in Rochberg's view, because only tonality (with its power of forecasting and delaying cadences) gave music the dynamic momentum that made possible the genuinely coherent and expressively meaningful articulation of long temporal spans. What Rochberg's essay did not explain, however, was why it was desirable or even necessary to evoke the styles of *particular* "old masters." (In the finale of the Third Quartet, Mahler is just as recognizably evoked as Beethoven had been in the Adagio; and toward the middle of the Adagio, the fast cross-string arpeggios are reminiscent—surely deliberately—of the luminous ending of Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht*, an emblem of consolation.) That was the hardest aspect of Rochberg's changed manner for colleagues and critics to accept. Another question worth asking is why Rochberg should have come to his impasse, and then his turning point, exactly when he did. The essay does not really explain that, either.

Only later did Rochberg divulge the answer to the second question. It turned out that his postmodernist revolt did not happen as spontaneously as he had formerly implied, nor were the reasons for it as theoretical as his discussion of them had been. His last serial work was a trio for piano, violin, and cello, completed in 1963. The next year the composer experienced a personal tragedy, when his twenty-year-old son Paul, a poet, succumbed to cancer. He found he had no vocabulary with which to mourn his loss or seek solace from it. "It became crystal clear to me that I could not continue writing so-called 'serial' music," the composer told an interviewer. "It was finished, hollow, meaningless."[36] Having made this admission, Rochberg went on to confess that his objective in reverting to "tonality" was less to debate theories of history than simply to recapture a lost expressive range. "The over-intense manner of serialism and its tendency to inhibit physical pulse and rhythm led me to question a style which made it virtually impossible to express serenity, tranquillity, grace, wit, energy."[37]

Notes:

(29) Andrew Porter, "Questions," *The New Yorker*, 12 February 1979; rpt. in A. Porter, *Music of Three More Seasons* (New York: Knopf, 1981), p. 305.

(30) Jay Reise, "Rochberg the Progressive," *Perspectives of New Music* XIX (1980/81): 396.

(31) Liner note to Nonesuch Records H-71283 (1973).

(32) *Ibid*.

(33) *Ibid*.

(34) "On the Third String Quartet," in Rochberg, *The Aesthetics of Survival* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), p. 240.

(35) Liner note to Nonesuch H-71283.

(36) Cole Gagne and Tracy Caras, *Soundpieces: Interviews with American Composers*. (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1982), p. 340.

(37) Liner note to Nonesuch H-71283.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online
Postmodernism

George Rochberg

ESTHETICS OF PASTICHE

Chapter: CHAPTER 9 After Everything
Source: MUSIC IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

But the first question remains: why evoke the styles of particular "masters" rather than use the language of tonality in a more generic way that might ultimately become one's own? Rochberg never answered this question, and some were therefore led to the conclusion that his motives were shallow. Pastiche composition (as opposed to actual quotation) had never before been used for any other purpose than instruction, or the formal demonstration of skill. To use it as a method for sincere expression of personal emotion seemed a contradiction in terms. But one of Rochberg's major contentions, in his essay on the Third Quartet, was that one's personal emotions are never only that, but are also part of the "physical-mental-spiritual web" that connects people.

Yet if true, that point would apply equally to the old masters, the composers Rochberg adopted as his models, who after all did manage to create the personal idioms that he was content to imitate. (And it would also apply, say, to Poulenc and Prokofieff, who wrote, and to Britten and Shostakovich, who were still writing, in personal tonal idioms even in the twentieth century.) To understand Rochberg's conviction that he had to speak in the recognizable voices of the past one needs to take a further step into specifically postmodernist terrain.

In the "Postscript" to his novel *The Name of the Rose* (1983), the Italian writer Umberto Eco described the dilemma of "belatedness," the sense of coming after everything that mattered. Many artists and critics have identified that despairing sentiment as the distinguishing esthetic frame of the late-twentieth-century mind. Some have associated it with modernism, with its heavy sense of history's burden. But the typical modernist solution to the dilemma was to try to evade the burden through voracious innovation. Dubbed the "anxiety of influence" in 1973 by the literary critic Harold Bloom (often invoked by music historians in connection with Brahms, the first of the burdened moderns), that compulsion to allude to but also to distort and "misread" the past was interpreted, in Bloom's briefly influential theory, as the main engine driving the breakneck history of the arts. When that anxiety subsides into detached acquiescence, Eco argued, postmodernism begins. "I think of the postmodern attitude," he wrote,

> as that of a man who loves a very cultivated woman and knows he cannot say to her, "I love you madly," because he knows that she knows (and that she knows that he knows) that these words have already been written by Barbara Cartland [1901–2000, a famous romance novelist]. Still, there is a solution. He can say, "As Barbara Cartland would put it, I love you madly." At this point, having avoided false innocence, having said clearly that it is no longer possible to speak innocently, he will nevertheless have said what he wanted to say to the woman: that he loves her, but he loves her in an age of lost innocence. If the woman goes along with this, she will have received a declaration of love all the same. Neither of the two speakers will feel innocent, both will have accepted the challenge of the past, of the already said, which cannot be eliminated, both will consciously and with pleasure play the game of irony. But both will have succeeded, once again, in speaking of love.[38]

Eco (as if practicing the detachment that he preached) wrote lightheartedly about what many artists have

experienced as a tragic state of affairs. The sincerity that so surprised and disconcerted critics and colleagues in Rochberg's resumption of a premodernist style, according to Eco's account of postmodernism, was bought at the price of a greater “global” irony. Rochberg expresses his own heartfelt emotion “as Beethoven (Mahler, Schoenberg) would put it,” for according to Eco, there is no other way of doing so at the fallen end of the twentieth century. Using an innocent language innocently—using tonality “in one's own way”—is no longer even an option. The choice is bleak: either renounce expression altogether or borrow a voice.

The implication is indeed depressing: just as we can communicate artistically only through the studied simulacra of styles that were once spontaneous, so our emotions themselves have become simulacra. Rochberg's quest to regain the full range of sincere emotional expression that had been available to artists (and other humans) before the horrors of the twentieth century is thus doomed to failure; but the failure is noble, because it faces the unhappy truth of contemporary life rather than retreating, as modernism had done, into a self-satisfied, self-induced (and socially isolating) delusion of freedom. “Postmodernism,” in this view, means resignation to (or making the best of) a state of diminished capacity.

Whether read at face value, as a brave and potentially fruitful undertaking to turn back the clock at the last minute, or in Eco's wry interpretation as a forlorn but necessary (and therefore still brave) coping with a hopeless reality, Rochberg's postmodernism was taken by many if not most of his fellow professionals as intolerable backsliding. It inspired a backlash; and as always, the backlash accomplished more than the original initiative had done toward publicizing and validating “new romanticism” as a timely creative option. As earlier, in the case of architecture, the fulminations did not do what they were supposed to do but instead helped turn postmodernism, or at least Rochberg's variety of it, into a media event. Within a few years, the New York Philharmonic commissioned its composer-in-residence, Jacob Druckman (1928–96), to organize a festival of recent music called “Horizons ’83: Since 1968, A New Romanticism?”

The loudest protests came from the most committed modernists. Among critics that meant Andrew Porter, who scoffed at the festival as a “swing to the right”[39] comparable to Ronald Reagan's election to the presidency, which in music as much in politics meant “the repudiation of newly enlightened ways, the reinforcement of old prejudices, the championship of easy mediocrity, and self-indulgent nostalgia.” Porter saw his task, correctly, as first of all to defend the modernist view of history. “In theory,” he allowed of Rochberg's about-face, “there is no reason a modern composer shouldn't write a Monteverdian madrigal as good as any Monteverdi wrote (or an artist paint in Vermeer's manner a Christ at Emmaus as moving as if it had been painted by Vermeer himself).”[40] But the allowance—especially the calculated reference to Vermeer—was in fact derogatory. Mentioning Vermeer brought to mind Hans van Meegeren, the artful forger whose “Vermeers” had made him rich. It was van Meegeren to whom Rochberg should be compared, Porter implied, because, he insisted, it doesn't ever happen in practice that a simulacrum is as good as an original.

But, comes the postmodernist retort, that is only because we know it is a simulacrum and judge it by irrelevant standards of authenticity. And it is only prejudice, such an answer might continue, that allows Porter to assert a priori that when Rochberg writes in the manner of Beethoven or Mahler, “it becomes apparent not only that he is not their peer but also that he has donned fancy dress.” But authenticity was not the only point to be raised in objection to the new postmodernist turn. When Rochberg came forward with an opera, *The Confidence Man* (after Melville), entirely composed in “pastiche” idioms, the critic was ready to make his political allegations explicit. “The effect of this music,” Porter warned,

> can perhaps be pernicious. It was disturbing to hear one of our abler young violinists remark at a symposium that he would rather play good Amy Beach than bad Elliott Carter. (Is there any bad Elliott Carter?) Rochberg writes reactionary stuff—music whose appeal is to closed, unadventurous minds. I know nothing of his extramusical beliefs, but his works could become cultural fodder for the New Right: Down with progressive thought! Down with progressive music![41]

That kind of critical hysteria is good press for any composer. And even though he distorted it with a dubious political analogy, Porter was correct to identify progress as the issue dividing modernists and postmodernists. Sometimes Rochberg's defenders have tried to justify him on the old grounds, by claiming (to quote his younger colleague Jay Reise) that his recontextualizations of "tonal" styles "have led to a highly progressive music,"[42] since one hears common-practice tonality differently when it is presented neither as the unquestioned norm nor as an inert relic of the past, but as one among equally valid alternatives for composers of the present. "That George Rochberg's music directly involves the past—for the sake of reopening the entire question of what is expressively valid in a transhistorical sense—is what spurs the erroneous conclusion that his music is reactionary," Reise concluded. "A careful and sensitive listening to Rochberg's recent music will clearly reveal, however, his exceptional role in the progress of music in our time."[43]

By casting Rochberg's eclecticism as novel rather than nostalgic, Reise emphasized its kinship with what Charles Jencks called "double coding" in architecture. Juxtaposing historical references without respect for their chronology does alter one's apprehension of them. The objective in both cases is for styles formerly thought of as part of an inexorable historical progression ("decorative" to "functional" in architecture, "tonal" to "atonal" in music) to be regarded as expressive rather than historical categories, all equally available to artists of the present, whose "transhistorical" reach is for that reason richer in possibilities than that of any previous generation of artists. But that viewpoint is possible only if one renounces the idea of historical progress in the arts. To call it progress (or progressive) in its own right only creates a needless paradox.

Beginning with his Quartet no. 7 (1979), Rochberg's music settled into a distinctive idiom reminiscent of what in historical terms used to be viewed as a "transitional" style poised on the cusp of atonality—a style bridging or synthesizing late Mahler, say, and early Schoenberg. To use such a style as an entirely stable idiom, not "pregnant with the seeds of the future" or leading inexorably to something else—using it, that is, in a manner altogether foreign to the way confirmed historicists like Mahler or Schoenberg themselves regarded it—is another way of liberating music from the tyranny of history. In a "transhistorical" view there is no such thing as a transitional style. To achieve that perspective is the essential postmodernist project.

Notes:

(38) Umberto Eco, *Postscript to The Name of the Rose* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), pp. 67–68.

(39) Andrew Porter, "Tumult of Mighty Harmonies," *The New Yorker*, 20 June 1983; rpt. Porter, *Musical Events: A Chronicle, 1980–1983* (New York: Summit Books, 1987), p. 466.

(40) Andrew Porter, "Questions," p. 306.

(41) Andrew Porter, "A Frail Bark," *The New Yorker*, 16 August 1982; *Musical Events*, p. 292.

(42) Reise, "Rochberg the Progressive," p. 395.

(43) *Ibid*., p. 406.

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See also from Grove Music Online

Krzysztof Penderecki

György Ligeti

David Del Tredici

ACCESSIBILITY

Chapter: CHAPTER 9 After Everything
Source: MUSIC IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Partly following Rochberg's example, partly in response to a general turn away from utopian thinking that mounted through the 1980s toward a dramatic climax in the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the cold war in Europe, several other prominent and successful serialists (and a few avant-gardists of a different stripe) defected to "tonal" idioms that the master narrative had long since declared dead. The loosening of cold-war thinking allowed the reopening of many old and ostensibly settled questions, including the question whether commitment to historical progress was worth the sacrifice of the audience. No longer shadowed by the specter of totalitarianism, "accessibility" regained a measure of respectability. Where Rochberg described his acts and motives strictly in "poietic" (maker's) terms—his own need for freedom of choice and expressive scope—younger converts to tonality put things "esthesically," in terms of the audience and *its* needs.

Two of the most prominent central European avant-gardists, György Ligeti and Krzysztof Penderecki, made spectacular neoromantic swerves in the 1970s. Penderecki's may have been stimulated by the *Solidarność* (Solidarity) movement in Poland, an independent workers' initiative that led ultimately to the fall of Communism there. Seeing social solidarity rather than social alienation as the most progressive political and social force is fatal to modernism. In any case, Penderecki began writing in a style that reminded Poles of the work of Mieczyslaw Karlowicz (1876–1909), a younger Polish contemporary of Mahler and Richard Strauss. Audiences abroad, unfamiliar with Karlowicz, tended to hear the music in terms of the latter's models in the New German School: one critic likened Penderecki's Second Symphony, composed for the New York Philharmonic in 1980 and reverently incorporating the familiar carol "Silent Night" as thematic material, to "Christmas at Wotan's."[44] Later, after the fall of Communism, Penderecki's style mutated again to a middle position resembling the later work of Shostakovich.

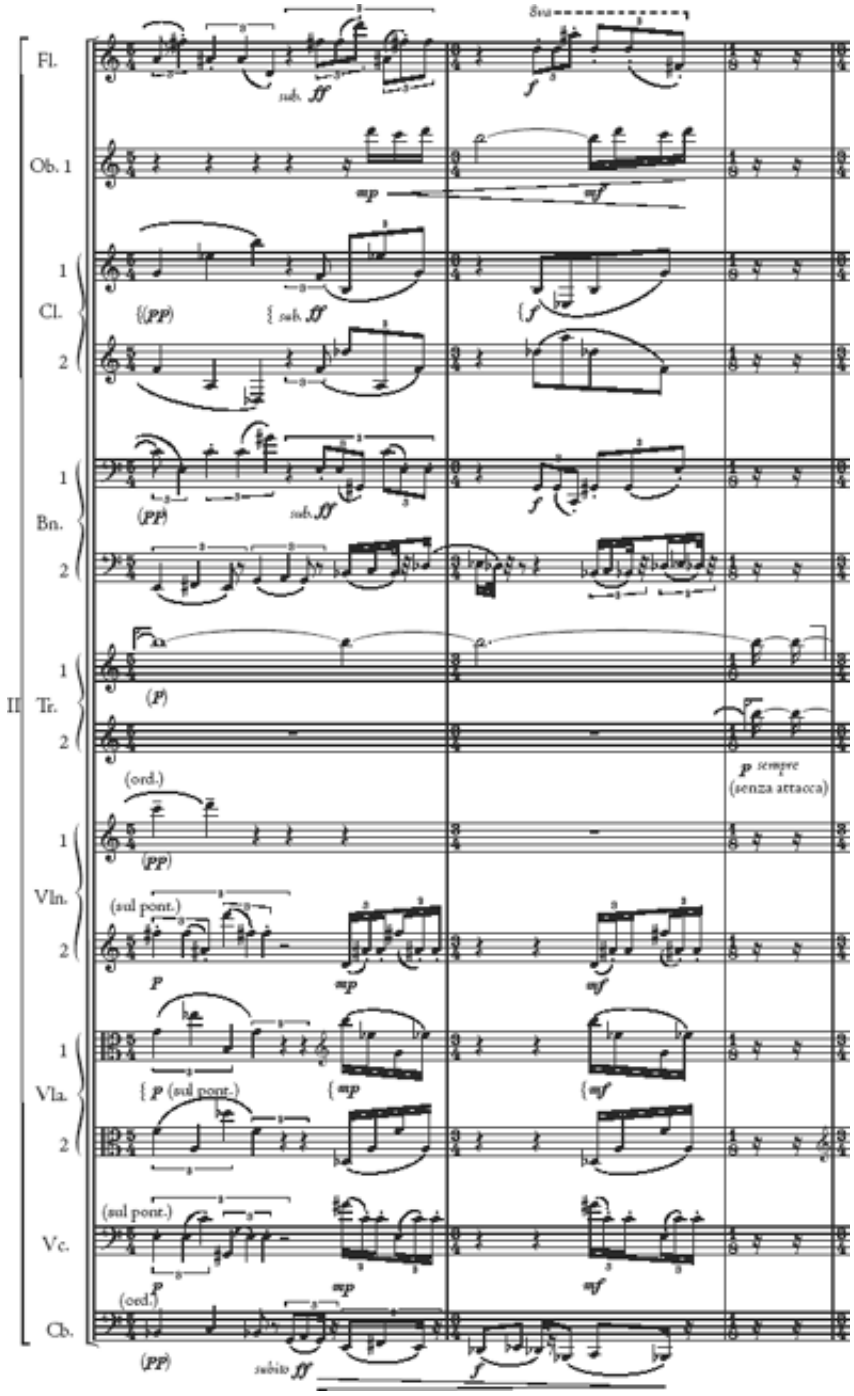
Ligeti's turnaround was stimulated by a lengthy stay in California in 1972, as composer-in-residence at Stanford University. There he heard the early minimalist works of Riley and Reich, and imitated them in *Clocks and Clouds* (1973) for women's chorus and orchestra. The second of his Three Pieces for Two Pianos (1976) is titled "Self-Portrait with Reich and Riley (and Chopin in the Background)." The opera *Le grand macabre* (1978) continued following the trend toward eclectic collage, now admitting rock. Finally, in his Trio for Violin, Horn, and Piano, written in 1982 as a companion piece to Brahms's trio for the same combination of instruments, Ligeti put himself into a picture with Brahms himself, along with Bartók, by then regarded (especially in Hungary) not as a "modern" but as a "classic." He frankly described the work as his regretful acknowledgment that the avant-garde had run out of steam, and that continued adherence to its ideals was a far more retrogressive stance than the "retro" styles that were taking its place.

The most prominent American defector after Rochberg was David Del Tredici (b. 1937), another alumnus (along with La Monte Young and Terry Riley) of Seymour Shifrin's composition seminar at the University of California at Berkeley. Unlike the others, Del Tredici went from Berkeley to Princeton and at first seemed destined for the

career that such a move implied. His early works, beginning in 1958, were serial compositions that fastened, like Rochberg's, on the unifying possibilities of hexachordal combinatoriality, and also displayed a virtuosic flair for crafty counterpoint.

Syzygy (1966), his best-known work from this period, is one of several based on texts by James Joyce. A twenty-five-minute setting of two Joyce poems ("Ecce Puer" and "Nightpiece" from *Pomes Penyeach*) for a virtuoso soprano and chamber orchestra with French horn as co-soloist, it has a first movement, based entirely on palindromic motives, that plays its pitches back from the midpoint in transposed retrograde and with string and wind parts reversed (see Ex. 9-4a), and a second movement that contains a cadenza for the two soloists in which the soprano sings a canon by inversion with herself by splitting her line into two registers, each independently setting the same line of text (Ex. 9-4b).

fig. 9-4 David Del Tredici.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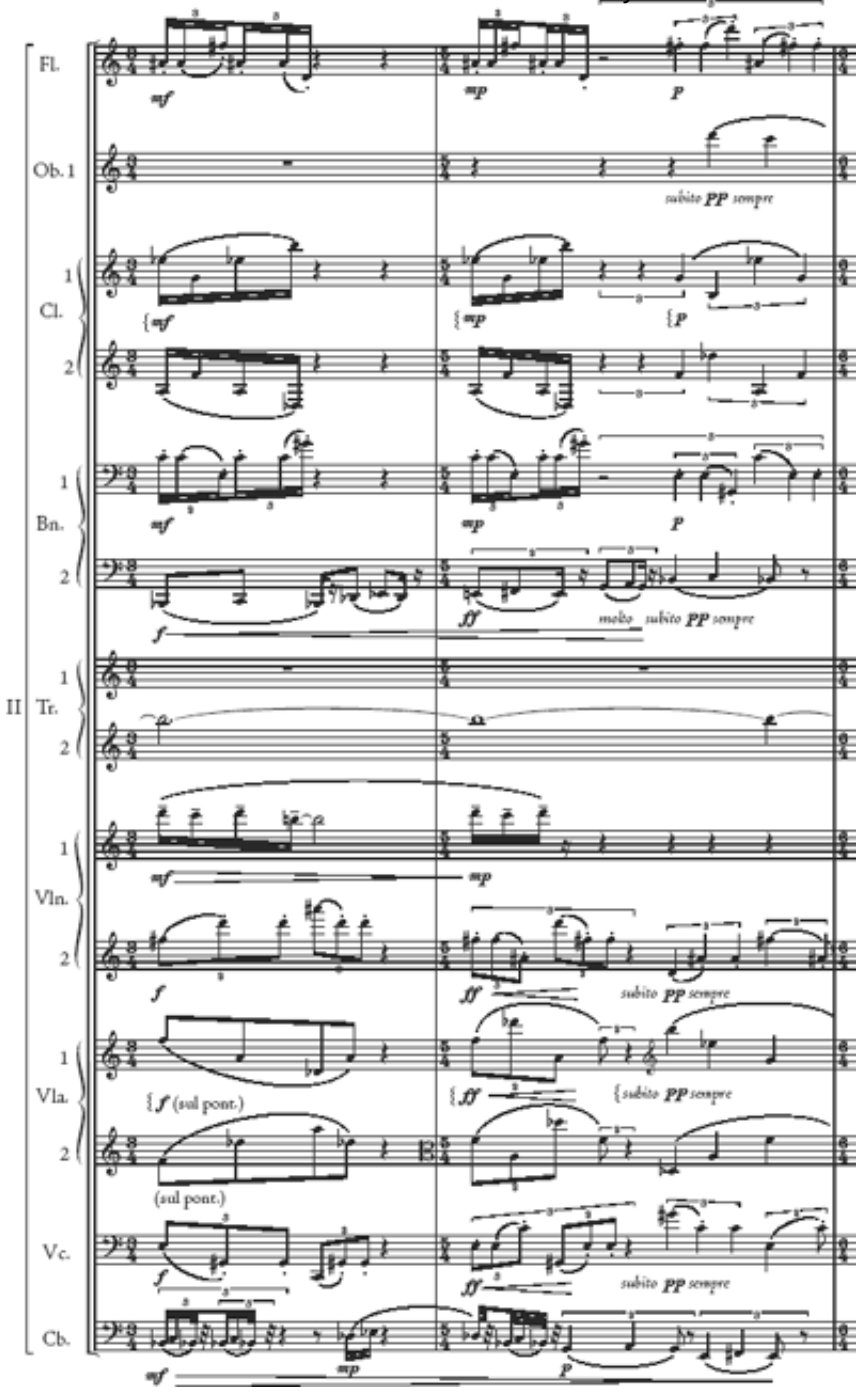
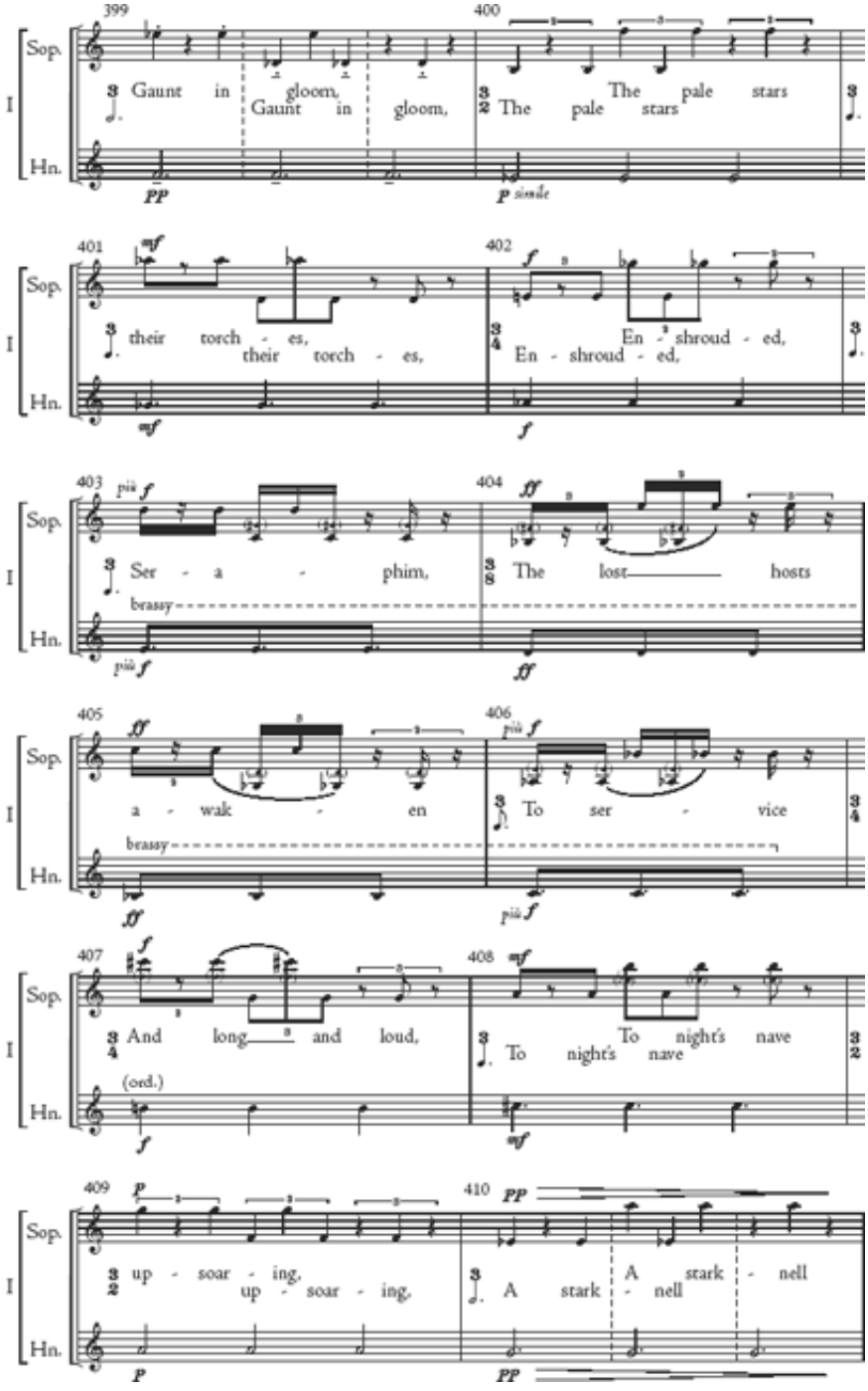


ex. 9-4a David Del Tredici, *Syzygy*, The midpoint of the palindrome in I



ex. 9-4b David Del Tredici, *Syzygy*, The canon by inversion in II

In both movements, the contrapuntal texture makes spectacular use of polyrhythms. Like Rochberg in his Second Quartet, Del Tredici was definitely keeping up with the Joneses (that is, with Elliott Carter). The title, an astronomical term meaning an alignment of heavenly bodies, refers to the arcane relationships—the palindromes and inversions—that so infest the composition. The composer remarked that he was always fascinated with the word and its queer spelling, which suggested that it was some other, nonexistent, word spelled backward.

Like many pieces by Princeton alumni, *Syzygy* was made for analysis, and received the full treatment in *Perspectives of New Music*, but it acquired a cult following not only among connoisseurs of serialism but also

among connoisseurs of musical eccentricity as an adorably esoteric in-joke by a composer "with a fondness for strict procedures but with the rarer ability"—in the words of Oliver Knussen (b. 1952), a bright young English composer and conductor—"to see their bizarre side."[45] One *bizarrerie* that would not escape even the most casual observer is the use of a huge -octave carillon of tubular chimes requiring two players, which made performance of the piece, for all intents and purposes, fiscally prohibitive.

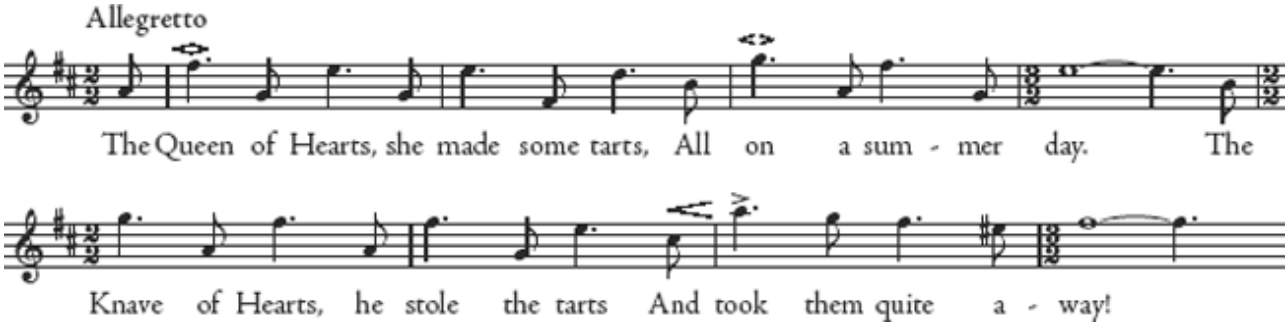
At this stage of his career, then, Del Tredici aimed at, and received, high professional esteem for exceedingly clever works composed in an esthetic vacuum. As far as the general public was concerned he did not exist; nor did it for him. No one would have predicted in 1966 that within ten years he would have forsaken serialism altogether, or that he would exercise his ingenuity in ways designed to tickle the fancy of subscription audiences in major concert halls. The catalyst was Lewis Carroll, whose poems (mainly drawn from *Alice in Wonderland*) would become for him a greater obsession, and a more fertile source of bizarre compositional scheming, than James Joyce had ever been.

Del Tredici's devotion to Carroll was even more consuming than Crumb's to Lorca. He has since acknowledged the programmatic (or even political) role that his identification with Carroll's "sexual secrets" played in channeling his composing activities, even though his own secrets (homosexual) were of a different order from Carroll's (pedophiliac). Between 1968 and 1996, he composed some dozen works on texts from Carroll's masterpiece ("some dozen" because various items were rescored, reused, reshuffled, and grouped into composites, and a definitive enumeration is impossible). Almost all of them are scored for a solo soprano voice amplified to compete with huge Straussian orchestras, plus in most cases a concertante "folk group" containing saxophones, banjo, mandolin, accordion, and (sometimes) electric guitars.

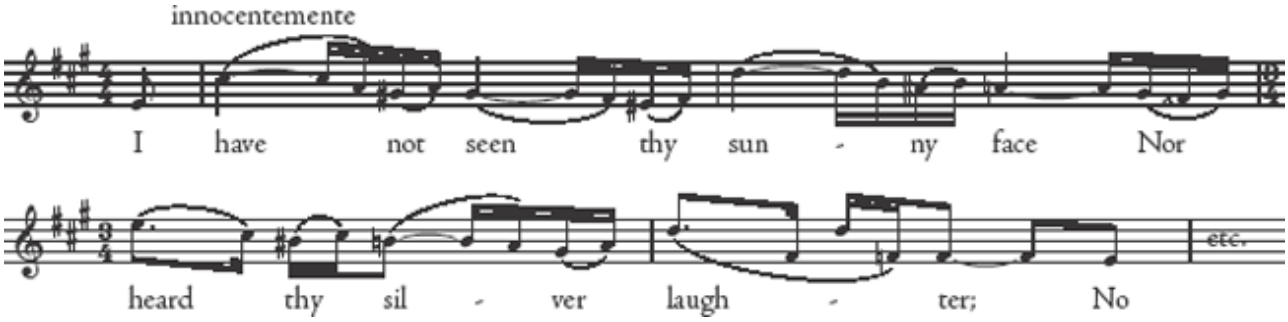
The first of them, called *Pop-Pourri*, was a typical "sixties" amalgamation of "high" and "vernacular" styles; when he composed it, Del Tredici thought of it as an isolated response to a transient historical moment. But then came a five-movement *Alice Symphony* (1969), followed by *Adventures Underground* (1971) and *Vintage Alice* (1972). By then, thinking enough was enough, he took his leave of Carroll with a sixty-five-minute epitome, pointedly titled *Final Alice* (1975), written in response to a commission from six major orchestras plus the National Endowment for the Arts in honor of the United States' bicentennial. It is based on the final episode of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, in which Alice observes, and finally upsets, the trial of the Knave of Hearts. The soloist must both narrate the tale and sing four interpolated arias.

Final Alice still contained a few twelve-tone passages to accompany magical transformations like Alice's fantastic growth. In context, the atonal music was an illustrative foil, in which the tone rows have the same distorting and disorienting effect as the accompanying glissandos for an amplified and reverberated theremin. They have become a sort of sound effect. The main musical matter, the four dazzling arias, are a virtuoso test both for the singer and for the composer, since they all amount to a huge set of variations on a single homely "Victorian"-sounding tune (Ex. 9-5a). The music appealed greatly to the kind of audience that relished, say, Strauss's *Don Quixote* (1897), another set of stunningly orchestrated, programmatic variations. The 1976 recording of *Final Alice* by its original performers (the soprano Barbara Hendricks and the Chicago Symphony under Sir Georg Solti, to whom the work is dedicated) was a classical "chart-topper" in the weeks following its release—a first for a contemporary composition.

But *Final Alice* was not the end. Its success brought in more commissions, and in 1980–1981 there followed the gargantuan *Child Alice*, another Alice Symphony—or better, perhaps, a composite cantata—that has hardly ever been performed in toto. The first of its four parts, *In Memory of a Summer Day* (commissioned by the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra and first performed in 1980), itself an hour long has three movements—"Simple Alice," "Triumphant Alice," and "Ecstatic Alice"—framed by an Introduction and a Postlude. The whole composition, like *Final Alice*, is a set of variations on another simple "Victorian" tune (Ex. 9-5b).



ex. 9-5a David Del Tredici, *Final Alice*, main tune



ex. 9-5b David Del Tredici, *In Memory of a Summer Day*, main tune

The palpable discrepancy between these homely materials and the prodigious structures to which they give rise, replete with *Götterdämmerung*-like culminations (marked "highpoint" and even, where necessary, "climax of climaxes" in the scores) and fantastically detailed, rhythmically intricate orchestral textures is in some sense the point of these pieces. In *Final Alice* the ironic incongruity between simple contents and inconceivably artful presentation seems quite explicit, as in Aria 3 ("Parody Variations"). But sometimes the artful textures and orchestration seem deliberately to recede from the forefront of the listener's attention, and at such moments the irony becomes precarious. It is when the composer seems to mean it that his music can become troubling. The fourth movement of *Child Alice*, called *All in the Golden Afternoon*, commissioned by the Philadelphia Orchestra and premiered in 1981, lasts almost another hour and consists of

• a lush A♭-major setting ("Aria") of the seven-stanza "Preface Poem" to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*

• an orchestral "Fantasia" in A major

• a "Lullaby" set to the last two stanzas of the same poem

• a "Cadenza" (five minutes' worth of melismas on the single word "Alice")

• yet another setting ("against all reason" as the composer confesses or brags in a program note) of the last stanza of the title poem,

• a coda, back in A♭ major, titled "In Conclusion (Sunset)," in which (quoting again from the program note) "steadily pulsing strings support a glowing texture, over which the soprano, as if from a great distance, floats, again and again, the poem's opening line—'All in the golden afternoon.'" Again and again—and again and again

Del Tredici's *Alice* pieces are only nominally about Alice. What they are really all about is excess—glut, overindulgence, binging on voluptuous sonority and honeyed harmony. Their reception has belied the easy charge of pandering, since for every listener who has reveled along with the composer there was at least one who

reacted as one might to a seven-course meal of cotton candy; and for every critic who hailed the composer's phenomenal mastery of variation technique and orchestration there were at least two who decried his "elephantine wallowing"[47] (Porter) in Carroll's delicate whimsy or attributed the way in which the composer was squandering his ingenuity to some sort of morbid pathology (their dismissals occasionally couched in thinly veiled homophobic terms).

Child Alice, the most transgressively extravagant piece of all, was also the first of Del Tredici's Carroll-inspired orgies to dispense altogether with "distancing" atonalisms. Nor has there been any subsequent backsliding on his part into modernism. Any suspicion that the composer's intention was anything but provocative is dispelled by the title of the 1985 orchestral fantasy, *March to Tonality*, which touts the recovery of conventional harmony as, yes, progress. It is a paradox that Del Tredici loves to milk, telling an interviewer, for example, that "for me, tonality was actually a daring discovery. I grew up in a climate in which, for a composer, only dissonance and atonality were acceptable. Right now, tonality is exciting for me. I think I invented it. In a sense, I have."[48]

But flouting (and in puncturing, exposing) the puritanism of the modernist "high church" is only part of the story. There is also the nostalgia for a happy childhood that Del Tredici habitually asserts in defense of his sincerity, to prove (curiously echoing the modernist line) that his turn toward tonality was conditioned by an inner necessity. In the same interview, he wittingly or unwittingly echoed (in a sort of retrograde inversion) Schoenberg's famous account of the irresistible forces that drew him kicking and screaming into atonality:

> About halfway through *Final Alice*, I thought, "Oh my God, if I just leave it like this, my colleagues will think I'm crazy." But then I thought, "What else can I do? If nothing else occurs to me, I can't go against my instincts." But I was *terrified* my colleagues would think I was an idiot. People think now that I wanted to be tonal and have a big audience. But that was just not true. I *didn't* want to be tonal. My world was my colleagues—my composing friends. The success of *Final Alice* was very defining as to who my real friends were. I think many composers regard success as a threat. It's really better, they think, if *nobody* has any success, to be all in one boat.[49]

But immediately after this squeamish protest against suspicion of pandering came affirmation:

> Composers now are beginning to realize that if a piece excites an audience, *that doesn't mean it's terrible*. For my generation, it is considered vulgar to have an audience really, *really* like a piece on a first hearing. But why are we writing music except to move people and to be expressive? To have what has moved us move somebody else? Everything is reversed today. If a piece appeals immediately, sensuously, if an audience likes it: all those are "bad things." It is really very *Alice in Wonderland*.

Later, Del Tredici was able to tell a sympathetic younger composer that "I used to play the complete first draft of *Final Alice* just one time each day and then would consider my response: where was it dull, illogical, too much, too little? My *immediate* response was all I valued. I wanted to hear the piece as, eventually, the audience would—once through, without preparation."[50]

Notes:

(44) R. Taruskin, "Et in Arcadia Ego."

(45) Oliver Knussen, "David Del Tredici and 'Syzygy,'" *Tempo* no. 118 (1976): 15.

(46) Stagebill, New York Philharmonic, 2 June 1983, p. 20d.

(47) Andrew Porter, *Musical Events*, p. 468.

(48) Rockwell, *All American Music*, p. 77.

(49) *Ibid*., pp. 82–83.

(50) Paul Moravec, "An Interview with David Del Tredici," *Contemporary Music Review* VI, part 2 (1992): 21.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online
Fred Lerdahl

Serialism

COGNITIVE CONSTRAINTS?

Chapter: CHAPTER 9 After Everything
Source: MUSIC IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Del Tredici's defiantly friendly identification or solidarity with the audience is reflected in the tougher, more "scientific" (or at any rate, more academic) stance adopted by Fred Lerdahl (b. 1943), a composer who has been impelled by postmodernist qualms to study structural linguistics and cognitive psychology in an effort to understand and possibly define the limits within which music must be composed if it is to be intelligible to listeners. This project is the most controversial of all, precisely because of its theoretical nature. It is not merely a description of one person's composing practice, but seeks general truths on which prescriptions can be based. Lerdahl has been accused of promoting his own music by "universalizing" it as a norm for listening. "No," he has objected, "I do not tell people how to listen; I try to find out how they listen."[51] Not everybody wants to know this, and there are good reasons why.

Like all utopian ideas, modernism is basically optimistic. The notion that composers are free to organize their music in unprecedented ways, and that it is up to audiences to adapt to them, is based on a "behaviorist" psychological model. Such a model assumes that the mind is a tabula rasa, a clean slate on which experience is inscribed and reinforced by practice. The mind's activities are conceived as responses to external stimuli, and forms of behavior can be learned, according to this theory, through positive or negative reinforcements (a.k.a. rewards and punishments). Serial music, or any other kind of highly structured music, however novel, is no less intelligible than tonal music, on this model; it is just that listeners have less practice with it. This is the model of mental behavior associated with B. F. Skinner (1904–90), one of the most influential psychologists of the twentieth century, whose theories had a profound impact on modern educational methods—an impact that coincided, as it happened, with the heyday of academic serialism.

Skinnerism received a strong challenge in the 1960s from the work of the linguist Noam Chomsky (b. 1928), who sought to explain how people can learn to form original utterances—sentences they have never heard spoken—on the sole basis of imitating languages that they hear, without any formal instruction in rules. In the case of one's native language, after all, one always "learns the rules" after one has already learned the language. To a large extent, therefore, the rules governing language must be axiomatic assumptions of which we are not conscious. They must be instinctual.

Or, to put it the way Chomsky did, all natural language possesses a "deep structure" that conforms to the innate structure of the mind—a concept that behaviorists had long since rejected. It is a pessimistic concept, since if there is such a thing as an innate mental structure, then it has limits that can in principle be discovered. In the Chomskian view, the mind is not "perfectible." Rather, it is decisively biased. There are some things we humans can learn and some things that we cannot, some ways of processing information that we can practice, some that we cannot. And if that is so, it follows that the mind is no tabula rasa. It is equipped to process only certain kinds of information.

In 1983, together with a linguist named Ray Jackendoff, Lerdahl published a novel study of tonal harmony that

sought, on the Chomskian model, not to build up a theory of harmonic practice on the basis of its materials (chords and progressions), but rather to uncover or infer the psychological processes ("transformations") to which musicians and other listeners intuitively subject the chords and progressions of tonal music in order to perceive (and produce) "meaningful" utterances. Borrowing directly from Chomsky's vocabulary, Lerdahl and Jackendoff called their book *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music*.

A generative theory of language, they write, models the "unconscious knowledge" that users of a language innately possess as "a formal system of principles or rules called a *grammar*, which describes (or 'generates') the possible sentences of the language." The objective is to infer the mental rules that make linguistic (or musical) structures coherent and intelligible to listeners, and the rules that make coherent and intelligible linguistic (or musical) structures "creatable" by speakers or composers. Ideally, if the theory is correct, the rules in both cases are the same. Language and music must communicate on the basis of assumptions and processes that composers and listeners innately share. The question a generative theory answers is, "How?"

That tonal music (like natural language) is hierarchically structured is obvious to all competent listeners. The essential task that all theories of tonal music perform is that of describing its hierarchies. The novelty of Lerdahl and Jackendoff's generative theory is its Chomskian assumption that listeners perceive hierarchies when listening to a piece of tonal music intuitively, without having to be taught to make such discriminations. They propose four main intuitive processes that all listeners bring to bear on tonal music:

- (1) grouping structure
- (2) metrical structure
- (3) time-span reduction
- (4) prolongational reduction

The first "expresses a hierarchical segmentation of the piece into motives, phrases, and sections." The second "expresses the intuition that the events of the piece are related to a regular alternation of strong and weak beats at a number of hierarchical levels." The third "assigns to the pitches of the piece a hierarchy of 'structural importance' with respect to their position in grouping and metrical structure." And the fourth "assigns to the pitches a hierarchy that expresses harmonic and melodic tension and relaxation, continuity and progression." In addition, the authors posit what they call *well-formedness rules*, which "specify the possible structural descriptions." That is, they act as gatekeepers between meaningful utterances and "noise," and (for example) tell us when we have heard a mistake in execution. And they posit *preference rules*, which "designate out of the possible structural descriptions those that correspond to experienced listeners' hearings of any particular piece."[52] That is, they mediate possible contradictions or ambiguities among the simultaneously processed hierarchies. It is at this last level that really creative composing and listening take place.

None of this is news. As a theory of tonal music Lerdahl and Jackendoff's "generative grammar" is uncontroversial except insofar as it describes musical perception as intuitive, the product of an innate mental predisposition, rather than a wholly learned behavior. (In other words, it is controversial in exactly the same way, and to exactly the same extent, that Chomsky's theories are controversial within linguistics.) Within the relatively settled world of tonal music, the distinction between calling perception intuitive and calling it learned did not make enough of a practical difference to warrant much dispute.

The book contained one hugely contentious passage, however: the last section of the next-to-last chapter, titled "Remarks on Contemporary Music," in which the authors took up what must have been a pressing concern for most readers who had worked through the text to that point. The whole basis and justification of nontonal or "posttonal" music, as everybody knew, had been the assumption that musical perceptions were wholly learned,

and therefore infinitely malleable. Could that assumption be reconciled with Lerdahl and Jackendoff's assumption that musical perceptions were in part intuitive—that is, ingrained and "natural"?

Obviously, it could not. Where there is no pitch hierarchy, and where (as a result of "a tendency to avoid repetition,"[53] long since asserted by Schoenberg as a sort of ethical imperative) there is no metrical hierarchy, listeners cannot perform the intuitive tasks on which a generative grammar depends. They cannot group the music into meaningful segments; they cannot identify strong and weak beats; they cannot assign individual pitches any structural importance on which the experience of tension or relaxation depends. Prevented from applying well-formedness rules, the listener cannot distinguish a significant musical utterance from "noise." The conclusion must be that, as far as unaided listeners are concerned (as opposed to formal analysts, eyeing the score), all atonal music is cognitive noise.

We have seen that some modernist composers (most notably Krenek and Cage) had accepted that characterization of their music, arguing that the question of "understanding" is esthetically irrelevant. (Others, notably Babbitt, have claimed that their atonal music is the cognitive equal of tonal music, a claim that depends utterly on the Skinner model.) Lerdahl and Jackendoff, unwilling to be sidetracked, assert that their judgments about atonal music are not concerned with compositional practice. "We do not wish to address the cultural or aesthetic reasons for this tendency, nor do we want to make value judgements,"[54] they insist. Their concern is not with the composer but with the listener.

But it is hard to shake free of value judgments, and it is questionable whether, for example, the following passage from Lerdahl and Jackendoff's notorious "section 11.6" can really be read as esthetically neutral:

> To the degree that the applicability of these various aspects of musical grammar is attenuated, the listener will infer less hierarchical structure from the musical surface. As a result, nonhierarchical aspects of musical perception (such as timbre and dynamics) tend to play a greater, compensatory role in musical organization. But this is not compensation in kind; the relative absence of hierarchical dimensions tends to result in a kind of music perceived very locally, often as a sequence of gestures and associations.[55]

The touted complexity of serial music (or of Carter's celebrated polyrhythmic structures) is thus challenged on its own terms. Music structured nonhierarchically is implicitly reduced to a kind of nonlinguistic or prelinguistic communication—grunts, sign language, or otherwise rudimentary conveyance of primitive needs and moods, if that. Whatever the complexity of its structural organization (discoverable from the score), its level of aural communication is drastically coarsened and blunted. The impression of a value judgment despite disclaimers is confirmed by a nearly explicit assertion toward the end of the discussion, where the "total serialism" of the Darmstadt and Princeton schools is the object of scrutiny. To the extent that nonpitch elements are serialized, they only enlarge the domains

> that do not directly engage the listener's ability to organize a musical surface. In each of these cases, the gulf between compositional and perceptual principles is wide and deep: insofar as the listener's abilities are not engaged, he cannot infer a rich organization no matter how a piece has been composed or how densely packed its musical surface is. It is in this sense that an apparently simple Mozart sonata is more complex than many twentieth-century pieces that at first seem highly intricate.[56]

In the end, although the authors contend that their theory "says nothing about the relative value of compositional techniques," and allow that "whatever helps a composer compose his music is of value to him," their parting shot (with its deliberate allusion to the notorious title—"Who Cares If You Listen?"—under which Babbitt's most widely read statement of Skinnerian principles was published in 1958) was read the only way it could be, as a gauntlet:

> We believe, nonetheless, that our theory is relevant to compositional problems, in that it focuses detailed attention on the facts of hearing. To the extent that a composer cares about his listeners, this is a vital issue.[57]

These tough words were widely remarked, and lots of umbrage was taken. But they could be dismissed on the grounds that Lerdahl and Jackendoff's proposals were backed up by nothing more than a hypothesis, and also because they had only negative implications. The authors' gloomy diagnosis of the state of contemporary composition was not accompanied by any suggestions for improvement. Without a positive program, it was just one antimodernist tirade among many. (Nor was it even the first to claim a "scientific" basis: Paul Hindemith, in his composition textbook of 1937, had tried to demonstrate the "unnaturalness" of atonal music by referring to the natural harmonic series; but as everybody knew that the practice of tonal harmony did not entirely conform to natural acoustical phenomena anyway, the demonstration fell flat.)

Notes:

(51) Fred Lerdahl, "Tonality and Paranoia: A Reply to Boros," *Perspectives of New Music* XXXIV, no. 1 (winter 1996): 246.

(52) Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff, *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1983), pp. 8–9.

(53) *Ibid*., p. 297.

(54) *Ibid*.

(55) *Ibid*., p. 298.

(56) *Ibid*., p. 300.

(57) *Ibid*., p. 301.

See also from Grove Music Online
Psychology of music: Perception & cognition
Leonard B. Meyer
Neo-romantic

WHERE TO GO FROM HERE?

Chapter: CHAPTER 9 After Everything
Source: MUSIC IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

As with Chomsky's theories, the success or failure of Lerdahl and Jackendoff's arguments will have to depend on something other than direct empirical confirmation. That is because, as the authors admit, if the mind has a "hard-wired" structure that enables it to process only some kinds of information, then any inquiry into its nature is itself constrained by the limits that a preset structure implies. If the theory is true, the innate knowledge (or "unconscious theory") that enables a human being to acquire and use a language without direct instruction is by its very nature "unavailable to conscious introspection."[58] All one can do is adduce the otherwise unexplained (if not inexplicable) phenomena that led to the suspicion that such mental predispositions exist. This scattered indirect evidence is of three types: (1) clinical, (2) anthropological, and (3) historical.

1. The clinical evidence[59] comes from the negative results of experiments in which subjects are asked, for example, to complete twelve-tone aggregates, or to observe the boundaries between aggregates. The fact that trained musicians cannot do these things under laboratory conditions suggests that the completion of aggregates (on which the "composing grammar" of twelve-tone music is based) does not constitute a cognitively significant "closure," and that the technical premises of serial composition are therefore not available to cognition.

2. The positive evidence for mental predispositions comes from anthropological (or within music, the ethnomusicological or "comparative") observation and testing of universals, a process that was greatly complicated in the late twentieth century by its being politicized. Hypothesized universals are mainly tested by looking for counterexamples. Since much human oppression is justified on the basis of assumed biological imperatives (e.g., that women, since they are the ones who bear children, are "natural" caregivers and nurturers and therefore should be confined to the home), there has been a strong political incentive to find evidence that such imperatives do not exist—or rather, that our assumptions about human nature are based not on nature but on politically-motivated social consensus. Hence the strong political interest, for example, in the work of Berkeley anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes, whose 1992 book *Death without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil* asserted (or was read as asserting) a counterexample to the assumed universality of the "maternal instinct."

Because belief in the existence of cultural universals is so easily turned to regressive (or repressive) political applications, an interest in establishing universals has sometimes been assumed to be in essence politically reactionary. That charge is certainly overstated and unfair; but even if not reactionary or ill-intentioned, belief in cultural universals is undoubtedly pessimistic and antiutopian. Behind cultural universals, if they are truly universal, must necessarily stand biological limitations that are transhistorical ("timeless") as well as ubiquitous, and that must ultimately come into conflict with faith in unlimited or unlimitable progress.

These transhistorical constraints do not constrain music, which can assume any form composers can imagine for

it (that is, conceptualize). But they do constrain listeners (including composers when they listen), and limit their ability to make perceptual sense out of musical concepts. The whole tragicomedy of twentieth-century music, for a believer in cognitive constraints, subsists in the lack of congruence between "composing grammars," on which there are no limits, and "listening grammars," on which there are inescapable limits.

Or as Leonard B. Meyer (already identified in this chapter as a precociously postmodernist music theorist) has put it:

> It is a mistake—albeit a common one—to conceptualize the problem as a search for "musical" universals. *There are none*. There are only the acoustical universals of the physical world and the bio-psychological universals of the human world. Acoustical stimuli affect the perception, cognition, and hence practice of music only through the constraining action of bio-psychological ones.[60]

Among these possible bio-psychological universals, Meyer has identified the threshold of pitch discrimination, which has militated against the development of microtonal music; the so-called "Seven, Plus or Minus Two" rule about the number of elements that can be comprehensibly related (which might help explain the prevalence of pentatonic and diatonic modes); the need for functional differentiation of elements if utterances are to be memorable or even intelligible (obviously related to Lerdahl and Jackendoff's "time-span reduction" principle); and an inverse correlation between motor activity and cognitive tension (which may explain some of music's affective properties, or "why a plaintive adagio seems more 'emotional' than a persistent presto"[61]).

Meyer also proposes that we need to classify our sense impressions in order for them to communicate information, and that these classifications are perceived as "syntactic [i.e., structural] hierarchies."[62] Borrowing from information theory, he posits that redundancy is necessary for comprehension. For all these reasons, Meyer was prepared to conclude as early as 1967 (in a book called *Music, the Arts, and Ideas*) that serial music was, if not altogether cognitively opaque, certainly more difficult to comprehend than anyone's degree of exposure was likely to offset.

3. As for historical evidence, it goes back to the very dawn of recorded musical histroy—indeed, to a new dawn that broke when a new starting point was identified in what was billed as "the world's oldest melody," a "Hurrian" (or Sumerian) hymn dating from somewhere around 1200 bce, and it was observed that the most remarkable thing about the song was how unremarkable it seemed. Already it used our familiar "diatonic pitch set" and accompanied it with harmonic intervals that we still classify as consonances.

The ancient song, excavated piecemeal between 1950 and 1955, was successfully transcribed in 1974, exactly when the controversy on cognitive constraints and their implications for musical practice was heating up. It may have been for that reason that Professor Richard Crocker, who performed the song before a scholarly audience, became perhaps the only musicologist ever to have his picture published on the front page of the *New York Times* as a direct result of his professional activity (Fig. 9-5).

Lerdahl attempted to address the problem of negativity, and proposed practical remedies for the malaise to which he and Jackendoff had called theoretical attention, in an article of 1988 called "Cognitive Constraints on Compositional Systems." To dramatize the problem of incongruity between composing and listening grammars, he cited a classic of cold-war modernism and its subsequent reception.

> Boulez's *Le Marteau sans Maître* (1954) was widely hailed as a masterpiece of post-war serialism. Yet nobody could figure out, much less hear, how the piece was serial. From hints in [a 1963 article by the composer], Lev Koblyakov at last determined [in a 1977 article] that it was indeed serial, though in an idiosyncratic way. In the interim listeners made what sense they could of the piece in ways unrelated to its construction. Nor has Koblyakov's decipherment subsequently changed how the piece is heard. Meanwhile most composers have discarded serialism, with the result that Koblyakov's contribution has

caused barely a ripple of professional interest. The serial organization of *Le Marteau* would appear, 30 years later, to be irrelevant. The story is, or should be, disturbing.[63]

World's Oldest Song Reported Deciphered

Near-East Origin

By LACEY FOSBURGH

Special to The New York Times

BERKELEY, Calif., March 5—The soft sounds of what is now believed to be the oldest song in the world were played here today at the University of California.

"This has revolutionized the whole concept of the origin of Western music," Richard L. Crocker, professor of music history at Berkeley, said today.

The discovery proves that Western music is about 1,400 years older than previously known and dates back to the ancient Near-Eastern civiliza-

Out of Prehistory

By HAROLD C. SCHONBERG

The startling discovery of the Hurrian cuneiform tablet containing a cult love song pushes back the frontier of notated music well over a thousand years.

An Appraisal

Up to now, the oldest piece of music in notated form has been a fragment of Greek papyrus containing a song in the "Orestes" of Euripides. That dates from the fourth century B.C. The new discovery is put at about 1800 B.C.

Listening to this music

fig. 9-5 The musicologist Richard L. Crocker on the front page of the *New York Times* (6 March 1974), playing the world's oldest song on a reproduction of a Babylonian harp.

Whether readers were disturbed depended largely on their age. *Le Marteau* exemplified the lack of concern on the part of modernist composers for the comprehensibility of their music. In 1954, when composers were focused entirely on esthetics and ideology, few regarded that as a problem. By 1988, when composers were beginning to focus on psychology and to address their social isolation, many did. Indeed, many young composers were resentful. As a consequence of having been taught to divorce their conscious methods from the unconscious intuitions that they share with listeners, they found themselves painted into a cold corner. They

were faced, as Lerdahl put it, “with the unpleasant alternative of working with private codes or with no compositional grammar at all.”[64]

What could be done about it? For those unwilling to employ “historical” styles—or rather, for those unable to regard traditional tonality as anything other than “historical”—Lerdahl tried to imagine what a novel composing grammar might be that took listening grammar into account. In this sense he was trying, ostensibly, to find a realistic (and more or less optimistic) middle ground between despairing postmodernists like Rochberg who were condemned to “a parasitic relationship with the past”[65] and unreconstructed utopians like Babbitt or Carter or Boulez, who still found it possible to believe that “one's own new system was the wave of the future.”[66]

The bulk of the article consists of stipulating conditions or “constraints” (seventeen in all), derived from the earlier *Generative Theory* but not limited to tonal music, that would ensure that compositional grammars maintained contact with listening grammars. The objective was to enable listeners to utilize the unconscious strategies described in the earlier book to infer musical structure. Thus in order to enable grouping, a musical surface must present the listener with a sequence of discrete events; in order to enable time-span reduction, it must present a discernable functional hierarchy; in order to enable the perception of metrical structure, there must be “a degree of regularity in the placement of phenomenal [i.e., perceived] accents”; and in order to enable prolongational reduction, it must specify “stability conditions” (in effect, it must “de-emancipate” dissonance).

As Lerdahl's list proceeds it becomes more and more specific, shading from minimum necessary conditions into the ideal conditions that will satisfy the author's “aesthetic claims”: first, that “the best music utilizes the full potential of our cognitive resources,” and second, that “the best music arises from an alliance of a compositional grammar with the listening grammar.”[67] Since the second esthetic claim merely restated the aim that furnished the argument's starting point, its placement as the argument's conclusion was obviously circular. Nor was that the only difficulty: by the end of the article, the author confessed a little sheepishly that, having pursued his theoretical insights into the realm of practical application, he found that “the constraints are tighter than I had bargained for.” Like Rochberg, he discovered by rejecting it a resistant utopian streak within himself: “Like the old avant-gardists, I dream of the breath of other planets. Yet my argument has led from pitch hierarchies to an approximation of pure intervals, to diatonic scales and the circle of fifths, and to a pitch space that prominently includes triads.”[68]

Yet, unwilling to admit that his proposed constraints “prescribe outworn styles,” he resolved to regard the constellation of traditional elements that have somehow forced themselves back into the picture not as an imperative but as “a reference point for other kinds of pitch organizations, not because of its cultural ubiquity but because it incorporates all of the constraints.” The article ends with a postmodernist “historical implication” similar to Rochberg's, but differently grounded:

> The avant-gardists from Wagner to Boulez thought of music in terms of a “progressivist” philosophy of history: a new work achieved value by its supposed role *en route* to a better (or at least more sophisticated) future. My second aesthetic claim in effect rejects this attitude in favor of the older view that music making should be based on “nature.” For the ancients, nature may have resided in the music of the spheres, but for us it lies in the musical mind. I think the music of the future will emerge less from twentieth-century progressivist aesthetics than from newly acquired knowledge of the structure of musical perception and cognition.[69]

Lerdahl's conclusion was pounced upon at least as much as the conclusion of Babbitt's “Who Cares If You Listen?” Modernists going back as far as Schoenberg, after all, saw their mission as one of emancipation above all, and here was a call to de-emancipate not only dissonances, but composers as well. The theory's descriptive and prescriptive components were conflated by those who found intolerable the suggestion that humans are subject to innate limitations, and the word “constraint” was widely, perhaps deliberately, misread. A lecturer at Darmstadt accused Lerdahl of being “bent on enslaving the listener, who is expected to listen ‘correctly,’ by

conforming to grammar-dictated conventions."[70] Despite his disclaimers, he was portrayed along with Rochberg as a purveyor of nostalgia.

But however controversial or unverifiable its claims, Lerdahl was expressing a view that over the course of the century's last decades, and hardly owing to his influence alone, gradually assumed dominance. Just as Charles Jencks could contend in 1986 that, although the critical consensus still favored modern architecture, "in any international competition now more than half the entries will be Post-Modern,"[71] so by the late 1980s most young composers were persuaded, like Lerdahl, of the necessity for congruity between composing grammars and listening grammars.

Especially in America, virtually all the emerging talents in the last two decades of the century were "neotonalists" (or "neoromantics," as they tended to be called by their critics), by upbringing or conversion. A short alphabetical list of them, confined only to Americans, would include *John Adams (b. 1947), *Stephen Albert (1941–1992), *William Bolcom (b. 1938), *John Corigliano (b. 1938), Richard Danielpour (b. 1956), *John Harbison (b. 1938), *Aaron Jay Kernis (b. 1960), Libby Larsen (b. 1950), Stephen Paulus (b. 1949), Tobias Picker (b. 1954), *Christopher Rouse (b. 1949), David Schiff (b. 1945), *Joseph Schwantner (b. 1943), Michael Torke (b. 1961), *Joan Tower (b. 1938), and *Ellen Taaffe Zwilich (b. 1939). (The asterisks denote winners of Grawemeyer and Pulitzer prizes, the most prestigious forms of recognition available to "classical" composers; in 1999 the Grawemeyer Award went to the English composer Thomas Adès, born in 1971, who fits a similar stylistic profile.) It is worth noting, moreover, that composers born in the 1940s tended to be less equivocal about their embrace of a "tonal" composing grammar than those born in the 1930s, and those born in the 1950s and 1960s or later, who never went through a serial period, are the most straightforwardly "tonal" of all. Critics whose tastes and allegiances were formed earlier have been unpleasantly amazed to find that "the younger Romantics," in the words of Jonathan W. Bernard, "are an even more conservative group, by and large, than their senior colleagues."[72] Bernard ascribes this "unnatural" situation to American provincialism and voices the

> hope that, in all respects that matter, the expression "return to tonality" is a misnomer, that composers, audiences, performers, and critics will eventually tire of the dwelling on the past and other retrogressive aspects of this movement, and that the progressive elements that shine forth in some of its better products will win out in the twenty-first century.[73]

Robert P. Morgan, the author of *Twentieth-Century Music* (1991), probably the last survey of its kind to be written from an uncorrupted modernist perspective, ended it with a complaint that "the openness and eclecticism of current musical life has been bought at the expense of a system of shared beliefs and values and a community of artistic concerns."[74] The easiest dismissals come from those who invoke the traditional modernist taboo against popularity, accusing composers who have broken faith with the hermetic styles mandated by history of cynical pandering—"courting" fickle and recalcitrant audiences who have no real interest in the authentic tasks and purposes serious composers are required to face. "Composers anxious to make that career breakthrough see immediate public response as more important than approval by peers, conductors and music critics," huffed one music critic (in the *San Francisco Chronicle*) after a concert season that had included premieres of new works by Adams and Tower. "Given the audiences and the commercialization of art," he went on,

> it's not surprising that many ambitious composers will try to tap that market any way they can. Simplified styles, borrowing on the tried and true, romantic and mystical cover stories, the parody and quotation of older music, and slick scoring are hallmarks of the new and chic "postmodernism." With remarkable ease, the glib practitioners of the 1980s win grants, awards, commissions and residencies. The panels and juries that give these awards do not seem guided by criteria of quality.[75]

To grumblings such as these postmodernists retort that the progressive/retrogressive dichotomy on which

Bernard's classification depends is a relic of an outmoded and rightly discredited philosophy of history. "Modernist ideology, while still dominant in an institutional sense, has become old-fashioned," Lerdahl has written. "For a younger generation it embodies attitudes about human nature and history that are no longer credible."[76] It is those who hold on to their habitual views in the face of a changing set of sociological and epistemological conditions (or what scientists call a "paradigm") who should be described as conservatives. As to Morgan's complaint, postmodernists contend that the "community" to which modernists nostalgically refer was more nearly a "hegemony," a system of institutional domination rather than a consensus. Meanwhile, the San Francisco critic's impugning of postmodernist motives in defense of an undefined "quality," like all *ad hominem* (or *ad feminam*) rhetoric, simply evades the issues. Modernists and their supporters were also, in their day, routinely accused of conspiracies.

Notes:

(58) *Ibid*., p. 5.

(59) For a listing of some relevant articles, see Lerdahl, "Tonality and Paranoia," p. 249n5.

(60) Leonard B. Meyer, "A Universe of Universals," *Journal of Musicology* XVI (1998): 6.

(61) *Ibid*., p. 9.

(62) *Ibid*., p. 12.

(63) Fred Lerdahl, "Cognitive Constraints on Compositional Systems," in *Generative Processes in Music*, ed. John Sloboda (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 231.

(64) *Ibid*., p. 235.

(65) *Ibid*., p. 236.

(66) *Ibid*., p. 235.

(67) *Ibid*., pp. 255–56.

(68) *Ibid*., p. 256.

(69) *Ibid*., pp. 256–57.

(70) James Boros, "A New Totality?" *Perspectives of New Music* XXXIII (1995): 546.

(71) Jencks, *What Is Post-Modernism?*, p. 13.

(72) Jonathan W. Bernard, "Tonal Traditions in Art Music Since 1960," in *The Cambridge History of American Music*, ed. David Nicholls (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 562.

(73) *Ibid*., p. 566.

(74) Robert P. Morgan, *Twentieth-Century Music* (New York: Norton, 1991), p. 489.

(75) Robert Commanday, "Composers Blow Their Own Horns," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 30 October 1988 (Datebook, p. 17).

(76) Fred Lerdahl, “Composing and Listening: A Reply to Nattiez,” prepublication typescript, p. 5.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online
Fred Lerdahl

Postmodernism

ONE PROPOSAL

Chapter: CHAPTER 9 After Everything
Source: MUSIC IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

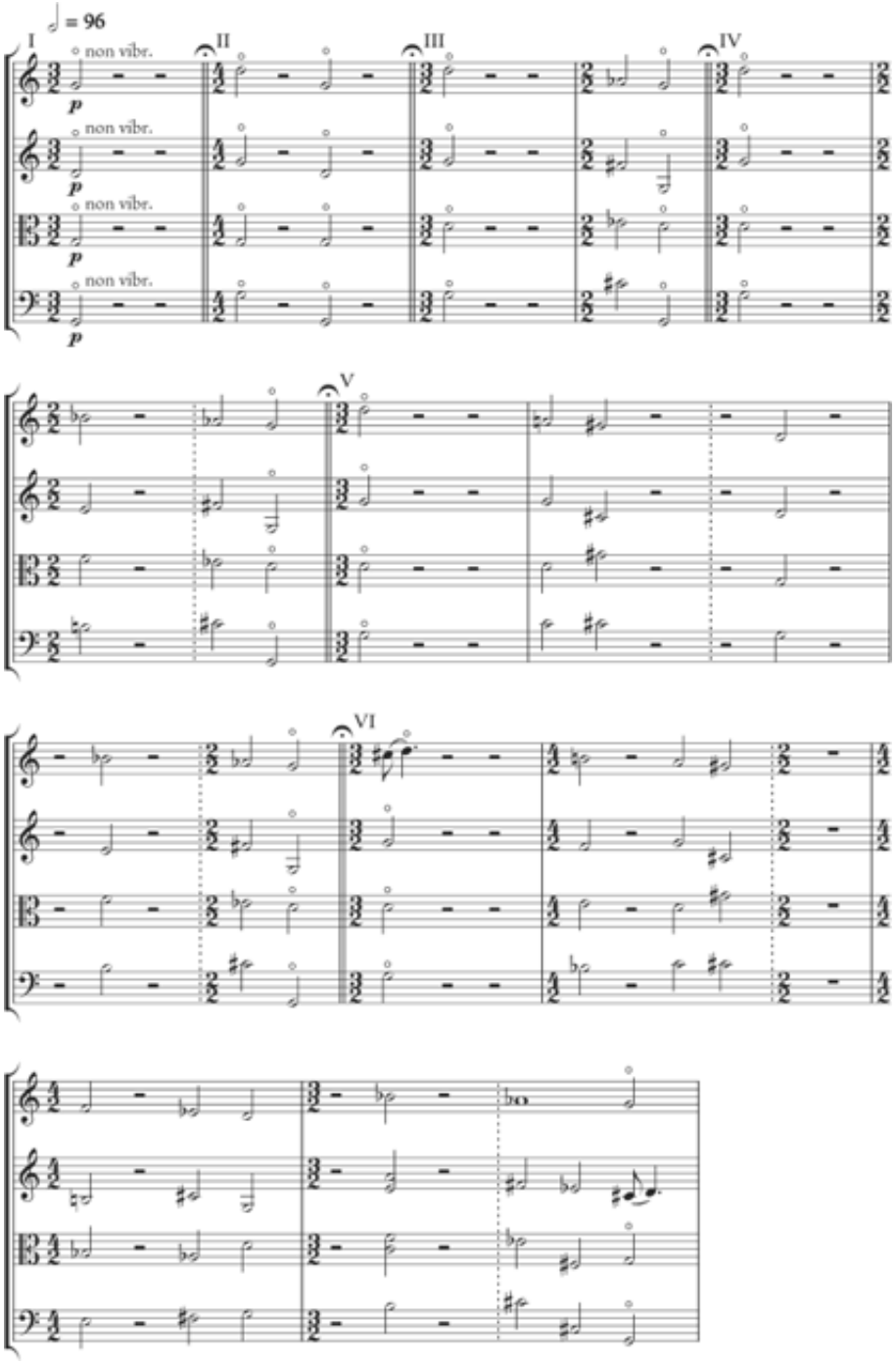
The issues can be clarified somewhat by examining Fred Lerdahl's actual composing style, to see how it compares with his unusually explicit and outspoken theorizing. It turns out to be not quite as beholden to "outworn styles" as his theories caused him to worry, or the accusations of his critics might seem to suggest. It is based, rather, on a compromise between, on the one hand, a reinstated ("de-emancipated") use of consonance and dissonance to effect tension and release, and, on the other, the kind of symmetricalized chromatic pitch relations that had a long history in twentieth-century practice (particularly in Bartók and Berg), but that had only lately achieved comprehensive theoretical formulation in an influential treatise, *Twelve-Tone Tonality*, by the veteran American composer George Perle (b. 1915), the first edition of which was published in 1977.

In that same year Lerdahl wrote a string quartet in which he first began to apply to contemporary problems of composition the principles that he and Jackendoff were developing for their "listening grammar" of tonal music. It is a "programmatic" work, like many works by theorists in the throes of formulation, in the sense that it sets forth its theoretical orientation as part of the actual musical argument. To put it bluntly, in addition to being a work of art, the quartet provides both an illustration and a practical test of the theory.

The de-emancipation of dissonance is evident from the very start (Ex. 9-6). The consonant dyad G-D is stated in the first measure, repeated in the second, and, in the fourth, established through a cadence as a stable reference point (not to say a tonic). Even though no triads have yet been heard, it is clear that the piece is "tonal," and that functional (if not necessarily conventional) harmonic closures will play a part in articulating its form. As Lerdahl has put it, "tonality is a psychological condition, not a stylistic one."[77] To put the functional premises of his quartet in terms of a cognitive grammar, one could say that a series of harmonic events unfolds in such a way that the listener is able to group them into discrete (and lengthening) time-spans characterized by fluctuations of harmonic tension. The listener, in short, is enabled (and encouraged) to apply intuitively the four processes held by the generative theory to translate aural stimuli into musical sense.

The fifth chord is distinguished from the others not only statistically, by merely being different, but also qualitatively by being dissonant. Its relationship to the tonic dyad, moreover, is easily specified in terms of function, since every one of its four notes can be interpreted as a leading tone (two converging on G, two on D). Thus measures 3–4 constitute a "departure and return," the basic form-defining gesture in traditional tonal music, even if the sonorities are not exactly those of traditional tonal music.

Notice now that mm. 3–4 are enclosed within double bars and labeled "III." They form a unit that takes its place in a series of such units that unfolds over the course of the piece and defines its form. Each begins and ends with the normative consonance, and (once other harmonies are introduced in the third unit) each performs a departure-and-return. Each is also longer than its predecessor. Group I lasts three beats, group II lasts four, III lasts five, IV lasts 7, V lasts 14, VI lasts 19, and so on. The later and longer groups expand in a rough 3:2 proportion, leading the ear to organize ever-greater time spans through prolongational reductions.

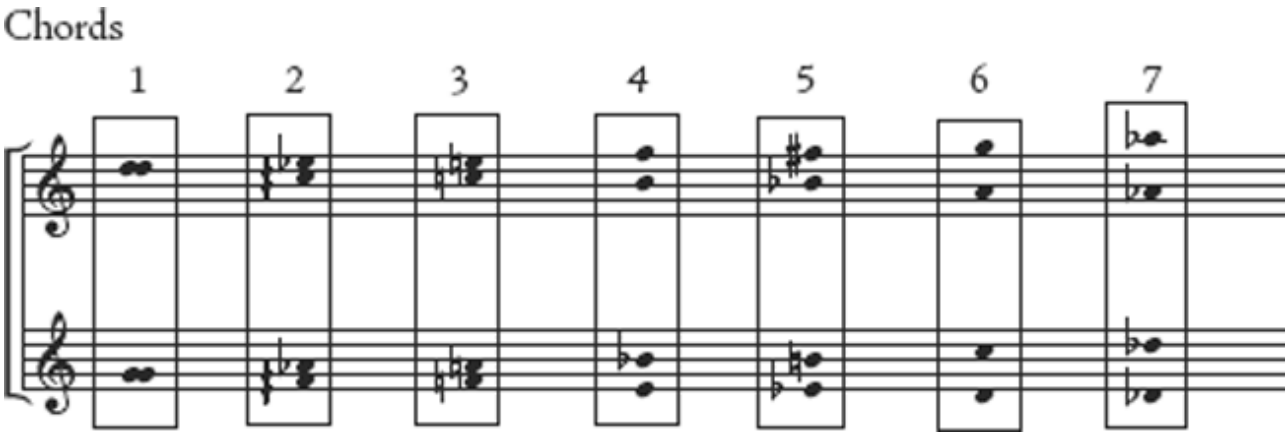


ex. 9-6 Fred Lerdahl, String Quartet no. 1, sections I-XIV

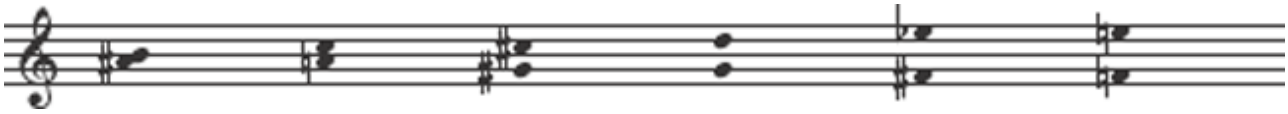
The complex of upper and lower leading tones operating in tandem in group III already suggests that harmonic motion is proceeding according to a pair of symmetrical (“equal sum”) interval matrices like the ones deduced by Perle, among others, when investigating Bartók's composing methods. (The difference, of course, is that Bartók's matrices never converged on perfect fifths to produce the kind of consonant reference sonority or functional tonic on which Lerdahl's system here depends.) The impressionis confirmed in group IV, when another chord is interpolated between the initial tonic dyad and the leading-tone complex, and it, too, relates to its companions by mirror-inversion: the first violin's intervallic succession in m. 6, a descending tone and semitone, is mirrored by the second violin's ascent by the same intervals to converge on G (allowing for an octave displacement at the end), while the viola and cello reproduce the same pattern implying convergence on D (allowing for the cello's substitution of the more resonant “root” G at the end).

We have made enough observations to warrant a hypothesis, as set forth in Ex. 9-7a, where complete symmetrical matrices that converge on G and D are superimposed. Every chord in the quartet through m. 12 consists of a superimposed pair of dyads in the same position within their respective matrices. The first chord with more than four pitches in it, in m. 13, adds a dyad from the symmetrical matrix in which the G-D tonic is embedded as a unit (Ex. 9-7b). Having added the third matrix, we can now account for every harmony until the second measure of group VIII (not shown in Ex. 9-6), where the dyad E♭-B♭ (followed eleven beats later by its tritone complement, A-E) invokes the matrix given in Ex. 9-7c.

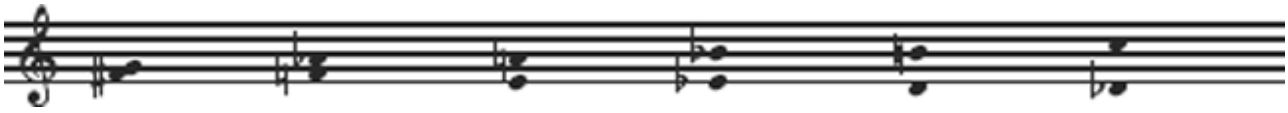
And so it goes. Successive Roman-numeral groups expand both in terms of the time-span they enclose and in terms of the pitch field on which they draw; in each case we are led from the normative consonance to a progressively further-out point and back again. The process provides for considerable variety (sometimes very dramatically expressed, like a sudden "modulation to E" near the middle of the piece) within a tightly organized and unified pitch system.



ex. 9-7a Fred Lerdahl, String Quartet no. 1, analytical sketches, inversional matrices on D and G superimposed



ex. 9-7b Fred Lerdahl, String Quartet no. 1, analytical sketches, inversional matrix that includes reference dyad G-D

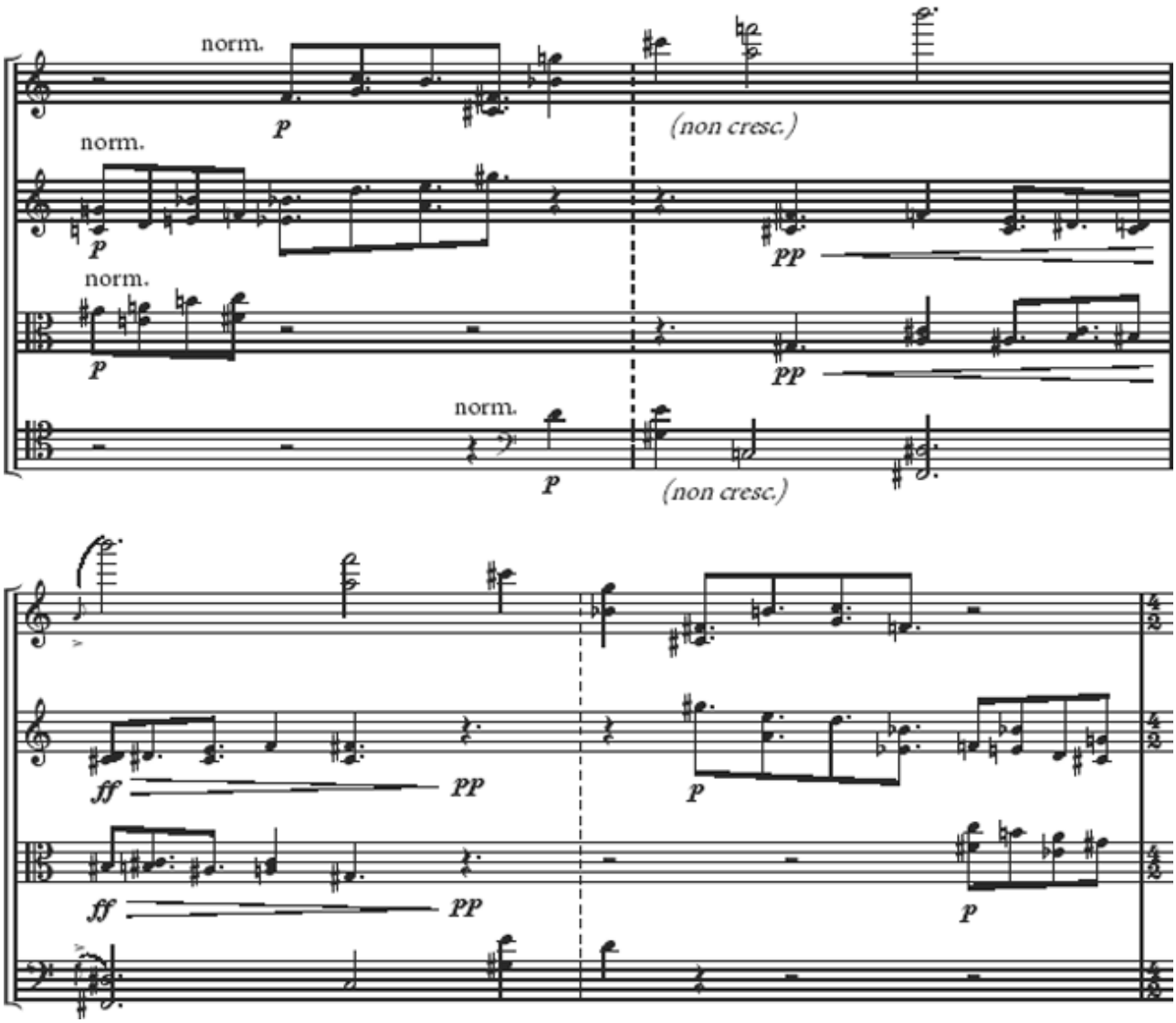


ex. 9-7c Fred Lerdahl, String Quartet no. 1, analytical sketches, matrix that includes E-flat-B-flat and A-E

In the later, lengthier sections, Lerdahl sometimes underscores both the expanding durational plan and the there-and-back trajectory by inserting literal palindromes that open out gradually from motion in eighths to dotted halves and contract back to eighths as the pitches run in reverse (e.g., Ex. 9-8). These help the listener infer the compositional strategy from the musical surface. The consciously constructed compositional grammar

is “transparent,” as Lerdahl would say, to the unconscious listening grammar. Or as Steve Reich would put it, the composer knows no secrets of structure that his listener cannot discover.

Although he describes his music as part of what he calls the “postmodern resurgence” of tonality (or more exactly, of hierarchical pitch and metric organization), it is clear that Lerdahl's postmodernism is of a very different character from Rochberg's or Del Tredici's. It entails no consciously formulated expressive or representational purpose, nor any impulse to revive past styles; and, while it certainly takes listeners into account as arbiters of intelligibility, the intended audience seems to be basically the same academic audience that modernist composers address.



ex. 9-8 Fred Lerdahl, String Quartet no. 1, section (C_4)

Lerdahl's reputation is far more academically circumscribed than Rochberg's or Del Tredici's, and he writes mainly for campus new-music ensembles. He has even stated, in response to the usual attacks, that “serious composers, myself included, pay more attention to the work than to the audience,”[78] and his sole stated theoretical preoccupation has been with devising and validating new techniques of composition. It is possible, ultimately, to regard his work as “progressive” in the “reformist” sense, correcting defects or errors that have deflected the evolution of music from the path of true progress. (The main error, as he puts it, was that of putting “complicatedness”[79] —a musical surface densely cluttered with unprocessable information—in place of

"complexity," a depth or richness of structural relations that a listener is able to infer from that surface.) Nevertheless, his is an equally significant manifestation of the postmodernist impulse, precisely because it has taken place within the ivory tower, and within the traditional academic discourses of formalism and even science. Lerdahl's project remains one of research and development, but it is no longer wholly "disinterested." Innovation can no longer be validated solely on the basis of the old "master narrative." Innovation must now pass a listener test, and that implies an "esthetic"—that is, a criterion of artistic quality—with a necessary social component. Cold-war purity, "Western"-style, has been breached, perhaps irrevocably.

Notes:

(77) Fred Lerdahl, musicology colloquium, University of California at Berkeley, February 2001.

(78) Lerdahl, "Composing and Listening," p. 6.

(79) Lerdahl, "Cognitive Constraints," p. 255.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online
Andrey Volkonsky

Russian Federation: Thaw and the end of the Soviet Union (1953–)

THE END OF SOVIET MUSIC

Chapter: CHAPTER 9 After Everything
Source: MUSIC IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

What, then, about cold-war purity, "Eastern"-style? The complementary orthodoxy, adhered to (and sometimes enforced) within what during the cold war was called the Soviet bloc, demanded above all the "accessibility" and "transparency" of style that (when embraced by Rochberg or Lerdahl) the Western critical establishment deemed heretical, and frowned upon the idea of stylistic progress that had led the music of "bourgeois decadence" into social isolation. One might expect that as the frigidity of the cold war eased, so might doctrinal rigidity on both sides. And indeed, as social criteria crept back into (and undermined) Western modernist commitments, formalist ideas played a similar role among composers in Eastern Europe—at first among a subversive minority, later more openly and commonly. The principal effect in the East, as in the West, was a growing and finally dominant eclecticism.

Besides the general liberalizing trend that followed the death of Stalin, known as the "Thaw" after the title of a 1954 novella by the Soviet writer Ilya Ehrenburg (1891–1967), a number of specific circumstances brought young Soviet musicians into previously risky or forbidden contact with the music of the European avant-garde. Official visitors from abroad, especially the Italian composer Luigi Nono, who occupied a singular position as a member of both the Western avant-garde and of the Communist Party, brought with them scores by "Darmstadt" composers and made gifts of them both to libraries and to individuals. The Canadian pianist Glenn Gould (1932–82) made a Soviet tour in 1957, during which he gave an informal recital for students and teachers at the Moscow Conservatory, playing works by Berg, Webern, and Krenek and lecturing through a translator about the technique of serial music. The most spectacular such occasion was an eightieth-birthday-year (1962) visit by Igor Stravinsky, who performed his music, met with students (and with the Soviet prime minister Nikita Khrushchev), and was accepted thereafter in his homeland as a "Russian classic." The nascent impact of Western avant-garde music on Soviet musical life was furthered by the presence in Moscow of two immigrants who, although little known to the public, enjoyed considerable professional prestige. The older of the two was Filip Gershkovich (1906–89), a Romanian-born composer and music theorist who had studied with Berg and Webern, composed his first twelve-tone score in 1928, and fled from Nazi persecution to the Soviet Union in 1940. His music being unperformable in Russia at the time, Gershkovich worked as a music editor and an orchestrator of soundtrack music for films. He began attracting private theory pupils in the 1950s.

One of them was Andrey Volkonsky (1933–2008), a young Moscow composer who belonged to a celebrated princely lineage (immortalized by Tolstoy in *War and Peace*) and was born in Geneva while his family was in exile from the Soviet Union. From 1945 to 1947 Volkonsky lived in Paris, where he studied piano with the Romanian-born virtuoso Dinu Lipatti. He was long reputed to have been one of Nadia Boulanger's many pupils in composition, but it seems he made the claim only to pad his résumé when applying to the Moscow Conservatory after his family's repatriation in 1947. At the Conservatory he became the pupil of the senior Soviet composer Yuri Shaporin (1887–1966). His early compositions met with success, particularly a *Concerto for Orchestra*, written under Shaporin's direction, which was performed in 1953, the last Stalinist year. That same year, however, a fellow student denounced Volkonsky for having scores by Schoenberg and Stravinsky in his

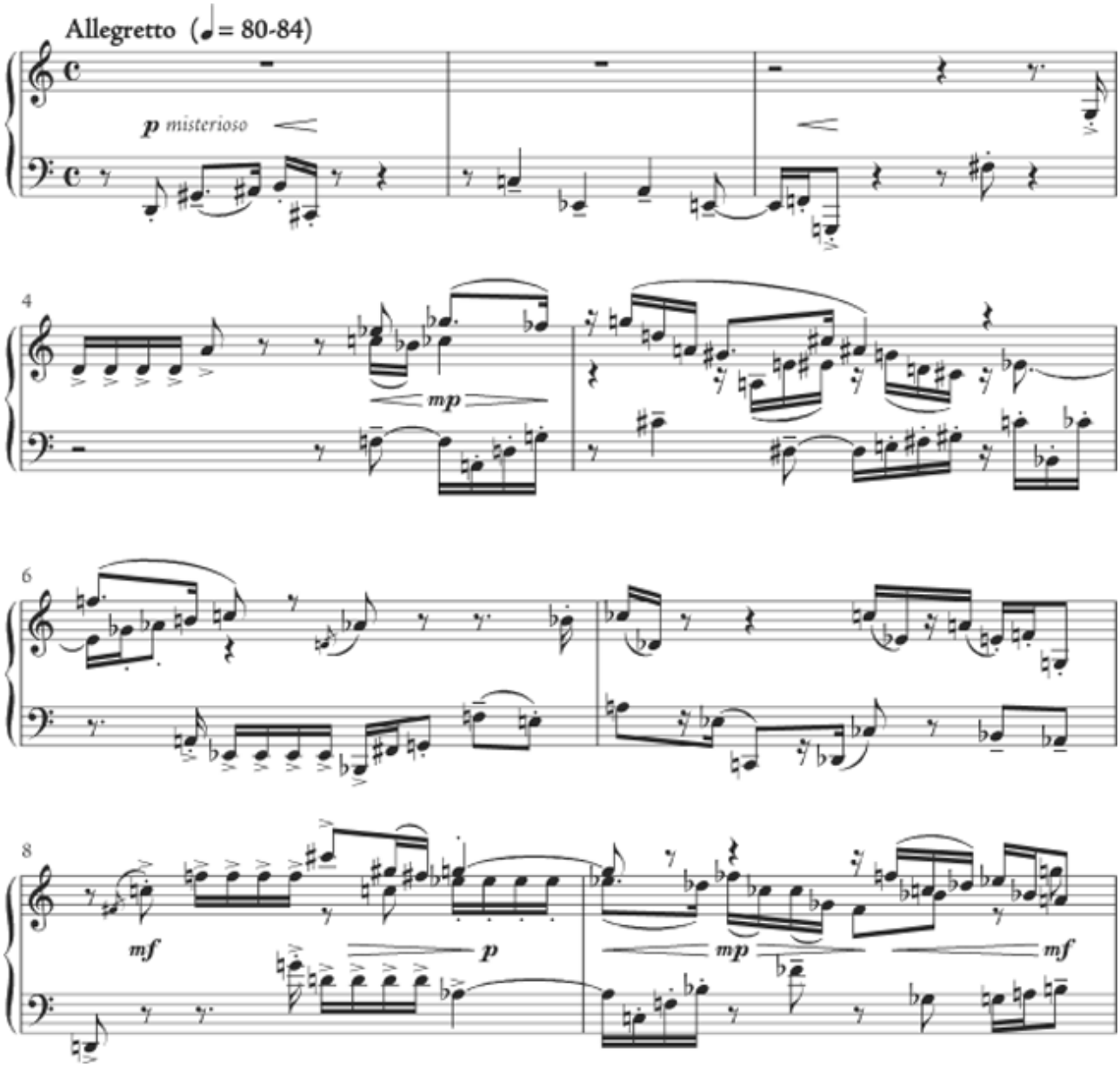
possession, and he was expelled from the Conservatory on the pretext that he had missed the beginning of classes owing to the birth of his first child.

Enjoying the protection of Shaporin (and, it was widely assumed, of Shostakovich), Volkonsky retained his membership in the Union of Soviet Composers; his exclusion from the Conservatory only confirmed his unorthodox stance. In 1956, having connected with Gershkovich, Volkonsky produced *Musica stricta*, the first twelve-tone composition by a Soviet citizen. The irony of such a title for a work that became emblematic of creative freedom was only a facet of a more general cold-war irony: musical behavior that in the West would have been regarded as the height of conformity meant just the opposite within the Soviet sphere of influence. At a time when Soviet writers and visual artists on the cutting edge were beginning to explore social and political themes that had been taboo as subjects for treatment while Stalin was alive, their musical counterparts were withdrawing as far as possible from social commitment. Formalism was for musicians the most effective way of displaying nonconformism.

A piano suite in four movements, *Musica stricta* is cast in an idiosyncratic twelve-tone idiom that is actually not at all strict. It is by no means confined in its pitch materials to twelve-tone rows, and when twelve-tone rows are used, they are varied in ways that are unrelated to Schoenbergian or Webernian procedures. “I didn't really understand the techniques very well,” the composer admitted to an interviewer in 1999, “but I understood the principle.”

> I did some things incorrectly, but it's good that I didn't do everything correctly. There are octaves, which Schoenberg forbade, and also triads, which Schoenberg also forbade. But I simply didn't know about that. I thought I had written a twelve-tone composition, and it's true that those techniques can be found in places. And because of that I named the piece *Musica Stricta*, because of the strict techniques, although I unwittingly used them entirely according to my own manner.[80]

In effect Volkonsky had responded as a listener to the sound of early twelve-tone music (or even earlier Viennese atonal music), rather than as an analyst to its technique. The writing is full of the stacked fourths and tritones (“atonal triads”) that abound in much early-twentieth-century music. The second movement, the easiest one to analyze in terms of row technique, is actually a sort of fugue or ricercar in which four rows seem to compete for dominance of the contrapuntal texture (Ex. 9-9). Volkonsky, who was then the Soviet Union's only professional harpsichordist as well as its only twelve-tone composer, evidently fell back on the formal procedures of the Baroque repertoire, with which he was exceptionally familiar, as a frame to accommodate what was for him, as much as for any Soviet musician, a highly unfamiliar method of composing.



ex. 9-9 Andrey Volkonsky, *Musica stricta*, II, mm. 1-9

By the time he composed *The Lamentations of Shchaza* (*Zhaloba Shchazï*, 1961), for soprano and instrumental quintet (English horn, percussion, harpsichord, violin, and viola), Volkonsky had had access to some of the representative scores of the "Darmstadt" school, obviously including Boulez's *Le Marteau sans maître*, which the work diligently imitates in its sound and gestures (although not in its strictly technical procedures, which, as Fred Lerdahl pointed out, were then quite arcane). Boulez returned the complement by performing Volkonsky's work in London and Berlin in the late 1960s, thus bringing the existence of a Soviet "underground" avant-garde to the attention of musicians in the West.

By then Volkonsky had several companions. Edison Denisov (1929–96), a protégé of Shostakovich, was especially energetic in promoting advanced Western techniques and esthetic principles among his contemporaries. His apartment, like Volkonsky's, became a lending library for scores that he had procured, beginning in the late 1950s, from Nono, Boulez, Stockhausen, Bruno Maderna, and other Darmstadters. He also agitated for performances of work by the advanced Soviet composers of the 1920s, hoping to forge a connection that would circumscribe the era of socialist-realist conformity. After analytical studies with Gershkovich and

several trips to the Warsaw autumn festival, Denisov made his debut as an avant-gardist with a twelve-tone cantata, *The Sun of the Incas* (1964), composed to a text by the Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral (1889–1957) and dedicated to Boulez.

A second center of Soviet avant-garde activity arose in Kiev (now the capital of Ukraine), the closest large Soviet city to Warsaw. Three Kiev composers—Leonid Hrabovsky (b. 1935), Valentin Silvestrov (b. 1937), and Volodymyr Zahortsev (b. 1944)—became known in the West when Joel Spiegelman (b. 1933), a composer and harpsichordist on the faculty of Sarah Lawrence College, brought their twelve-tone compositions back with him from a trip to the Soviet Union and had them performed, together with works of Volkonsky and Denisov, in New York. A benchmark for the recognition of Soviet twelve-tone music was reached in 1968, when Silvestrov's Third Symphony, subtitled “Eschatophony,” became the first composition by a Soviet composer to be performed (under Maderna's baton) at Darmstadt.

The next year, an orchestral work by another Soviet avant-gardist—*Pianissimo* by Alfred Schnittke (1934–98)—was performed at the Donaueschingen Festival, the other major West German contemporary-music showcase, which had in fact commissioned it. The composer, who had already had pieces performed in East Germany and Poland, was at the time earning his living in Moscow by writing soundtrack music for animated cartoons. He was not allowed to attend the festival. The restrictions placed on his employment and travel were heavily publicized, as was the program that the work was supposed to illustrate, a torture scene from Franz Kafka's story “The Penal Colony,” in which an inmate is pricked by a multitude of tiny needles that inscribe a slogan on his body.

The music, consisting of a tone cluster that expands à la Ligeti until it becomes a sonic cloud, must have sounded fairly old-hat at Donaueschingen but for the fact that it was the work of a Soviet composer. That was enough to tinge its Darmstadt conformism with iconoclasm—a typical cold-war inversion. But there was also a somewhat subtler sense in which Schnittke's composition could be taken as un- or anti-Soviet, and that was the sense suggested by its title. Soviet composers were expected to make affirmative public statements, *fortissimo*. To speak in atonal whispers was genuinely countercultural (more for the whispers than for the atonality), and invested the oddly un-Slavic name of this shadowy Soviet son of a German-Jewish father and a Russian-born but ethnically German mother, whose first language was that of his parents and who divided his time between writing utilitarian film scores for a livelihood and unperformable masterworks “for the drawer,” with a romantic aura of martyrdom that continued to dominate reportage about him for the rest of his life.

Notes:

(80) Quoted in Peter J. Schmelz, *Listening, Memory, and the Thaw: Unofficial Music and Society in the Soviet Union, 1956–1974*. (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Berkeley, 2002), pp. 93–94.

Oxford University Press

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online

Sofia Gubaidulina

Alfred Schnittke

Shostakovich: Posthumous reputation

POLYSTYLISTICS

Chapter: CHAPTER 9 After Everything
Source: MUSIC IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Over the next decade, then, Schnittke emerged, together with Denisov and the Soviet Tatar composer Sofia Gubaidulina (b. 1931), as one of the so-called “Big Troika” of late-Soviet nonconforming composers regarded throughout Europe and America as major figures in contemporary music. Of the three, Schnittke was of particular interest for the way his career trajectory seemed to complement those of the Western postmodernists, taking his music out of the Darmstadt or Donaueschingen orbit and into the major or “mainstream” concert venues. This further stimulated press interest in him during his lifetime, and vouchsafed his posthumous reputation as a defining force in the music of the twentieth century's final quarter.

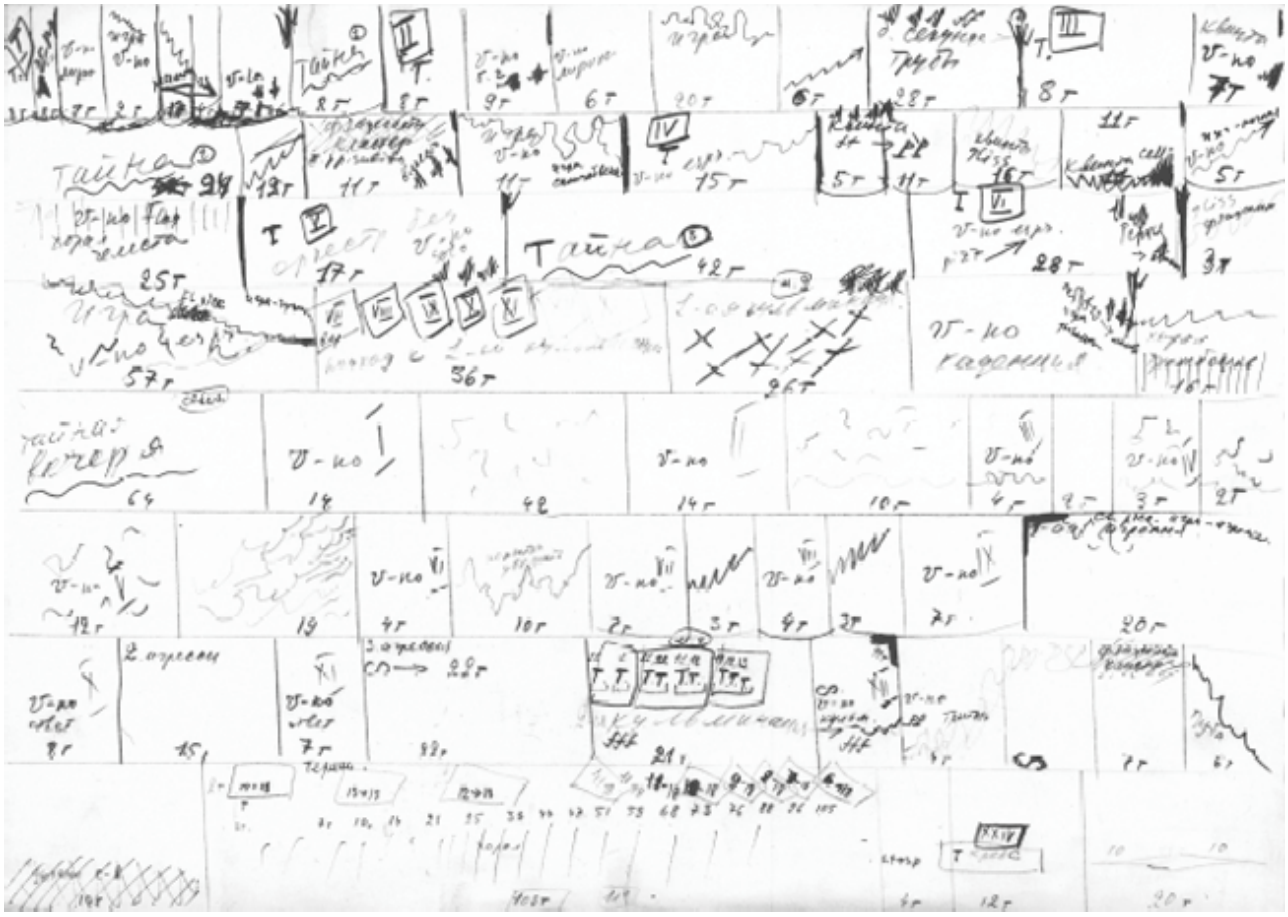


fig. 9-6 Sofia Gubaidulina, sketch for *Offertorium*, Concerto for Violin (1980, revised 1986).

Like so many composers in the 1970s (but unlike Denisov, who remained faithful to the ideals of the 1950s, and to an orthodoxly "Boulezian" conception of the avant-garde), Schnittke abandoned serial technique out of a conviction that no single or "pure" manner was adequate to reflect contemporary reality, and that stylistic eclecticism—he called it "polystylistics"—had become mandatory. The watershed was Schnittke's First Symphony (1972), the collage to end all collages, a grim riot of allusion and outright quotation, much of it self-quotation, in which Beethoven jostles Handel jostles Haydn jostles Mahler jostles Chaikovsky jostles Johann Strauss, and on into ragtime and rock, with parts for improvising jazz soloists. Here, too, the distinctive Schnittke orchestra first announced itself, an omnivorous combine to which the harpsichord is as essential as the electric bass guitar. All styles and genres are potentially and indiscriminately available to it. It is the musical equivalent of the chemist's nightmare, a universal solvent.

Like Mahler or Ives, Schnittke envisioned his symphony as a musical universe, enfolding all that is or could be within its octopus embrace. But it was not a loving embrace. Schnittke's Tower of Babel proclaimed not acceptance of all things, but—as the work's "dramaturgy" betokens—more nearly the opposite, an attitude of alienation in which nothing could claim allegiance. At its beginning only three musicians are onstage. The rest of the orchestra enters gradually, improvising chaotically until the conductor, who enters last, calls a halt. At the end, the players make random exits until (improving on Haydn's "Farewell" Symphony), only a single violinist is left on stage, playing a childishly banal solo. But then everybody suddenly returns and seems ready to begin the piece all over again with the same unstructured freak-out as before. Again the conductor gives a signal, but instead of silence the orchestra gives out a sudden unison C—simplicity itself—on which note the symphony finally reaches an end.

Simplicity so unearned and perfunctory can suggest no resolution, just dismissal. The world of Schnittke's First Symphony recalls Dostoyevsky's nihilistic world without God, where everything is possible—and so nothing matters. Within the oppressively administered world of Soviet totalitarianism, where nothing was possible and everything mattered, the sarcastic suggestion that all or nothing was the only available choice came as a dismally disaffected message. It was clearly the work of a resentful, marginalized artist. To that extent, at least, it remained securely modernist in attitude.

And yet its very indiscriminateness contradicted modernist assumptions. Rather than postmodernism, the First Symphony signified mere "post-ism," after-everythingism, it's-all-overism. The work was so despairing—so subversive of socialist realism's obligatory optimism—that it was allowed only a single performance in 1974, in Gorky (now Nizhniy Novgorod), a "closed city," off-limits to foreigners, later notorious as the site of the dissident physicist Andrey Sakharov's exile, before it was consigned to the index of prohibited works that lasted until Mikhail Gorbachev, the last Soviet leader, proclaimed the age of *glasnost'* ("openness") in the late 1980s.

It took the addition of gallows humor to suggest a postmodern way out. Concerto Grosso No. 1 (1977), the first Schnittke composition to gain a big reputation in the West, deploys three distinct stylistic strata: the highly disciplined, intensely fiddled neobaroque passagework the title promised; an amorphous atonal sonic lava-flow; and syrupy Soviet pop music at its stalest, banged out on a prepared piano sounding like a cross between Radio Moscow's signature chimes and the beating of ash cans. (No points for guessing which one wins out in the end.) The Concerto Grosso established the pattern that would distinguish Schnittke's version of postmodernist collage. No longer despairingly helter-skelter like the First Symphony, Schnittke's polystylism now took shape through bald, easily read contrasts. Plush romantic lyricism, chants and chorales and hymns (real or made-up), actual or invented "historical" flotsam (neoclassic, neobaroque, even neomedieval, as one finds in Pärt, a close friend of the composer), every make and model of jazz and pop—all of this and more are the ingredients. As they are stirred together, the pot frequently boils over in violent extremes of dissonance: tone clusters (a Schnittke specialty), dense polytonal counterpoint (often in the form of exceedingly close canons), "verticalized" melodies whereby the individual notes of a tune are sustained by accompanying instruments until they are all sounding together as a chord.

Yet however harsh, aggressive, or even harrowing, the music never bewilders because it is never abstract. Discord, heard always as the opposite or absence of concord, functions as a sign, and so do all the myriad stylistic references. They do not merely stand for themselves, but point. It is this "semiotic" or signaling aspect, a traditional characteristic of Russian music (and especially of Shostakovich, Schnittke's obvious model), that makes Schnittke's later music so easily "read"—or rather, so easily paraphrased on whatever terms (ethical, spiritual, autobiographical, political) the listener may prefer. Nor did Schnittke neglect more traditional signaling devices like leitmotifs or symbolically recurring chords and sonorities.

The result, as one critic observed, was "socialist realism minus socialism."[81] For some, it was hard to see any real difference between Schnittke's postmodernism and old-fashioned Soviet "unmodernism." But there was a difference, and it was a crucial one, because nothing was off-limits any longer. Both socialist realism and Western avant-gardism had harbored taboos. While a student, conforming to the former, Schnittke knew that there were things he and his fellows could not do. But while dabbling in Darmstadt serialism, there were also things he and his fellow nonconformists could not do. For full inclusiveness, the rigid dichotomy that reflected and supported the divided postwar world had to be rejected. It was a solution that, as we have seen by now, transgressed equally on both sides of the cold-war boundary.

With an unlimited stylistic range at one's disposal, one could construct contrasts of a previously inconceivable extremity. Out of them one could achieve a more vivid instrumental "dramaturgy" than anything previously attempted in Soviet music. Maximalism could stage a comeback. Schnittke's postmodernism reengaged with the grandest, most urgent, most timeless—hence (potentially) most banal—questions of existence, framed the simplest way possible, as primitive oppositions. With a bluntness and an immodesty practically unknown since the First World War, Schnittke's music tackled life-against-death, love-against-hate, good-against-evil, freedom-against-tyranny, and (especially in concertos) I-against-the-world.

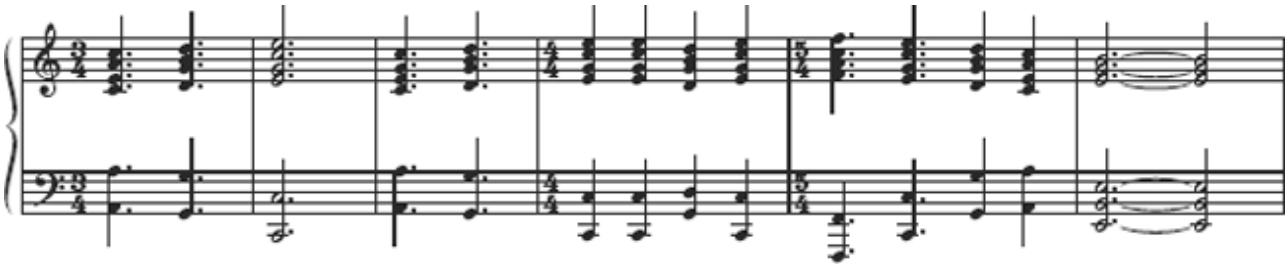
As Alexander Ivashkin, his friend and biographer, put it, no one since Mahler had so unashamedly "undressed in public"[82] as did Schnittke. In doing so, Schnittke recaptured the heroic subjectivity with which bourgeois audiences love to identify. The concerto, which has both a built-in exhibitionism and a built-in "oppositionism," was the ideal medium for such a project, and so it is not surprising that Schnittke produced more concertos than any other major composer of his generation—twenty-two in all, including seven for violin (if one counts as concertos the orchestral arrangements of his two violin sonatas), three for piano (including one for piano four-hands), two for cello, two for viola, and seven concerti grossi for multiple soloists (counting among them a piece called *Konzert zu* 3 for violin, viola, cello, piano, and strings).

This unique body of work was composed almost as if in collusion with an outstanding generation of late-Soviet soloists, particularly string virtuosos. Schnittke's concentration on the traditionally humanoid, voice-aping strings, so often shunned for just that reason by old-fashioned modernists like Stravinsky, was another token of his spiritual kinship with the "neoromantics" in the West. But his music resembled theirs only slightly. Increasingly, the polystylistics were attached to an urgent moral program; and in this, perhaps, Schnittke showed himself a composer in the time-honored Russian, not just Soviet, tradition after all.

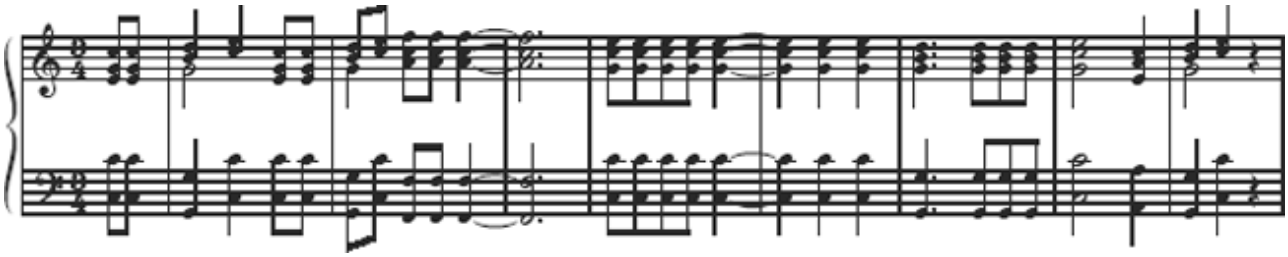
"Good," in Schnittke's moral universe, was associated with a naive diatonicism exemplified by the finale of the first cello concerto (1986), a "Thanksgiving Hymn" à la Beethoven, composed shortly after the composer's recovery from the first of a series of strokes that eventually took his life. "Evil" came in two forms. Absolute evil is represented by references to raucous popular music: its apotheosis comes in the third movement of the Third Symphony (commissioned and first performed in 1981 by the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra), where a platoon of anarchic rock guitars spewing feedback distortion attacks a panorama of German classics—a tribute to the Leipzig performers and their distinguished tradition.

Schnittke's most interesting music, perhaps, was that associated with "relative evil" or moral realism, consisting of "good" music distorted by avant-garde techniques. Consequently, for many listeners the most affecting

Schnittke compositions are not the resolute, quasi-religious ones in which good triumphs, or the tragic ones in which evil is given unequivocal victory (like the Viola Concerto, with its pathetic, brutally quashed attempts at a harmonious cadence). In these, as the post-Soviet musicologist Levon Hakobian points out, the "moral of the story," playing "an all-too-conspicuous role,"[83] often reduces the musical content to a sort of accompaniment. But the works whose arguments vacillate at some fraught point between triumph and tragedy are often fascinating. A particularly compact and effective work of this kind is the Concerto for Piano and Strings (1979), written for the composer's wife but first performed by the Soviet pianist Vladimir Krainev. The main theme, given many long preparations and a couple of climactic statements, is a stout chorale in C major that bears a small but probably not coincidental resemblance to the harmonized Orthodox chant, *Gospodi, spasi ny* ("Save us, O Lord") that opens Chaikovsky's famous 1812 Overture (Ex. 9-10). But on its every appearance, it has to fight its way through a barrage of "noise" in the form of disfiguring chromatics, or heterophony, or polytonality, or clusters, or microtones, or glissandi, or...



ex. 9-10a Alfred Schnittke, Concerto for Piano and Strings, fig. 6



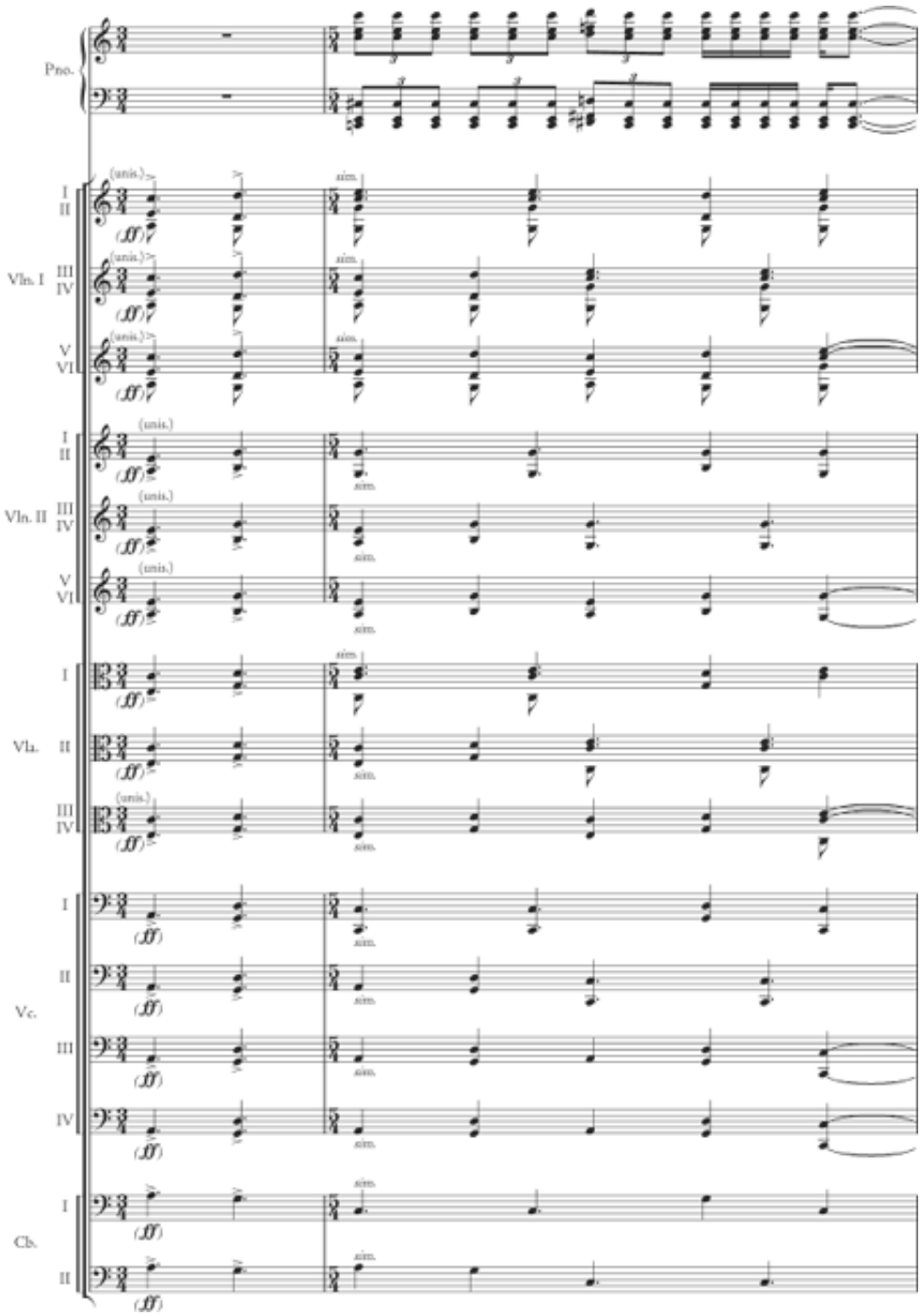
ex. 9-10b Pyotr Ilyich Chaikovsky, 1812 Overture, beginning

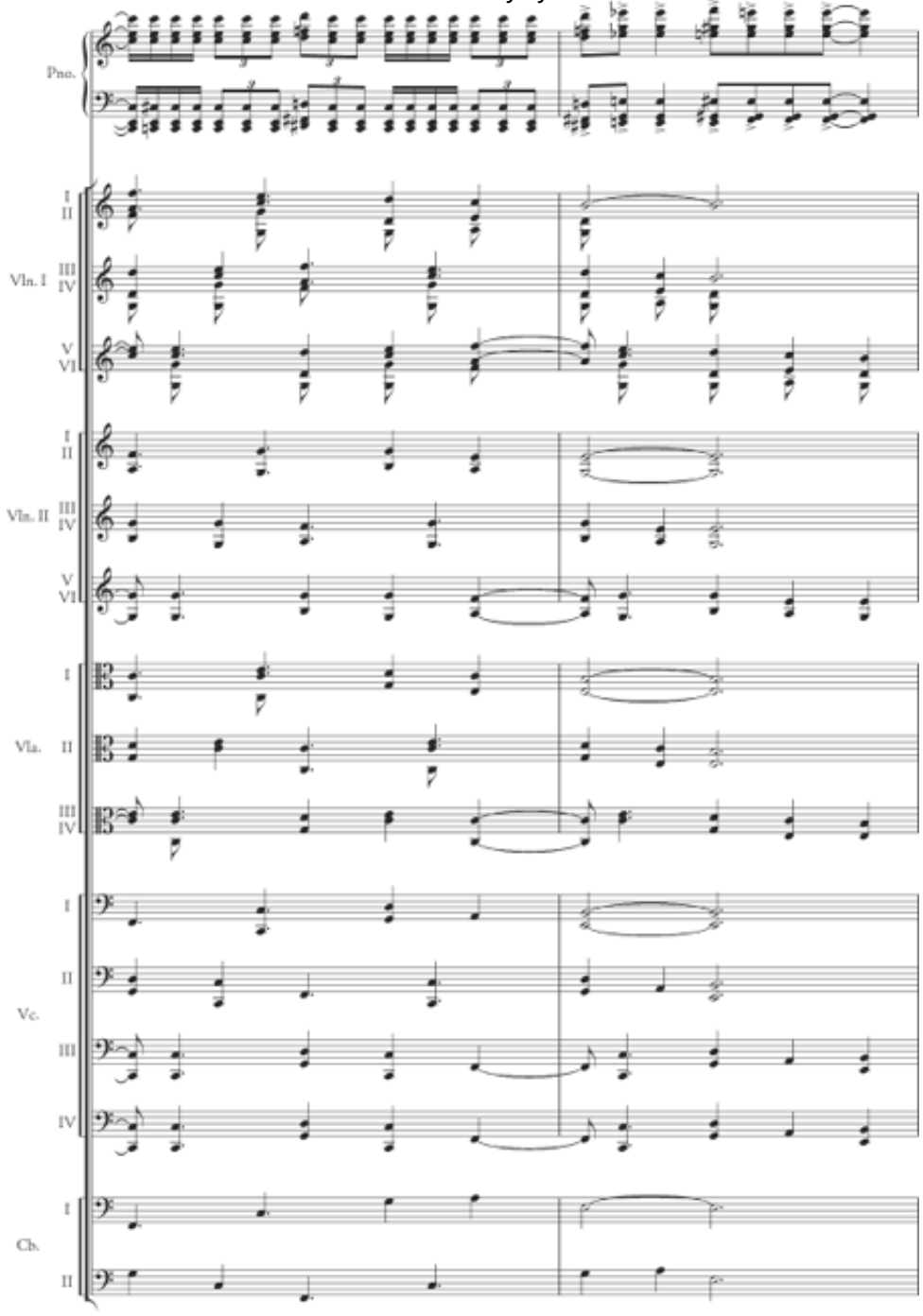
A macabre waltz section, reminiscent of many similar passages in Shostakovich but vastly exceeding them in harshness, reaches a point of maximum tension ("evil"), after which the piano, in a cadenza, tries in vain to shake off the malign influence. The ensuing reprise of the chorale (Ex. 9-11) shows the crazed soloist and the accompanying group at their point of greatest mutual disaffection. The soloist finally manages to derange the chorale, and a typically Schnittkean disintegration or entropy sets in. In the coda, the piano and orchestra seem to be back in sync, but the pianist's last melody is a twelve-tone row, and the orchestra, having picked up each tone and sustained it, is left holding a gigantic "aggregate harmony" at the end. To the metaphysical maximalists of the early twentieth century—Scriabin, Schoenberg, Ives—who emancipated dissonance, the aggregate could mean wholeness. Within the context of Schnittke's "de-emancipated" idiom, it seems more like the ultimate in disorientation.

But while sharply dichotomized, extremes of consonance and dissonance (or tonality and atonality) do not register as incongruous within a style like Schnittke's. They no longer stand for separate stages in a historical development. They are equally available, located not on a historical but on an expressive continuum. As in all the postmodernist music we have surveyed, dissonance is once again heard in relation to consonance, which resumes its status as the tacitly asserted (if easily destabilized) norm. The ease with which the normal is

destabilized is perhaps the essential Schnittkean metaphor for our fallen moral state. There is no escaping the preachiness of that message.

The tendency to sermonize, more than anything else, has made Schnittke a controversial figure. Moral commitment had long fallen victim to irony in modernist art, whether East or West; nor is black-and-white much of a moral color scheme. Upholders of "eternal moral categories"[84] (as one admiring post-Soviet critic has described Schnittke) are exactly the sort that disillusioned sophisticates, especially in countries where artists risk nothing more than public indifference or the withholding of a grant, are apt to denounce as the sheep's clothing of complacency or worse.





ex. 9-11 Alfred Schnittke, Concerto for Piano and Strings, reprise of chorale

But Schnittke's Soviet background weighed in his favor. In the 1970s, following the expulsion of the dissident writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn from the USSR, it became fashionable in the West to look for signs of resistance in all late-Soviet art, and this gained for Soviet artists a measure of Western interest and respect that had formerly been denied them on the cold-war assumption that Soviet art was created under conditions of coercion and served the interests of the totalitarian state. (The notion that the better Soviet artists were dissident in direct proportion to their perceived artistic standing was of course just another way of stating the same cold-war prejudice.)

The tendency to look for messages-in-a-bottle in Soviet art was given a powerful boost in 1979, when a book called *Testimony* appeared, its subtitle proclaiming it to be “The Memoirs of Dmitry Shostakovich as Related to

and Edited by Solomon Volkov." The portrait the book painted of Shostakovich as a disaffected liberal, inserting anti-Communist messages between the lines of his compositions to encourage those of his countrymen "with ears to hear," came at the right time. Its authenticity has been convincingly questioned (and zealously defended), but that debate has been a sideshow, hardly impinging on the book's powerful appeal to many readers' imaginations. Coinciding with the emergence of postmodernist styles in the West, and the weakening of the modernist grip on musical attitudes, the Shostakovich of *Testimony* became an interpretive touchstone against which a great deal of other music could be measured.

Schnittke, more than any other composer, reaped the benefit of this development and began to command Shostakovich's immense and growing following. Long oppressed by the same ideological dictatorship that had oppressed Shostakovich, Schnittke (unlike Shostakovich) survived it, and survived the nihilism to which his First Symphony had once attested. The appeal of his music, like Shostakovich's, lay for many listeners less in its actual sound patterns than in their sense of the composer's moral and political plight (and the fragility of his life, as his many debilitating illnesses became known). That empathy, born of historical awareness, lent an extra concreteness, an extra force to his musical plots and arguments—that is, to the way in which audiences construed and valued his paraphrase-inviting stylistic antitheses and juxtapositions.

The Shostakovich debates, and Schnittke's special status among his contemporaries, were perhaps the last musical symptoms of the cold war. By the time the cold war ended in Europe (with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, followed by the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991), not only Schnittke, but practically his whole generation of Soviet composers—Volkonsky, Gubaidulina, Pärt, Hrabovsky, and many others—were living abroad (mainly in Germany and the United States), the result of a mass emigration or "brain drain" that paralleled the one that attended the beginning of Soviet power in 1917. Denisov, though he never emigrated, spent at least part of every year, beginning in the 1980s, in Paris, as a guest of IRCAM (Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique), Boulez's new-music research foundation. PostSoviet Russian music dissolved into the general European modernist and postmodernist currents, of which it forms a newly vital, if no longer always stylistically distinctive, constituent.

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The term "postmodernism" is obviously unsatisfactory and temporary, a stopgap. Rochberg rejects it because it is semantically dependent on the modernism he opposes. Other writers, like Jonathan Kramer (1942–2004), a composer and critic who wrote one of many retorts[85] to Rochberg's undeniably shrill polemics, suggest that postmodernism is merely the next stage in the history of modernism (which might seem to confirm Rochberg's discomfort with the term). Leonard B. Meyer, who astutely predicted some of its attributes in theory when hardly any artist was putting it consciously into practice, used terms like "fluctuating stasis" or "stable pluralism" or "ahistorical and acultural taste" to describe the era that would necessarily follow the progress-driven ideology of modernism, whose eventual doom was inscribed in its very premises.

Looking back on his predictions in 1992, Meyer noted with some satisfaction that the triumph of communications technology had irrevocably replaced that kind of linearity with a cultural "Brownian motion," which he proceeded to define by recalling the physicist James Clerk Maxwell's analogy to "a swarm of bees, where every individual bee is flying furiously, first in one direction and then in another, while the swarm as a whole is either at rest or sails slowly through the air."[86] There are signs, however, that technology may have brought about yet another revolution, the effects of which are only slowly looming into view, but which will decisively change the nature of music in the twenty-first century and beyond. It remains, in one last chapter, to explore some of these possibilities.

Notes:

(81) R. Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 101.

(82) Alexander Ivashkin in conversation with the author, Glasgow, October 2000.

(83) Levon Hakobian, *Music of the Soviet Age 1917–1987* (Stockholm: Melos, 1998), p. 284.

(84) L. Ivanova, "Ot obryada k èposu," in *Zhanrovo-stilisticheskiye tendentsii klassicheskoy i sovremennoy muzïki* (Leningrad: Leningradiskiy Gosudarstvennïy Institut Teatrï, Muzïki i Kino, 1980), p. 174.

(85) Jonathan Kramer, "Can Modernism Survive George Rochberg?" (response to Rochberg's "Can the Arts Survive Modernism?"), *Critical Inquiry* XI, no. 2 (1984): 341–54.

(86) James Clerk Maxwell, "Science and the Nonscientist" (1965); quoted in Leonard B. Meyer, "Future Tense," p. 349.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

CHAPTER 10 Millennium's End

The Advent of Postliteracy: Partch, Monk, Anderson, Zorn; New Patterns of Patronage

Chapter: CHAPTER 10 Millennium's End
Source: MUSIC IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

GRAND OLD MEN

There are so many composers these days, you cannot perform all the worthy music that is being written.[1]

—William Schuman, *a* "Conversation" (1984)

If the amorphous "new spirit" of contemporary music has any coherence at all, it lies in its spontaneity, immediacy, its fondness for subconscious decision-making ... associated in part with the demise of the composer-scribe.[2]

—Nigel Osborne, Introduction ("editorial") to *Musical Thought at Ircam* (1984)

Radios, records, and tapes allow the listener to enter and exit a composition at will. An overriding progression from beginning to end may or may not be in the music, but the listener is not captive to that completeness. We all spin the dial ...[3]

—Jonathan Kramer, *The Time of Music* (1988)

I like to say that I'm really rootless. I think that the music that my generation is doing is really rootless in a lot of ways, because we listened to a lot of different kinds of music from an early age, ... and as a result we don't really have a single home.[4]

—John Zorn, in Conversation with Cole Gagne (1991)

[We're] simplifying the pitch landscape to allow you to pay attention to something else.[5]

—Paul Lansky, in Conversation with Kyle Gann (1997)

I remember Cage writing about [the painter] Jasper Johns, and how if Johns sees anything on his canvas that remotely resembles anything someone else has done, he destroys it. It took me a while to realize that there's just the opposite way to be an artist: to be a kind of omnivorous personality. I think Stravinsky was one, and certainly Mahler was, and Bach as well—somebody who just reached out and grabbed everything, took it all in and through his musical technique and his spiritual vision turned it into something really great.[6]

—John Adams, in Conversation with David Gates (1999)

To say that modernism “collapsed” in the last quarter of the twentieth century would be as one-sided and misleading (and perhaps as wishful) as the old claim that tonality had collapsed in the same century's first quarter. It is worth one last reminder that all “style periods” are plural, and that the dominance of trends is never as absolute or obvious as historical accounts inevitably make them seem. At century's end, just to pick the most conspicuous examples, Milton Babbitt (aged eighty-four) and Elliott Carter (aged ninety-two) were both still impressively productive as composers (Fig. 10-1).

Karlheinz Stockhausen was still keeping up appearances as an avant-garde icon: in 1995, he made some headlines with a string quartet in which the players “phoned in” their parts from separate helicopters in which they were airborne. (The Salzburg Festival, which commissioned it, was prevented from producing it by local environmentalists.) Six years later, aged seventy-two, the composer was awarded a large prize for the work by the Deutscher Musik-verleger-Verband (the German Music Publishers' Association). Still an enfant terrible at heart, Stockhausen made much bigger headlines later in 2001 with the remark that the terror attack that destroyed New York's World Trade Center was “the greatest work of art there has ever been.”[7] Though shocking at the time, the sentiment (or fantasy) was familiar: Hans Werner Henze, in an essay of 1964, recalled Stockhausen “at the beginning of the 1950s,” looking down on Vienna through the window of an automobile and gloating, “In a few years' time I will have progressed so far that, with single electronic bang, I'll be able to blow the whole city sky-high!”[8]

fig. 10-1 Fifty-two New York composers photographed by Bruce Davidson at the United States Customs House on 29 September 1999. Milton Babbitt and Elliott Carter are the two figures closest to the camera, with George Perle at left in the second row and Paul Lansky behind Perle.

In the year 2000 another old firebrand, Pierre Boulez, was honored at the age of seventy-five with the Grawemeyer Award, the most lucrative of all classical music "purses" (which the year before had gone to the twenty-eight-year-old Thomas Adès, a model postmodernist from England), for *Sur incises*, an exemplary serial composition scored for three pianos, three harps, and three "mallet" percussionists. Like most Boulez compositions by that time, it was based on an earlier work; the prize was generally regarded as a well-earned "lifetime achievement" award.

These composers, all highly distinguished and quite loftily unaffected by recent trends, remained the object of the sort of critical adulation that always attends grand old men. But their ages were significant. Their styles remained modern, but they were the opposite of new. Whether serial (like Babbitt's and Boulez's) or not (like

Stockhausen's and Carter's), their music identified them as senior composers, working in idioms that even their most respectful juniors had to regard as outmoded. Despite their honors, they knew that they had been marginalized, and took it hard. Carter expressed his resentment at the success of the "New Simplicity" indirectly, in titles like *A Celebration of Some* 100 × 150 *Notes* (a short orchestral piece first performed in 1987), and by—like Stravinsky—employing spokespersons, notably his pupil and biographer David Schiff, to vent his spleen at "the tyranny of the audience."[9] Babbitt, invited to comment on recent developments in the program book for the 1984 sequel to the "New Romanticism" festival described in the previous chapter, delivered himself of a self-pitying tirade, "The More Than Sounds of Music," in which he came close to casting himself and his colleagues as victims of an esthetic mugging by unnamed (but plainly enough identified) totalitarian forces. It would be an interesting exercise to ferret out all the code words in its concluding paragraphs:

> It is certain to be observed that the "music" being buried, at least in the archives, will be mourned by few, since it was loved by so few. If "good" or "worthy" is to be determined by the counting of ears (at least that is an explication of that supervenient), then let it be noted that there is a musical arena where the true cultural heroes of this people's cultural democracy hold forth, where a mere seventy-five million copies of a single record album are purchased. And if this be adjudged a rude category error, where should the category boundaries be drawn, and by whom? By those who will not or cannot offer reasons, and so only can be called unreasonable? By such a mighty computermite as condemns Brahms for his elitist, inconsiderate "just another modulation" (the very language of the condemnation reveals the sophistication of the analysis)? By those who dismiss a work by the invocation of *a priori*s as to what music (allegedly) has been, or never was, and therefore should be?
>
> Perhaps music today does present a confusing, even confused picture; for all that it is a truism to remark that the world of music never before has been so pluralistic, so fragmented, with a fragmentation which has produced severe factionalization, it is nonetheless true. But not even those composers who dare to presume to attempt to make music as much as it can be rather than the minimum with which one obviously can get away with music's being under the current egalitarian dispensation would wish to have contemporary compositional variety (however skeined, stained, or—even—strained) diminished by fiat, mob rule, or verbal terrorism.[10]

But the rejection, this time, had been performed not by "the people," or by journalists or concert managers or recording executives, but by the writers of tomorrow's music.

Notes:

(1) Robert S. Hines, "William Schuman Interview," *College Music Symposium* XXXV (1995): 138.

(2) Nigel Osborne, Introduction ("Editorial") to *Musical Thought at IRCAM, Contemporary Music Review* I, part 1 (1984): i.

(3) Jonathan Kramer, *The Time of Music* (New York: Schirmer, 1988), p. 45.

(4) Cole Gagne, *Soundpieces 2: Interviews with American Composers* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1993), p. 516.

(5) Kyle Gann, *American Music in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Schirmer, 1997), p. 274.

(6) David Gates, "Up From Minimalism," *Newsweek*, 1 November 1999, p. 84.

(7) Remark made at a press conference at the Hotel Atlantic, Hamburg, on 16 September 2001 (original German

as reported in the Hamburg newpaper *Die Zeit* on 18 September: “das großte Kunstwerk, das es je gegeben hat”).

(8) Hans Werner Henze, *Music and Politics: Collected Writings 1953–81*, trans. Peter Labanyi (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 39.

(9) David Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter* (1st ed.; London: Eulenburg Books), 1983.

(10) Milton Babbitt, “The More Than the Sounds of Music,” in *Horizons ’84: The New Romanticism—A Broader View* (New York Philharmonic souvenir program, June 1984), pp. 11–12.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online
Brian Ferneyhough

Michael Finnissy

TERMINAL COMPLEXITY

Chapter: CHAPTER 10 Millennium's End
Source: MUSIC IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The youngest composers working in styles and media comparable to those of the grand old men were around forty by the time Babbitt wrote his fulminations. Two of them, Brian Ferneyhough (b. 1943) and Michael Finnissy (b. 1946), were English composers associated with the Darmstadt Summer Courses, where Ferneyhough coordinated the composition program between 1984 and 1994. They formed the nucleus of a group identified with "the New Complexity," a term coined by the Australian music theorist Richard Toop in direct and embattled reaction against the advancing tide.

Their manifestos, many of them unprintable in a book like this, were worthy successors to the original Darmstadt blasts surveyed in chapter 1. And their music was, at least in appearance, even more complicated. To speak of the appearance of the music is in this case not trivial, because composers associated with the New Complexity put much of their effort into finding notations for virtually impalpable microtones, ever-changing rhythmic divisions and tiny gradations of timbre and loudness in an effort to realize their ideal of infinite musical evolution under infinitely fine control and presented with infinite precision, with absolutely no concession to "cognitive constraints." As a result, to quote Christopher Fox (another British composer who has worked at Darmstadt), their scores "pushed the prescriptive capacity of traditional staff notation to its limits, with a hitherto unprecedented detailing of articulation."[11]

The claim displays a familiar sort of bravado, but it is probably true: see Fig. 10-2, from Ferneyhough's String Quartet no. 2 (1980). It is not an unusually complicated page for Ferneyhough, but it shows clearly his device of "nested rhythms" (tiny sextolets in the time of five sixteenths within medium triplets inside of big quintolets, etc.) that motivated the notational extremities, plus the individual editorial attention given every single note (each with its own articulation mark and, usually, its own dynamic) and the "extended" playing techniques (trilled artificial harmonics, microtonal glissandos, etc.) that reflect the composer's determination to diversify at all costs. "It is imperative," the composer wrote, "that the ideology of the holistic gesture be dethroned in favor of a type of patterning which takes greater account of the transformatory and energetic potential of the sub-components of which the gesture is composed."[12] Nothing is too small to be individuated, or given a distinctive written shape. The "late, late Romantic" implications are familiar enough: the notes are rugged individuals whose rights must be respected.

But despite the evident progress it fostered in notational technology the movement was too obviously a rear-guard action to inspire much interest. Nobody took the "new" in New Complexity seriously, not even its coiner. "Still complex" is what he really meant, wrote Toop, "but who uses labels like that?: they don't sell well!"[13] Even its sympathizers kidded it: Barry Truax (b. 1947), a Canadian composer and acoustician, good-naturedly undermined Ferneyhough's ideology of endless differentiation with the remark that, after all, the New Complexity was "a lotta notes."[14] That could be a selling point: Michael Finnissy proudly billed his 5½-hour *History of Photography in Sound* as being (in pointed comparison with the minimalists) "the longest *non-repetitive* piano piece to be performed."[15] But Eric Ulman, a former pupil of Ferneyhough, aired some tough

objections of a kind that had always dogged modernist art, but now seemed especially relevant. “Sometimes,” he warned,

> the “complex” score becomes an intimidation mechanism, staving off critical scrutiny by cultivating incomprehension, substituting colorful notational and verbal detail for musical detail, and depending on an inevitable inaccuracy of interpretation for either a genuinely improvisatory performative power or a final excuse for the failure of the material to present itself audibly.[16]

The notational detail was significant, even if the music was not; for its intricacy set a benchmark that is never likely to be equaled, let alone surpassed. The primary concern of this final chapter will be to show why this is so.

Notes:

(11) Christopher Fox, “New Complexity,” in *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Vol. XVII (2nd ed., New York: Grove, 2000), p. 802.

(12) Brian Ferneyhough, “Form—Figure—Style: An Intermediate Assessment,” *Perspectives of New Music* XXXI, no. 1 (winter 1993): 37.

(13) Richard Toop, “On Complexity,” *Perspectives of New Music* XXXI, no. 1 (winter 1993): 54.

(14) Barry Truax, “The Inner and Outer Complexity of Music,” *Perspectives of New Music* XXXII, no. 1 (winter 1994): 176.

(15) Ian Pace website (www.ianpace.com/text/history2.htm).

(16) Eric Ulman, “Some Thoughts on the New Complexity,” *Perspectives of New Music* XXXII, no. 1 (winter 1994): 204–5.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online
Pierre Boulez

Electro-acoustic music

"BIG SCIENCE" ECLIPSED

Chapter: CHAPTER 10 Millennium's End
Source: MUSIC IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

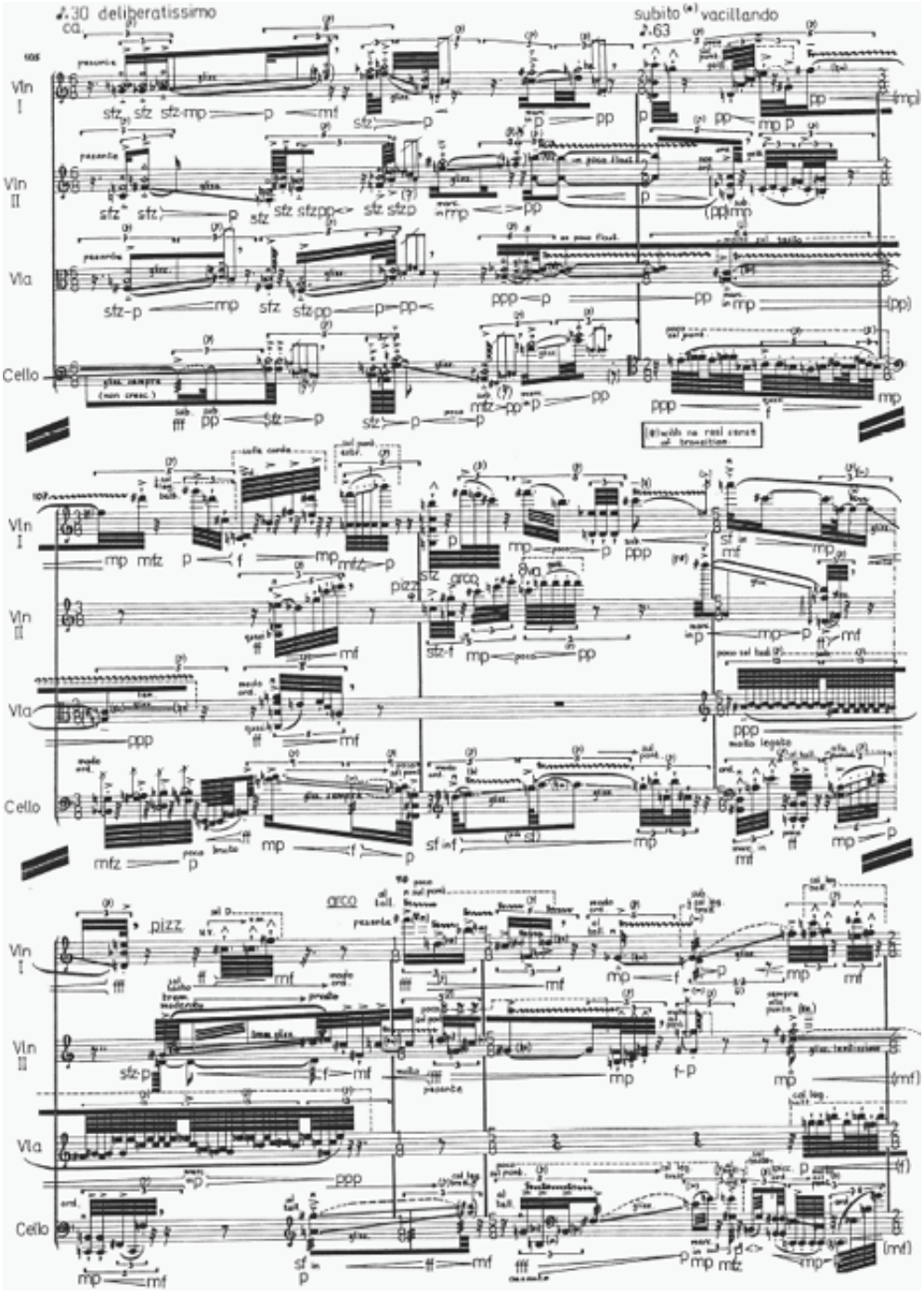

fig. 10-2 Ferneyhough, Quartet no. 2.

Although he remained a commanding presence on the musical scene, Boulez lost his hold on young composers even as he created opportunities for them. One reason was the steady decline in his productivity over the 1970s, caused in part by his engagement between 1971 and 1977 as music director of the New York Philharmonic, and by his simultaneous conducting commitments elsewhere and everywhere. Even after leaving the Philharmonic post, Boulez has been active mainly as a conductor with a heavy international schedule, in incessant demand for commercial recording of early-twentieth-century repertoire with major orchestras, and as leader of a handpicked new music group, the Ensemble InterContemporain.

Composition went on the back burner. Four years after giving up full-time employment as a conductor, Boulez produced *Répons* (1981), a twenty-minute composition for chamber orchestra, six solo instruments (two pianos, harp, vibraphone, glockenspiel, and cimbalom) and live electronics. An extended, thirty-three-minute version of the piece was performed the next year, and in 1984 a full-hour, "full evening" variant was unveiled and taken on an international tour. The longer versions contained no actual new material but were developments, in the traditional motivic sense, of the original piece. That mode of meticulous elaboration has become Boulez's primary compositional method. *Répons* was further cannibalized in two chamber works, both titled *Dérive* (I, 1984; II in two versions, 1990, 1993). Since then Boulez has produced only one short piano piece (*Incises*, 1994) that is not a reworking of earlier pieces, some going back to the 1940s; and (as we know) *Incises* itself was cannibalized in the Grawemeyer Award-winning composition of 1998.

This strangely symptomatic way of living, compositionally, in the past seems related to the circumstances of Boulez's late career. *Répons* was composed at IRCAM, the electro-acoustical research institute the French government (under President Georges Pompidou) set up for Boulez as an inducement to lure him back from America. Fully operational from 1977, when Boulez took up the reins, it was touted as a "meeting place for scientists and musicians,"[17] but in practical terms it amounted to a sort of laboratory, well stocked with electronic and computer equipment and well staffed with technicians, to which composers from all over the world (as well as some musicologists and music theorists) were invited for residencies and fellowships. Boulez retained the directorship of the center until 1992 and devoted much of his energy to its administration. But creatively he was from the start a somewhat isolated figure even there. Even there, a basic esthetic and generational divide loomed up.

In 1984, when Boulez finished the final version of *Répons*, he was fifty-nine years old, between one and two decades older than any of the support staff. Most of the technicians came from (or at least had significant exposure to and knowledge of) the world of commercial pop music, where as much or more progress was being made in audio technologies than in the world of the cloistered avant-garde. And while nobody thought that IRCAM was going to be hospitable to pop music, the differences in background and viewpoint nevertheless showed up in attitudes toward technology, its applications, and its benefits.

As the stately beneficiary of unprecedented government largesse, and no doubt remembering the wall-covering, $175,000 Mark II synthesizer bestowed on Babbitt by corporate patrons at the Columbia-Princeton electronic music lab, Boulez was fervently committed to the conspicuous consumption of technology. He had his own custom-built "machine" at IRCAM, the 4X computer developed by the Italian engineer Giuseppe di Giugno to Boulez's specifications. The 4X was an enlarged and more sophisticated version of a "live electronic music" device called a Halaphone, which could modify the timbres of instruments as they were being played, and disperse their outputs, by means of a computer program, among the speakers of an electro-acoustical installation. The engineer who processed these transformations and moved the sounds around during the performance was in effect a member of the performing ensemble. (Boulez had first employed a Halaphone in an instrumental septet called *Explosante-fixe*, composed in 1971.)

The 4X, an exceptionally rapid computer for its day, greatly enhanced the capacity and versatility of real-time digital sound processing. It was (to borrow a phrase from Dominique Jameux, a musicological disciple of Boulez) "the technological 'trophy' of IRCAM,"[18] and conferred status on the few who were qualified and privileged to use it. Or as Boulez's personal technician put it, the 4X was "the Rolls Royce of computer music."[19] Its size, costliness, and complexity, and the difficulty of running it (which required a special expertise that few if any composers possessed), made it an indispensable emblem of progress, and a tangible justification for the whole IRCAM enterprise, which relied heavily on public funds. The Institute's commitment to spectacular big-system development — "Big Science," as it was called in America—thus had a nationalistic significance for the French in addition to an artistic one.

But there was a paradoxical or ambivalent side to high-tech modernism, since one of the principal tenets of the modern movement had always been the composer's autonomy or freedom from external factors. So technology, whatever prestige or possibilities it may deliver, is inherently suspect. It must be kept in its place; it must never seem to dominate or determine the artist's conception. As Jameux put it (speaking for Boulez), there must be no compromise of "the necessary priority of compositional thought over the empiricism of dealing with a machine."[20] Hence *Répons* is a completely composed composition (to put it as redundantly as the situation demands), with a fully specified score that includes a part for an engineer or "sound designer" who performs it exactly the same way every time.

Thus, even as the maximum technological potential is demanded, its application is held in check. Jameux comments that the work "derives its armature from the perenniality of a completely notated score, which could almost be played and suffice in itself,"[21] that is, without the electro-acoustical transformations. So, paradoxically, the legitimacy of the computer technology is established by limiting it almost to the point where it becomes superfluous. "Whatever the degree of success of the processes of transformation, and of the electro-acoustic equipment in general, the 'machine' treatment seems subordinated to a relatively traditional musical text," she writes. "We do not have the impression (although this is a purely personal opinion) that the available technology *gave rise* to the composition, but rather that an abstract idea—enshrined in the title — led to a score written in the light of what technology could offer *in addition*." It is safe to say that this squeamishness was not only the commentator's, but the composer's as well.

IRCAM's support staff, meanwhile, was more and more intrigued with the burgeoning "digital revolution," the commercial development of personal computers and software that miniaturized, standardized, and democratized technology. A rift opened up between Boulez, whose aristocratic disdain for small machines reflected his high modernist commitments, and David Wessel (b. 1942), an American psycho-acoustician and composer with a jazz background, who was serving as IRCAM's director of pedagogy, over the introduction of mass-produced Apple Macintosh computers and Yamaha synthesizers. An impasse was reached in 1984, when Boulez forbade the move and Wessel (who had negotiated independently with the American and Japanese companies) ordered them anyway.

There was even a political component to the struggle: production of the 4X machine had been contracted through the French government to a company (Dassault/Sogitec) that was mainly engaged in the design and manufacture of high-tech aircraft and munitions equipment for the military. IRCAM was thus implicated in what Americans call the "military-industrial complex." Those advocating the downsizing of technology made it a "Green" issue; those committed to Big Science invoked traditional avant-garde hostility to commercialism.

Georgina Born, an English anthropologist and cultural critic with a musical background who in 1984 had received a grant to conduct an "ethnography" of IRCAM as a thesis project, built her narrative (published in 1995 as *Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde*) around this controversy, which she luckily happened to be on the scene to witness, casting it as a paradigmatic modernist-postmodernist confrontation. She made a compelling case for its significance, especially in the light of the outcome. Despite Boulez's opposition, the "dissident" faction led by Wessel triumphed, even if Wessel

himself was disaffected in the process and departed for the University of California at Berkeley, where he became head of a Center for New Music and Technology. The downsizing of technology, while a personal defeat for Boulez, nevertheless transformed IRCAM in accordance with changes that were sweeping the whole world of information processing, keeping the Paris institution relevant and, in effect, saving it.

The essential irony of late-twentieth-century art—the transformation of the *avant-garde* (vanguard) into an *arrière-garde* (rear-guard) precisely because of its commitment to an old concept of the new—was thus dramatically encapsulated. The change of course at IRCAM reflected in microcosm the transformations in the wider world that led the American composer Kyle Gann to suggest that "centuries from now, the years 1980 to 1985 may well appear one of the most significant watersheds in the history of music."[22] It is of course far too soon to gauge the accuracy of such a prediction, but the world that many musicians inhabit at the time this text is being written did come into being then. And to describe it is a fitting way to conclude a book devoted to tracing the history of the fine art of music in the West. For the defining feature of that history, as emphasized from page one, has been its reliance on written transmission; and what the digital revolution of the 1980s presaged above all was liberation from the literate tradition to which Boulez remained so unbendingly attached, and its probable eventual demise.

Notes:

(17) Tod Machover, "A View of Music at IRCAM," *Contemporary Music Review* I, part 1 (1984): 1.

(18) Dominique Jameux, "Boulez and the 'Machine,'" *Contemporary Music Review* I, part 1 (1984): 19.

(19) Georgina Born, *Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), p. 285.

(20) Jameux, "Boulez and the 'Machine,'" p. 18.

(21) *Ibid.*, p. 20.

(22) Kyle Gann, "Electronic Music, Always Current," *New York Times*, 9 July 2000, Arts and Leisure, p. 24.

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TWENTIETH-CENTURY “ORALITY”

Chapter: CHAPTER 10 Millennium's End
Source: MUSIC IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Yet at the same time another point emphasized throughout the present multivolume narrative has been the persistence of the oral tradition. It has never been fully supplanted in Western classical music or anywhere else. To learn any instrument one needs a live teacher who instructs as much by example as by verbal precept. We all know songs—including “composed” songs like “Happy Birthday” or “Take Me Out to the Ball Game”—that we learned by ear. No musical repertoire, not even the Beethoven symphonies, is wholly fixed and transmitted by its text; there are always unwritten performing conventions that must be learned by listening and reproduced (and that, like spoken languages, change over time).

The point has already been made, moreover, that the one musical medium that originated in the twentieth century—namely, the electronic—is the one that depends least on writing. It achieves what written texts achieve—namely, the fixing of the unique artwork—even better than written texts can do, and it does so without the use of texts. Or rather, “text” and “work” can fuse under electronic conditions so as to produce a definitive work-object (phonograph record, tape reel, cassette, CD, MP3 file) in a way that the intervention of human performers inevitably precludes.

So there have been two ways of doing without writing since the mid-twentieth century: the novel “autographic” or performerless way, in which the composer creates a unique object (as a painter produces a canvas) that can be mechanically reproduced but requires no reenactment in order to go on existing; and the age-old, traditionally “oral” way, in which there are only live performances, not objects (only acts, not texts). But an orally transmitted performance can also be recorded. And so twentieth-century technology has provided a bridge between the two methods of nonliterate art-production; or rather, it has enabled the two methods to surround and attack the literate tradition like pincers. The paradoxical fact is that recording and electro-acoustical technologies have not only produced their own media, but also spurred the professional revival in the late twentieth century of age-old oral practices normally associated with folklore, giving rise to the genre that is known, for want of a better term, as performance art. So before resuming our account of the digital revolution of the 1980s, we need to fill in a bit of “oral” background.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online

Recorded sound

Harry Partch

Instrumental modifications and extended performance techniques

HOBO ORIGINS

Chapter: CHAPTER 10 Millennium's End
Source: MUSIC IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The great precursor here was Harry Partch (1901–74), as close to a total maverick or "alternative" figure as the history of music can provide. He not only talked the talk of a maverick; he lived the life as well. His was a nomadic existence that included a period in 1935 (at the depths of the Great Depression) as a "hobo" or vagrant, a homeless wanderer living in various transient shelters along the West Coast of the United States. A diary he kept during this period, published posthumously under the title *Bitter Music*, shows him translating his social alienation into an artistic program. There are many Musorgsky- or Janáček-like notations of overheard "speech-melodies" (Ex. 10-1), followed by attempts at harmonizing them, and even a few sketches that shape them into dramatic scenes, including some that eventually found their way into his "music-dance drama" *King Oedipus*.

His hobo experiences became the subject matter for several of his works. Four of them, gathered up into a suite or cycle called *The Wayward*, constitute a unique panorama of depression life. *Barstow: Eight Hitchhiker Inscriptions from a Highway Railing at Barstow, California* (1941, revised 1968) was the first. The others were *US Highball: A Musical Account of a Transcontinental Hobo Trip* (1943, revised 1955), *San Francisco: A Setting of the Cries of Two Newsboys on a Foggy Night in the Twenties* (1943, revised 1955), and *The Letter: A Depression Message from a Hobo Friend* (1943, revised 1972). Inspired by his resentments, and by ancient and exotic models of ritual theater, Partch, though trained in it, turned his back on the entire tradition of Western music—its tuning systems, its instruments, its conventional notations, its social practices, its customary venues—and sought to create a better alternative: a didactic and communal *Ges-amtkunstwerk* (he called it "integrated corporeal theater"[23]) founded on a musical system that harnessed the fabled powers of just intonation, speech-song, and choric dancing to exert spiritual influence and effect social change.

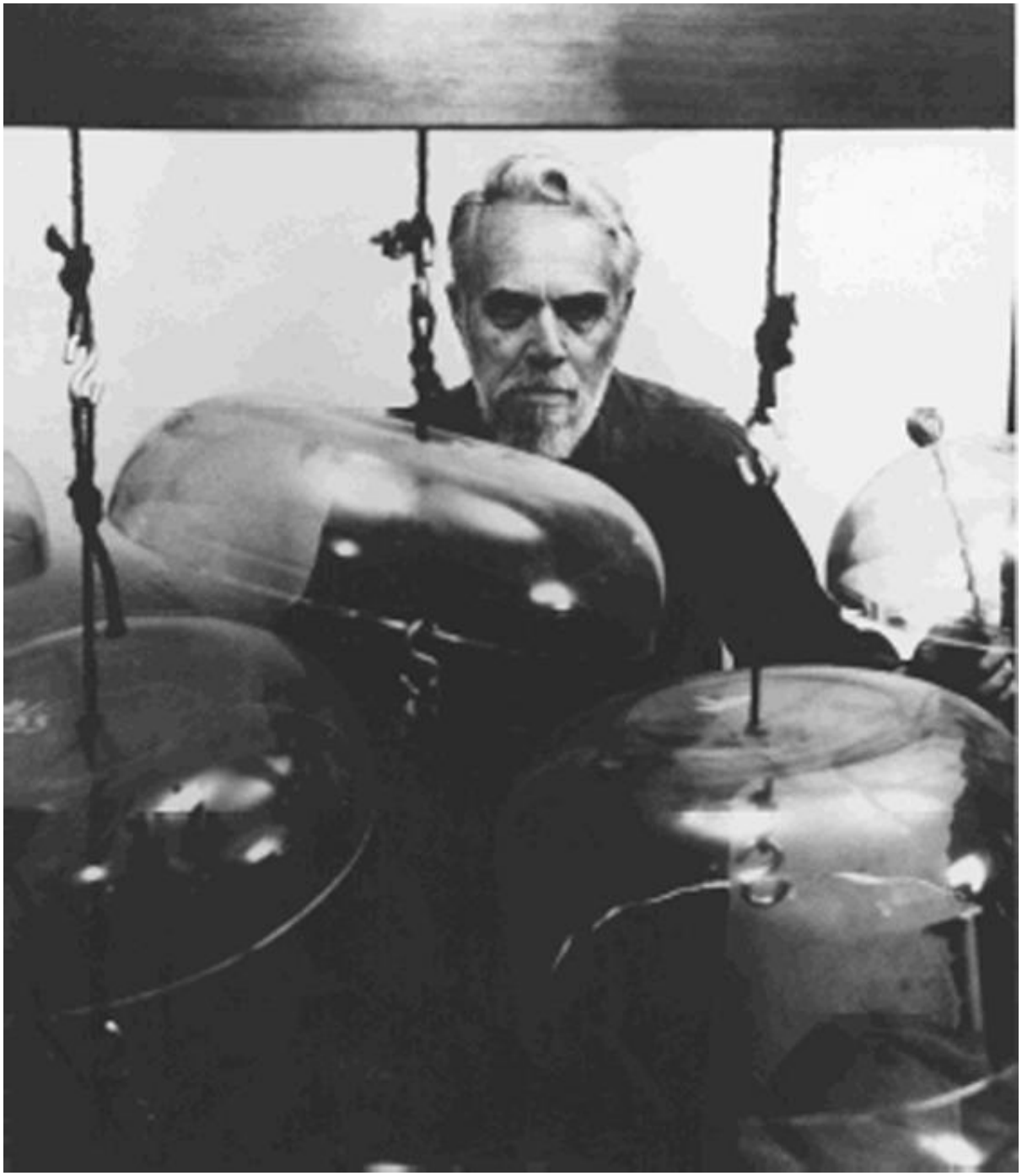


fig. 10-3 Harry Partch.

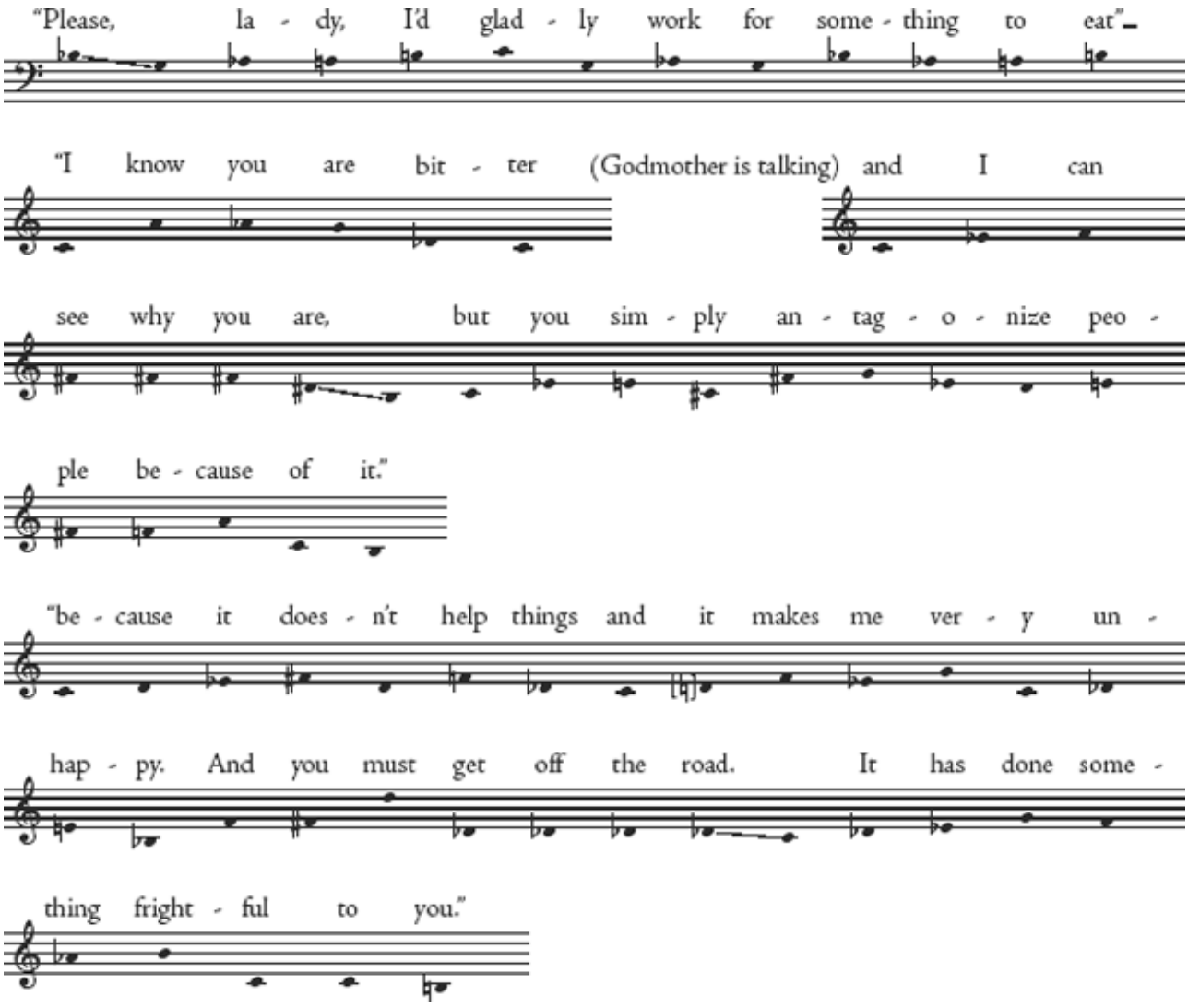
"I am first and last a composer," Partch wrote in 1942. "I have been provoked into becoming a musical theorist, an instrument builder, a musical apostate, and a musical idealist, simply because I have been a demanding composer."[24] His inability to compromise (or to work with collaborators as equals, as the choreographer Alwin Nikolais found out in 1957[25]) was at once the source of the considerable fascination his work exerted during his lifetime—and even more powerfully after his death, when he became a legendary "pioneer"—and the source of its incommunicability except through the person of the composer.

Partch wrote a large book, *Genesis of a Music* (1949, revised 1974), to expound his theories. It contains an irately skewed history of music ("Corporeal versus Abstract Music") to legitimize his ideas and make them seem like the answer to all the big questions; a detailed and mathematically sophisticated treatise on his tuning

system; and a description, replete with photographs, of the numerous imaginatively designed and skillfully built instruments he had had to make in order to provide the forty-three unequally tempered tones to the octave that his modal theories demanded.

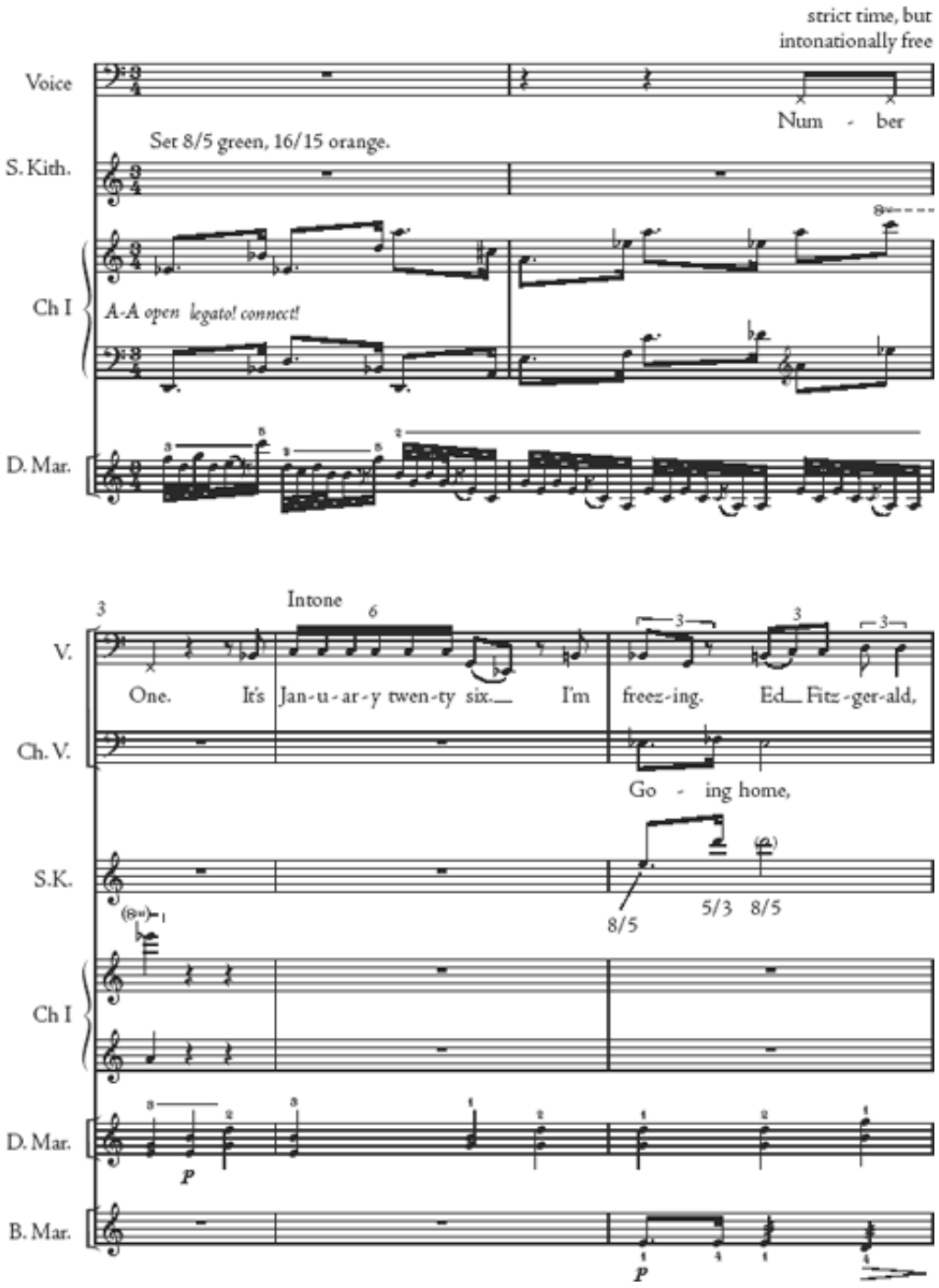
The Partch instrumentarium comprised plucked and bowed string instruments, “adapted” with extra-long fingerboards on which intonation points were marked, as on medieval monochords; “chromelodeons,” or modified reed organs; “kitharas,” harps or lyres played with plectra; “harmonic canons,” or psalteries played with plectra; adapted kotos; many tuned percussion instruments, including marimbas and mbiras in many sizes; and “cloud chamber bowls,” tops and bottoms of twelve-gallon Pyrex bottles sawed off to precise measurements (so called because the original ones came from a radiation laboratory at the University of California at Berkeley). These instruments, visually beautiful, were always visible in performance, on stage along with the singers and dancers in Partch's theatrical works, like the pianos in Stravinsky's *Les noces*.

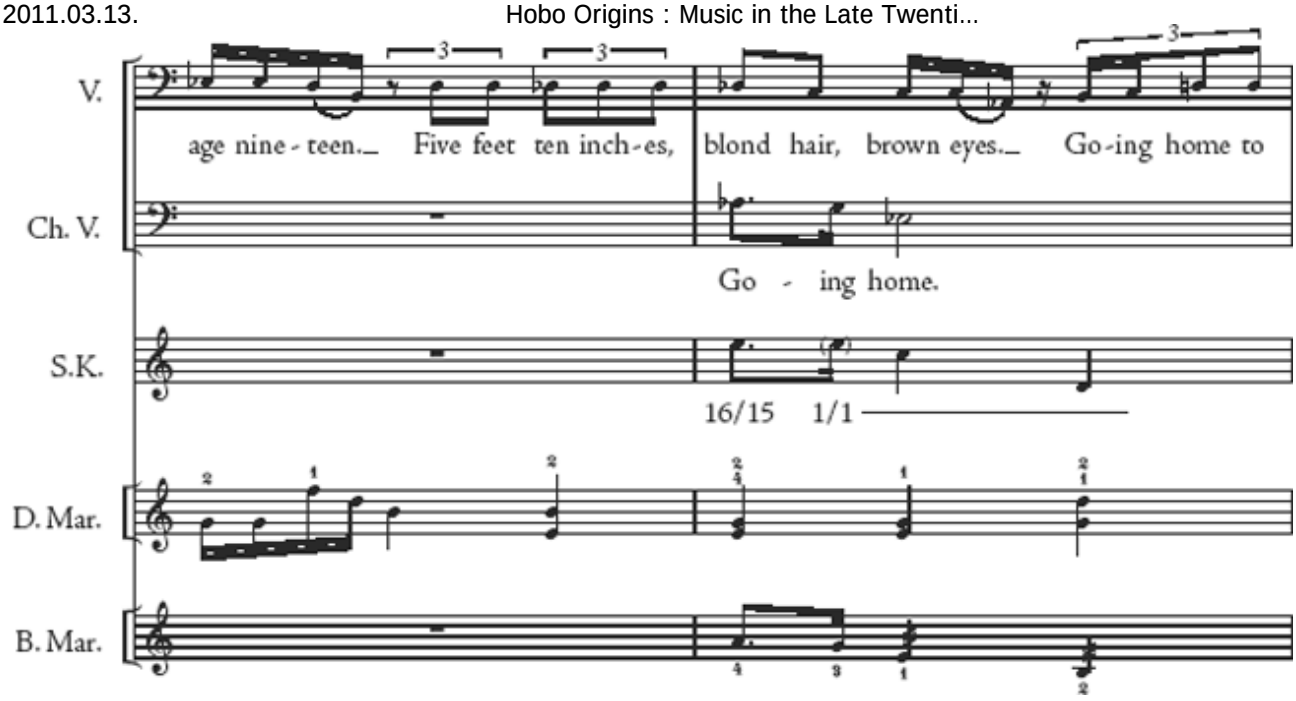
Partch did invent tablature notations for his instruments; Ex. 10-2 shows the beginning of *Barstow* both in Partch's tablature and as transcribed by the musicologist Richard Kassel to show (approximately) the actual pitches. But like ancient neumes, Partch's tablatures best served performers who had already rehearsed “hands-on” with the composer, or with someone to whom the composer had transmitted the work orally. Thus, to perform his music adequately, Partch's charismatic presence was always required. As his reputation grew, he was invited to residencies and research fellowships at educational institutions (among them the Universities of Wisconsin and Illinois and Mills College in Oakland, California). There he would gather around him groups of interested students and musicians, whom he taught by example, and put on recitals and, later, dramatic spectacles.



ex. 10-1 Harry Partch, *Bitter Music*, speech melodies

Once performed, however, they could be adequately preserved only in record-ings—a bitter irony, given Partch's extreme commitment to the physicality of live performance. "I believe in musicians who are total constituents of the moment, irreplaceable," he wrote, "who may sing, shout, whistle, stamp their feet; in costume always or perhaps half naked, and I do not care which half."[26] But he was the truly irreplaceable component. A Columbia LP disk, issued in 1968 and containing three works including *Barstow*, was the only stereophonic recording of fully professional quality he ever made.


strict time, but
intonationally free
Voice
Num - ber
Set 8/5 green, 16/15 orange.
S. Kith.
Ch I
A-A open legato! connect!
D. Mar.
Intone
V.
One. It's Jan-u-ar-y twen-ty six. I'm freez-ing. Ed Fitz-ger-ald,
Ch. V.
Go - ing home,
S.K.
8/5
5/3 8/5
Ch I
D. Mar.
p
B. Mar.
p

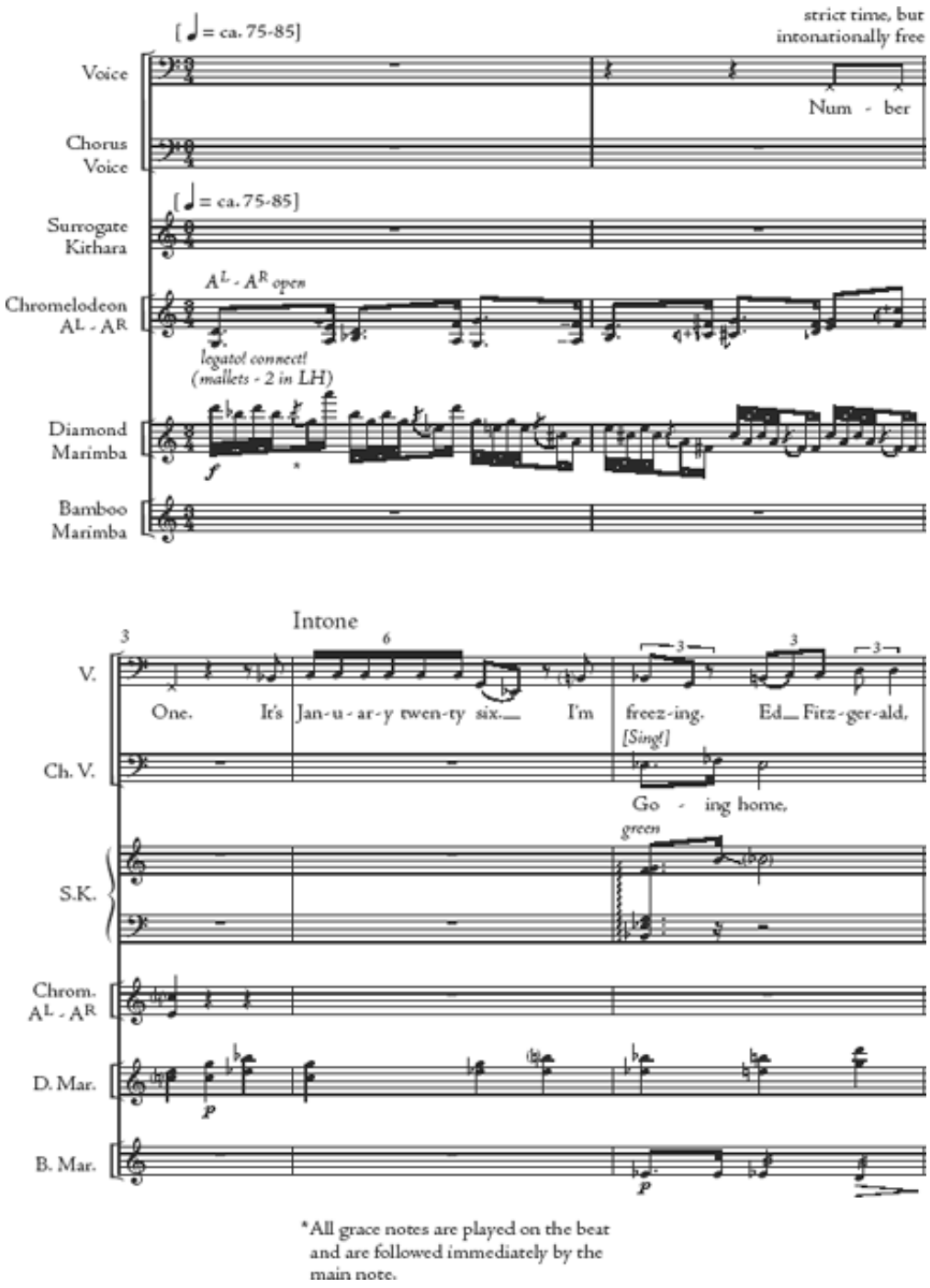


ex. 10-2a Beginning of Harry Partch's *Barstow*, Partch's tablature

On his death his instruments went to Montclair State University in New Jersey, and from there to the Smithsonian Institution. A few of his disciples, notably Danlee Mitchell, a percussionist and conductor who was Partch's companion from 1956 to his death, have continued to perform on them or on replicas. In the 1980s, Mitchell brought Partch's work to Europe for the first time. But the likelihood of Partch performances diminishes every year, even as historical interest in his work has mounted and its influence has spread. A ruinous limit on dissemination was the price Partch paid for his idealism.

Two of his music theater pieces, preserved in fairly primitive recordings on Partch's own "Gate 5" label, were actual adaptations of ancient Greek plays, putting Partch in a noble line going right back to the Florentine Camerata at the wellsprings of opera. *King Oedipus* (1951), based on W. B. Yeats's translation of Sophocles, was produced at Mills College in 1952 and, because the Yeats estate withheld permission to use the text, it was revised for recording (at the Sausalito Arts Fair) in 1954. It is probably the purest and most effective extant example of Partchian *Gesamtkunstwerk*. The most famous Partch composition, *Revelation in the Courthouse Park*, after Euripides's *Bacchae*, is less representative. It was staged in 1962 at the University of Illinois, where one of Partch's admirers, the microtonal composer Ben Johnston (b. 1926), was on the faculty. It was intended as an overt and timely political statement, and as such it caused some modification of the composer's usual style.

Revelation was inspired by Partch's perception of a parallel between the orgiastic rites of Dionysus as portrayed by Euripides and "two phenomena of present-day America."[27] One was the Pentecostal revival meeting ("religious ritual with a strong sexual element"), and the other was the reception that pop singers like Frank Sinatra and Elvis Presley enjoyed among their fans. "I assume," Partch wrote drily, "that the mobbing of young male singers by semihysterical women is recognizable as a sex ritual for a godhead."[28] It stood in his mind for the triumph of "mediocrity and conformity" in postwar America and their threat to the founding values of the American republic, namely the rights and the integrity of the individual.



ex. 10-2b Beginning of Harry Partch's *Barstow*, as transcribed by musicologist Richard Kassel

(*) All grace notes are played on the beat and are followed immediately by the main note.

Scenes from Euripides are juxtaposed with contemporary counterparts depicting a small town's reaction to a visit by an updated Dionysus, a hybrid faith-healer and rock 'n' roll star named Dion, something like an Oral Roberts (or a Billy Graham) and an Elvis Presley rolled into one. King Pentheus and his mother Agave, the chief victims of the Dionysian frenzy in Euripides, become "Sonny" and "Mom." Under the wild influence of Dion, the crazed Mom murders the skeptical Sonny. The audience is invited to contemplate, and to "consider" (in the words of W. Anthony Sheppard, a historian of twentieth-century music theater), "the menace of mindless group

behavior."[29] The score, uniquely for Partch, combines his singular neoantique idiom with American vernacular styles, in keeping with the alternation of scenes. It is no "crossover," however. The use of popular styles in illustrating the degradation of the townspeople renders a fiercely negative (as well as misogynistic) judgment on them.

The tragedy of *Revelation in the Courthouse Park* unwittingly exposes Partch's own fatal ambivalences. His life experiences at the margins of society imbued him with an implacable individualism to which the drama gave overt approval. "I was not going to be straitjacketed by anyone," he snarled defiantly at an interviewer in the year of his death, "I was going to be completely free." He saw himself, like Sonny, threatened by the herd instincts at the core of American life. But his manner of functioning as an artist inevitably made him a charismatic leader like Dion, requiring what Ben Johnston called "cultlike devotion"[30] from his performers. And Dion was nothing if not a "corporealist," from whom Partch could not withhold a grudging (homoerotic) admiration. He saw his own staged embodiment of evil as "an exotic altar priest whose revolving ass is not a lustful and transitory whim, but a divine right."[31] His inability to resolve these conflicts ensured that his work, imprisoned in its idiosyncrasies and dependent on his own function as an altar priest, would effectively die with him.

So his posthumous influence, while potent, has been almost entirely in the realm of ideas and social practice rather than in actual musical practices or styles. "Among his disciples may be counted all American composers who employ just intonation and most of those who use microtones,"[32] claimed one of them, Andrew Stiller, who went on to ascribe to Partch's influence all kinds of later developments from percussion music to multimedia music theater to minimalism to "sound-sculpture" installations. A more realistic assessment would cast Partch as a spiritual forerunner to musicians of a "Green" persuasion, who responded, as the times caught up with him, less to Partch's actual music than to the example of his easily romanticized existence. He has been elected posthumously to the "bum aristocracy"[33] that (as we may read in *Bitter Music*) he despised in life.

That is why, despite Partch's musical purism, his denigration of popular culture, and his classical training, he became, according to the pop critic Damon Krukowski, "one of a handful of composers who seem to interest rock musicians."[34] Musically he had little in common with them, but he worked the way they do. His style was a function of his medium (or vice versa); he composed viscerally, at his instruments; he rehearsed his musicians by rote and performed from memory. And that has made him an inspiration not just to rock musicians but to the increasing number of composers who have relied, in the quarter of the twentieth century that Partch missed, on various sorts of oral transmission to disseminate their work.

Notes:

(23) W. Anthony Sheppard VI, *Revealing Masks: Exotic Influences and Ritualized Performance in Modernist Music Theater* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), p. 180.

(24) Harry Partch, *Bitter Music: Collected Journals, Essays, Introductions, and Librettos*, ed. Thomas McGeary (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), p. ix.

(25) See Bob Gilmore, "'A Soul Tormented': Alwin Nikolais and Harry Partch's *The Bewitched*," *Musical Quarterly* LXXIX (1995): 80–107.

(26) Quoted in Andrew Stiller, "Partch, Harry," in *New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, Vol. III (London: Macmillan, 1992), p. 895.

(27) Partch, "Revelation in the Courthouse Park" (1969); *Bitter Music*, p. 245.

(28) *Ibid*.

(29) Sheppard, *Revealing Masks*, p. 212.

(30) Quoted in Sheppard, *Revealing Masks*, p. 223.

(31) Partch, *Revelation in the Courthouse Park*, libretto; *Bitter Music*, p. 353.

(32) *New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, Vol. III, p. 896.

(33) *Bitter Music*, p. 69.

(34) Damon Krukowski, "Vox populi," *Bookforum*, winter 2000, p. 18.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online
Meredith Monk

IMAGINARY FOLKLORE

Chapter: CHAPTER 10 Millennium's End
Source: MUSIC IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

In this sense, Partch's most direct conceptual descendant is Meredith Monk (b. 1942), a composer whose career was only beginning at the time of his death, and who has never mentioned him among her influences. Like Partch, she began as a lonely outsider, creating an eccentric music "corporeally," by training her own voice to do things no one (at least within the traditions of her schooling) had thought of doing before. At a time when no one could duplicate (or was interested in duplicating) her effects, she became her own performance medium. She told an interviewer, who asked whether her pieces were autobiographical, that her relationship to her work went deeper than that. "I was using," she said,

> myself as material. I was very objective about it, though, so it wasn't really autobiographical. It was more that my hair was material, and my singing with a guitar was material. It was personal in a way that I let myself use myself—anything that I had—as material. But then it was made into a piece of poetry, because it was extremely objectified.[35]

Partch could have said that. Monk's music was, like his, produced at the outset from within her own body. But where Partch (like the ancient Greeks) did everything for the sake of words and their expressive projection, Monk tried to dispense with words without dispensing with the expressive projection. Most of her early compositions are solo songs, with simple piano accompaniments (usually ostinatos and grounds) for herself to play while producing an astonishing variety of nonverbal vocal sounds: sometimes invented syllables sung conventionally, sometimes more elemental sonorities—unusual wobbles and vibratos, nasal timbres, extreme registers, guttural breathing, vocalized inhaling—that Monk, preempting a common reaction from listeners, called "folk music from another planet."[36] Looking back on her early work in 1979, she summed it up as "working with the solo voice as an instrument."

> After classical voice training and experience as a folk and rock singer, I realized that I wanted to create vocal music that had the personal style and abstract (as well as emotional) qualities that come into play in the creation of a painting or a dance. My method began as one of trial and error: translating certain concepts, feelings, images and energies to my voice, seeing how they felt, how they sounded, and then refining them into a musical form. Over the years I have developed a vocabulary and a style designed to utilize as wide a range of vocal sound as possible.[37]

At the time she was recalling, a person with Monk's training inevitably assumed that painting and dance were nonrepresentational media that channeled subjective feeling into objective form in the manner of abstract expressionism. Monk's ideal was a kind of musical (or vocal) abstract expressionism, and that required the dethroning of words. "The voice itself is a very eloquent language," she told an interviewer, "and I've always felt that singing English on top of it is like singing two languages at the same time."[38] To another interviewer, she elaborated:

> Usually, if I do use text, it will be very simple, and it will be there as much for the sound of it as for the meaning. I also think that music, itself, is such an evocative medium. It's very openhearted. And I don't like the idea that people have to work through the screen of language .... Language, in a way, is a screen in front of the emotion and the action. I like the idea of a direct communication that bypasses that step ...[39]

And again like Partch, at a certain point Monk made "an inevitable decision"

> to teach some of my techniques to other voices in an attempt to expand my writing — to see if these principles could be translated (transferred) to other singers and made into group forms. My main concerns in the group music have been to work with the unique quality of each voice and to play with the ensemble possibilities of unison, texture, counterpoint, weaving, etc.[40]

Monk's "classical" training shows through in her use of the word "writing" as an interchangeable equivalent for "composing." But just as her early solo work, while fully composed (never improvised), had been unwritten, since there was no need to communicate the music to any other performer, so the ensemble music remained unwritten, the product (like rock) of intensive daily rehearsal and rote memorization. The avoidance of notation was partly due the fact that there were no conventional symbols for the vocal effects Monk had been evolving. But only partly. "I don't know how you would notate some of the vocal work," she said when asked,

> and I don't know if I want to or not. I'm struggling with that right now because I do want to pass my work on. It's not that I don't want to have other people do it, but I think that the way it's made comes from a primal, oral tradition that is much more about music for the ears. In Western culture, paper has sometimes taken over the function of what music always was.[41]

Whether by accident—ontogeny recapitulating phylogeny, as a biologist might say—or by design (on the basis, perhaps, of her music history classes at Sarah Lawrence College), many of the textures and structures Monk has employed in her ensemble music recall the textures and structures of medieval genres—organum, hocket, rondellus—that found their way into written sources only after considerable development as oral practices.

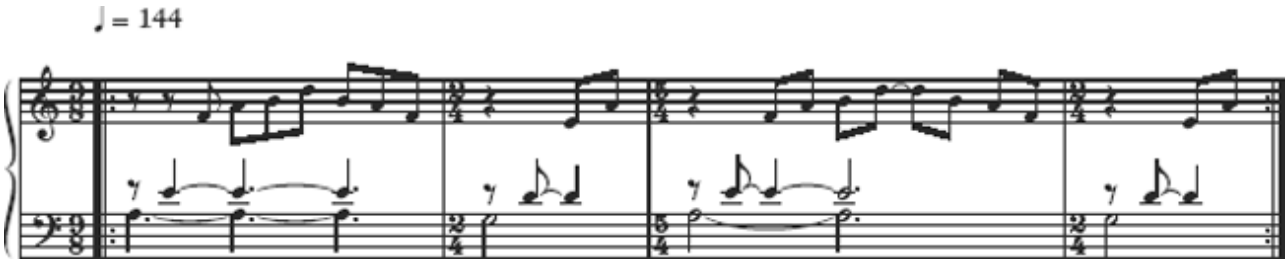
The first work Monk created after forming her own performing ensemble was the wordless *Dolmen Music* (1978), for six singers, a cello (played by one of the singers), and percussion (played by another). The title, derived from an old Breton word that refers to prehistoric cult monuments like Stonehenge (upright stones supporting a horizontal stone), evokes an imagined antiquity. The various movements—"Overture and Men's Conclave," "Wa-ohs," "Rain," "Pine Tree Lullaby," "Calls," "Conclusion"—seem to suggest the primordial rituals and practices out of which music emerged. "In all cultures there are what I would call archetypal songs—the lullaby form, work song, love song, march, funeral song."[42] Just as by avoiding words she sought a universal vocal language, so "it's interesting to hook into these song categories that exist all over," forms that speak wordlessly of life's functions and their ubiquitous, eternal round.

At the very end of *Dolmen Music* all of the voices coalesce into a "composite" parallel organum (multiple fourths, fifths, and octaves) of the kind described in ninth-century Frankish treatises. Twentieth-century musicians of the avant-garde making contact with their ninth-century forebears dramatizes the idea of "cyclic time," a notion that many in the late twentieth century have found irresistibly attractive, and have used as a weapon for dismantling the idea of linear historical progress. Monk has occasionally made this agenda explicit. Asked by an interviewer how she felt she related to the "Western musical tradition," she snapped, "I know there are people very concerned about where they fit into music history; but I would say that's a very male point of view."[43] As with many marginal figures who are eventually discovered by the mainstream, Monk has had to make an accommodation with convention. In the late 1970s she began (like Steve Reich) to record her music for the German ECM label, and she embarked on a series of concert tours that by the mid-1980s amounted to as much as four months a year. Finally, in 1986, a consortium that included the Houston Grand Opera and the

American Music Theater Festival commissioned from her a full-length opera, *Atlas*, based loosely on the discoveries of Alexandra David-Néel (renamed Alexandra Daniels in the opera), the first European woman to travel in Tibet. It was first performed in Houston in February 1991.

Unlike Monk's earlier theater compositions (some of which she had rather loosely called operas), *Atlas*, which requires a cast of eighteen singers and a ten-piece pit band, actually looked like an opera: a sequence of scenes with action and costumes and a semblance of plot. It remained almost entirely wordless, however, using the "language of the voice" to tell the story of Alexandra's quest—through desert heat and Arctic cold, rain forests and agricultural communities, finally back home—in a way that sought to translate the explorer's discoveries into universal emotional experience. And it kept faith as far as possible with Monk's "oral" ideal. The instrumental music, mainly the sort of accompanying ostinatos and grounds Monk had formerly extemporized at the keyboard, had to be written down so as to be playable at sight (see Ex. 10-3), but the vocal music was, much of it, worked out in rehearsal and committed to memory as before.

fig. 10-4 Meredith Monk as Alexandra Daniels in *Atlas* (Houston Grand Opera, 1991).



ex. 10-3 Meredith Monk, *Atlas*, ostinato from "Travel Dream Song"

Another concession Monk had to make in *Atlas* was to electronic technology, something she had hitherto resisted. Her pit band included electronic keyboards and "samplers" (to be further discussed below) to increase the range of sounds available to a small ensemble. But she used electronics the way she used notation, as sparingly as possible. It was a principled renunciation. Some of her earliest pieces (like some of Steve Reich's) were created by layering tape loops. In Monk's case all the layers contained recordings of her voice, and the composite was then used as an accompaniment to a dance performance or film. But once she had an ensemble she rejected the process of "overdubbing" in performance (although she retained it as a creative tool). She told one of her many interviewers that she often worked pieces out by layering voice tracks, but then taught the various tracks to different singers, since the object of composing was to enable a performance (an act in real time, a social process), not just produce an object (a score or CD).

"I don't think anything can really replace people making music together,"[44] she said, leaving little doubt that "can" really meant, "should." Technology, with its inevitable tendency to "reify" and "commodify" (i.e., turn whatever it touches into things for sale) endangered the social and disinterested aspects of performance. Like Partch, she had a finger in the dike but could not stop the flood. The ironic fact is that her music (like Partch's, like everyone's) is now known primarily through commercial recordings.

Her increasing fame finally landed Monk a contract, announced early in 2001, with Boosey and Hawkes, the most distinguished and commercially potent classical music publisher in a shrinking industry, to disseminate her works in written form. This meant not only taking them down from recordings (a task performed by the publisher's staff, subject to the composer's approval), but also codifying and verbally explicating her vocal techniques for the first time, and distributing compact discs of Monk's performances along with the scores "as an aid to performance practice and interpretation."[45] A publisher, in other words, is trying belatedly, and for commercial gain, to reclaim Monk's quintessentially oral art for the literate tradition. Contradictions abound.

Notes:

(35) William Duckworth, *Talking Music: Conversations with John Cage, Philip Glass, Laurie Anderson, and Five Generations of American Experimental Composers* (New York: Da Capo, 1999), pp. 352–53.

(36) *Ibid*., p. 359.

(37) Liner note to Meredith Monk, *Dolmen* Music, ECM Records 1–1197 (1981).

(38) Geoff Smith and Nicola Walker Smith, *New Voices: American Composers Talk about Their Music* (Portland, Ore.: Amadeus Press, 1995), p. 189.

(39) Duckworth, *Talking Music*, p. 359.

(40) Liner note to ECM 1–1197.

(41) Smith, *New Voices*, p. 189.

(42) Smith, *New Voices*, p. 191.

(43) Smith, *New Voices*, p. 192.

(44) "A Conversation with the Composer" (interview with David Gere), booklet accompanying Meredith Monk, *Volcano Songs*, ECM New Series 1589 (1997).

(45) *Boosey & Hawkes Newsletter*, October 2000, p. 8.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online

Electro-acoustic music

Women in music

Laurie Anderson

A FEMININE REDOUBT

Chapter: CHAPTER 10 Millennium's End
Source: MUSIC IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

But the literate tradition is undeniably weakening under pressure from visual media and audio technologies, and performance art like Monk's is one of the symptoms. Most other performance artists have fewer scruples than she about accepting technological innovation, are less resistant than she to reification, and are consequently less likely prospects (or targets) for reclamation by those who trade commercially in notation.

Is it a coincidence that most of them are women? How could it be one, given that performance art is the only creative musical scene that women have ever dominated? Unsurprisingly, male and female explanations for the phenomenon vary in perspective. Kyle Gann, unable to come up with more than two names of men who "use their own voices and bodies as material for their music" but having easily listed a dozen women who did so and claimed to know dozens more, suggested that such an activity "involves a vulnerability, a publicly emotive expressiveness, that men in our society are perhaps too inhibited to indulge."[46] Susan McClary, the feminist musicologist, puts it somewhat differently. "Women's bodies in Western culture," she writes, "have almost always been viewed as objects of display."[47] It is the traditional role of women in the performing arts to be a "body set in motion for the pleasure of the masculine gaze." And she quotes Laurie Anderson (b. 1947), one of the most successful performing artists of the 1980s and 1990s, as corroboration: "Women have rarely been composers. But we do have one advantage. We're used to performing. I mean like we used to tap dance for the boys."[48]

The difference, of course, is that performance artists write their own scripts. "Women have rarely been permitted agency in art," McClary writes, "but instead have been restricted to enacting—upon and through their bodies—the theatrical, musical, cinematic, and dance scenarios concocted by male artists."[49] One can observe those prejudices and restrictions against women's creative agency over the whole range of musical histroy. Performance art is one way in which women have been able to wrest creative agency from its traditional custodians while maintaining, as Anderson whimsically suggests, their traditional "advantage," and without becoming authoritarian figures themselves. Performance art, as a site of female self-representation, thus found itself a natural ally of the feminist movement.

Some performance artists espoused an aggressive feminism. One, Karen Finley (b. 1956), who performed acts of sexual degradation upon herself such as smearing her nude body with chocolate, became the object of a fierce controversy in 1990 when the National Endowment for the Arts withdrew a grant to her at the behest of several enraged congressmen. Others, like Anderson, taking a less confrontational but still politically engaged approach, sought to beguile rather than harangue. Anderson cultivated an androgynous persona in her "punk" hairstyle and unisex (often leather) attire, deliberately downplaying her sexuality, which, as McClary remarks, "given the terms of the tradition [of feminine performance], always threatens to become the whole show."[50]

fig. 10-5 Laurie Anderson, 1985.

Yet in another way she does actively contest rather than evade gender stereotypes, and that is in her enthusiastic embrace of technology, the very domain that Meredith Monk has tended to shun. As McClary comments, by mastering high tech "she displaces the male subject who usually enacts that heroic feat." Also heroic is the sheer Wagnerian scale on which Anderson operates, with one-woman shows (or "solo operas,"[51] to use John Rockwell's term) that combine visual images, words, and music, and that last four and five hours, sometimes split over two evenings (though her popularity is mainly based on excerpts that have been disseminated—all right, marketed—as recorded "singles" and music videos).

Yet she does it all with a wink. An Anderson performance rarely goes by without recourse to a wide array of digital hardware. The hardware includes samplers and sequencers that enable instantaneous manipulation (including "looping") of sounds recorded on the spot; "drum machines" that synthesize percussion tracks; and

voice-distorting machines like the vocoder (which blends the voice with keyboard-controlled harmonies so that one can “sing” whole chords) or the harmonizer, which radically transforms pitch and timbre, giving a user of either sex a potential range from the squeakiest soprano to the boomingest basso (or what Anderson calls her “Voice of Authority”). Trained as a violinist, she has even rigged up an amplified fiddle with tape playback heads so that a bow strung with audiotape can play (and distort) intelligible words on it. The Anderson that performs (particularly when heard in recordings) is in effect a synthesized instrument, capable of simultaneously shamming and mocking superhuman vocal (and instrumental) feats.

Self-parody is an essential part of the performance (but so is seriousness); that is one reason why so many critics have called Anderson the postmodern artist par excellence. Her breakthrough piece, “O Superman” (1980; an excerpt from the seven-hour multimedia presentation *United States* first performed complete in 1983), is a particularly teasing example of that interplay. Subtitled “For Massenet,” on one level it is a straight parody of the aria, “O souverain, ô juge, ô père” (O King, O Judge, O Father) from Massenet's grand opera *Le Cid* (1885), in which the title character prays for victory on the eve of battle. Anderson's translation of the opening line, “O Superman, O Judge, O Mom and Dad,” takes it down many pegs, even as she identifies herself with a heroic operatic tenor. (Who's making fun of whom—or what?) On another level it is a sincere tribute to Charles Holland (1909–87), an African-American opera singer whose career, thwarted by racism at home, had perforce to be carried on in Europe. (Anderson heard him sing the Massenet aria in a farewell recital in 1978.)

The audience does not necessarily have access to this background information, of course. (*Le Cid* is a pretty well forgotten opera; “O souverain” is known today only to retired performers, voice teachers, recital buffs, record collectors, and maybe a few stray scholars.) But the ironic interplays certainly inform what the audience does hear. The song begins with Anderson's voice, looped by the sampler into an unhurried Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha that lasts the length of the performance. When it comes to the words, Anderson's voice is expanded by the vocoder into two alternating chords (C major and E minor) with two tones in common including the pedal pitch, differing by only a hypnotically reiterated semitone. The whole song rocks gently back and forth between them like a babe in arms while the weird synthesizer-voice, joined gradually by Farfisa organ and a couple of winds, croons a dozy meditation, warm and comforting and matter-of-fact yet also somehow sinister, on ... what?

> O Superman. O Judge. O Mom and Dad.
>
> Hi. I'm not home right now.
>
> But if you want to leave a message, just start talking at the sound of the tone.
>
> Hello? This is your mother. Are you there? Are you coming home? Hello? Is anybody home?
>
> Well you don't know me but I know you. And I've got a message to give to you. Here come the planes.
>
> So you better get ready, ready to go. You can come as you are, but pay as you go. Pay as you go.
>
> And I said: OK! Who is this really? And the voice said:
>
> This is the hand, the hand that takes. This is the hand. The hand that takes.
>
> Here come the planes.
>
> They're American planes, made in America. Smoking or nonsmoking?
>
> And the voice said:
>
> Neither snow nor rain nor gloom of night Shall stay these couriers from the Swift completion of their

appointed rounds.

'Cause when love is gone, there's always justice, and when justice is gone, there's always force,

and when force is gone, there's always Mom. Hi Mom!

So hold me, Mom, in your long arms. So hold me, Mom, in your long arms, In your automatic arms, In your electronic arms.

So hold me, Mom, in your long arms, Your petrochemical arms,

Your military arms,

In your electronic arms ...

A lullaby of annihilation? Of robotization? Of self-imprisonment? An Orwellian nightmare of sweetly instilled thought-control? Or (more topically) a demurrer at the lullingly soft-spoken yet military-minded Ronald Reagan's election as president? The song seems to be about the potential horrors of technology, yet its medium is very high tech. (Who is laughing—ha-ha-ha—at what?)

Whether despite or because of its ironies and ambiguities, something in *O Superman* touched a nerve. Semiprivately pressed at the instigation of Anderson's promoter as a 45 RPM single (with another affably nightmarish Anderson song—*Walking the Dog*, about a domestic relationship going up in flames—as the flip side) in a tiny edition of 1,000, the song was played on the air in Great Britain and shot briefly to the top of the pop charts. To fill the orders, Anderson signed a contract with Warner Brothers Records, a major pop label. Sales of *O Superman* grossed over a million dollars. It lifted Anderson out of the avant-garde and into the popular culture.

That freakish, never duplicated success is why Anderson's CDs are usually marketed as rock recordings, while those of Meredith Monk are found in classical bins. The arbitrariness of the classification is symptomatic of the nature of performance art, just as performance art is symptomatic of postmodernism. Their superficial differences—Anderson highly verbal, openly political, and urbane; Monk pre- or postverbal, only implicitly political, and "artless"—are outweighed by their similarities, the most striking of which is the irreducibly oral/aural nature of their products. Translate their work into notes on a page and everything that counts is lost.

Notes:

(46) Gann, *American Music in the Twenieth Centuiry*, p. 208.

(47) Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), p. 138.

(48) Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 139.

(49) *Ibid.*, p. 138.

(50) *Ibid.*

(51) Rockwell, *All American Music*, p. 125.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

MUSIC AND COMPUTERS

Chapter: CHAPTER 10 Millennium's End
Source: MUSIC IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

But the medium least dependent on notation had always been electronic music, which can bypass the performance process as well as the pencil-and-paper process. And no medium was more thoroughly transformed during the 1980s than electronic music, thanks to the advent of personal computers, the very thing that Pierre Boulez was so determined to stave off. From the perspective of midcentury modernism he was right to fear it. Personal computers revolutionized every aspect of music making from composition (including nonelectronic composition) to performance to distribution to consumption. And at every level their effect has been to simplify and democratize the art. But in the process they may have dealt the literate tradition a slow-acting death blow.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online

Computers and music

Max V. Mathews

Charles Dodge

THE ELITE PHASE

Chapter: CHAPTER 10 Millennium's End
Source: MUSIC IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The beginning of "computer music" can be specified with greater precision than perhaps any comparable event in the history of music. It took place in Summit, New Jersey, in 1957, when Max V. Mathews (b. 1926), an engineer at Bell Telephone Laboratories, produced computer-generated musical sounds with his "transducer," an instrument he invented that could convert audio signals into digital information that could be stored or manipulated by a computer and then reconverted into audio signals. (Its initial purpose was to simulate and recognize speech so that some of the tasks that telephone operators performed could be automated.)

At first, what attracted the interest of engineers and, eventually, composers to the new medium was the classically modernist prospect of overcoming all limitations on creative sovereignty. "With the development of this equipment carried out at the Bell Telephone Laboratories, the composer will have the benefits of a notational system so precise that future generations will know exactly how the composer intended his music to sound," Mathews wrote. "He will have at his command an 'instrument' which is itself directly involved in the creative process." And even more grandly:

> Man's music has always been acoustically limited by the instruments on which he plays. These are mechanisms which have physical restrictions. We have made sound and music directly from numbers, surmounting conventional limitations of instruments. Thus, the musical universe is now circumscribed only by man's perceptions and creativity.[52]

The new freedom came at a high price. The composing process for computer-assisted music was at first almost unbelievably cumbersome, and would remain so for a long time. Here is how Mathews, its inventor, described it in prospect:

> Any sound can be described mathematically by a sequence of numbers. Our composer thus begins by determining what numbers specify the particular sounds in which he is interested. These numbers are then punched on IBM cards; the cards are fed into the computer and the digits recorded in the memory of the machine. The computer is thus able to generate limitless sounds, depending on the instructions given it by the composer. The latter, instead of writing the score in notes, programs his music by punching a second set of IBM cards, which when fed into the computer cause it to register on tape certain sounds from its vast storehouse.[53]

But here is how Kyle Gann, a composer, described it in retrospect:

> From these early days to the late 1970s, computer music was made by punching Hollerith computer cards in stacks of maybe 3,000 for a few seconds' worth of music, sending those cards out to a mainframe

> computer for processing, then having the resulting number-coded tape run through a digital-to-analogue converter to get actual sound. This generally meant punching your cards and waiting two weeks for them to come back—often only to find that some number error or miscalculation had torpedoed the desired results.[54]

The composers willing to pay the price, naturally, were the composers to whom the prospect of infinite control was most attractive. This chiefly meant Princeton and Columbia composers at the outset, and only partly because their universities were located within forty miles of Bell Labs. "Using a computer," wrote Charles Dodge (b. 1942), who studied at both universities, "it is realistically possible for a composer to structure all elements of his composition (e.g., tempo, timbre, rate and shape of attack and decay, register, etc.) to the same degree as pitch and rhythm."[55] To "structure," in those days and in those places, of course meant to serialize.

The earliest fruits of the Bell transducer program, presented on a commercial LP record called *Music from Mathematics*, consisted in the main of little experimental pieces by engineers in which the purpose was working the kinks out of the program. (The quotations given above from Mathews come from the sleeve notes to this recording.) Since the best way of testing the accuracy of one's results was to measure it against a known prototype, one of the bands on the record contained a sixteenth-century fantasia for three computer-simulated recorders, and another was the voice-synthesized rendition of "A Bicycle Built for Two" ("Daisy, Daisy") that became famous when Stanley Kubrick put it to dramatic use in his futuristic movie *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

But the record also contained two twelve-tone studies by David Lewin (1933–2003), later an eminent theorist and music analyst, who had graduated from Harvard in mathematics and from Princeton in composition, and whose computer pieces were attempts at serializing multiple "parameters" like duration and register. (But also featured was an unnotatable *Noise Study* by James Tenney (1934–2006), a disciple of Cage, in which complex sounds were allowed to modify one another in a manner that proved more indicative of things to come.) The first course in computer music technology was offered at Princeton in 1966 by Godfrey Winham as part of the university's newly approved Ph.D. program in composition. Among the earliest composers to use the computer regularly as a creative instrument was J. K. Randall (b. 1929), a Princeton professor whose earliest computer compositions, like Lewin's, sought serial control over every measurable aspect of the musical result.

Soon afterward a computer music-synthesis program was established at Columbia, Princeton's electronic music partner; it, too, was affiliated (through Vladimir Ussachevsky) with Bell Labs. Dodge, a widely noted young serialist then completing a doctorate in composition, was its star. At first, in keeping with his enthusiastic comment quoted above, he was attracted to the computer as a sort of performer—an instrument capable of coping (in the words of Kurt Stone, a celebrated music editor of the period) "with superhuman structural and interpretative complexities so typical of much of today's music."[56]

Changes (1969–70), Dodge's first computer composition, resembled his earlier pieces for conventional instruments (like *Folia*, a very complicated chamber nonet commissioned by the Fromm Foundation and performed at Tanglewood in 1965), and used the new medium very much the way Milton Babbitt had used the big RCA synthesizer. The machine was programmed to store digitally and convert into an analog recording a fully written-out twelve-tone composition that live performers might also perform (provided they could be programmed with equal precision).

Dodge's next computer piece, though, was a turning point. He received a commission from Nonesuch Records (an adventurous company that had already had great success with *Silver Apples of the Moon*, a composition produced by Morton Subotnick directly on tape using an electronic synthesizer) to create a piece of computer music that could be marketed on disk. The work he produced, *The Earth's Magnetic Field*, was based on numbers derived from measurements that geophysicists at Columbia's Goddard Institute for Space Studies had taken of fluctuations in the earth's magnetism caused by the sun's radiation (the so-called "solar wind") over the course of the year 1961. The measurements are averaged every three hours (for a yearly total of 2,920 readings)

according to a scale known as the Kp index, which has twenty-eight values or degrees of magnitude (Fig. 10-7).

On the second side of the record, Dodge arbitrarily assigned the twenty-eight values to the tones of an equal-tempered chromatic scale covering two octaves plus a major third (twenty-eight semitones), and from other aspects of the geophysical data he derived some equally arbitrary but consistent rules for varying tempo, dynamics, and timbre. The result was an atonal and dissonant texture, not organized according to twelve-tone principles but similar to twelve-tone music in harmonic effect. That is, it was harmonically undifferentiated and undirected, and was therefore typical of the academic music of Dodge's generation. Nothing newsworthy about that.

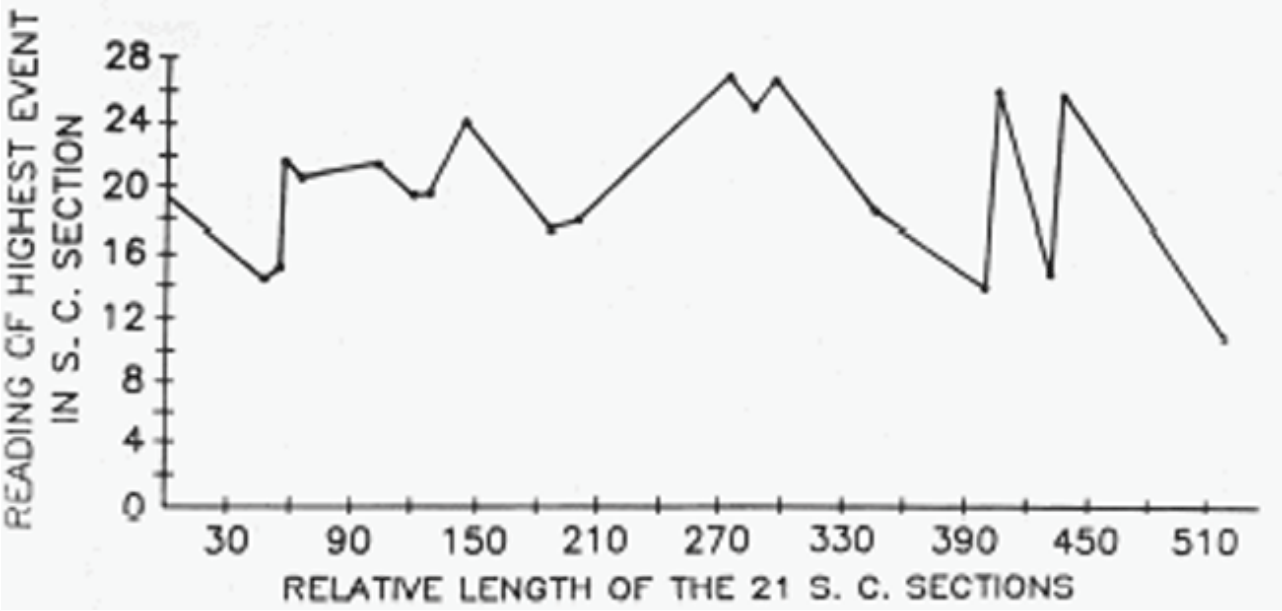

fig. 10-6 Graph of sunspot activity used to control aspects of the composition in Charles Dodge's *Earth's Magnetic Field*.

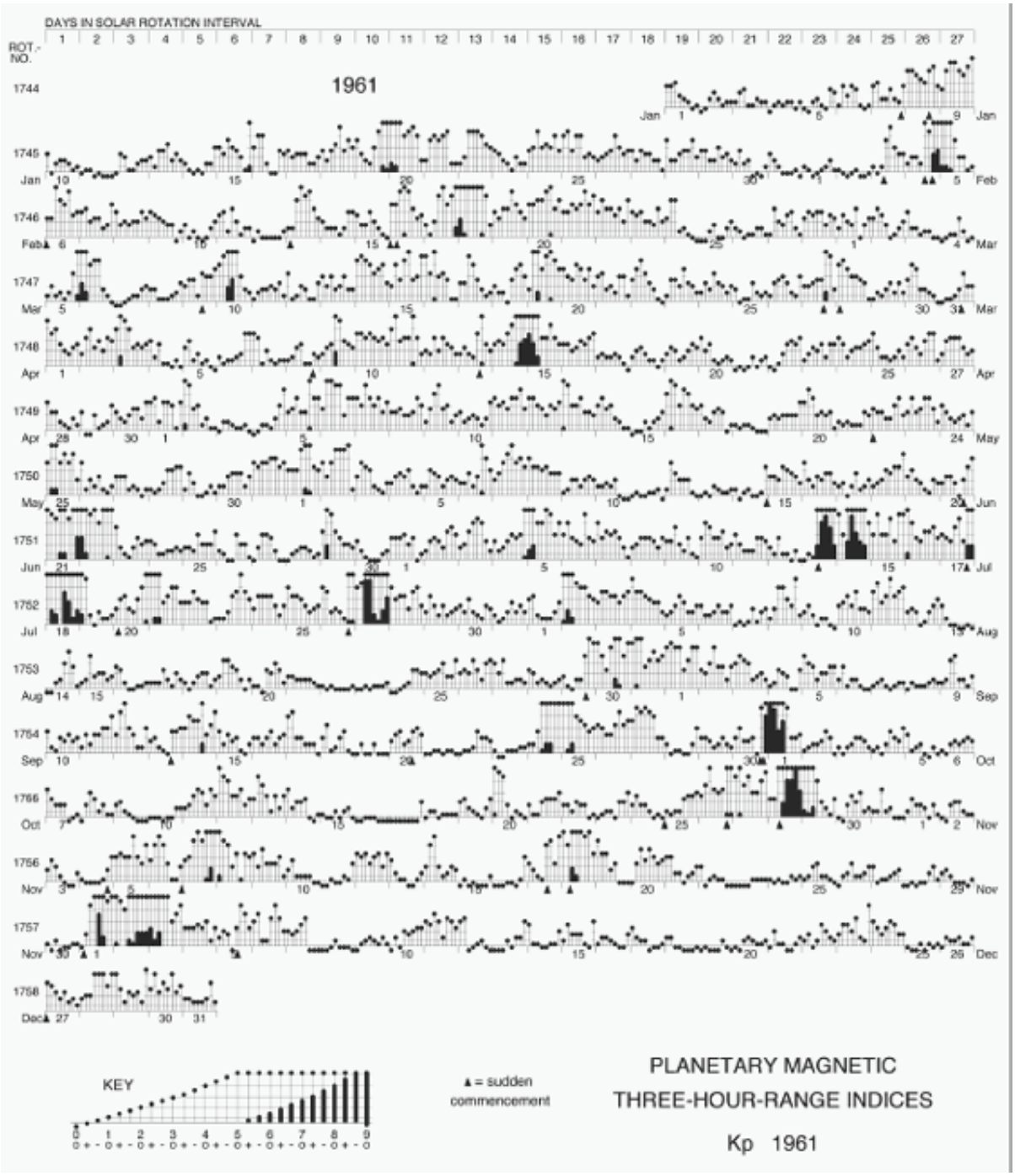

fig. 10-7 Dodge, *Earth's Magnetic Field*, Kp readings, including the time interval January 1 to February 6, 1961.

On the first side of the disk, however, Dodge accepted a correlation between Kp measurements and musical pitches that had been previously worked out by one of the astrophysicists at Goddard, a musical amateur who mapped the measurements onto a diatonic scale that covered four octaves and a second. The result was a series of quirky, catchy tunes that listeners (perhaps with the kind of chemical assistance that prevailed among lovers of "alternative musics" in 1970) could imagine the sun "playing" on the terrestrial atmosphere. The record sold like hotcakes.

Dodge never returned to serial music. Instead, he became particularly interested in speech synthesis (the original Bell project) and its musical applications. A set of exercises called *Speech Songs* (1972), in which Dodge

read a set of little poems by his friend Mark Strand several times into Mathews's transducer and then electronically resynthesized, modified, and mixed the sounds of his own readings, became a cult classic. "Laughter at new music concerts, especially in New York these days, is a rare thing," the composer wrote in 1976, "and it has been a source of great pleasure to me to hear audiences respond with laughter to places in all four of the *Speech Songs*."[57] The second in the series plays on the cusp between the obviously synthesized and the possibly "real" sound of a voice.

In 1980 Dodge produced a hilarious sequel: *Any Resemblance Is Purely Coincidental*, in which the raw material was the recorded voice of the great operatic tenor Enrico Caruso. Against expectations, work with the computer had nudged him away from the serious but hermetic project that originally attracted him, and also away from musical idioms that could exist in notation apart from the new medium. At the same time, high technology conferred sufficient prestige to license (or excuse) an "accessible," even humorous musical result that might again court the "lay" audience academic musicians had, it seemed, permanently forsworn. Computers, of all things, seemed to promise relaxation of the quixotic standards of difficulty by which composers in the academy had sought to justify their existence. Improbably enough, the most advanced technology was leading some of its elite practitioners toward a postmodernist posture.

Notes:

(52) Max V. Mathews and Ben Deutschman, liner note to *Music from Mathematics*, Decca Records DL 79103 (ca. 1962).

(53) *Ibid*.

(54) Gann, *American Music in the Twentieth Century*, p. 266.

(55) Charles Dodge, liner note to *Computer Music*, Nonesuch Records H-71245 (ca. 1970).

(56) Kurt Stone, "Current Chronicle: Lenox, Mass.," *Musical Quarterly* LI (1965): 690.

(57) Liner note to *Synthesized Speech Music by Charles Dodge*, Composers Recordings CRI SD 348 (1976).

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online
Spectral music

Jean-Claude Risset

SPECTRALISM

Chapter: CHAPTER 10 Millennium's End
Source: MUSIC IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Jean-Claude Risset (b. 1938), a French composer and mathematician, received his training under Mathews at Bell Labs between 1964 and 1969 and went on to become the first computer *chef* at Boulez's IRCAM (1975–79). His research specialty was the matching and manipulation of recorded instrumental and natural sounds as a way of bridging the gap between the two mutually antagonistic worlds of early electronic music as described in chapter 4: the world of musique concrète, which made collages of "real" sounds, and that of the "tape studio," where only electronically produced sounds were used. The computer offered a way of combining the rich sonic resources of the one and the precise composerly control of the other.

A Risset composition of 1968, "Fall," from *Music for Little Boy* (a suite from an incidental score to a play about the aftermath of the bombing of Hiroshima), gave an impressive inkling of that potential. Having made a thorough study of the overtone structures of instrumental timbres and their relationship to perceived pitch, Risset was able to create in sounds the analogue to a nightmare in which a character imagines that he is the bomb itself, falling through space until the dreamer awakens. "This fall," Mathews wrote in a note accompanying a recording of the piece, "is psychological and never reaches any bottom."[58] By changing the relative strength of the overtones in the complex timbre of a descending glissando, the computer interferes with the listener's perception of register. When a "subjective" octave is reached, the original pitch is actually restored so that an uncanny illusion of endlessly descending pitch is produced.

Experiments like these were musically rudimentary but vastly suggestive. In fact a whole "school" of French composers arose in the mid-1970s in response to music produced, like Risset's, on the basis of computer analyses and transformations of timbre. What is particularly interesting about these composers—most prominently Gérard Grisey (1946–98) and Tristan Murail (b. 1947)—is that their *musique spectrale* ("spectral" or "spectralist" music) is not "computer music." It is neither (necessarily) composed nor performed with the aid of a computer and does not (necessarily) use electronic media. It is, rather, an approach to musical form, and particularly to orchestration, that not only was inspired by the precedent of computer music but would have been inconceivable without that precedent—a preliminary inkling of how pervasive the influence of computers has been on music since the 1970s.

In spectral music "the material derives from the natural growth of sonority," Grisey told an audience at Darmstadt in 1978. "In other words there is no *Grundgestalt* (no melodic cell, no complex of notes or note-values)."[59] Rather than an arbitrary basis in the composer's imagination, spectral music finds a natural grounding in the physical qualities of sound, its "spectrum" of overtones as objectively analyzed by an unprejudiced machine. Grisey's *Les espaces acoustiques* ("Acoustic spaces"), a cycle of five pieces ranging in size from solo viola with an optional "electro-acoustical environment" (*Prologue*, 1976) to full orchestra (*Epilogue*, 1985), derives its material from a sonogram, or computer analysis, of the relative amplitude or prominence of sixty-six overtones arising from a low E (41.2 cycles per second), produced as a trombone "pedal" or as the fourth string of a double bass when played in various ways (arco, pizzicato, sul ponticello, etc.).

Chord progressions are produced by variously sampling the upper partials. Bass lines are often the product of combination or difference tones. "Dissonance" is introduced by transposing some of the upper partials so that they become "inharmonic" (i.e., they no longer resonate as integral multiples of the fundamental frequency). In *Partiels* (1975), for eighteen players, the third item in *Les espaces acoustiques*, the overall trajectory is from harmonicity through inharmonicity to disintegration, ending in silences, rustling percussion and isolated bass clarinet moans. In the fourth piece, *Modulations* (1977), the formal progression is from harmonicity to inharmonicity and back again to the pure spectrum of E, but the overtone series is inverted (the large intervals now coming at the top and proceeding downward in ever decreasing increments), and the harmonies reflect the spectra produced on a trombone timbre by the use of various mutes, which act as filters. Four such spectra are set in counterpoint by an orchestration that separates the ensemble into four antiphonal groups.

Inharmonicity is emphasized in the scoring by increasing the "roughness" of sound with nonpitched percussion, string ponticello, wind overblowing, and the like, and returning to smoother sounds when inharmonicity "resolves" to harmonicity. Since the natural overtone series has no "tempering," spectral harmony is an unusual idiom in which tempered "inharmonic" intervals actually resolve to microtonal but acoustically pure "harmonic" ones. But since spectral music is played not by overtone-free sine-wave generators (as it might be in the computer lab) but by instruments that have their own harmonic spectra, the objective of spectral music is not to reconstitute or reproduce the timbre of the sonority analyzed in the sonogram, but rather to orchestrate unique timbre complexes—and "beautiful" ones at that, orchestration being the area in which the composer exercises subjective choice in manipulating the raw sonogram material.

Thus there is in spectralism, as in any composed music, an arbitrarily shaped component that reflects the composer's tastes and preferences. But that component inhabits the realm of timbre rather than the more traditional realm of rhythmicized pitches and intervals. In this, some have seen a continuing French (or "impressionist") predilection. In any case, it was not surprising that after a period of teaching at the University of California at Berkeley, Grisey should have been hired by the Paris Conservatory as a professor of orchestration, only later being given a composition class.

Spectral music resembles earlier electronically influenced instrumental music, like Penderecki's "sonorist" scores or especially Ligeti's *Atmosphères*, with which it shares a predilection for long, slowly-changing sounds. Like all "high-tech" music of its period, it depended on privileged access to rare and expensive equipment housed in elite research institutions like industrial labs, universities, and state-subsidized endowments such as IRCAM. Paul Lansky (b. 1944), a veteran of Winham's Princeton seminar, estimated that "by 1979 you could probably get a good computer-music studio for $250,000, if you could raise it."[60] After twenty years, in other words, it was still something only institutions could afford, and therefore a place to which entry was limited both by available time and by social barriers like mandatory professional affiliation.

Notes:

(58) M. V. Mathews, liner note to *Voice of the Computer*, Decca Records DL 710180 (1977).

(59) Gérard Grisey (trans. A. Laude), liner note to G. Grisey, *Partiels, Dérives*, Erato Stereo STU 71157 (1981).

(60) Paul Lansky, "It's about Time: Some Next Perspectives (Part One)," *Perspectives of New Music* XXVII, no. 2 (summer 1989): 271.

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online

Paul Lansky

MIDI

Sampler

"THEN ALONG CAME MIDI!"[61]

Chapter: CHAPTER 10 Millennium's End
Source: MUSIC IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The exclamation is Lansky's, in recognition of the "great and revolutionary accomplishment" that, as we have seen, some writers have greeted as the dawn of a new musical era. Like the earlier elite phase of computer music, but this time by design rather than fortuitously, the new musical era was the by-product of industrial innovation in pursuit of profits. It was literally—and directly—created by capitalism, and can stand therefore as a musical monument to the global triumph of the free market and the worldwide conversion to an "information-based" economy. Since the latter is the standard economists' criterion of postmodernity, the "MIDI revolution" is perhaps the most intrinsically entitled of all late twentieth-century musical developments to the status of "postmodernist" standard-bearer.

The word MIDI is an acronym for "Musical Instrument Digital Interface." It was a protocol—a set of specifications—agreed upon by representatives of computer and synthesizer manufacturers between 1981 and 1983 to standardize their products so that they could all interact (and so that everybody's sales might stimulate everybody else's). This development took place virtually simultaneously with the beginning of mass-produced and affordable minicomputers of the kind that have since become ubiquitous household items.

All of a sudden, this nexus vastly miniaturized and domesticated the hardware required for computer synthesis of music. "I don't think anyone can really appreciate the meaning of this unless they have spent six months getting a [mainframe computer] to go 'beep,'" Lansky wrote. His description of the change, written in 1989 when it was still a recent thing, is the most vivid testimony on record:

> This really created a democratization of computer music in which it was no longer solely the domain of wealthy institutions and professors who could devote years to mastering its intricacies.... Those of us who had sweated with software realized quite quickly that to get ninety-six oscillators singing in real time at a 50-kiloHertz sampling rate, and for less than two thousand dollars, was no trivial accomplishment. And the Macintosh [the personal computer manufactured by Apple] really blew us away. One could only admire this cute little machine that you could lift with one hand and take with you anywhere, that could give you intimate control over those ninety-six oscillators.... I still marvel when I am able to open a factory-sealed box and get sound out within twenty minutes.[62]

The new accessibility and ease of sound synthesis using home computers connected via MIDI to synthesizers was accompanied by the development and marketing of a pair of inventions that similarly revolutionized the process of patterning and manipulating sound materials—that is, composition itself. One was the sampler, a device that stores and instantly retrieves recorded sounds of any kind; can subject them to instantaneous ("real-time") modifications like transposition, compression, elongation, "looping," or reversal; and can even engineer the gradual transformation of any recorded sound into any other by a process similar to video "morphing." The

other was the sequencer, a device that puts digitally stored sounds into a programmed order that can encompass thousands of individual units.

Samplers work on the same principle as digital recording itself. Whereas earlier forms of recording (now called "analog") actually simulated continuous sound waves in the form of grooves in shellac or plastic disks (phonograph records) or by magnetizing iron filings (tape), digital recording samples waveforms in tiny slices (up to 50,000 per second) and stores the slices as numerical information that when reconverted and played back gives the illusion of continuous sound as a moving picture produces the illusion of continuous motion out of a rapid sequence of still photographs. A sampler does not just store microscopic bits like these but can accommodate and transform recorded units of up to three minutes' duration. As Gann writes, a composer using a sampler equipped with a keyboard "can record a cicada, a train whistle, a car crash, and play cicada melodies, train whistle melodies, car crash melodies." The "old promise of electronic music—that any noise could become available for musical use"[63] —became a practical reality in a way that the pioneering composers of musique concrète could never have imagined.

Between 1980 and 1984, the price of a sampler capable of all the operations just described fell from about $25,000 to about $1,300, putting it within range of mass marketability. At the same time, the operations performed by a sequencer were made available in the form of software programs that could be installed in personal computers. As a result, by the mid-1980s (to quote Gann once again), "it was possible for middle-class teenagers to have, in their bedrooms, music-producing equipment that put to shame the great electronic studios of a mere 10 years before."[64] The "classics" of electronic music have aged—become quaint—in away that no other music of its time has done, since even if music does not "progress," technology certainly does. Speaking from two generations of classroom experience on both sides of the lectern, Gann writes that Varèse's *Poème électronique* (see chapter 63) "sounded like music from Mars when I first heard the old Columbia recording in 1972, but students today giggle when they hear it. Its spooky 'ooooo gaaah' voice samples seem camp in comparison with the sampling experiments of any ambitious high school computer jockey."[65]

Notes:

(61) *Ibid*., p. 272.

(62) *Ibid*., pp. 272–73.

(63) Gann, *American Music in the Twentieth Century*, p. 270.

(64) Gann, "Electronic Music, Always Current," p. 24.

(65) *Ibid*., p. 21.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online
Steve Reich

Kronos Quartet

FIRST FRUITS

Chapter: CHAPTER 10 Millennium's End
Source: MUSIC IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The sample-based composition best known to audiences at century's end—the first "classic" of the new technology—was *Different Trains* (1988), a late or "post-minimalist" composition by Steve Reich. It was commissioned by and dedicated to Kronos Quartet, a San Francisco-based ensemble with a self-avowed postmodern repertoire (mixing avant-garde compositions and twentieth-century "classics" with transcriptions of early music, "world music," jazz, and rock) and over 400 hundred premieres to its credit. In keeping with the group's adventurous spirit, Reich, who had already been planning to use a sampling keyboard for his next composition, wrote a piece that pitted the live quartet against two prerecorded quartet tracks and a track of sampled voices that compared the composer's experience as a child in the early 1940s, shuttling back and forth across the continent between the New York and Los Angeles residences of his divorced parents, and the simultaneous experiences of Jewish children in Europe, who were being transported by train from the ghettos of Eastern Europe to the Nazi extermination camp at Auschwitz.

The live and recorded quartets play in a typically "minimalist" style, only this time their chugging subtactile pulses symbolize the actual chug and clack of moving trains, evoked also by periodic train whistles that in the piece's midsection are transformed into air-raid sirens as Reich's own childhood memories give way to the imagined nightmare of the Holocaust. The sampled voices in the first section are those of the composer's childhood governess, interviewed in later life, and a train historian. In the middle section, the voices are those of Holocaust survivors, collected from oral history archives. In the final section, samples from the two sources are mixed.

The samples, resolved into musical phrases approximating their pitch and contour, dictate the music's tempos and tonal modulations. (It was because the live quartet needed to be coordinated with the shifting tempos of the samples that the recorded quartet tracks, which set the tempos and provide the live quartet with cues, were necessary.) The understated climax comes in the third section, when the train historian's voice is heard matter-of-factly remarking, "Today, they're all gone." Remembering his voice from the first section, one knows that he was talking about the American transcontinental trains of the 1930s and 1940s. But remembering the second section, one cannot help relating his comment to the Jewish children, too. Both a synthesis of the subject matter and an effective musical close, the moment is haunting. (The coda adds another ironic and quintessentially postmodernist stab: one of the survivors recalls the Germans' sincere love of music, preventing today's music-loving listeners from deriving any complacent sense of moral superiority from their esthetic sensibilities.)

Different Trains is almost unique among artistic memorials to the Holocaust in its successful avoidance of pomposity and false comfort. There are no villains and no heroes, just the perception that while this happened here, that happened there (or, as Reich told an interviewer, "There but for the grace of God ..."), and a stony invitation to reflect. Since then, Reich has used the voice-sampling technique in a series of multimedia compositions (or "documentary video operas") that he has produced in collaboration with his wife, the video artist Beryl Korot. Like *Different Trains*, they all use collage techniques to address contemporary social and

moral concerns.

One, *The Cave* (1993), is a meditation on the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians viewed against its historical background as symbolized by the cave of Machpelah, believed to be the burial site of the patriarch Abraham. Another, *Three Tales* (2000), juxtaposes accounts of the destruction of the German airship Hindenburg in 1937; the atomic and hydrogen bomb tests at Bikini Atoll between 1946 and 1958; and Dolly the sheep, the first successful cloning of a mammal, in 1997. A warning against blind faith in technological progress, the work adopts a typically ironic postmodern stance insofar as it is itself an example of art that relies on—or, even, arises out of—the application of advanced technology.

Reich's applications of the new technology remain conservative, however, as one might perhaps expect from a composer of his generation. For more thoroughgoing applications one must turn to composers born in the 1950s or later, for whom it was a "given" rather than a challenge to be mastered. At the radical extreme is John Oswald (b. 1953), a Canadian composer who fashions compositions entirely out of samples of existing music, and who flaunts his postmodern challenge to the whole idea of "original composition" by defining his method of musicmaking as "plunderphonics." A CD by that name, issued in 1989, was a collage of humorously altered and intermixed rerecorded sound bites from every source in sight, juxtaposing the standard classical repertoire (Beethoven, Stravinsky), rhythm-and-blues (James Brown), standard pop (Beatles, Michael Jackson), hardcore rock (Metallica), and country-and-western (Dolly Parton). Knowing that his "electroquoting" violated copyrights, he distributed the disc free of charge, with the additional (unenforceable) proviso that copies could not be resold. Nevertheless, "prudes in the Recording Industry"[66] (as Oswald has referred to the lawyers who threatened him) filed suit and succeeded in having the disc suppressed the next year, their pretext being a cover illustration that illustrated the album concept (which included the "aural-sex transformation" of Dolly Parton's voice into a male register) with a copyrighted photo of Michael Jackson's head atop a nude female torso.

Of course the stir thus created was good for business; soon afterward Oswald received not only permission but an actual commission from Elektra/Nonesuch to create a plunderphonics compact disc from its own extensive catalog that the firm could market as a sort of advertisement. (It was called *Elektrax*.) Other sampler composers, like Carl Stone (b. 1953), perform their work "live," sitting onstage with a laptop computer and tapping its keys to summon forth prerecorded performances, looped and "morphed" into configurations the original artists would not have recognized.

Notes:

(66) "Composer to Composer with John Oswald," http://redcat.org/season/music/johnoswald2.html.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online

John Zorn

Modernism

MODERNISTS IN POSTMODERNIST CLOTHING?

Chapter: CHAPTER 10 Millennium's End
Source: MUSIC IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Even composers who do not actually (or always) use the new machines write in a manner that vividly reflects their influence. John Zorn (b. 1953) has been touted by the *New Grove Dictionary* as "an archetypal example of the composer in the media age."[67] Putting it more bluntly, he writes that "I've got an incredibly short attention span," and that his music is meant for listeners who, like him, grew up with television.

> In some sense, it is true that my music is ideal for people who are impatient, because it is jam-packed with information that is changing very fast .... You've got to realize that speed is taking over the world. Look at the kids growing up with computers and video games—which are ten times faster than the pinball machines we used to play. There's an essential something that young musicians have, something you can lose touch with as you get older .... It's a whole new way of thinking, of living. And we've got to keep up with it. I'll probably die trying.[68]

Maybe it is not quite that new; Zorn's pronouncements are not that different from the ones that filled Futurist manifestos nearly a hundred years ago. If they had our technology, the Futurists would surely have lived as fast as we do. But the point is that we do have the technology and can realize some old dreams. Zorn's perfervid paragraph comes from the notes that accompany *Spillane* (1986), a much-discussed collage balanced on the cusp between improvisation and composition, live performance and sample patchwork, that seemed determined to take eclecticism to its limit.

Zorn first made his name as the leader of an improvising band that dazzled audiences with its ability to shift styles in midstream (or midphrase), and a range of reference that recognized no boundaries, incorporating Josquin des Prez, TV jingles, Indian ragas, and every type of American pop. His self-proclaimed models were the soundtracks that accompanied the animated cartoons (Bugs Bunny, Road Runner) that children his age imbibed in great quantities on TV. These cartoon scores were composed of studio-recorded snippets that were spliced and intercut to follow the breakneck antics on the screen. Another source of inspiration was commercial novelty bands like the one led by Spike Jones (1911–65), who began by incorporating unusual percussion instruments into his arrangements of pop standards and proceeded from there into a boundless world of wacky sound effects. The first big hit scored by Spike Jones and His City Slickers—*Der Fuehrer's Face* (1942), in which the familiar Nazi salute ("Heil!") was accompanied throughout by a Bronx cheer (or "raspberry")—originally accompanied a Walt Disney war-propaganda cartoon. Zorn's band became proficient in the use of raucous sound effects—screams, whistles, gunshots, explosions—that punctuated the music and served as signals to the players for sudden changes of tempo and texture.

While no short-range "structural" coherence could be detected in a Zorn composition—that was in a way the whole point—his performances made sense as accompaniments to a vividly implied scenario. Just as Spike Jones affectionately spoofed tender love ballads, the twenty-five-minute *Spillane* (named after Mickey Spillane, whose Mike Hammer detective novels were the basis for many popular Hollywood low-budget or "B" movies) parodies

the soundtrack of a manically condensed "gumshoe" mystery, mixing screams, police dogs and sirens, jazz combos, "fade" and "dissolve" effects using synthesizers, muttering voices adding atmosphere to instrumental solos, and so on. The CD version subjects the music to further "cinematic" manipulation, treating the live performance sounds like raw material for sampling and intercutting, just as studio sound editors treat the music of an actual soundtrack.

Such an ambitious work could no longer be achieved with the required precision through actual on-the-spot improvisation, so Zorn began organizing his work with the use of file cards containing directions for the performers. "I give the musicians the music for the section that we'll be working on," he told an interviewer:

> We'd rehearse it, get it perfect, and then record it onto tape. Then I'd give them the music for the second section of the piece. Bit by bit we'd build it up. An additive process, with the musicians concentrating on the details of one section at a time, but relatively blind, as far as where the piece is going. Like a director in film, only I would have the overall perspective. We'd roll the tape back, listen to the previous section recorded, and then just where they're supposed to come in, I'd cue them and they'd begin performing. It's like a series of short live performances put directly onto tape. No splices, no splices ever. Everything just put right into place on tape using A-B sets of tracks so that you never actually cut into the previous performance. Sections literally overlapped, with the reverb of the previous section dying behind the beginning of the following one.[69]

When his recordings began attracting the attention of "legitimate" performing groups (including the inevitable commission from Kronos Quartet), he made as little compromise as possible with traditional notation and the kinds of forms it enabled (or imposed). *Cat o' Nine Tails* (1988), the Kronos score, consisted of sixty "moments" (borrowing a term from Stockhausen) on file cards that covered a typical Zorn "mishmash" (his word), ranging from allusions to the standard repertoire to cartoon noises to "random" effects. Some were fully notated. At other times, the musicians are told something like "between this written piece and that written piece, you have six seconds to fool around with *col legno* [drawing the wood of the bow across the strings]."[70] But even when unwritten, this was composed rather than improvised music; the initiative belonged at all times to the composer, who planned each "random" effect in advance.

The music remained a sort of soundtrack; but its resolute nonlinearity reminded many critics of the cutting techniques employed on "Music Television" (MTV), where (reversing the traditional procedure) visual accompaniments were added to music tracks to allow for their exposure on TV. These supersophisticated treatments suggested to many artists that the much-decried short attention span of the TV or video-game generation was not a dulling of wits but more probably the opposite. The ever-faster pace of media impressions had greatly speeded the process of comprehension. Concepts of linear logic and "organic" wholeness that had previously dominated musical esthetics were called into question. Indeed, as the epigraph from Jonathan Kramer at the top of this chapter confirms, listening (or, more generally, perceptual) habits fostered by the age of remote-controlled tuners and car radios eventually, and inevitably, affected the way in which music was composed. Zorn's is perhaps the most consummate manifestation, but it is far from an isolated or negligible one.

And as his music became more ambitious and widely recognized, the composer began, despite his protestations and affectations, to be treated as an adult. No longer regarded as a throwback to the irresponsible naïveté of a Spike Jones, he was held more accountable for the contents of his product. It was in some ways a painful compliment. In the early 1990s, appearances by Zorn's band were picketed in Los Angeles by Asian-American women offended by his stereotypical depiction of a Japanese love slave in "Forbidden Fruit" (1987) and the cover art on some of his more recent CDs, especially *Torture Garden* (1990), which showed Asian women being subjected to sexual abuse.

These protests came at a time when several avant-garde artists were under intemperate attack by members of the United States Congress who disapproved of the disbursement of tax revenues, through the National

Endowment for the Arts, to recipients whose art embodied controversial or (to them) offensive messages. The situation was complicated by the widespread perception that these attacks were directed more at the Endowment itself than at the artists, who were being used, in effect, as scapegoats to justify an otherwise indefensible political posture. Zorn at first defended himself as if he were under a comparable attack, asserting his right to free expression and portraying his critics as censors. “You're really not able to step back and analyze what you're doing,” he told an interviewer in 1992:

> I really try to just follow my instincts, whether it pisses off people who are trying to be politically correct, or who are concerned with a certain musical tradition. That cannot concern me; I can't think about trying to censor my work. I've got to follow through wherever my crazy mind takes me. Artists stand on the outside of society. I think that's an important point: I see the artist as someone who stands on the outside; they create their own rules in a lot of ways and shouldn't try to be socially responsible; being irresponsible is the very point of their existence. That's what makes that person able to comment on what's going on around them, because they aren't restricted by the censors or the powers that be—or in the case of what's happening in the arena today, the Big Brother that used to be watching in the ’60s is now your next-door neighbor ....
>
> I'm figuring a lot of shit out, drawing my moral line, and saying, “Fuck you. I don't need this. I've got to follow my artistic vision, whether you think that it's repulsive or anti-women or anti-Asian or whatever. I have to follow it through.[71]

Despite the postmodernity of his media, Zorn was expressing a typically modernist bravado. Yet eventually, at the urging of the Nonesuch record firm (with which he later broke), he agreed at least to repackage the offending CDs and issued a somewhat grudging apology: “As an artist you can't please everyone. If I took all their criticism to heart I'd never create anything. I don't want to make it harder for Asians in this country; I'm on their side. But frankly, I don't think my records are doing that.”[72] Under commercial pressure, an intransigent artist was forced or shamed into a compromise with public decency. From the modernist perspective, that had to count as a defeat.

But Susan McClary, writing as a postmodernist, gave the outcome of the collision between Zorn, his label, and his public an interestingly optimistic interpretation, seeing public indignation as distinctly preferable to the public indifference that had, in the century following Baudelaire, typically greeted modern “art” music, at least in the democratic West. “If art music has been spared such scrutiny for several decades,” she comments, “it is in large part because so little was at stake for either composer or audience.”[73] She argues further that the far greater public scrutiny, and occasional outcry, that contemporary popular culture attracts—even though its “level of transgression” is often far tamer than Zorn's open embrace of sadism—is evidence of popular culture's greater creative vitality, or at least its greater pertinence to issues that truly matter to most people.

To maintain this position may be to underestimate how much the issue of creative freedom truly matters to artists. The geopolitical polarization engendered by the cold war made that freedom—or, more precisely, that perception of freedom—an issue worth the sacrifice of public relevance to many artists in the West, who saw totalitarian regimentation as, if not the only alternative, then at least the one that needed to be most vigilantly resisted, whatever the social cost. That was indeed a heavy stake for composers, if not for audiences.

But if that is true, then McClary's optimism is not misplaced. If anything, it is even more cheering to note the coincidence of postmodern esthetics, which embrace exchange and communication between artist and public and all the attendant risks, and the end of the cold war with its hardening influence on cultural attitudes. The year 1989, which saw the fall of Communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the opening of the Berlin Wall, may in the end have been as great a watershed for Euro-American art as it has been for Euro-American politics. Polarizing attitudes that once held artists on both sides of the Iron Curtain captive have been deconstructed, perhaps permanently, by the march of events on the eve of the twenty-first century.

In the West, it may no longer be quite so necessary for artists to maintain belief in "the irreconcilable nature of the esthetic and the social worlds," to quote the German cultural critic Jürgen Habermas, voicing a creed that goes back long before the cold war, to the wellsprings of Romanticism. Yet John Zorn, who practically paraphrased Habermas in some of the vulgar remarks quoted above, turned right around and told an interviewer that "I'm at the point now where maybe I can make somebody cry with music; that's been a dream all my life."[74] The contradiction, the seesaw between social alienation and social communion, was as old as Romanticism itself. Postmodernism seems to have encouraged communion to reassert its rights.

Notes:

(67) Peter Niklas Wilson, "Zorn, John," in *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians,* Vol. XXVII (2nd ed.), p. 869.

(68) John Zorn, liner note to *Spillane* (1987); quoted in Susan McClary, *Conventional Wisdom: The Content of Musical Form* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), p. 146.

(69) Gagne, *Soundpieces 2*, pp. 519–20.

(70) Gagne, *Soundpieces 2*, p. 525.

(71) Gagne, *Soundpieces 2*, pp. 530–31.

(72) Quoted in McClary, *Conventional Wisdom*, p. 150.

(73) McClary, *Conventional Wisdom*, pp. 150–51.

(74) Gagne, *Soundpieces 2*, p. 534.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online

Computers and music

Electronic instruments

A GLIMPSE OF THE FUTURE?

Chapter: CHAPTER 10 Millennium's End
Source: MUSIC IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Even composers who do not use samplers use sequencing programs, and this has affected virtually everyone's musical style. Very common since the 1980s have been “layered” textures of polymetrically superimposed instrumental ostinatos, something that can be produced effortlessly by a computer with a MIDI connection to a bunch of synthesizers. Laying down track upon track is curiously reminiscent of the techniques of “successive” composition associated with the medieval motet. As in the case of Meredith Monk's vocal compositions, the late-twentieth-century avant-garde links up with musical practices prevalent in an age when literacy had not yet gotten very far in supplanting oral composition and transmission. Computer-assisted “real-time” electronic composition—used sometimes in performance, sometimes as a basis for written elaboration—is another aspect of the same resurgence of “orality.”

Computer interface has affected performance as well. Digital “controllers” that record and store information that tracks the physical actions of players can be hooked up via MIDI to virtually any instrument to reproduce, edit, and modify a real-time performance: a player-piano, for example, that can reproduce a pianist's rendition at any tempo, at any transposition that the keyboard will accommodate, with changed dynamics, even with octave doublings (not to mention corrected errors). Other machines (e.g., “electronic gloves”) can complement the sounds of a live performance with computer-controlled modifications instigated by the players' movements. Dancers can create their own musical accompaniments in the act with movement sensors that activate synthesizers.

Nor have basic changes been exclusively technological. As always, technological breakthroughs have had unpredicted reverberations and will go on having unpredictable ones. Gann notes a basic “philosophic” or attitudinal change in composers since the advent of samplers: rather than the individual note, he has declared, the musical “atom” or minimal manipulable unit has become any sound complex that can be recorded and stored. To use his actual words, sampling has “led music away from atomism toward a more holistic approach.”[75] If one regards serialism, which manipulates individual notes with singular assiduousness, as the most “atomistic” style, then Gann's remark offers a possible explanation for the paradoxical effect that working with computers has had on so many composers who originally approached the medium as a means of securing easier control over an ever greater range of serial algorithms, but who instead found themselves seduced into rejecting their motivating premises.

fig. 10-8 Tod Machover (b. 1953), director of computer music applications at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, modeling his "electronic glove," officially named Exos Dexterous Hand Master.

But the implications do not end even there. Observing that it is notation that creates the "note" (as opposed to the "tone"), Gann suggests that "the sampler frees composers from the habits inculcated by Western notation." And indeed, it is now not only possible, but increasingly common, to create, "perform," and preserve music that is recognizably within the traditions of classical music without ever using notation. Music, without any necessary loss of conceptual complexity or novelty, can now take leave of the eye. The lineaments of a postliterate age are clearly discernable.

"Composed" (that is, fixed rather than improvised) music will surely go on being not only possible but common in a postliterate age, just as it had been possible and common in preliterate ages, and as it remains in nonliterate societies. In preliterate cultures compositions can be fixed in memory and reproduced orally or (with rehearsal) by ensembles of performers; in the postliterate future pieces will go right on being fixed and reproduced in those time-honored ways, but it will also be possible to fix them digitally and reproduce them via synthesizer or via MIDI. Indeed, it is already possible to do these things, even if only a minority of composers now work that way.

When a majority of composers work that way, the postliterate age will have arrived. That will happen when—or if—reading music becomes a rare specialized skill, of practical value only for reproducing "early music" (meaning all composed music performed live). There has already been much movement in this direction. Very few, especially in America, now learn musical notation as part of their general education. The lowered cultural prestige of literate musical genres has accompanied the marginalization of musical literacy and abetted it; the availability of technologies that can circumvent notation in the production of complex composed music may eventually render musical literacy, like knowledge of ancient scripts, superfluous to all but scholars.

Related to the general loss of musical literacy in the wider culture has been the decline of the music-publishing industry. Amateur and school performance of literate repertoires having become far less prevalent than in the past, the demand for "sheet music" shows signs of eventually drying up. New music being at once the most expensive of all types to publish (because it must be freshly set up and edited and because the composer must be paid) and the least promising of a financial return, it is no wonder that, as Gann puts it, "music publishers have quit publishing all but a tiny amount of the most conservative new music." Interestingly, though, Gann does not see this entirely as a loss. Like many adventurous composers at the end of the twentieth century, he looks forward to the benefits as well as the costs of the coming postliterate musical culture:

> It is nearly impossible for a composer to get his or her scores distributed through commercial channels in the 1990s. On the other hand, compact discs have become relatively cheap to produce, and distribution channels have multiplied. Therefore, whereas the mid-twentieth-century composer distributed his music through scores and had a difficult time getting recorded, those possibilities are reversed for today's young composer. To at least some extent this reversal has been healthy, for midcentury composers showed a tendency to consider the score the actual music, with a corresponding loss of concern for how the music sounded; today, more and more music can be judged only for how it sounds, for the score may either not exist or be practically unavailable.[76]

And yet, although in the long run it cannot help affecting style along with every other aspect of musical life, it is by no means clear that the advent of postliterate composition will necessarily produce any immediate change in musical style. After all, the advent of notation did not have any immediate effect on the style of the music it was invented to preserve. It coexisted with oral methods for at least a couple of centuries without gaining the upper hand; nor have oral methods been wholly supplanted. There is every reason to expect a similar period of coexistence at the other end of the history of music as a literate tradition, one that will last far longer than this book will go on being read.

And yet eventually the advent of literacy did have a profound impact on musical style. Twelfth-century plainchant (for example, the Kyrie *Cum jubilo*, discussed and analyzed in the first volume of the Oxford History of Western Music), composed after notation had been in wide monastic use for at least 200 years, and after a body of "theory" or analytical work had grown up around the written-down and musically (or "modally") classified Gregorian chant, was written in an elegantly integrated and interwoven form that bore all the earmarks of analytical thinking—the kind of thinking that relates parts to wholes. That is the kind of thinking that notation facilitates (or, indeed, enables).

Now compare John Zorn's description of his music, quoted above, as being shaped by an "additive process, with the musicians concentrating on the details of one section at a time, but relatively blind, as far as where the piece is going." That is nonanalytical, indeed antianalytical thinking. Still an exceptional (and therefore noteworthy) way of thinking about composed music at the end of the twentieth century, it may be a harbinger of the postliterate future, when such thinking about music will be considered normal and undeserving of comment.

To a considerable extent postliterate media have already accustomed us to non-analytical or additive thought processes: think of broadcast news with its "sound bites," or MTV with its brusque nonlinear cutting techniques that have influenced all movie editors. Additive thought processes are no less intrinsically "intelligent" than analytical ones, but they require different skills: quick processing of impressions rather than "deep" reflection, the drawing of inferences from surface juxtapositions (contrasts) rather than underlying connections (similarities). That is the way one has to listen to Zorn's music, and that of many if not most of his contemporaries, to say nothing of his juniors. Postliterate listening as well as postliterate composition is already upon us.

But we are not unprepared. As the epigraph atop this chapter from the theorist Jonathan Kramer reminds us, "we all spin the dial." Even when we listen to the traditional repertoire of classical music at the start of the

twenty-first century, we often if not usually listen to it out of context and out of sequence. If we turn on the car radio en route to the shopping mall, we may briefly visit the development section from the first movement of a favorite symphony, and encounter the finale on our way home. Our clock radio usually greets us in the morning with the middle of a highly structured piece, but we experience no serious disorientation even if the piece is unfamiliar, as long as it conforms (as "radio music" is sure to do) to one or more of the many prototypes we have stored in our memories. The same process of comparison with prototypes makes collage compositions intelligible and (sometimes) interesting.

Notes:

(75) Gann, "Electronic Music, Always Current," p. 24.

(76) Gann, *American Music in the Twentieth Century*, p. 354.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online
Jerrold Levinson

Psychology of music: Perception & cognition

BACK TO NATURE?

Chapter: CHAPTER 10 Millennium's End
Source: MUSIC IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

Our ease with fragmentary listening may be an artifact of (or an adaptation to) modern living. But it might also be "natural," as at least one recent theory of music, itself possibly an artifact of the burgeoning postliterate age, contends. That theory, called "concatenationism," received its most extensive exposition in a 1997 book called *Music in the Moment*. The title reflects an abiding interest of many theorists of avant-garde music (like Jonathan Kramer), who have responded to Karlheinz Stockhausen's notion of *Momentform*, the idea that contemporary composition is (or may be, or should be) based on a series of unique irreducible impressions or *Gestalts*, a concept that obviously points toward the "musical atom" theories of high-tech theorists of the 1990s like Kyle Gann.

Music in the Moment, however, was the work of a philosopher, Jerrold Levinson, rather than a composer or a music theorist, and the theory it propounded was instantly controversial. Levinson maintained that the idea of "moment form" actually described all actual musical listening (no matter who was doing it), and that holistic (or integrated, or unified, or "organic") theories of musical form, as well as holistic or unifying systems of formal analysis (up to and including the vaunted Schenkerian method, taught by the 1990s in many European and virtually all American conservatories and universities, which reduced complex compositions to a single underlying or overarching basic progression called the "Ursatz"), were based not on listening to music but on looking at it—or rather, at its notation.

Musical coherence as actually perceived by listeners, Levinson argued, was based on moment-to-moment connections, grasped and processed "additively" as the music actually unfolded in time, not on the far-ranging "global" relationships analysts analyzed (and which composers trained to analyze that way might try to conceptualize in composing). Such relationships, Levinson argued, being atemporal, were essentially amusical. Inquiring into "the degree to which musical understanding requires reflective or intellectual awareness of musical architecture or large-scale musical structuring," the philosopher concluded that "that degree is approximately zero." Instead, he maintained, "all that basic understanding requires is, as it were, listening in the moment."[77]

The position was surely overstated for effect. Everybody knows from experience that memory and prediction play a significant part in musical understanding, just as they do in understanding any temporal unfolding: all speech (not only narratives), as well as drama, cinema, and dance. Experience, moreover, hones everybody's memory and prediction skills, and our understanding of any utterance is laden both with unconscious theory and with awareness of context. Nobody literally listens only in the moment. But as Levinson forcefully argued, nobody literally listens to musical wholes either. He stated the "concatenationist" position in the form of four postulates:

- 1. *Musical understanding* centrally involves neither aural grasp of a large span of music as a whole, nor intellectual grasp of large-scale connections between parts; understanding music is

centrally a matter of apprehending individual bits of music and immediate progressions from bit to bit.

- 2. *Musical enjoyment* is had only in the successive parts of a piece of music, and not in the whole as such, or in relationships of parts widely separated in time.

- 3. *Musical form* is centrally a matter of cogency of succession, moment to moment and part to part.

- 4. *Musical value* rests wholly on the impressiveness of individual parts and the cogency of successions between them, and not on features of large-scale form per se; the worthwhileness of experience of music relates directly only to the former.[78]

This argument, which has been confirmed in some of its aspects by empirical psychological testing, was widely welcomed as being at the very least a healthy corrective to its opposite extreme; and its welcome was enhanced by its timing. It joined the other forces and tendencies toward postliteracy that this chapter has been describing.

It had always been one of the main virtues of musical notation that it enabled music to become visual as well as aural, and to occupy space as well as time. In this way music could be stored and stockpiled, easily taken from place to place, learned otherwise than by rote, and conceptualized in new ways, some of them indispensable to the art of composition as it evolved over a thousand years of development. But it also always fostered the vices of its virtues, at least potentially, since it always offered lettered or "learned" musicians the temptation of concentrating on the virtual reality of music-as-seen—"spatialized representations"[79] of music, as Levinson called them—in preference to the physical reality of music-as-heard.

As related in chapter 3, that trend reached a disquieting peak, in some of the music composed in the mid-twentieth century, especially in the academy, the seat of learning. And at the same time another peak began to be decried, namely the bland literalism that had become the norm in academically influenced performances of classical music, which strove above all to reproduce the music as it looked on the page, sometimes in active contemptuous rejection of the traditions of performer-to-performer dissemination that persisted as an oral component of modern musical culture. Both kinds of hyperliteracy were significantly reined in during the last quarter of the twentieth century.

In its more radical formulations Levinson's theory was obviously a reaction (and probably an overreaction) to these unhappy peaks. But more significant was the seriousness with which it was taken to heart by many turn-of-the-century musicians, including repentant analysts and composers, despite Levinson's specific disclaimer that he was addressing not learned musicians but musical amateurs like himself, whose habits of listening and appreciating music he had set out to defend against academic snobbery. "No doubt some people," he conceded,

> having acquired analytical dispositions and descriptive technical resources in the course of their musical education, found their fundamental listening transformed to a truly significant degree. But I am not one of them, and I suspect that such listeners are not the norm among those who can rightly claim both to know and to love the bulk of what constitutes the broad repertoire of classical music. It is an implicit aim of this book to defend such listeners—ones who, though untutored, are experienced, attentive, and passionate.[80]

But he had touched a nerve among the tutored as well, many of whom had to agree with Levinson, in spite of themselves, that much of the theory that supported twentieth-century composition (and performance) was based on a "tendency to misapply the results of musical analysis,"[81] and ultimately, therefore, on a misapplication of musical literacy. The swerve toward postliteracy, instigated by "Green" mavericks like Partch and Monk and powerfully abetted by new technologies, had received a theoretical reinforcement within the very

bastion of the literate tradition. It is less relevant to our present purposes to try and decide how valid Levinson's theory is than to see it (and, more particularly, its reception) as a symptom of a general tendency that had many other symptoms as well. Suffice it to say that such a theory would never have gained a serious hearing in the musical academy had it appeared a quarter of a century earlier than it did.

One final augury of an emergent postliterate culture, and a particularly vivid one, was the rise at the very end of the twentieth century of "interactive sound [or sound-and-image] installations"—computer software programs that allow users to call forth very complex sound patterns, sometimes allied with visual patterns as well, merely by moving through a space equipped with sensors and deploying an electronic glove or handheld signaling device. The creators of such programs—Luke DuBois, Mark McNamara, Timothy Polashek, Jason Freeman, David Birchfield, and others whose installations were displayed at a spectacular and widely reported exhibit mounted at Columbia University in connection with an electronic music festival in July 2000—call themselves "sound designers" rather than composers. (Recall Beethoven's insistence, near the end of his life, on calling himself a "sound poet" or *Tondichter* rather than a composer.) And rightly so, for their work eliminates distinctions between composers, performers, and listeners. The user of an interactive installation is all three at once—or none of the above.

Anthony Tommasini, a reviewer for the *New York Times*, found the exhibit "seductive and unsettling," not least (he thought) because once listeners become empowered to create music instantly to their individual taste, there will be no need for critics, either. But he managed to console himself with an interesting thought:

> For those of us who persist in thinking of a musical composition as a creative statement of a trained and artistic individual, there was one reassuring thing: though the users of these interactive installations worked alone, having witnesses watching and listening on extra earphones seemed a large part of the enjoyment. So composers as we have known them may disappear someday. Yet perhaps the concert, or at least a new kind of collective listening experience, will continue.[82]

Notes:

(77) Jerrold Levinson, *Music in the Moment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. xi.

(78) *Ibid*., pp. 13–14.

(79) *Ibid*., p. ix.

(80) *Ibid*.

(81) *Ibid*., p. x.

(82) Anthony Tommasini, "Music, Minus Those Pesky Composers," *New York Times*, 6 August 2000, Arts and Leisure, p. 28.

See also from Grove Music Online
Opera: The 20th century

PAYING THE PIPER, CALLING THE TUNE

Chapter: CHAPTER 10 Millennium's End
Source: MUSIC IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

That, at any rate, is one possible future that may be projected at the dawn of the third millennium on the basis of trends observable at present. Whether it is a probable future (let alone "the" future) will depend on as yet unforeseeable factors and variables of a kind that always conspires to make monkeys out of "futurologists." As always, among the most potent and volatile factors will be patterns of patronage. So let us end this chapter, and this book, with one last look at how that factor—of all factors the one most susceptible to "external" stimuli (demographic, sociopolitical, economic)—has been functioning.

Ever since the watershed of the sixties, predictions of the imminent demise of "classical music" have been rife. Its audience, undermined by the decline in public music education and decimated by defections to pop, was assumed to be aging, indeed dying off. Whether as a symptom of this process or as one of its causes, media coverage for classical music steadily and drastically diminished over the 1970s and 1980s (coinciding with the rise in "serious" pop coverage), as did the number of radio stations that purveyed it.

In the 1970s, classical music accounted for 20 percent of record sales in Japan, its most avid market, 10 percent in Western Europe, and 5 percent in North America. As the medium of commercial recording switched in the mid-1980s from LP to CD, and the American market share for classical record sales stabilized at approximately 3 percent (about the same as jazz, increasingly regarded and described as "America's classical music"), its status was relegated to that of a "niche product," serving a tiny, closed-off clientele whose needs could be met with reissues rather than costly new recordings of the standard repertoire. Major symphony orchestras, especially in the United States, found themselves without recording contracts, with serious consequences for the incomes of their personnel. Major labels began concentrating on "crossover" projects, in which the most popular classical performers collaborated with artists from other walks of musical life in an effort to achieve sales that might transcend the limits of the classical "niche." The huge fees such artists commanded virtually squeezed others out of the recording budget altogether. Classical music seemed destined to become the culture industry's "basket case."

The implications for composers seemed particularly grave, since this period of attrition had no effect on the numbers trained within the protected walls of the academy, which as always offered temporary insulation from the vagaries of the market. The result was a vast overpopulation of composers, whose numbers swelled even as their outlets contracted. Their activity, as already implied above, came ironically to resemble the sort of self-publication and self-promotion that was known in the declining Soviet Union (where it was a response to political rather than economic pressure) as *samizdat*. Their work met no measurable consumer demand and found little source of subsidy. Its main purpose became the securing of academic employment and promotion—another sort of niche—that enabled its creators to train the next generation of socially unsupported and unwanted composers, and so on in possibly meaningless perpetuity.

In the late 1980s and 1990s, however, that pattern began unexpectedly to change, permitting the emergence of a composing elite—tiny, perhaps, but larger than ever before—whose work was suddenly in demand, sought out by traditional performance organizations for performance at major venues, and who could in some cases live off

their commissions and performance royalties without seeking academic employment. New York's Metropolitan Opera, for example, which had not presented a premiere since the 1960s, commissioned four operas during the this period, of which three achieved production: *The Ghosts of Versailles* (1987; produced 1991), an opera by John Corigliano based on *La mère coupable* ("The guilty mother"), the one remaining member of Beaumarchais's *Figaro* trilogy that had not already been turned into an operatic classic by Mozart (*The Marriage of Figaro*) or Rossini (*The Barber of Seville*); *The Voyage* (first performed on Columbus Day, 1992) by Philip Glass, commemorating the 500th anniversary of Columbus's arrival in the New World; and *The Great Gatsby* (first performed on New Year's Day, 2000) by John Harbison, based on the novel of the same name by F. Scott Fitzgerald.

The Harbison work had been jointly commissioned by the Met and the Chicago Lyric Opera; this ensured that it would have a life beyond its premiere production (and also allowed the composer the chance to revise the opera on the basis of its reception, as was traditional in opera's heyday, but discouraged in the later twentieth century both by economic conditions and by the ideology of modernism). The Met and the Chicago Lyric also issued a tandem commission to William Bolcom for an opera based on Arthur Miller's play *A View from the Bridge*, premiered in Chicago in 1999 and significantly revised for its New York performances in 2001.

fig. 10-9 Scene from act I of Philip Glass's opera *The Voyage*.

Nor were these houses alone: the San Francisco opera commissioned several works in the 1990s, including *A Streetcar Named Desire*, after Tennessee Williams's play, by André Previn (b. 1929), and *Dead Man Walking* by Jake Heggie (b. 1961), based on a memoir of death row prisoners by Sister Helen Prejean that had already been turned into a major Hollywood movie. Just how "bankable" a commodity the Met thought new opera now might be is indicated by the generous terms of the commissions—especially the one to Glass, who received $325,000. (Expenditures on the production approached $2 million.)

In part this seeming rebirth was a result of the changes wrought by “postmodernism” in the relative prestige of composing styles. Harbison had been trained as a serialist, and of course Glass was one of the founders, in the 1960s, of “hard-core” minimalism. Both had abandoned their earlier avant-garde positions and were now meeting in the vast moderate middle ground labeled “neoromanticism.” And yet there had always been relatively “accessible” composers available for commissioning, including some specialists in vocal or theatrical genres like Ned Rorem or Hugo Weisgall (1912–97), who had gone untapped by the major houses all during the 1970s and 1980s. It seemed that the new interest in opera had to do with new sources of money to support it. It was tied, that is, to the interests of new patrons.

Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online

Philip Glass

John Corigliano

John Adams

Nixon in China

A NEW TOPICALITY

Chapter: CHAPTER 10 Millennium's End
Source: MUSIC IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

The new interest in supporting classical composition in traditional “audience” genres affected the concert hall as well as the opera house. The most spectacular case, perhaps, was that of John Corigliano's First Symphony (1989), first performed in 1990 by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and later, internationally, by almost 100 others. Along with its lavish orchestration (including parts for virtuoso piano and cello soloists), its rhetorical intensity, and its at times poignant use of collage, the symphony's topicality contributed to its success. A memorial to victims of the AIDS epidemic, it had four movements each dedicated to the memory of a deceased friend, and gave public expression to the composer's “feelings of loss, anger, and frustration,” in alternation with “the bittersweet nostalgia of remembering.”

So if the composer John Adams's “impression,” voiced to an interviewer in November 2000, was a true one—namely, “that in terms of commissions there's never been a more bullish period in American history”[83] than the 1990s—it is testimony to a new consensus among composers and their patrons that contemporary classical music can and should have the sort of topical relevance more usually found in popular culture, and that works relevant to the topical concerns of the contemporary cultural elite are the ones that will be (and should be) rewarded. John Adams was in a good position to know, having been among the most conspicuous beneficiaries of this dispensation. One of the moments that defined its emergence, in fact, took place in 1990, when the San Francisco opera rescinded a commission it had given to Hugo Weisgall for on opera on the “timeless” biblical story of Esther in favor of a topical opera by John Adams called *The Death of Klinghoffer*, based on the killing by Palestinian terrorists of an American Jew on board an Italian cruise ship in 1985.

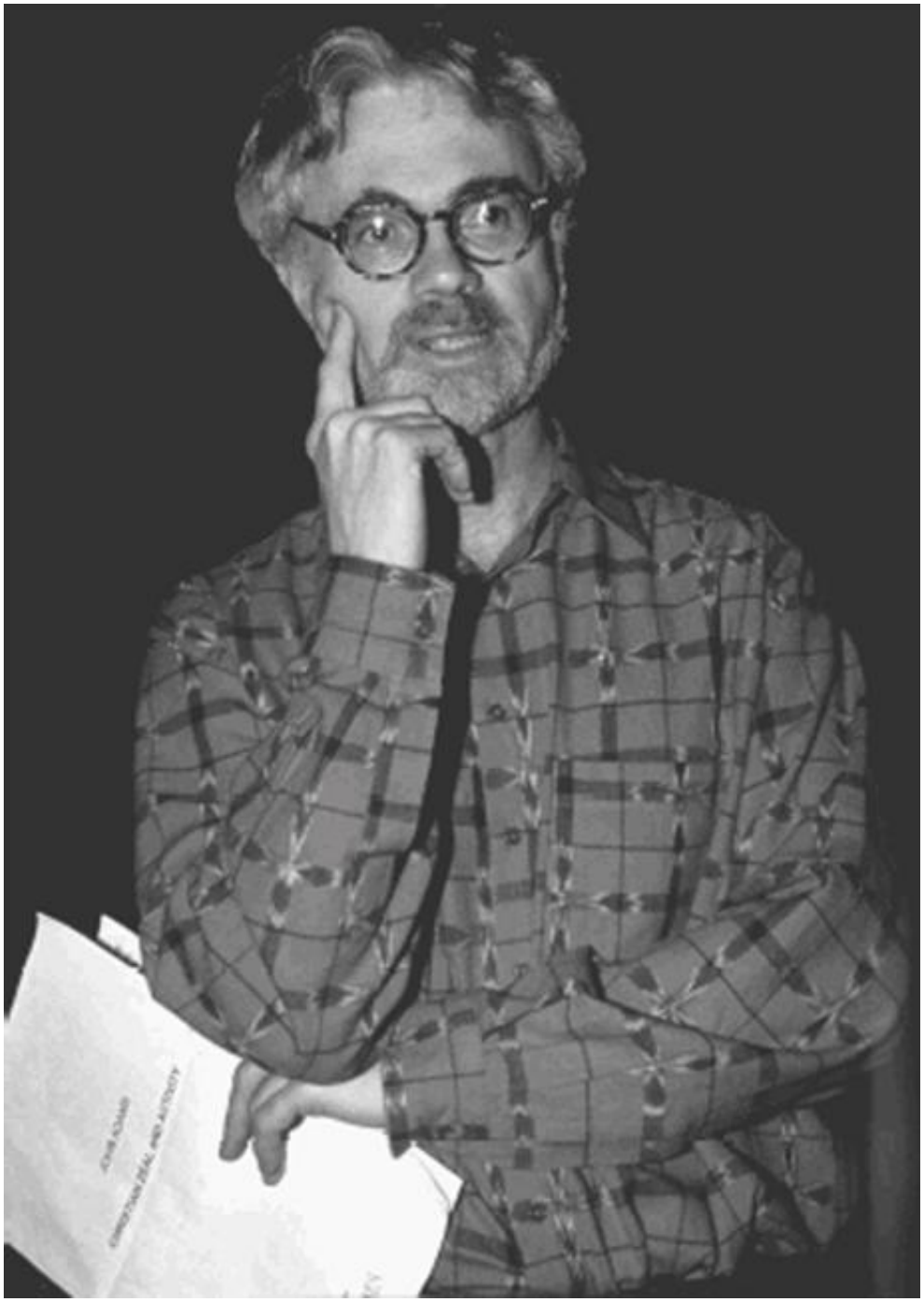


fig. 10-10 John Adams, 1991.

Klinghoffer was the second opera Adams had composed in collaboration with the poet Alice Goodman (b. 1959) and the director Peter Sellars (b. 1957). The first, *Nixon in China* (1987), was the work that originally stimulated the new wave of commissions. Largely on the strength of Sellars's reputation as an operatic enfant terrible (known for radical "updatings" of familiar operas, such as a *Don Giovanni* set in the New York slums and a *Marriage of Figaro* set in a luxury apartment building often assumed to be Trump Tower), and on the assumption that it would satirize one of America's most controversial political figures, the opera had been jointly commissioned by four houses: the Houston Grand Opera, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C., and the Netherlands Opera. Its four premieres took place between October 1987 and June 1988.

fig. 10-11 Scene from act I of the opera *Nixon in China* (Houston Grand Opera, 1987).

The work confounded expectations by being cast not as a farce but as a heroic opera that turned the title character, as well as the Chinese leaders Mao Tse-tung and Chou En-lai, into mythical representatives of their countries—naively idealistic young America and ancient, visionary China. Adams's music, like that of Glass's *Voyage*, was set in what could be called a "postminimalist" style, in which the freely grouped and regrouped subtactile pulses and arpeggios of minimalism, and interesting textures obtained by pitting pulses at differing rates of speed in counterpoint, were reconciled with a fairly conventional harmonic idiom, naturalistic vocal declamation, a neat "numbers" format replete with entertaining choral and dance sequences, and frequent references to various styles of popular music. A fairly standard orchestra was given a late-twentieth-century, somewhat Steve-Reichian sonic edge by replacing the bassoons with a quartet of saxophones, and by adding a pair of pianos and a keyboard sampler to the percussion section.

Adams's harmonies move around circles of major and minor thirds as consistently as traditional harmony moves through circles of fifths, thus making the early-twentieth-century "Franco-Russian" idiom the foundation of his late-century style, and making the same sort of end run around the twentieth century's German and German-influenced music that the midcentury "neoclassicists" (especially the French-trained Americans of the "Boulangerie") had made in their day around the Germanic music of the nineteenth century. But in Adams's work that idiom is "demaximalized," domesticated, made comfortable. Chords that Stravinsky might have mixed into dissonant "polyharmonies" succeed one another in gleamingly consonant progressions.

To take one example, one of the score's most characteristic progressions puts in alternation the two triads that together had made up Stravinsky's so-called *Petrushka*-chord as early as 1911. (In Ex. 10-4a it is quoted from Chou En-lai's toast to the Nixon party near the end of act 1.) Later, as the toasting scene reaches its climax, Adams astutely allows the subtactile pulse to drop out, so that an irregular succession of halves and dotted halves, formerly controlled by a steady stream of quarters, can ring out as if spontaneously, achieving a true emotional climax. The harmonies here form a module, a chain of triads with roots related by thirds (cast, Philip Glass–like, in a textbook-defying voice leading that grants full rights of citizenship to the chord), which picks up extensions and interpolations as it repeats (Ex. 10-4b):

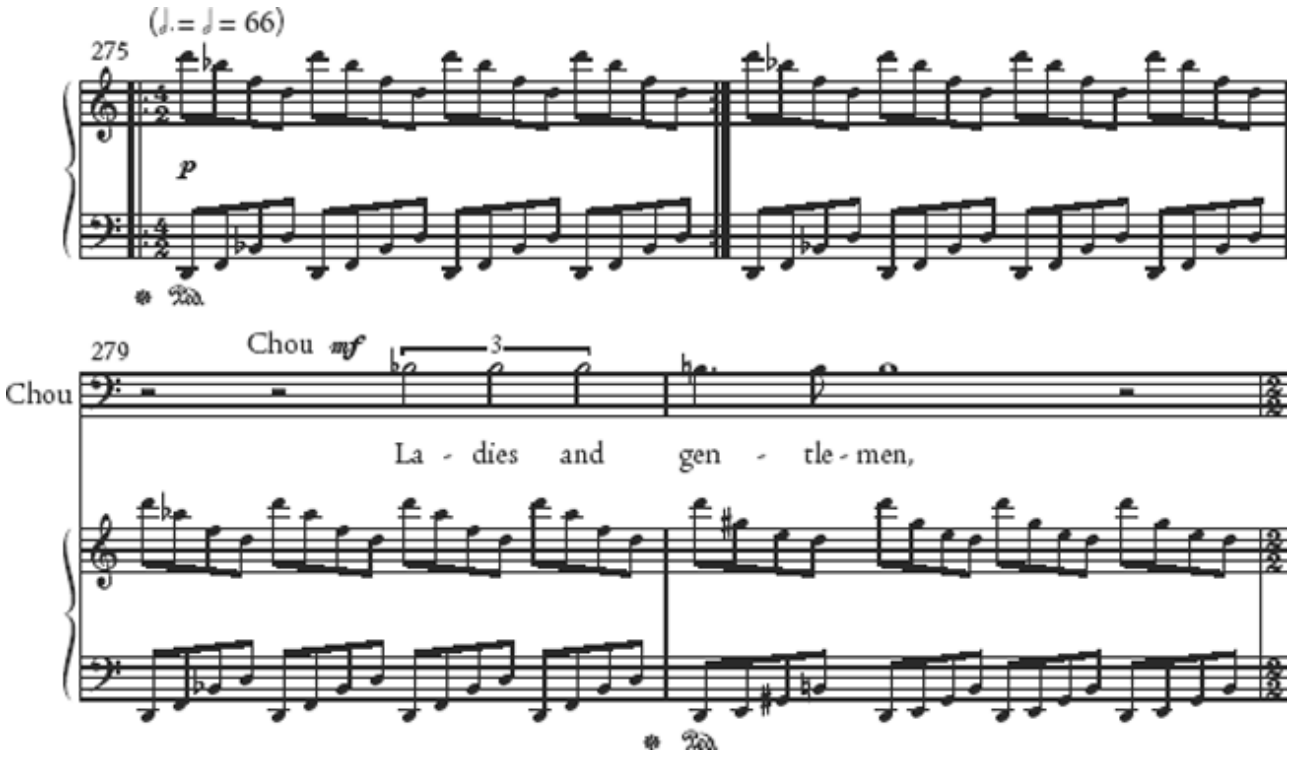
[C (+m3) E♭(−M3) B (+m3) D (−M3) B♭]

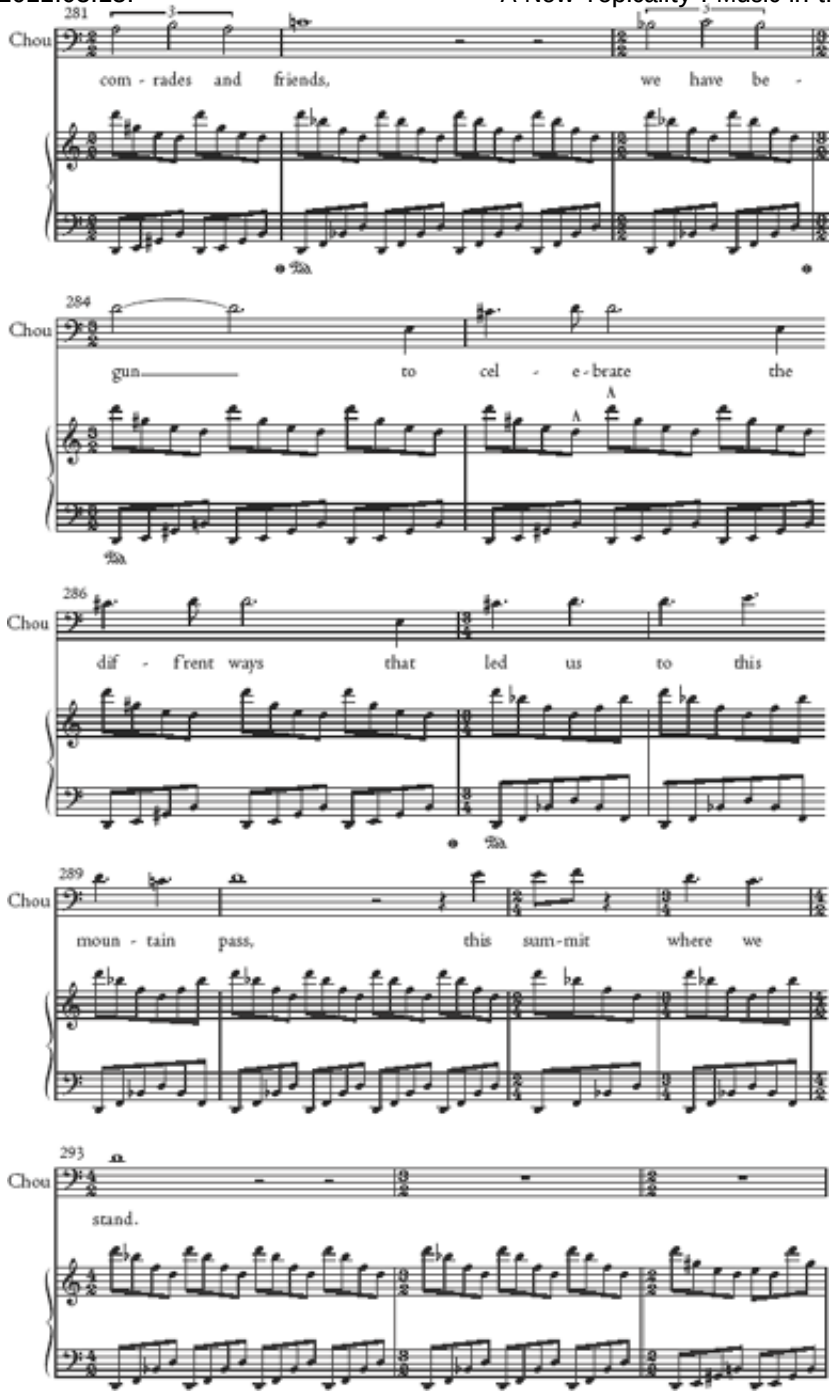
[C (+m3) E♭(−M3) B (+m3) D (−M3) B♭]

[C (+M3) E (−M3)]

[C (+m3) E♭(−M3) B (+m3) D (−M3) B♭]

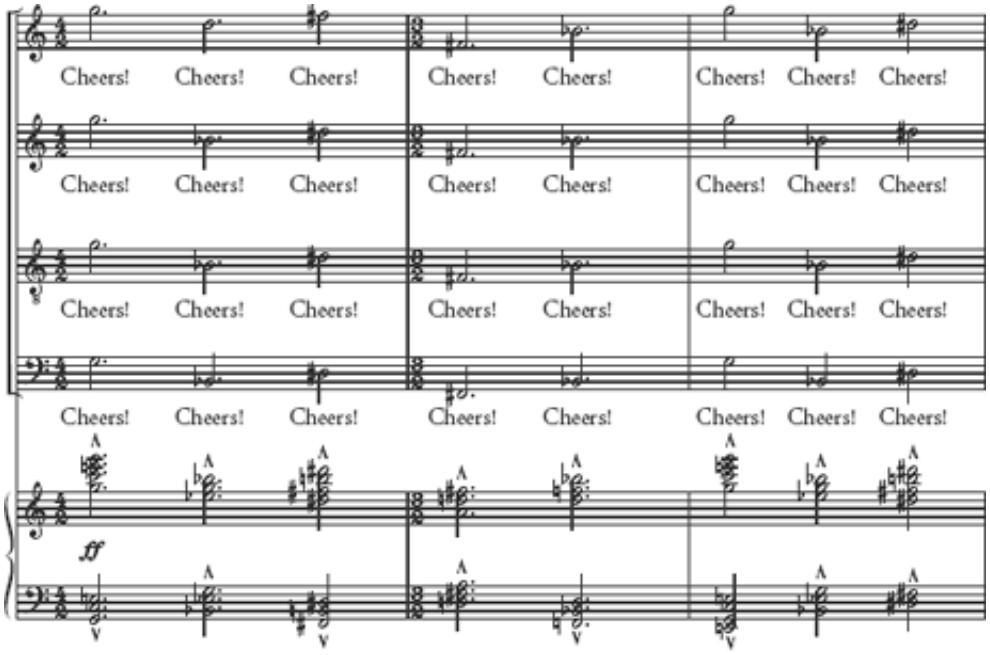
[C (+M3) E (+M3) A♭(+M3) C]

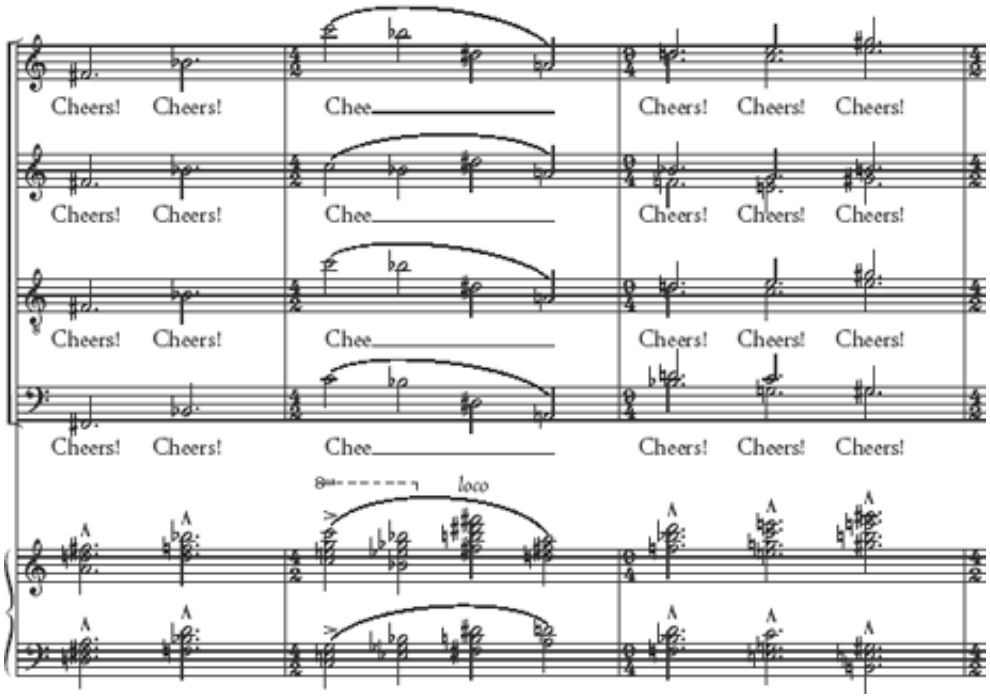


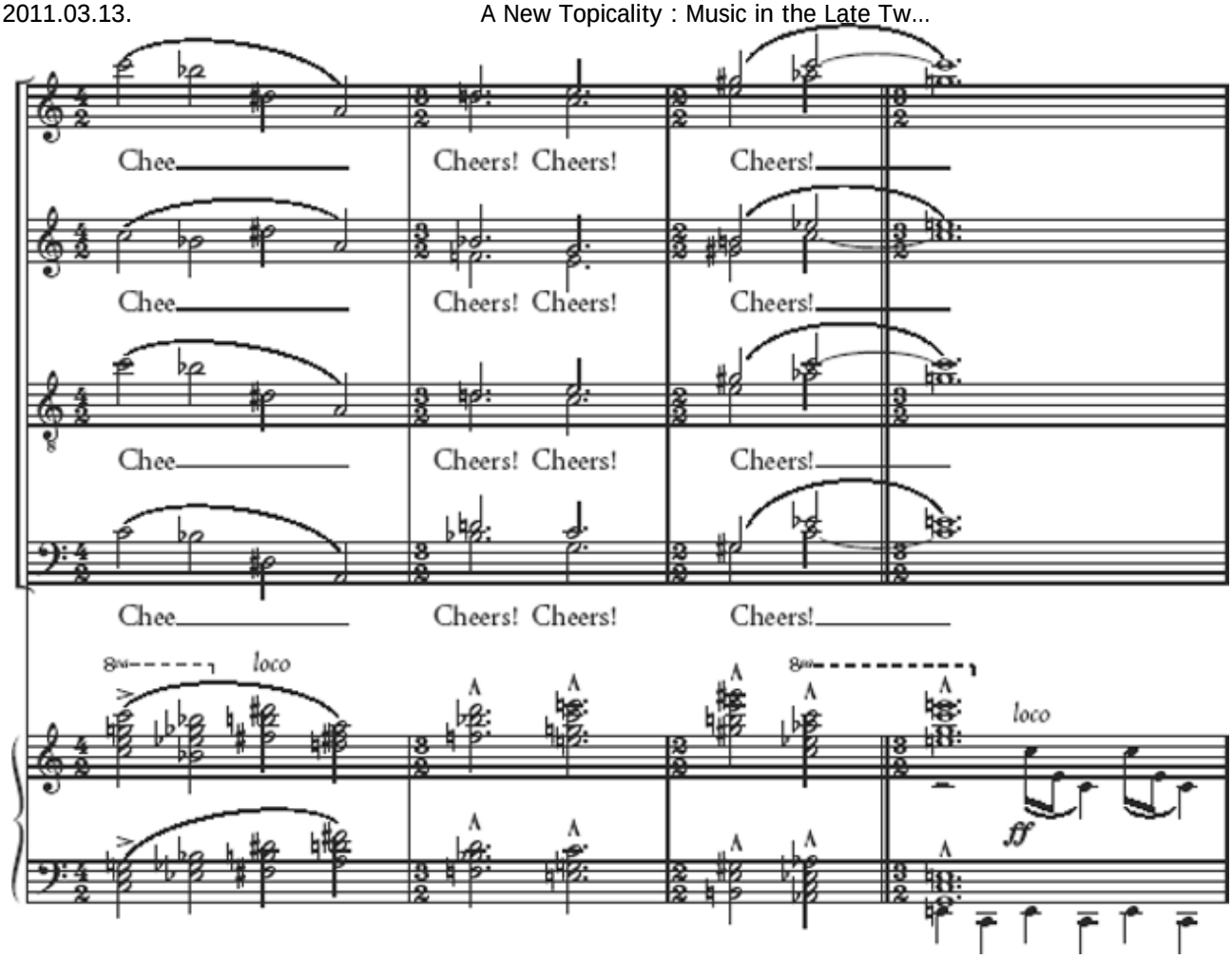


ex. 10-4a John Adams, *Nixon in China*, Act I, Chou En-lai's toast

Nixon in China differed from most twentieth-century operas by reinvoking music's power of enchantment, surrounding historical characters with a “transcendent” aura that turned them into “timeless,” godlike figures. In particular, this characteristic set the opera off from the topical operas or *Zeitopern* (“now-operas”) of the 1920s and 1930s. Where in the disillusioned aftermath of World War I audiences enjoyed an operatic genre that debunked the myth of “timeless” art, in the super-affluent, triumphant post–cold war decade audiences sought through art the monumentalization of their own historical experience.


Cheers! Cheers! Cheers! Cheers! Cheers! Cheers! Cheers! Cheers!
ff


Cheers! Cheers! Chee Cheers! Cheers! Cheers!
8va loco



ex. 10-4b John Adams, *Nixon in China*, Act I, choral response

The operatic mythologizing of Richard M. Nixon's most impressive diplomatic coup displeased a minority who objected to the way it helped turn memory away from the domestic scandal that ended his presidency. It disturbed others who objected to the callow way it cast the bloody Chinese Communist dictatorship, fresh from the excesses of the Cultural Revolution, in an uncritical, heroic light. But the critical consensus that formed over the remaining years of the twentieth century seemed to favor the aesthetic eclipse of "mere" history or politics. The critic Alex Ross went so far as to predict that "a century from now audiences will still be fascinated by this opera, and that some listeners will have to double-check the plot summary in order to remember who Richard Nixon was."[84] Its value, like that of all great art, the critic implied, was independent of its relationship to external reality, and that value was its capacity to create spiritual archetypes.

And yet that very evaluation, that very assignment of values, was the product of an external reality; and another external reality, that of Arab-Israeli conflict, prevented *The Death of Klinghoffer* from having a comparable success. The work was commissioned, on the coattails of *Nixon*'s success, by another international consortium that included the Brooklyn Academy of Music, the Théâtre Royale de la Monnaie (Brussels, Belgium), the Opéra de Lyon (France), the San Francisco Opera, the Glyndebourne Festival (Scotland), and the Los Angeles Festival of the Arts (or rather, by their various corporate sponsors).

Adams modeled the work to a degree on the Bach Passions, with choral commentaries from mythologized communities of Jewish and Palestinian exiles (cast as the biblical offspring of Jacob and Ishmael) set in dramatic counterpoint against the bloody events of November 1985. As with *Nixon in China*, the subject matter sufficed to make the work controversial, and attracted attention (and audiences) to it. It was to many, moreover, a

hopeful sign that "high" art was participating in an ongoing political and moral debate, and might therefore seem less marginal to contemporary society and culture. But this time, the stance of transcendence was widely read as an arrogant, or at least a complacent, evasion of moral judgment.

One critic, echoing the claims of the work's creators, wrote that "as the authors' approach to this sensitive subject is classical, no 'sides' are taken,"[85] a comment which elicited from another critic this perhaps overwrought rejoinder:

> Bach, the ostensible model, who knew not "classical," took sides, all right. Or should we prefer a "classical" Passion, in which Christ and his betrayers are treated "evenhandedly"? If such moral indifference is an accurate measure of what the "classical" has now become, then the "classical" deserves its fate. Its death may ultimately be judged a suicide.[86]

He went on to complain at the way "the forms of old sacred genres (in this instance, the Bach passions) are appropriated to cloak moral blankness and opportunism in a simulated religiosity," and in so doing, may unwittingly have put a finger on the "external reality" that undergirded the seemingly sudden new viability of classical music. At a time of gross materialism and commercialism widely compared in America to the "Gilded Age" at the end of the previous century, classical music (Wagner then; Adams now) was being marketed for its powers of "uplift" to a guiltily affluent audience ("robber barons" then; "venture capitalists" now) eager to depict itself as humane.

Peter Sellars, the mastermind behind both Adams-Goodman operas, made the claim quite forthrightly. "I think in this age of television and Hollywood film, if classical music is going to stick around, there'd better be a very good reason," he told an interviewer. Then, shifting oxymoronically into the language of commerce, he added, "We have to offer something that is not available otherwise. I think it is spiritual content, which is what's missing from the commercial culture that surrounds us." This time, the subject under discussion was not an opera but a new collaboration by Sellars and Adams, and a more overtly religious one: a topically slanted nativity oratorio called *El Niño*, commissioned by another international consortium—Théâtre du Chatelet (Paris), the San Francisco Symphony, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts (New York), the Barbican Centre (London), and the British Broadcasting Corporation—and performed according to the terms of the commission in Paris, San Francisco, Berlin, New York, and London between December 2000 and December 2001. It will make an apt final exhibit for this book.

Notes:

(83) "In the Center of American Music" (interview with Frank J. Oteri conducted on 21 November 2000), *New Music Box*, no. 21 (II, no. 9): www.newmusicbox.org/first-person/jan01/5.html.

(84) Alex Ross, "The Harmonist," *The New Yorker*, 8 January 2001, p. 46.

(85) Robert Commanday, "'Klinghoffer' Soars Into S.F.," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1 November 1992, Datebook, p. 42.

(86) R. Taruskin, "The Golden Age of Kitsch," *The New Republic*, 21 March 1994, p. 38; rpt. in R. Taruskin, *The Danger of Music*, p.260

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Oxford History of Western Music: Richard Taruskin

See also from Grove Music Online
Peter Sellars

Oratorio: The 20th century

A NEW SPIRITUALITY

Chapter: CHAPTER 10 Millennium's End
Source: MUSIC IN THE LATE TWENTIETH CENTURY
Author(s): Richard Taruskin

El Niño was one of a number of works of flamboyant "spiritual content" commissioned and performed under prestigious auspices to solemnize the new millennium. Another, Philip Glass's Fifth Symphony (1999), was (like several of Mahler's symphonies, or the finale of Beethoven's Ninth) an oratorio in all but name, scored for five vocal soloists, mixed chorus, children's choir, and orchestra. Its subtitle, "Requiem, Bardo, Nirmanakaya," pits the Latin title of the service for the dead (representing the world's past) against the Tibetan word for "in between" (as in the Tibetan Book of the Dead—*Bardo Thodol*—which describes the soul's journey after death) and the Sanskrit Mahayana Buddhist term for rebirth or bodily transformation (representing mankind's hoped-for future). The text draws on "a broad spectrum of many of the world's great 'wisdom' traditions,"[87] as the composer put it in a program note, translated from Greek, Hebrew, Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, Bengali, Chinese, Japanese, Tibetan, Hawaiian, Zuñi, Mayan, Bantu, and Bulu scriptures. The symphony was commissioned by the ASCII Corporation, a computer software company, for performance at the Salzburger Festspiele, Europe's most exclusive summer music festival.

Another example was the cycle of four Passions—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—that the German choral conductor Helmut Rilling, with the support of the city of Stuttgart and the publisher Hänssler Musikverlag, commissioned from a quartet of composers, one a German and three with conspicuously "multicultural" backgrounds, for premiere performances in Rilling's home city to be followed by world tours. Luke went to Wolfgang Rihm (b.1952), a neo-Expressionist representing the Germanic "mainstream." Mark went to Osvaldo Golijov (b. 1960), an Argentinian-born Jew residing in the United States (where he studied with George Crumb), who composed a lavish collage of Latin American, Afro-Cuban, and Jewish cantorial idioms and stole the show.

Matthew was assigned to Tan Dun (b. 1957), a Chinese composer trained at the Beijing Conservatory and Columbia University, who had demonstrated his suitability for the Passions project with a work entitled *Symphony 1997 (Heaven Earth Mankind)* for orchestra, children's chorus, an ensemble of Chinese temple bells, and a solo cello part written for Yo-Yo Ma, a Paris-born American cellist of Chinese descent who had been making a specialty of "crossover" undertakings involving repertoires as diverse as jazz, Brazilian pop, Appalachian folklore, and the classical music of Central Asia.

John, finally, went to Sofia Gubaidulina, the post-Soviet composer of actual Central Asian ("Tatar" or Mongolian) descent then living in Germany, whose predilection for religious subject matter had been considered a mark of political dissidence in the waning years of Soviet authority. Yet the fact that two of the composers chosen for the Passion project were not Christian—Golijov, for one, cheerfully admitting that it was only after receiving the commission that he looked into the New Testament for the first time—suggests that the impulse behind it was something other than religious in the customary or doctrinal sense of the word.

The Adams-Sellars oratorio was also of distinctly "multicultural" content. Its texts were drawn from the New Testament, the Aprocrypha, the old English Wakefield Mystery Plays, and a Latin Hymn by Hildegarde von

Bingen (the twelfth-century German abbess whose own music had achieved an improbable popularity in the late twentieth century via recordings, supplemented by modern poems by several Latin Americans, including Sister Juana Inés de la Cruz (1651–95), Rubén Dario (1867–1916), Gabriela Mistral (1899–1957), and, most prominently, Rosario Castellanos (1925–74), who combined an artistic career with a diplomatic one, serving at the end of her life as the Mexican ambassador to Israel.

One of the oratorio's most striking moments was the juxtaposition, near the end, of the terse biblical account of the Slaughter of the Innocents (Herod's massacre of all the male children younger than two years of age in Bethlehem to ensure that the infant Jesus would not survive) with *Memorial de Tlatelolco* ("Memorandum on Tlatelolco"), a long poem by Castellanos sung by the soprano soloist with choral support, that furiously protests the violent police repression of a student demonstration that took place on 2 October 1968 at Tlatelolco Square in Mexico City, which more than 400 years earlier had been the site of the last bloody confrontation between the Aztecs and the Spanish conquistadors led by Hernando Cortez (13 August 1521).

The poem bears witness to a crime that went unreported at the time by the government-controlled Mexican press. Its inclusion in the oratorio text draws explicit parallels between religious observance, acts of political conscience or resistance, and the role of artists as keepers of public memory and conscience. Adams's setting reaches, within the limits of the composer's openly avowed commitment to an ingratiating idiom, a pitch of intensity reminiscent of Expressionism in its use of wide intervals to distort the lyric line.

The oratorio's final number balances the vehemence of the *Memorial de Tlatelolco* by juxtaposing an Apocryphal account of the infant Jesus's first miracle, in which he commanded a palm tree to bend down so that his mother could gather its dates, with a consoling poem by Castellanos that pays respects to an Israeli palm tree for inspiring a moment of peaceful reflection amid the turbulence of the contemporary Middle East. Here Adams underscores the message of solace and chastened optimism by, as it were, resurrecting the Innocents in a children's chorus that gets to sing the oratorio's last word—"Poesia" (poetry)—accompanied by a pair of Spanish guitars.

There is something satisfyingly symmetrical, perhaps, in drawing on a work with a religious (and specifically Christian) subject to end a historical narrative that begins with the liturgical music of the Roman Catholic Church. But that symmetry is illusory, as is any hint of closure. There is a world of difference between actual service music and an entertainment that alludes to sacred tales, and that difference reflects the fundamental trajectory of art—"high" art, at any rate—within Western culture over the past millennium.

The symmetry is fortuitous as well. The narrative begins with sacred music only because it was the first music to be written down—a distinction that came about only partly because it was sacred. And it is ending with a sacred entertainment only because at the moment of writing that sort of work seems to be the most marketable and profitable music the literate tradition can boast at a time when its end has become foreseeable.

The sacred as marketable, as profitable: it seems a paradoxical notion, even a blasphemous one. But it is not unprecedented. Nearly 300 years ago, Handel's oratorios made similarly opportunistic—and similarly successful—use of sacred subject matter to exploit the market. And just as we now resolve the paradox in Handel's case by reading through the sacred metaphor to what we take to be the Handelian oratorio's "real" (i.e., nationalistic) appeal, it may not be too early to attempt a similar reading of the "multicultural" religiosity that found such impressively widespread musical expression at the end of the twentieth century.

Historians agree that Handel's oratorios achieved their amazing success not only by dint of their musical caliber, but also by flattering their elite English audience—a mixture of nobility and high bourgeoisie (comprising "the first Quality of the Nation," to quote a noteworthy review that greeted Handel's *Israel in Egypt* in 1739)—with comparisons to the biblical Hebrews, God's chosen people. The audience that patronizes the work of the successful sliver at the top of today's seething heap of struggling classical composers is a new social elite. It has

been identified by the social critic David Brooks, the author of *Bobos in Paradise*, an amusing but penetrating study published in 2000, as "bourgeois Bohemians" (Bobos)—the highly educated nouveaux riches of the Information Age, who live comfortably and fashionably but retain a sentimental attachment to the "sixties" concerns of their youth, and who are most effectively flattered by art that reflects their ethical self-image. "The people who thrive in this period are the ones who can turn ideas and emotions into products," writes Brooks. And that, among other things, is what composers do.

The cherished Bobo self-image is one of personal authenticity, constructed not in terms of a wholly original worldview but in terms of eclecticism—an individual selection from among the unlimited choices on the global cultural and spiritual menu. The greatest challenge the new establishment faces, according to Brooks, is "how to navigate the shoals between their affluence and their self-respect; how to reconcile their success with their spirituality, their elite status with their egalitarian ideals."[88] Their task, in constructing their identity, is to reconcile values that had been traditionally at odds: bourgeois values of ambition, social stability, and material comfort on the one hand, and on the other, bohemian values that identified with the victims of the bourgeois order: the poor, the criminal, the ethnic and racial outcast. The essential dilemma is that of reconciling the need for spirituality with the even more pressing need for personal autonomy and unlimited choice, since "real" religion imposes obligations and demands sacrifices.

It is not too difficult to see how the spiritualized classical music of the turn-of-millennium catered to these needs and predicaments. Audiences looking for purifying experiences are easily beguiled by symbols of innocence, hence the ubiquitous children's choirs in the works described above. (But that is nothing new: children's voices have long been exploited as an insurance policy by traders in romantic nostalgia: Mahler's Second, Third, and Fourth Symphonies all feature real or metaphorical child-performers, as did the work of Soviet composers at times of particularly intense political pressure.) The success of "Holy Minimalists" like Pärt, Gorecki, and Tavener in the 1980s was more specifically related to the coming Bobo phenomenon. It already bespoke the desire for a way to return "aesthetically" or "appreciatively" to a world of "spiritual wholeness" without assuming the burdens of an actual religious commitment.

The added attraction of "multiculturalism"—eclecticism writ large—in the works of the 1990s completes the parallel with the Bobo mentality, which places the highest premium on "personal" pastiche. A Princeton University study of contemporary religious practices, cited by David Brooks, turned up an extreme but characteristic example: a twenty-six-year-old disabilities counselor, the daughter of a Methodist minister, who described herself to her interviewer as a "Methodist Taoist Native American Quaker Russian Orthodox Buddhist Jew."[89] Philip Glass's post-minimalist Fifth Symphony was made for her, indeed *of* her.

The Adams-Sellars *El Niño* tapped into another time-honored trope of innocent authenticity, especially as it was performed during its initial run, with dancers interpreting the content of the words alongside the singers, and with a simultaneous film by Sellars adding yet another level of commentary. The film paralleled the unfolding story of the Nativity with footage showing the unaffected lives of anonymous members of Los Angeles's Hispanic community: a Chicano couple stood in for Joseph and Mary, their baby for Jesus, some rookie policemen for the shepherds, some local fortune-tellers for the Magi, and so on. Audience members and critics alike exclaimed at the beauty of the film, of the nameless actors, and of their emotional lives.

One of the most scathing passages in Brooks's study is devoted to precisely this sort of updating of the old myth of neoprimitivism. The immediate subject is travel:

> The Bobo, as always, is looking for stillness, for a place where people set down roots and repeat the simple rituals. In other words, Bobo travelers are generally looking to get away from their affluent, ascending selves into a spiritually superior world, a world that hasn't been influenced much by the global meritocracy .... Therefore, Bobos are suckers for darkly garbed peasants, aged farmers, hardy fishermen, remote craftsmen, weather-beaten pensioners, heavyset regional cooks—anybody who is likely to have

> never possessed or heard of frequent flier miles. So the Bobos flock to or read about the various folk locales where such “simple” people live in abundance—the hills of Provence, Tuscany, Greece, or the hamlets of the Andes or Nepal. These are places where the natives don't have credit card debts and relatively few people wear Michael Jordan T-shirts. Lives therefore seem connected to ancient patterns and age-old wisdom. Next to us, these natives seem serene. They are poorer people whose lives seem richer than our own.[90]

But as Adams and Sellars showed, you don't have to travel so far to ogle “indigenous peoples” or “noble savages.” Any urban ghetto can supply them in quantity. Nor is it clear that displaying an estheticized, romanticized fantasy image of the poor for the edification or titillation of the affluent really furthers egalitarian ideals. Will imagining the poor as leading lives richer than one's own inspire social action on their behalf? Or will such a notion foster complacency? Will it inspire a true reconciliation between material comfort and social conscience? Or will it allow the comfortable to congratulate themselves on their benevolence and silence the nagging voice within?

Is the new spirituality, then, just another screen behind which high art engages in its traditional business of reinforcing social division by creating elite occasions? The old questions that bedeviled modernism have not gone away with the advent of postmodernity—which is another reason, perhaps, to doubt whether postmodernism is anything more than the latest modernist phase. Or are such moralizing concerns of dubious benefit to art or to artists, whose task of creating beauty is a constant imperative, transcending the politics (or the “political correctness”) of the moment? The debate goes on.

And so we must take our leave of it without resolution. We have observed at least three coexisting if not contending strands of literate musical composition at the end of the twentieth century. There is a thinning faction of traditional modernists, mostly aging but not without younger recruits, who maintain the literate tradition at its most essentially and exigently literate. There is a vastly overpopulated stratum of composers, as yet virtually without a nonprofessional audience, who avail themselves of new technologies that presage the dilution and eventual demise of the literate tradition. And there is a small elite of commercially successful caterers to the needs of a newly ascendant class of patrons who currently control the fortunes of the mainstream performance and dissemination media, insofar as these remain open to elite art. All three are energetically active, productive, endowed with genuine talent. Which will prevail in the long run?

In the long run, it has been wisely observed, we are all dead.[91] That long a run is of no concern to the historian. At present, things remain in motion. That is all we can ask for. The future is anybody's guess. Our story ends, as it must, in the middle of things.

Notes:

(87) Philip Glass, “A Bridge Between the Past, the Present, and the Future,” booklet essay accompanying Glass, *Symphony No. 5: Requiem, Bardo, Nirmanakaya*, Nonesuch Records 79618-2 (2000).

(88) David Brooks, *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), p. 40.

(89) *Ibid*., p. 242.

(90) *Ibid*., pp. 206–7.

(91) John Maynard Keynes, *Tract on Monetary Reform* (1923).

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- 2-5c Iannis Xenakis, *MetastaseisB*, Full Score, Boosey and Hawkes Music Publishers, London and New York, 1953–1954, mm. 309–317.
- 2-5d Philips Company Archives. In Marc Treib, *Space Calculated in Seconds: The Philips Pavilion, Le Corbusier, Edgard Varèse*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, © 1996 by Marc Treib, jacket illustration and facing p. 1.
- 2-6 In *Scratch Music*, ed. Cornelius Cardew, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1972, pp. 114ff.
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- 6-1 AKG Images/Marion Kalter.
- 6-2 From David Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, p. 48.
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- 8-4 Photograph by Gian Franco Gorgoni. In Steve Reich, *Writings on Music 1965–2000*, ed. and intro. Paul Hillier, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 2002, p. 67.
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