SELECTIVE AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES ON ISSUES OF TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY MUSICAL PROGRESS

DOCUMENT

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Musical Arts in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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ABSTRACT

To define musical progress is an arbitrary matter. However, this has not prevented attempts to discuss it in the past. Igor Stravinsky, Arnold Schoenberg, and George Dyson were only three figures from the previous century who offered discourse on this subject. The concern for its definition, various manifestations, and value in our twenty-first century will be the central topic of investigation through eight interviews with American composers.

The selected composers for interview in this document are Stefania de Kenessey, Mathew Fuerst, Eric Ewazen, Julia Wolfe, Francis Thorne, Michael Torke, Milton Babbitt, and Richard Danielpour. In this order, they were all interviewed during a four-day period between Monday, September 13th and Thursday, September 16th, 2004. For seven of the eight composers who reside in New York City, their interviews were conducted at various locations in the Borough of Manhattan. Milton Babbitt, however, was met in New York two days prior to his interview, and it was then decided to arrange his discussion via the telephone on September 15th from his domicile in Princeton, New Jersey.

Many composers today could bring forth stimulating and authoritative insights in regard to this topic. Yet, these eight choices help achieve two objectives. The first is to hear American viewpoints on musical progress from a stylistically diverse group which
spans several generations. The second is to emphasize the views of nationally recognized composers born after 1950.

Prior to the interviews will be a “Preface” and an introductory chapter. The Preface will discuss the reasons for choosing our topic, preview a list of eight questions to be asked by the author, and explain the reasons behind their development. Next will be the Introduction, which will clarify the perspectives of the author on the main topic.

Eight interviews will then be presented. Rather than following the chronology of the interviews, they will be presented according to the birthdates of the composers. Therefore, we will begin with Mathew Fuerst and end with Milton Babbitt. After the interviews, there will be a three-part concluding chapter that will consider the interviewees’ individual and overall responses.
Dedicated to the Bortz, Impola, and Barone Families.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would first like to extend gratitude to the people of the State of Ohio and The Ohio State University for providing the opportunity and forum to develop this document. Gratitude is also extended to Donald Harris and Dr. Jan Radzynski for their wisdom, encouragement, and belief in the value of composer interviews, which stirred this author to proceed. As well, gratitude is expressed to all of the eight composers who participated so sincerely in these discussions, and whom were also considerate for the logistical issues in scheduling these interviews. And finally, gratitude is extended to two people who helped support this investigation: Michael Toriello for his technical assistance, and my dear wife, Samantha, who was with our daughter, Aila, during the time of these interviews.
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Certainly American composers in the past century contributed to what may be described as “progress” in music; it can be the mark of forward-moving efforts through innovations to expand a hypothetical musical language or an established body of musical ideas and concepts. If the writings of Arnold Schoenberg in the essay, entitled, *Brahms the Progressive*, or Igor Stravinsky in the book, entitled, *Poetics of Music in the Form of Six Lessons* are an indication, generating “progress” was an internationally conscious endeavor among twentieth-century composers. Whether termed as *Fortschritte* (Gr.), or by various derivatives of *progressus* (Lat.), it was the preoccupation with its idea that may explain why the previous century flourished as it did in terms of musical innovations.

While other terminology could also be used to represent this idea, such as “development,” or, “advancement,” “progress” is commonly chosen in English. Yet, in consideration that the idea of progress may still loom in the psyche of American composers, the overall question, “What is musical progress?” underlies a series of eight questions directed at the composers participating in this study (see “List of Eight Interview Questions” on page “xiii”). As the chapter, entitled, “Introduction” will discuss, Schoenberg and Stravinsky expressed very different perspectives in regard to the definition of this word. In considering such a contrast, it then seemed logical to first ask the selected composers, “How do you think ‘progress’ will be defined in the twenty-first
Just as potentially variable are the possibilities as to what composers could say “generates” musical progress. The subject of visual art seemed to be an appropriate starting point. Eric Salzman has written about pre-World War I “sonic” events by visual-artist groups that were “antecedents” for later avant-garde music development, specifically the Futurist “concerts of noise” and the “Dadaist” Marcel Duchamp’s *Erratum musical* of 1913.¹ To add, if such events influenced musical developments, it is reasonable to also consider the literature of artistic movements (e.g., Marinetti’s *Futurist manifesto*) and also the literary sources from other fields (e.g., philosophical and spiritual writings).

It also seemed timely to ask a question about the trend of integrating non-European and Western “classical” instruments. Recent musical examples of this are by Bright Sheng, who featured the Persian-Chinese *pipa* in *Nanking! Nanking!* at the 2002 Tanglewood Festival of Contemporary Music,² and Philip Glass who included the Indian *sitar*, African *kora*, Australian *didgeridoo*, and other “world” instruments in *Orion* for the 2004 Summer Olympic celebration in Athens. The “importance” of this type of instrumental synergy in terms of “musical progress” will be the focus of our inquiry.

A subject related to the “non-European influence” is how American popular culture and its music influences “serious music” composition. This, of course, has been

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continuing for quite some time, whether referring to an American Indian dance source for the second movement of Dvorak’s *New World Symphony* (1893), or the 1980s electric slap bass in Michael Torke’s *Adjustable Wrench*. The question to be raised here will consider the “progressive” role of our own “indigenous music” and how it will shape twenty-first century composition.  

The effects of recent technological advances and how they may “generate” musical progress will also be addressed. The role of the musical recording, computers, the Internet, and devices such as the I-pod are undeniably changing the way world listens to music. Our question for the participants is how such technology may effect the dissemination, presentation, and creation of new music in the twenty-first century.

Two questions were also developed to address recent stylistic “developments” observable since about “1980,” and the proposed “stylistic diversity” that exists in our field today from the “progressive currents” of the last century. On the next page is the “List of the Eight Interview Questions” to be asked to all of the eight interviewees.

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List of Eight Interview Questions

1) Schoenberg and Stravinsky were only two composers from the twentieth century who referred to musical progress in their writings. How do you think "progress" will be defined in the twenty-first century?

2) It could be said that twentieth-century visual art (e.g., Kandinsky, Duchamp) had a significant effect on contemporary composition worldwide. Will this continue in the twenty-first century? Will the boundaries between visual art and music continue to dissipate?

3) Many areas of twentieth-century musical progress were foreseen in the later nineteenth century (e.g., Wagner and chromaticism). In retrospect since about 1980, do you have any observations regarding musical trends that have since grown and may continue to do so in the next decade?

4) The appearance of non-European instruments has become more important to composers today (e.g., the use of the Chinese pipa, Indian sitar, African kora, and Australian didjeridoo in Glass’s Orion). How important is this type of progress to you?

5) As the twentieth century had many artists proposing new ideas via manifestos (e.g., Marinetti’s Futurist manifesto) and literature (e.g., Kandinsky’s Concerning the Spiritual in Art, Schoenberg’s Harmonielehre), are there any literary, political, philosophical, or spiritual sources in recent times that have had a significant influence upon your work?

6) As many of the innovations and "progressive" currents in the past century resulted in many new subgenres of music (e.g., serialism, minimalism), what are the possible challenges that will result in this century from the continuing diversification of compositional approaches found in our "serious" music community? What could be the benefits?

7) In the twentieth century, American popular music and culture began to be incorporated into serious composition (e.g., the use of the slap bass in Torke’s Adjustable Wrench). Will this trend continue, and how will it manifest itself in the twenty-first century? How important is this type of synergy in musical progress for your work?

8) Gradually the musical recording has taken on a greater influence than in the past. What new changes or opportunities due to technological progress (e.g., I-pod, Internet) will there be for the dissemination of new music? How will live concert presentations of new music be affected? As a newly made computer-generated composition is instantly ready for distribution via the Internet without the need for human performers and a concert hall, will composers turn more and more to the computer in twenty-first century composition?
To different degrees there are implied opinions in these questions (e.g., non-European instruments being more “important” to composers today). This subjectivity is only for the purpose of stimulating stronger responses. For example, the opening phrase of the second question, “It could be said that twentieth-century visual art had a significant effect on contemporary composition worldwide,” was devised instead of a more objective, “Was there an effect of twentieth-century visual art on music?” It is because a response such as, “I do not even accept the notion that there is a visual-art effect in music,” reveals a greater independence of thought than would be the case of a “yes” or “no” answer followed by some explanation. Such a reluctance towards accepting provided opinions and terminology will be necessary if we are to move towards an understanding of “musical progress.” Also serving to bring about this spirit is the mentioning of Arnold Schoenberg in the first question. Not only did he and the critic-philosopher Theodor Adorno articulate their positions on “progress” during the twentieth century, but their bold personalities may stimulate equally bold responses.

However, despite this strategy, it was also an objective in these interviews to have a comfortable rapport with the participants. While the atmosphere did become quite casual in all of the discussions, and even extraordinarily so in some cases, there was a slight overall tenseness at the start of these interviews. Conjecturing for the years ahead of us can require a more prudent formulation, and one would definitely have reason to avoid responding hastily. After all, these eight composers may very well live to see how their answers play against the actual unfolding of the twenty-first century.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Progress of any kind requires a goal, or at least, a discernible direction. However, if we can accept that this “direction” of progress need not necessarily coincide with our human interests, to mark the arrival of something that is better for us, then we would be deviating from a frequent connotation for the word, and particularly in the domain of music. According to Warren Dwight Allen in *Philosophies of Music History*, Sethus Calvisius, Cantor of the Thomasschule of Leipzig in 1600, published a supplement, entitled, *De origine et progressu musices* (*Of the Origin and Progress of Music*), which was written because “Calvisius felt the necessity of an appeal to history, to show, in brief review, what the successive steps had been in developing the art which he believed was just about perfect in his day.” ⁴ This was followed later in the seventeenth century by Fontenelle’s *Digression sur les Anciens et les Modernes* (1688), which Allen credits as a “landmark work in the history of social theory in bringing the term ‘progress’ to our modern sense of it’s meaning.” ⁵ Allen explains the modern connotative meaning on the next page.

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⁵ Ibid., 245-6.
When the average person says “we have made progress,” a value-judgment is involved, meaning that some particular achievement is a better solution of a problem... The word progress today expresses confidence and optimism, belief in human intelligence, and in the possibility of its continual improvement. But this meaning did not dawn upon the human minds until the seventeenth century, during the Baroque era with which this history of music histories began.

A metaphorical critique related to this value-judgment appears in “Lesson 4: Musical Typology,” in Igor Stravinsky’s Poetics of Music (1942), where a “religion of P” (“P” for “progress”) is said to exist among many composers. Progress is depicted as a revered “bastard myth” born unto the “sometimes-tramp-goddess” idea of “artistic evolution.” Stravinsky shows a keen awareness for the value-attachments of progress, caustically pointing to “the advance” and what may be described as the “always-more-worth-while today.”

For the devotees of the religion of Progress, today is always necessarily more worth while than yesterday, from which the consequence necessarily follows that in the field of music the opulent contemporary orchestra represents an advance over the modest instrumental ensembles of former times - that the Wagnerian orchestra represents an advance over that of Beethoven.

A different view of musical progress was held by Arnold Schoenberg. In Section III of his 1933 essay, entitled, Brahms the Progressive, he states, “Progress in music consists of the development of methods of presentation which correspond to the conditions just discussed.” Those “just-discussed conditions” are described in the next excerpt.

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Repeatedly hearing things which one likes and is pleasant need not be ridiculed. There is a subconscious desire to understand better and realize more details of the beauty. But an alert and well-trained mind will demand to be told the more remote matters, the more remote consequences of the simple matters he has already comprehended. An alert and well-trained mind refuses to listen to baby-talk and requests to be spoken to in a brief and straight forward language.

Whether one chooses to apply the above passage towards defining “progress” for the development of the musical idea, or for a greater musical language, it is clear progress arises from expansions in what could be loosely called “musically communicated meaning.” As “alert and well-trained minds” “refuse” to accept the “already comprehended,” progress is also presented here as a consciously-generated expansion. This is reverberated in Theodor Adorno’s 1955 essay, entitled, *The Aging of New Music*, where it is suggested that “the concept of progress loses its justification when composition turns into a mere hobby.” In other words, those who are content with the static musical “language” of the presumably less generative linguistic realm of the recreational “hobby,” see no reason for progress and will not make it without the conscious goal.

This suggestion of progress intertwined with “proactive” goal-attaining efforts is generally accepted here. However, despite the first line of Schoenberg’s paragraph claiming, “Repeatedly hearing things which one likes and is pleasant need not be ridiculed,” Schoenberg soon, like Adorno, positions his properties of progress to rather straw-like, weak-sounding antitheses. Schoenberg’s “brief and straight forward language of progress” becomes the very antithesis to “baby-talk”; Adorno’s “concept of progress”

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becomes the antithesis to the non-professional “mere hobby.” It is then that a full acceptance for these two views requires us to 1) accept what indeed seems to be a ridicule of verbatim repetition, 2) permit a dismissal for the possibility of progress resulting from compositional “hobbyists,” and 3) exclude the possibility of the unconscious goal in generating progress.

This leads to the point that observations on musical progress can be easily obscured or made vulnerable by subjectivity, value attachments, and exclusions of other progressive paths. An extreme case hampered by subjectivity and subsequent exclusion appears in regard to “the composers of progress,” based upon the nineteenth-century notion that “great men” dictated the epoch of music history. A known subscriber to such a view was Raphael Georg Kiesewetter. Allen explains, “For Kiesewetter, the law of progress is demonstrated by the succession of epochs each named after a composer, the greatest of his period, and greater than the leader of the epoch preceding…the epochal composers (within our Renaissance and Baroque boundaries) included Willaert, Carissimi, A. Scarlatti, Leo, and Durante. Bach nor Handel, not mentioned as leaders at all, are now placed far above Leo and Durante in modern histories; Kiesewetter’s…have sunken into an oblivion.”

The greatest challenge with the term progress today is not so much about its subjective use. It is in regard to the insurmountable degree of positive aesthetic value-attachment that would cause many composers to assume if they heard their own piece of own music described as “progressive,” or, as “representing progress,” they would also

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gladly entertain the idea that the person who selected such words also valued the “progress,” and the listening experience of their “progressive” piece (all apologies to those who would resist). Exercising idea separation could help restore the integrity of the core meaning of “progress.” However, before more is said, let us also see why the source of musical progress can be difficult to determine.

Henry Cowell, who coined the term “tone cluster,” is regarded as the first composer to have used these harmonic mannerisms in his “Third Chapter” from the 1913 piano novelette, Adventures in Harmony, which premiered in 1913 at Arts and Crafts Hall in Carmel, California.\(^\text{10}\) It would be naive to say that no one ever tried to depress a multitude of adjacent keys on a keyboard prior to Cowell, or that such attempts were not expressive ones. Nonetheless, if musical efforts were made with yet-to-be-named “tone clusters” in 1785 Vienna, it would be hard to imagine their public presentation; it would have been a far-too-radical departure from the contemporary harmonic language for most listeners to have taken it seriously (with exceptions, of course). Yet, if composers in 1785 had conceived the sonorous effects of “tone clusters,” it is not likely the public promotion of this harmonic item would have been encouraged by contemporary luminaries in the way that Charles Seeger did in encouraging Cowell to write New Musical Resources (1919), which presented “such Cowell inventions as the tone clusters…original ideas on dissonance, shifting rhythms, and a whole new theory for the organization of melody and counterpoint according to an original system of ratios.”\(^\text{11}\)

\(^{10}\)Michael Hicks, Henry Cowell, Bohemian (Urbana, IL and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 44.

While it is also arbitrary to say it was “in the Year 1913” or “1919” when the tone cluster finally entered the “musical language,” it is safely said a quantum leap in awareness had been made by the time Béla Bartók wrote a letter to Cowell in 1923 as “the presumed inventor of the tone cluster” asking permission “to use the device in some of his own music.” The difference in 1923, however, was that a century-and-a-quarter after our “1785,” Cowell’s “innovation” was recognized by peers and listeners due to a harmonic history that had already included the music of Wagner, Scriabin, Debussy, Stravinsky, Webern, and Schoenberg. (Yet, despite such predecessors, there were critics like Jules Combarieu who would have likely labeled this “progress” as further evidence for a “disintegration in music.”)

Let us now return to the word “progress.” For, as the tone cluster was realized in a period where harmonic roles were expanding, it is still limited to a particular element (harmony), and it contains a developmental path towards its realization which is observable in a given period of history. Due to this specificity, precise terminology is needed to emphasize the discrepancy between what historians recognize as the progress or regression of a concept within a given historical period, and that which is the forward “macrocosm” of all periodic movements. George Dyson brings attention to a description of the “macrocosmic” progress in Herbert Antcliffe’s Living Music (1912).

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In Music, almost more than any subject...there is a ceaseless and inevitable progress...And when that which has been carried in a wrong direction is eliminated by the passage of time, it is always found that an advance upon the right lines has been made by the main body which remains.

Henceforth, suggestions are made for three new terms: macroprogress, microprogress, and antimicroprogress.

Although Antcliffe assigns “right” and “wrong” value-judgments to his views of progress (not subscribed to here), an ernstwhile epiphany from this passage arrives via the constancy of macroprogress, in that all musical occurrences - “right,” “wrong,” or “otherwise” - must still move along with “the main body.” Even the regression of a concept can only be periodic regression and is antimicroprogress. Macroprogress (which Antcliffe simply calls progress) is indeed “ceaseless and inevitable,” only ever moving forward, and totally independent of periodic expansions or regressions.

This may lead to one to wonder how American composers today view musical progress. Among our selected composers, five serve to give the views of composers born in the first two decades after 1950. They are Stefania de Kenessey (b. 1961), Michael Torke (b. 1961), Julia Wolfe (b. 1958), Richard Danielpour (b. 1956), and Eric Ewazen (b. 1954). Stefania de Kenessey is recognized for the widespread critical acclaim of her melodic and lyrical compositions, and the founding of the traditionalist Derriere Guard in 1996. Michael Torke has been commissioned by numerous American orchestras in the past two decades, and has combined Stravinskian ostinatos, jazz harmony, and popular influences towards aural and visual synaesthesias. Julia Wolfe is chosen for her minimalist and popular sensibility, and leadership in the Bang On A Can
Richard Danielpour is selected for his rhythmically dynamic and visceral approach to music, which has produced some of the more poignant works from the late 1980s and 1990s. Also is Eric Ewazen, who has become one of the most regarded American composers in recent years, and is especially known for his brass works.

While these last five composers may appear to reflect a “current generation,” Milton Babbitt (b. 1916) is also selected on at least equal standing for his vitality and leadership in American music in the year 2004, and also for having composed landmark works in seven decades tone composition. Just as active is Francis Thorne (b. 1922), who is known for integrating his jazz roots into serious music, and also for his role in founding the American Composers Orchestra, which he currently directs. Also included among our composers is Mathew Fuerst (b. 1977), who is a doctoral candidate at the Juilliard School and only twenty-seven years of age. He is chosen not only to provide a possible lens into an emerging generation, but also for his successes in the past three years that indicate his continuing presence in the decades to come.
CHAPTER 2
INTERVIEW WITH MATHEW FUERST

Mathew Fuerst was born in Covina, California in 1977. As a student at the Eastman School of
Music, he studied piano with Alan Feinberg, and composition with David Liptak, Christopher
Rouse, Joseph Schwantner, Sydney Hodkinson and Augusta Read Thomas. He has also studied
on the graduate level with Robert Beaser and John Corigliano at the Juilliard School of Music,
where he has won two Palmer-Dixon Prizes and entered doctoral candidacy.

Date: Tuesday, September 14, 2004, 2:30 p.m.
Location: The Juilliard School, fourth floor

1) Schoenberg and Stravinsky were only two composers from the twentieth century
who referred to musical progress in their writings. How do you think “progress”
will be defined in the twenty-first century?

MF: I think one of the big differences between the twentieth century and the twenty-first
century will be the fact that when we look upon the twentieth century and talk about
“progress,” a lot of times this tends to be revolutionary things that occur - revolutionary
in the style of harmony, revolutionary in tems of rhythm, and orchestration, and what
have you. I think, especially for people of my generation that are just in their early
twenties now in the first years of the twenty-first century, that we’ve been far enough
away removed from all the progress that we’ve made in the twentieth century (be it
serialism, Ligeti, the sound mass, George Crumb, or even the neo-Romanticism of
maybe a generation prior) so that “progress” is not so much a revolutionary thing now as
an evolutionary one.

We all have the capabilities now of looking back at the prior century and being
able to take techniques of minimalism, and techniques of controlled aleatoricism, like
Lutoslawski. Hopefully, we can have a very solid technique, which seems to be a great concern with my friends here at school and my friends abroad: to be able to combine various elements of various styles - not necessarily in a collage effect like you find with Bolcolm *per se*, but I think a more unified effect so that there will still be many individual styles, but they will all be based upon what interests us on our own and what sort of elements interest us from various progressive movements of the past century.

YB: That’s very interesting about what you said in looking at things as an “evolutionary” process now more than a “revolutionary” process. Do you think we’re done with revolutionary-type progress?

MF: That’s very hard to say, because you don’t know what sort of technological advances will be had in the next ten years, or five years for that matter. You can look at the amazing things that are happening at IRCAM and Boulez’s work as of late. There are still a lot of progressive things happening.

“Revolutionary” always seems to me to have an idea of “fighting,” or, “breaking down barriers,” whereas “evolutionary” seems to have…I’m not sure if “positive” is the right word…but just more of a “natural flow” to it. I don’t think that there’s really much at this point that can be done in a revolutionary way. I think that kind of ended with 4’33”. I think at that point, it’s like, “From here what can you really do?” (This is not to say that there still wasn’t controlled sound in a sense that John Cage put in some parameters, and the sound was *aleatoricism* from the audience, and from the lights and what have you).
Occurrences like *The Rite of Spring* or *Pierrot Lunaire* will not happen again, but then again, like I said, it’s always hard to tell what sort of advances will happen and how audience reactions will be. Maybe people were saying that back even in the 1950s and 1960s, and then Steve Reich comes along with *Four Organs* and it causes a real stir. It’s hard to say. You never know what is going to happen, but I tend to think that those kinds of days with riots and the like--with Stravinsky, and the *scandale* concert of 1913 with Schoenberg and his followers--I don’t believe that sort of thing will happen again. The only possibility of that would maybe be something of a staged work, in which you actually have something scandalous outside of music. And even so, I think *The Rite of Spring* occurrence had more to do with the *dance* than it did with the music itself, because a year later there was a very successful performance of it without the dance. But as far as *music* is concerned, I think the sort of “revolutionary” thing is basically *done* as we study it in concern with the twentieth century.

2) *It could be said that twentieth-century visual art (e.g., Kandinsky, Duchamp) had a significant effect on contemporary composition worldwide. Will this continue in the twenty-first century? Will the boundaries between visual art and music continue to dissipate?*

MF: I actually tend to think the opposite thing. I think things have become so specialized now. Part of it has to do with the economics. I remember William Bolcolm was talking to me when I was turning pages with him last year, and he was describing artists, writers, composers - and everyone kind of knew who each other was. He would get phone calls about poetry readings by Allen Ginsberg and he would check that out, or a new performance by someone else and check that out.
Again, I think nowadays things have become so specialized--part of the reason being economic. Being in New York for about six years, I tend to notice that whenever a certain area of New York is deemed an “artist’s colony,” or an “artist’s residency,” suddenly everyone seems to want to move out there to be a part of this exciting scene, and then as soon as you see a Starbuck’s it seems as if that’s kind of the end of it. It seems to be that in order to live somewhat comfortably, artists keep moving further and further away from the city to the point where I know a lot of people way up in the Bronx.

YB: So some of these synergies in the arts are a matter of location?

MF: Completely. Because if you look at these examples you’ve talked about - Kandinsky and Schoenberg were good friends…Picasso and Stravinsky and the Ballet Russe. This isn’t to say in hundred years from now, if we’re even around, that historians won’t see similarities. I do believe there is a Zeitgeist that goes around. I think that in a weird sort of a way after September 11th, it becomes more apparent. Not to bring politics into anything, but even if I’m not aware of what a young artist is doing in the Village, and I’m doing my work here, there might still be a connection just because of the whole issue of postmodernism - that everyone has to come to terms with in figuring out their own definition (something that is undefinable by its own definition). This is just from my point of view. It’s hard to say. And so I think there will be trends that one will see. I just don’t think you will have as much as in the Schoenberg-Kandinsky correspondence.
3) Many areas of twentieth-century musical progress were foreseen in the later nineteenth century (e.g., Wagner and chromaticism). In retrospect since about 1980, do you have any observations regarding musical trends that have since grown and may continue to do so in the next decade?

MF: It’s a little harder for me to say, but I believe Schnittke’s *Concerto Grosso, No. 1* in 1975-76 (around then)…this is a very significant work because of its collage effect. One moment you have this kind of Baroque thing. The next minute it goes haywire with a very aggressive, dissonant type of music. Even farther back with Berio’s *Sinfonia* with the famous third movement with all the quotes. I think what you begin to find are people trying to find ways to meld various styles and techniques, which is something I do think you still find. Corigliano is a great example of someone who does this extremely well. Bolcom, Rouse, and a whole number of composers are also ones you could talk about. With my generation of composers this is something that does continue.

YB: That kind of ties into what you were saying in response to the first question regarding technique in the twenty-first century.

MF: I think what one should try to remember at least is that this is coming from only *my* aesthetic point of view. You could ask another composer here at Juilliard and they’ll have a completely different opinion. But, I think that’s what will make this next century so interesting. I’ve heard some people say that they believe the age of serialism is “dead.” I don’t think that’s ever going to happen. There are very wonderful works by composers here, by Wayne Oquin, that use the twelve-tone system to very beautiful and moving effects.

YB: The techniques may not be as flourishing as they were, but that doesn’t mean they’re “dead.”
MF: I don’t think anything’s really going to die. At this point, we live in an era where you basically can do anything you want. I think a lot of people are having the idea that “music is music.” I don’t think you have this sort of “Serialists here,” “Cagian people here,” and “Classicists here,” like you did a little further back. I remember a story of Gershwin visiting Alban Berg. Gershwin was at the American premiere of *Wozzeck* in Philadelphia (oddly enough Elliott Carter was sitting right behind him I understand). Afterwards, Berg invited Gershwin to sit down at the piano and play some of his tunes. Gershwin was a little reluctant to play, but played some and eventually turned to Berg and said, “I don’t understand how with the music that you write that you could even possibly like this music at all.” Berg’s response to that was, “Good music is good music.”

4) The appearance of non-European instruments has become more important to composers today (e.g., the use of the Chinese *pipa*, Indian *sitar*, African *kora*, and Australian *didjeridoo* in Glass’s *Orion*). How important is this type of progress to you?

MF: I personally am not interested in it myself. There’s a great composer here named Wong Ro that does a very good job of blending Asian and Western styles. It makes sense for him to be doing this. He comes from China and this is part of his background. As a child growing up--ever since I was ten--it was nothing but the Western classical music tradition for me. At fifteen, Stockhausen, Boulez, and Cage became idols of mine, so I tried to invent some instruments - the Harry Partch kind of thing. But in general, I’m probably a little more conservative. The most interesting thing to me would maybe be experimenting with electronics, but I’m so awful with computers. I always
figure that with the time it would take to really figure out a computer program, I could actually write another piece of music. This isn’t to say anything bad about these other instruments. They’re really incredible and interesting sounds. Maybe someday I’ll maybe be able to use them.

But, I think one needs to be careful when mixing Western and non-Western instruments. One needs to find a way so that there’s a mixture of sounds…not just for the sake of being exotic.

5) As the twentieth century has had many artists proposing new ideas via manifestos (e.g., Marinetti’s Futurist manifesto) and literature (e.g., Kandinsky’s Concerning the Spiritual in Art, Schoenberg’s Harmonielehre), are there any literary, political, philosophical, or spiritual sources in recent times that have had a significant influence on your work?

MF: No.

YB: Okay, “no.” Don’t feel you have to come up with something…

MF: I think part of it is we live in an era now in which manifestos don’t really seem to present themselves anymore….where anything sort of goes. If anything, it might be some postmodern writing. For a while, I was interested in trying to figure out what postmodernism was. So I read some postmodernist writing on architecture and the like. It’s interesting to read these things, but in the end it’s an “ism” that doesn’t define anything. You need to make sure you remain true to yourself more than anything. I think some of the composers that are still alive today, from the oldest generation, exhibit this very well, the best of them being Henri Dutilleux.
6) As the many of the innovations and “progressive” currents in the past century resulted in many new subgenres of music (e.g., serialism, minimalism), what are the possible challenges that will result in this century from the continuing diversification of compositional approaches found in our “serious” music community? What could be the benefits?

MF: As I’ve said, one trend, at least with my numerous friends in composition I’ve noticed, is a trend to try and bring various techniques together. I think that actually is the challenge, because you have this great freedom to do whatever you want. Not to get really political (I’m not even very political as a person), but I think one of trends in America right now is freedom being a luxury instead of a responsibility. And that’s where the biggest challenge is. With all of this information and tools that we can use at our disposal, how is it we’re going to take things and create a work of logic, and a work that will be moving hopefully to a listener? This is the biggest challenge.

Yet, there are those who work within the realms of serialism or minimalism. I think the challenges for them is “how to progress” from the achievements that have already occurred, and how to take these “isms” and keep pushing them further along the path. I think the benefits that you will find are a greater variety of styles, but I think “voices” might be a better way to describe it. I actually honestly believe that we’re about to enter one of the richest eras of music history with at least my generation. I remember what Robert Beaser said in a lesson and what others say in how they “would hate to be a composer now, because there’s nothing to fight against.” He was very instrumental in bringing back tonality. And I think this was a challenge that was presented to his generation. Maybe they got tired of the serialism of the 60s and 70s. When I was younger, I used to think, “My gosh, there is nothing to fight against.” But as I’ve gotten
a little older I began to realize, “Why is that such a bad thing?” I think, in fact, it’s almost a breath of fresh air. Do what you want, and to the best of your abilities, and I always think there will be an audience.

People talk about “the death of classical music.” I think this is going to change. I’ve found that at Juilliard more and more people every year are interested in playing new music. People are beginning to realize you’re not going to have a career playing Beethoven anymore. There are a million and one recordings of the Beethoven piano sonatas. How many people can really say something in those that Arrau, Solomon, or Serkin haven’t already said? They’re beginning to realize that contemporary music is probably the way to go to jumpstart your career. And at the same time, audiences will begin to come back as they become less and less afraid of contemporary music and modern music, which is also a benefit.

I think people will find that there’s a lot of exciting stuff happening right now. I could mention a whole bunch of composers in our generation that are really doing fantastic work and that will make a significant contribution to music.

7) In the twentieth century, American popular music and culture began to be incorporated into serious composition (e.g., the use of the slap bass in Torke’s *Adjustable Wrench*). Will this trend continue and how will it manifest itself in the twenty-first century? How important is this type of synergy in musical progress?

MF: This is nothing new, really. You look all throughout history and you find people using popular tunes. I think it all depends on the individual, and what sort of influence pop music plays in your work. I know Jefferson Friedman’s *Second String Quartet* was
influenced by heavy metal, and I think you can hear it in the music, even though it’s purely a classical work, and a very exciting one at that. This was obviously something that was a part of him growing up, and something in which I know he still interested. As far as I am concerned, I grew up listening to nothing but classical music until about 1995 when I bought my first pop album. It was R.E.M.. Certainly, I’ve been influenced by some jazz and some pop. You can’t not be. It’s part of the world we live in and the music we hear every day. I don’t think you can avoid it really. I think it just depends on how much of that actually played a role in your whole development growing up.

8) Gradually the musical recording has taken on a greater influence than in the past. What new changes or opportunities due to technological progress (e.g., I-pod, Internet) will there be for the dissemination of new music? How will live concert presentations of new music be affected? As a newly made computer-generated composition is instantly ready for distribution via the Internet without the need for human performers and a concert hall, will composers turn more and more to the computer in twenty-first century composition?

MF: You get the feeling in reading about the 1950s and 1960s, when there was sort of this burst of electronic music scene in Germany, France, and here in New York, that this “new thing” would make performers obsolete. That has turned out not to be the case whatsoever. If anything, it seems that the “great works” concerning computers are actually these initial works...Philomel, Gesange der Jünglinge, some of the Berio works. These are actually still the works that kind of stand out as really fine examples.

I think one of the problems with technology is it’s moving so fast now. It’s very difficult to work in a medium like that without sounding “old hat” within a span of even a couple of years. Look at pop music. Watch one of those VH-1 “I Love the 80s” or “I
Love the 90s” shows, or these “flashback” videos. Nevertheless, I think, if it’s good music, and created by a very intelligent and musical mind, it will still survive. The Babbitt, Stockhausen, and Berio works - they will always survive and be listened to, and be admired, I think. And it’s hard for me to say of whether there will be more people doing computers or not. Who knows what direction people are going to go in? There also seems to be more and more composers with each generation, or, at least people calling themselves composers.

YB: Regarding dissemination…

MF: It will obviously be far easier to distribute new music. A person who is really doing a fantastic job of promoting himself and taking control of the distribution of his music is Michael Torke. He has his own label now and distributes his music in box sets (1 through 8). The performances were originally on Argo. With the Internet it makes it so much easier. If only I was Internet savvy I could produce my own web page and be able to put up my music and be able to sell it online.

In the way of performances, it will be more and more interesting in something you see already happening - when performers will give recitals and sell their own CDs. I think something classical music needs to do take the approach of what rock musicians have been doing when they go on tour. They’ll play a lot of the classic hits, but they’ll also perform songs on the new album. And obviously, this an attempt to promote the new recording. I think this is a wise business decision. And for some reason, it’s something you don’t see classical musicians doing quite as much, but they do seem to be doing it a little bit more. And it’s hard for me to say. I’m twenty-seven. Things could
have been going on like this since the 80s, but I just didn’t know because I was, you know, “three.”
INTERVIEW WITH STEFANIA DE KENESSEY

Stefania de Kenessy was born in Budapest, Hungary in 1961. She was educated at Yale and Princeton Universities, receiving her doctorate under the tutelage of Milton Babbitt. Her chamber, orchestral, and operatic works have been acclaimed by leading music journals. As well, she founded the Derriere Guard, which had its first festival in New York in 1997.

Date: Monday, September 13, 2004, 3:15 p.m.
Location: Studio, 27 West 67th Street

1) Schoenberg and Stravinsky were only two composers from the twentieth century who referred to musical progress in their writings. How do you think “progress” will be defined in the twenty-first century?

SDK: I think musical progress will be defined by something that will be a regression, simply because I’m convinced that tonality of the most old-fashioned kind is making a ferocious and strong return. It’s not going to be the same kind of tonal music that’s been written before. Nobody really wants to be condemned to repeat the past. On the other hand, I am also convinced that this is eventually the path that the future will take, and it is certainly already beginning to start to take hold in classical music. And, of course, it has never died out in popular music. That is my general assessment.

2) It could be said that twentieth-century visual art (e.g., Kandinsky, Duchamp) had a significant effect on contemporary composition worldwide. Will this continue in the twenty-first century? Will the boundaries between visual art and music continue to dissipate?

SDK: Well, I am not entirely convinced with your thesis that visual art had a profound impact on the course of development of modern music. I think certainly there was an
aesthetic spirit at large in the twentieth century - the spirit of modernism - which affected all of the arts at various points. In painting, it meant the development of abstraction. In music, it meant the dissolution of tonality. I don’t now know to what extent one was simply the influence of the other. It was also palpable in literature, in poetry, in architecture, and in every realm of artistic endeavors. So, it really was a change of worldwide aesthetic, if you like. And at that level, I think that all of the arts are going to converge also towards more traditional means in the twenty-first century.

I think there are painters now...in fact, I know the ateliers of young painters are flourishing. They’re oversubscribed with people who want to learn in the old-fashioned way, meaning “real figure from live model.” The architectural schools that offer more traditional architecture are also overwhelmed with applicants. And more and more, people are starting to write contemporary “classical” music that also has melody and tonality. So I’m not sure if it’s “the cart drawing the horse” or “the horse pulling the cart.” It’s a fairly complicated question. But, I do think that there is underway, a general change of aesthetic spirit, and that it will be visible in all of the arts.

Now, I would also say that very often in music, and in particular the biggest kind of revolutions, tend to take place in those kinds of musics which are linked to the other arts. Very often in the field of ballet, or opera, where there is a strong visual component, or strong verbal component, a sister art will drive important stylistic shifts in music. But, to what extent it’s driven by these, and to what extent music, itself, is simply using those as a resource for changes that are inevitable, is a question I can’t begin to answer.
3) Many areas of twentieth-century musical progress were foreseen in the later nineteenth century (i.e., Wagner and chromaticism). In retrospect since about 1980, do you have any observations regarding musical trends that have since grown and may continue to do so in the next decade?

SDK: Well, the two trends that are notable from the 80s are *minimalism* and sort of whatever it was called - the “new eclecticism.” I don’t believe either one of those are going to be avenues that are going to be ultimately fruitful. I think in some sense they have already played themselves out. I think they were very important historically, because they opened up, in some way, the floodgates to a kind of experimentation with “traditional” materials, or, “non-twentieth-century” “standard-modernist” musical materials.

YB: Are there any specific works that come to your mind that opened those “floodgates?”

SDK: No…I was just thinking of the minimalists…Steve Reich…Philip Glass…those people. The very idea that they brought back triads and pleasing sonorities or pleasing textures…I think that was a breath of fresh air for many, many people.

Composers such as George Rochberg, and the certain younger generation that he taught, were also willing to write at least movements that sounded pleasant…that sounded like Beethoven, or sounded like early Stravinsky. The idea that there could be styles of music being written in the contemporary era, which were nonetheless tonal entities and beautiful in ways that genuinely eked modern music, was not supposed to be. I think both of these trends were enormously liberating. But, I also think that they are self-limiting simply because the eclecticism - the idea that one can only write in styles
that have already been established - certain pastiche, you know, cut-and-paste-away - is ultimately not going to be fruitful once it has been done for a certain number of years…and the same thing with minimalism.

I think one of the great gifts of the Western tradition is its ability to combine both pleasing sounds and music that has a narrative structure to it on an intellectual basis. It’s not clear to me that minimalism is interested in the latter two. I don’t know what the next avenue is for development. I have some ideas in my own music, but I don’t think minimalism or new eclecticism are really going to take off.

4) The appearance of non-European instruments has become more important to composers today (e.g., the use of the Chinese pipa, Indian sitar, African kora, and Australian didjeridoo in Glass’s Orion). How important is this type of progress to you?

SDK: To me, personally, it has not been particularly important, simply because most of my music is commissioned for and performed in standard concert venues. And for standard concert venues, the Western instruments are really the best suited to those spaces. The problem with most non-Western instruments is that while they’re absolutely gorgeous - the sounds and sonorities they give out are stunningly beautiful - they are not powerful enough by and large to be heard in very, very large spaces, and certainly not loud enough to be heard in tandem or in conjunction with other kinds of Western instruments. So, at just some acoustical level, they don’t work in standard concert venues typically.

Having said that, I adore these non-Western instruments. I adore the sonority. If I had to make a prediction (and God only knows) by and large more and more music will
be amplified, including concert music, and more will be presented in alternative spaces, because I think the classical repertoire is really, really suffering, having become kind of a museum piece. And I think there will be a lot of new concerts and new musics written for variable instrumentations and for instruments that are “off the beaten path” by Western standards. I would venture to guess those instruments will become more important rather than less, but I think that two things have to happen: Concert venues have to be a different size and shape from the standard (i.e., Carnegie Hall which seats several thousand), and a lot of music will have to be amplified for recording purposes essentially, where the live performances are adjunct to the main product - which is the CD or sound recording.

5) As the twentieth century has had many artists proposing new ideas via manifestos (e.g., Marinetti’s Futurist manifesto) and literature (e.g., Kandinsky’s Concerning the Spiritual in Art, Schoenberg’s Harmonielehre), are there any literary, political, philosophical, or spiritual sources in recent times that have had a significant influence on your work?

SDK: I would say the closest there is to something like a manifesto that is in accord with what I do is represented by Frederick Turner in his book, Beauty, The Value of Values, in which he argues that there is something to the concept of beauty which transcends time and space - a kind of Platonic ideal as it were, which is variable, culturally-guided and historically-guided, but nonetheless exists, much the same that Plato would say that the idea of beauty exists; we can only approximate it and know it through experience, and these experiences will vary from person to person, and time, and place. Nonetheless, that doesn’t preclude the idea of beauty actually existing.
That’s pretty close to where I stand in terms of philosophical or aesthetic beliefs myself. He (Turner) has written a couple of books on these subjects, but that book I think has something like a twenty-page manifesto directed at all the arts. Interesting enough, Fred, himself, is a philosopher and poet, and he talks about music, architecture, and painting. It is an aesthetic manifesto, as opposed to a simple musical set of principles.

YB: Have other composers talked to you about this writing?

SDK: Most composers, as you know, don’t read a lot of philosophy. So, the honest answer is “no.” On the other hand, you also know that I founded the Derriere Guard six years ago. And part of what we’ve done with the Derriere Guard is try to unite all the artists who think in similar terms. And “thinking in similar terms,” by the way, does not mean that all of us think alike by any stretch of the imagination, but it does mean that it is a group of people in all of the various arts, from architecture and painting to poetry and drama, who do believe that there’s going to be some kind of return to values that are traditionally recognizable from the distant past. And for some people, it comes from the nineteenth century, for some the twelfth century, and for some people it is other cultures. Nonetheless, it’s a group of people who do believe that certain kinds of traditional values simply are ageless and timeless. In music, that might be melody and beautiful harmony. In poetry, that could be meter, or rhyme, or a narrative structure. In architecture, it would be a sense of proportion and a sense of ornament in accordance with proportion, and so forth.
6) As the many of the innovations and “progressive” currents in the past century resulted in many new subgenres of music (e.g., serialism, minimalism), what are the possible challenges that will result in this century from the continuing diversification of compositional approaches found in our “serious” music community? What could be the benefits?

SDK: I think the real challenge is the availability of so many different possible voices. One of the great gifts and one of the great banes of living in the present time is that we know so much. We have available to us, even with a minimal musical education, a vocabulary which is vast. I don’t know anyone who isn’t at least conversant with music from Gregorian chant through minimalism and all the sort of subgenres or stylistic shifts throughout the ages. And that’s a huge arsenal of stuff to work with. And I would say also in addition to that, most people do know something about non-Western music - about Indian, Indonesian, African, et cetera. So if you just wanted to make a laundry list of the number of possible styles in which we write music today, it is stupefyingly vast. And I would argue much, much more vast than any composer had to contend with in the fifteenth, seventeenth, or even nineteenth century. That is a blessing and a curse, because when one sits down to write music, one simply cannot use every resource available to one’s self. It’s very good to have them. At some level it’s very liberating. At some level it’s truly stultifying. So, I think actually our task as composers will to be to simply somehow melt these influences into a coherent whole. How does one do that? That’s up for grabs. That is the compositional challenge ahead: to simplify and to reuse, not to keep expanding.

Expansion - one can argue perhaps that it has yet to go further afield…but not a whole lot further afield. Much of what is possible to do has been done at some technical
level (if one means exploring sonorities). Now look at that vast array of stuff and do something coherent with it - something that has a real voice and a real center, an aesthetic center, a philosophical center, and a musical center. Another metaphor I like to use is “voice.”

YB: What could be the benefits of this diversity?

SDK: That will be much easier to know at hindsight. Right now, of course, going forward, just the freedom to do all sorts of various things is always wonderful - not to be in a straight jacket. That, in and of itself, is a joy. The benefit is also that when one encounters compositional problems, one can think “outside the box” in some sense. For example, I am deeply, deeply committed for every kind of reason, from emotional to intellectual to philosophical, to writing tonal music. And by tonal, I really mean tonal - you know - with triads, harmony, and scales. On the other hand, I have no interest in simply replicating what Mozart or Brahms were doing. So the question becomes, “How does one write tonal music that has an equivalent sense of beauty, which does not sound like Mozart or Brahms?” One of my solutions, for example, has been to write music that is in effect modal rather than tonal. But I use modality in a way that has a functional harmony, so that there is a sense of narrative, a sense of resolution and forward progress, if you like. The other thing I’m toying with right now is how to use the rhythmic power that one finds not only in African music, but also a lot of American popular music that I like and admire.

YB: I think you just segued into the next question.
In the twentieth century, American popular music and culture began to be incorporated into serious composition (e.g., the use of the slap bass in Torke’s *Adjustable Wrench*). Will this trend continue and how will it manifest itself in the twenty-first century? How important is this type of synergy in musical progress?

SDK: I think it’s going to be crucial for revitalizing twenty-first century music. I think it will continue. I think it will only be successful if somehow the underlying aesthetic values of popular music are incorporated into “serious music.” So long as it’s just an “add on,” say “adding on” an electric bass or a trap set to an otherwise preexisting composition, I don’t think it will quite work.

I think we’re all struggling with convincing fusions of these kinds of influences. That’s the real task at hand - to not simply take bits and pieces of popular culture and glue them on to so-called “serious” music. On the other hand, the idea of using certain types of modalities and rhythms, and perhaps variable instrumentation and improvisational-type qualities - I think all of those will continue to make themselves felt in “serious” music. I would suspect they’re going to be increasingly important. The challenge is to make them sound incorporated, rather than simply borrowed.

YB: Are there any pieces that come to mind where it works?

SDK: I don’t think it’s been yet done completely successfully by anybody, including myself. I think there are people who have come close. I have heard some pieces by Eric Ewazen that I think come close. Some pieces by Michael Torke come close. But in all honesty, none of us have really nailed this thing yet. I think we’re working on it. There’s still a lot of work to be done.

YB: What’s the main problem technically and theoretically?

SDK: If I could put it in compositional terms, it is much of what is valuable and aurally
a lot of fun in popular music is intellectually not terribly challenging. As I said, one of the great gifts of Western music and one of the legacies that we cannot let go of is its capacity to unite the emotional and aesthetically pleasing with the intellectual.

And one of the problems, for example, with adding a trap set to a piano trio is that typically in pop music - you set up a group and “you go for it.” When it starts, it’s really cool and you want to tap your foot to it, but you know exactly how time is going to be parsed. You know what’s coming for the duration of the song. And that, finally, is not enough - not once you’ve heard Beethoven symphonies where you’re really wondering what will happen next. So, how does one then use a trap set, or rhythmic patterns that are really a lot of fun and that people enjoy listening to? You don’t want to repeat the same four-bar pattern over, and over, and over, and over again. Right? You could make corollaries for all the other kinds of pop idioms and influences. They flourish in environments where, finally, the intellectual component is not that strong. The question is, “Can you take things away from those (environments), which still maintain some kind of integrity, but can be brought into a kind of compositional idiom which is still approachable?” For example, Shakespeare is really, really deep and well-crafted, and appealing, but not predictable.
8) Gradually the musical recording has taken on a greater influence than in the past. What new changes or opportunities due to technological progress (e.g., I-pod, Internet) will there be for the dissemination of new music? How will live concert presentations of new music be affected? As a newly made computer-generated composition is instantly ready for distribution via the Internet without the need for human performers and a concert hall, will composers turn more and more to the computer in twenty-first century composition?

SDK: I think composers already have turned in vastly larger numbers than ever before to computers, computer software, or synthesized sound…whatever you want to call it. This is simply because labor is very expensive in this country. And as joyous as it is to work with live music and acoustic instruments, it is also a very expensive proposition. So, just in very practical terms, using electronic sounds makes possible experimentation and writing new music in quantities and stylistic experiments that are much more difficult to do with live performers.

To some extent it’s already true that many “serious” concert performances are really ways of selling the CD and are really showcases for the recordings. It’s also true that the CD industry is in deep trouble because of the Internet. I don’t know if I understand the finances and business well enough to make a grand prediction, but I would guess in the long run CDs will become obsolete and most music will be coming through the Internet. I don’t know how the royalties will work. I suspect those will go by the wayside as well. It’s not quite clear how composers will make a living, but copyright is a relatively late invention when you look at the history of Western music.

That having been said, I don’t think live performances will ever go away any more than fine French restaurants disappeared after the advent of McDonald’s. Just because there is a vast amount of technology which is readily available to a vast segment
of the population, I don’t think concert performances, or acoustic instruments will disappear. Their preponderance will lessen if you compare it to the beginning or middle of the twentieth century. I also think, arguably, that the quality will rise to make a difference in the mass market.

YB: You don’t think composing concert music will fade away either?

SDK: I think a smaller percentage of, say, young people in their early twenties, are going to be turning to concert music rather than music that is more easily accessible and written via synthesizers and reproduced much more easily. On the other hand, you can argue that this is just fine, because the number of people who will turn to just writing concert music will be smaller, presumably more dedicated, and even more talented. I think things balance themselves out.

And, I think there should always be a connection to the marketplace at some level. You don’t want the arts to be market driven purely, but you have to be responsible at large. And the world at large is our audience. And I don’t think the audience will ever disappear for Beethoven string quartets - or contemporary music that’s on that level.
CHAPTER 4

INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL TORKE

Michael Torke was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1961. As a student at the Eastman School of Music, he studied piano with David Burge, and composition with Christopher Rouse and Joseph Schwantner. He has also done graduate study at Yale University with Jacob Druckman and Martin Bresnick. Since 1985, he has composed full-time and become one of America’s most acclaimed composers.

Date: Wednesday, September 15, 2004, 5:00 p.m.
Location: Blue Ribbon Bakery, Downing Street and Bedford Avenue

1) Schoenberg and Stravinsky were only two composers from the twentieth century who referred to musical progress in their writings. How do you think “progress” will be defined in the twenty-first century?

MT: Well, it’s a difficult question, because there’s a lot of assumptions going on. And maybe that’s part of what your paper is about - “How do we define progress?” Although when Stravinsky, and especially Schoenberg, were talking about “progress,” they certainly knew what they meant. So it must mean something.

We live in a time where that word is tricky. We may have already answered that. At the end of the last century…in the mid- to late 90s…throwing out notions of progress…even before that with the advent of postmodernism, which started in architecture and moved into art, and even into music where our relationship to history was a different one from what we’ve always come to think of what history is: that there is some sort of “A goes to B goes to C goes to D.” And that progression is called “progress.” And that comes with all kinds of baggage.
It’s weird how so many people - thinking musicians, audience members, and performers - just accepted that without question. For example, the classic thing is that the tonal material Mozart used was made more complex by Beethoven, and that then the early Romantics, going to the middle and late Romantics, kept increasing the complexity of the triad, going into greater and greater altered chords, until you got to Wagner (with Tristan as it’s always pointed out) and you almost lose the tone center. And then, Schoenberg jumps on that and says, “Well, we don’t need any tone center at all.” So that seems like it’s a logical thing.

But that begs the question, “What came before Mozart?” And what came before Mozart was the rococo. And before that it was the Baroque, which was far more complex than Mozart was. It’s so obvious and, yet, we never kind of challenge that.

So in other words, Mozart was a simplification period. And I’m sure there were thinking people of the time saying, “This is trash. It’s commercial junk that these composers are doing. It just sits around with an Alberti bass, and outline the chords of a triad, and calls that a melody? What’s that all about?” - which is what they say about Philip Glass. So, it’s very interesting to come full circle.

And we can also see in our music history, pointing to other periods - in the Renaissance (which I don’t know as well) where contrapuntal stuff reached a manneristic extreme that a composer like Monteverdi with the advent of opera made things homophonic. Everyone screamed, “Bloody mercy!” and “Anti-intellectualism!” and “How could you be so awful and crass, dumbing things down?” and on, and on, and on. So, we enjoyed a similar kind of period when composers went back to
tonal materials and rhythmic structures, which of course, dates all the way back to the 70s. So we’ve gone through thirty years of things getting more simple.

And it always seemed like when composers were doing this, they were making a stand, like David Del Tredici in *Final Alice*. His reputation grew because he had the audacity to write a Romantic symphony. Then when time passes where we’re thinking, “Well, everyone’s just writing tonal music anyway,” we then relook at David’s piece and we think, “Okay, well, it’s a piece. Now how we do judge it?” It kind of goes on hysterically, and we see in it a very different kind of dialectic.

Maybe I can answer your question also in another way. If you’re talking about “progress” . . . I’m assuming that we’re talking about “classical” music, or, “concert” music . . .

YB: I’m not going to define.

MT: I can say something else: I think the notion of “progress” goes hand-in-hand with what dominated the twentieth century - the math and science people, especially the science people, the physicists. When we think of one of the “big” figures of the twentieth century, we think of Einstein or we can think of any other Nobel Prize winner for science.

In science, you can talk about progress, because you take the advancements of what’s gone before and you create new theories, which are proved - and *actual* progress is made. And so I think because people were so enamored by that - that science had made such strides, and technology became so important, that they wanted to *apply* that model to art - where it doesn’t belong.
And so I would venture to say that there isn’t, and never has been progress. I would say it is a term that doesn’t apply. And when we do apply it, not only is it incorrect, but we run into all kinds of problems. And I think that if Schoenberg got off his notion of “progress” and didn’t adhere to this idea of the chromaticism going into the democracy of all notes, he wouldn’t have developed all of these stupid theories that, in my opinion, are the train wreck of music.

Certainly in American popular music there’s this notion of “progress,” but it’s funny: I think it’s a human need to think that there’s some sort of logic to what we do. So, someone is a fan of the Beatles, and they go, “Look at the early stuff and see how it got more and more complex into Sgt. Pepper.” Even then it’s sort of b-b-b-b-b. If we had Paul MacCartney sitting right here he would say, “What about the White Album?” They were going back to just kind of rock structures of simple tones. Maybe with George Martin putting on all of these layers of color it could be seen as more complex, but the notion of how a song works…there’s no such thing as progress.

When you talk about a “hook” in pop, what makes a “good hook?” Were hooks “less evolved” in 1920 then they are now? You could make a case they were more evolved, that Gershwin’s hooks are the most sophisticated of any of the writers. But it doesn’t stop us from making pop music. We don’t throw our hands up and say, “Oh! Were not making any progress! So what’s the use?” It seems to happen a lot in “concert” music.

What I think is that classical music, as we know it, may just die out altogether. And people have been saying this. But maybe that could be the best thing that
could happen to music: that all the major orchestras went bankrupt, and we just had recordings of the “main big guys,” and that we started some sort of new platform in which to express ourselves that became an opportunity to just not cash in on money and entertainment, but was a true artistic expression.

2) It could be said that twentieth-century visual art (e.g., Kandinsky, Duchamp) had a significant effect on contemporary composition worldwide. Will this continue in the twenty-first century? Will the boundaries between visual art and music continue to dissipate?

MT: Well, it certainly did seem like there was a relationship between the visual arts and music in the broadest, simplest terms. We think that there’s some parallel between what the French Impressionists were doing and what Debussy and Ravel were doing, and that there are certain parallels between Cubism and certain discontinuous types of music, or that George Antheil was influenced by the Futurists. And going further, certainly one could draw parallel with the internationalist style of architecture and the international style of “super serialism” that started after World War II for all the reasons that it did. And then one can even point to even more recent things. Certainly minimalism and the visual art have parallels.

I know composers - Todd Levin is one of them, who is no longer composing - who was directly putting Jeff Kunz in everything he did. And that was his point. He could do that better than anyone else.

But my feeling is that the visual arts are also in a huge slump. There was a time when the visual arts sort of captivated the thinking of the educated public. I came to New York in the 1980s, and just remember that all the “cool things” seemed to happen
happen “down in the galleries.” I always thought that composing music was a poor
cousin to that. And right now, when I talk to people (and maybe I’m talking to the
wrong people) there doesn’t seem to be anything resonating beyond the boundaries of the
insular art world, which sort of reminds me of what’s happening in contemporary music.
No one knows outside of what we’re doing what’s happening. I don’t think it’s just
speaking beyond itself. And so, if that is true, then the relationship between music and
art is probably less, and more tenuous.

3) Many areas of twentieth-century musical progress were foreseen in the later
nineteenth century (e.g., Wagner and chromaticism). In retrospect since about
1980, do you have any observations regarding musical trends that have since grown
and may continue to do so in the next decade?

MT: What are the big trends? Minimalism was before it (1980). There was talk of this
“New Romanticism,” which is meaningless. I think that there are composers using tonal
material and writing expressive music and that it is not seen as dialectic - making an
argument to something else, but you’re in fact just creating a piece of music for its own
sake, which is a very different impulse. Even in my own music, which is sometimes
talked about as being “post-minimalist”…whatever that means…

You know what? I don’t think there’s any “trend” going on. I just kind of think
we’ve lost it. I really do. I don’t see anything.
4) The appearance of non-European instruments has become more important to composers today (e.g., the use of the Chinese *pipa*, Indian *sitar*, African *kora*, and Australian *didjeridoo* in Glass’s *Orion*). How important is this type of progress to you?

MT: That just means we’re less ethnocentric, and maybe in the advent of technology we’re more sort of aware of what other’s cultures are doing. I have a friend who was born in Seoul, but she studied classical music here. So she knows all the Western instruments. So she puts them all together. Well, that isn’t any grand statement. It’s just that she knows those two areas and doesn’t see any reason not to use them. They speak to her and they speak to curious, open-minded concert artists. I think it’s sort of inevitable.

I don’t like when they exoticize all of this. There is this teacher at Eastman, Robert Morris. With his long, intellectual hair he would go on and on, and I was thinking, “If one of those Polynesian drummer guys were here they would say, “You’re talking like this is Einstein.” I never knew how sophisticated his analysis was, because we had nothing to compare it to. And he sort of hid, I felt, behind that lack of knowledge - that by being exotic you were being profound. I always didn’t like that. I think it’s great that different composers are coming from different areas and different things are being used, but I think it is inevitable.

YB: …because people are traveling, and there’s more communication and mass media….

MT: We’re a global economy. We’re a global reality. We sort of have to be. If we all are to get along, we have to be tolerant of the differences and incorporate them.
It’s almost like a mandate that we have to be or, you know…maybe we will become more ethnocentric? May World War III will be because we will “turn in?” Who knows? Certainly terrorism - part of that is a feeling that a culture is being infiltrated by an evil outside force and they have to right that wrong. If terrorism is on the rise, then how can my theory be true? I don’t know. I still think in fifty years China’s going to be running the world.

YB: Well, that was pretty interesting. We moved quite a bit in that question.

5) As the twentieth century has had many artists proposing new ideas via manifestos (e.g., Marinetti’s Futurist manifesto) and literature (e.g., Kandinsky’s Concerning the Spiritual in Art, Schoenberg’s Harmonielehre), are there any literary, political, philosophical, or spiritual sources in recent times that have had a significant influence on your work?

MT: I don’t think so. No. I don’t know if that kind of rhetoric is going on (manifestos)...I might be influenced by different things...but the influences aren’t coming from rhetorical stances.

6) As the many of the innovations and “progressive” currents in the past century resulted in many new subgenres of music (e.g., serialism, minimalism), what are the possible challenges that will result in this century from the continuing diversification of compositional approaches found in our “serious” music community? What could be the benefits?

MT: That’s an excellent question. The pluralism gives us all greater freedom, but it also doesn’t offer any direction for anyone. And that is the plus and the minus. And people will say, “We’re pluralistic because we don’t have any great leaders,” and, “If we had a Stravinsky among us everyone would follow.” I don’t think so. To use an analogy, let’s
talk about pop music.

In the 50s, 60s, and especially into 70s, there were only six or seven major pop record companies. So the A&R people would select who they thought, and they would really promote these people. And they became the pop music industry. Airplay...people bought their albums. That was our rock n’ roll. That was our pop music.

And everyone just thought, “Well, that’s our culture.” But, in fact, it was very arbitrary, because of the way the power was funneled through these channels of distribution. Then when you had the digital revolution, it broke down. And so everyone, and anyone, has equal access of distribution. What happens? There’s a billion different subgenres of pop music, which we all know.

There’s a documentary on Metallica that I saw. It opens up with, “Metallica has sold ninety million albums or units.” Jesus, put that in perspective! We’re talking about Frank Sinatra or the Beatles! We’re talking about four guys and t-shirts and short hair (the current Metallica). And although the metal movement had its influence, Frank Sinatra was a cultural icon. The Beatles were a cultural icon. Metallica made no difference whatsoever to anyone.

I know I could get some arguments, but it isn’t the same thing. Why? Because they (Metallica) have to compete with a hundred different styles! They can sit over here in the metal world and do really well, and not have, in my opinion, any cultural impact whatsoever. And that’s the “plus and minus of pluralism,” or whatever you want to call this.

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“Diversity?” I don’t know what that means. I find it sort of puzzling and paradoxical to the point when I think about my own work. I sometimes think, “Well, maybe I’ll just have to create a catalogue of stuff that earn enough royalties so that I can continue composing, because that’s what I love to do, and that’s all there is to it. And loftier ideas of “influencing a generation,” or, “making a difference in art”…maybe it’s just not going to happen.

7) In the twentieth century, American popular music and culture began to be incorporated into serious composition (e.g., the use of the slap bass in Torke’s Adjustable Wrench). Will this trend continue and how will it manifest itself in the twenty-first century? How important is this type of synergy in musical progress?

MT: I don’t know. The usual arguments that are always made is that in music history pop music always influenced the classical. In the Baroque this happens. Certainly in the Renaissance they always took the drinking songs of the day. It’s something that has a long tradition. It’s no revolutionary idea.

What compelled me to think that way was when I was in school. I would listen to a difficult Boulez piece. I would enjoy it, but it felt like the music was an arms distance away in terms of how it spoke to me emotionally. Or, it spoke to me emotionally, but I had to use my brain for that “two feet between my head and the end of my arm.” Then, I would put on Tchaikovsky and it came within “three inches of my face.” And then I thought, “Well, that’s interesting.” Then, I would put on Michael Jackson and it was “right in my face.” And I thought to myself, “‘In-your-face impact’—why is that not important? Why don’t we try to quantify that? No one talks about that in music school. Why shouldn’t that be a goal?” And that was one of the ways I thought
about it. And I continue to think about it that way.

YB: Is that an issue of, perhaps, educational philosophy?

MT: What can you teach? You can teach that which can be quantified or mathematized. And that’s why certain kinds of twentieth century music lend themselves to the academy-because they’ve turned it into a science. What makes something “groove?” What makes something “in your face?” Those things are almost poetic. They’re intuitive. They can’t be taught. And so they aren’t except maybe in some jazz departments where they sit around talking about it.

What do I conclude? I don’t conclude that schools are at fault. I think that maybe students are at fault, because they’re thinking they can learn what they think they can learn. In other words, music composition can’t be taught. But everyone should go to music school, because it’s a great opportunity to be around other talented people. And you can sit around and kind of pick things up because you’re in the right environment.

I’m writing a ballet score right now for the National Ballet of Canada up in Toronto. I’ve chosen to rewrite the whole score, which was finished last summer. One thing that happened between that rewrite was that I tried my hand at writing a Broadway musical, which for many and complicated reasons, failed miserably to even get off the ground.

But what I had, now that this piece self-destructed in midair, were all these melodies. I had all these themes. And I thought, “What really gives music richness is to have themes.” Even in a dance piece where you think dance is all rhythm, but in fact, when you think of Tchaikovsky ballets, they’re filled with melody too. And so I used
some of that material. So what’s really weird is that I was influenced by a popular source that’s considered here old-fashioned. So I’m not being “progressive” at all! I’m being “retro!” The “heyday” of musical comedy was in the 30s, 40s, and 50s! I’m really an old f- - -! “Looking back on that s - - -? That’s not progress, man!”

8) Gradually the musical recording has taken on a greater influence than in the past. What new changes or opportunities due to technological progress (e.g., I-pod, Internet) will there be for the dissemination of new music? How will live concert presentations of new music be affected? As a newly made computer-generated composition is instantly ready for distribution via the Internet without the need for human performers and a concert hall, will composers turn more and more to the computer in twenty-first century composition?

MT: I do have an opinion. Here’s my theory. With the digital revolution, where music digitized and can be reproduced easily, and files can be shared on the Internet, what happens is that the value of copyright goes down. Copyright is a mini-monopoly such that the writer is protected. So, when it is copied, turned into sheet music, recording, or whatever, he can be compensated. If digital things break this down so that you can’t harness that monopoly, then the value of copyright goes down, and the price of music gets to “zero.” So then, what will be the incentive for composers to write music, if they can’t make any money to write music, if they can’t make any money off of it (to put it in the crassest terms)? There’s one answer: public appearance.

So, live music in fifty years will be the coolest and most important thing, because that can’t be digitized. Sure you can record it, but then it’s a copy of something. But to be there - when it happens! Consequently, theater is going to become really important as well when we have the ability to download movies. We want a live actor on stage.
We want to see a musician actually putting spit into his flute.

So then composers will be performers, and they will be sort of icons, the way maybe Liszt was. And the bigger personalities will make it. Recordings will be free. They’ll just be given out at the concert...“To be there!”

YB: So, the ironic future may be that due to technological progress, the greatest days of live performance may be ahead?

MT: Right. Absolutely. Because if you lived in 1815 Vienna, and you wanted to hear music, you went off to the concert. People were so moved by them. That’s how composers got to be so famous. Now you go to a concert and it’s like, “Well, I can hear that at home.” Nothing makes any difference anymore. There isn’t any impact by it. Everything is so saturated. So if the technology drives all of that away, we’ll go back to 1815 Vienna. That’s “progress.” Isn’t that interesting?
CHAPTER 5

INTERVIEW WITH JULIA WOLFE

Julia Wolfe was born in Philadelphia in 1958. She has studied at Princeton University and also at Yale University where she received a MM degree studying with Martin Bresnick. She is known for her award-winning career and musical style which draws from an eclectic variety of influences. As well, she co-founded New York’s Bang On A Can Festival in 1987.

Date: Tuesday, September 14, 2004, 9:15 p.m.
Location: Wolfe and Gordon Residence, 20 Desbrosses Street

1) Schoenberg and Stravinsky were only two composers from the twentieth century who referred to musical progress in their writings. How do you think “progress” will be defined in the twenty-first century?

JW: It’s a big question and this century is just starting. Maybe we’ll know better in fifty years. Initially one of the strong features of our time (this year, and the past ten years or so) is certainly a mixing of language. You’ve seen a little bit of that in the past, but I think it’s on a whole new level right now. By mixing of language, I mean mixing different kinds of musical traditions, and that being a very natural phenomenon as opposed to something that I’d say is more self-conscious, like with Debussy, who very beautifully incorporated aesthetic features from other musics. It’s a little less of a conscious inclusion today.

And I think now it’s just a natural part of the language, as people are exposed to musics of other cultures, and are exposed to musical ideas from other traditions. It’s so accessible now because of communication, and because of the crossing over of people from one land to another. You would have to live in a closet to be a purely “Western
European” musician. The first thing that comes to mind of “what’s going on in the music world today” is that feature.

YB: The incorporation of the larger world just doesn’t take as much effort today as it may have been a very conscious effort before…

JW: I don’t know if it’s even avoidable. It just may be who we are. Certainly living in New York City and living in an urban center - it’s what you wake up hearing, what you walk down the street hearing. I also personally don’t think in a hierarchy in terms of music. There’s plenty of banal, idiotic music out there. But, there has been in classical music too. The categories for me are meaning less and less. I think there’s a much more sophisticated understanding of what makes music interesting now.

YB: This realization is progressive perhaps…

JW: I think of it as progressive, yes. Some people think of it as the “deterioration of Western music.” I think it’s progressive, because I think the more you know, and the more you’re exposed to, the richer your world is. So if you have an understanding, or even are exposed to something like gamelan music, a very sophisticated musical system, or the very interesting complicated rhythms of African drumming - even if you haven’t studied it - if you have been exposed to the kind of polyphony and the kinds of rhythms and cross rhythms, you’re just a different kind of musician. That’s something I find very exciting about the time were in - that you’re infused with a lot of history of different sources.
2) It could be said that twentieth-century visual art (e.g., Kandinsky, Duchamp) had a significant effect on contemporary composition worldwide. Will this continue in the twenty-first century? Will the boundaries between visual art and music continue to dissipate?

JW: I hope it does. I think it’s amazing to have communication with other artists of other disciplines in the visual arts, as well as performing arts, such as dance and theater, particularly with the visual. There has been a long history between those two arts. It has kind of fizzled off a little while, but I think, and hope, it’s coming back. I know a lot of visual artists. Part of it is because I have friends who are married to visual artists. It’s not as if I just happened to cross them or have gone out to see tons of openings. So I have some personal connections. But it has had tremendous meaning for me, partly because it’s such a different art form that is so different. Certainly we saw that with John Cage and Merce Cunningham, and Jasper Johns’ generation, which is obviously older than I am. But even today there are interesting collaborations happening, and a lot of artists are crossing into both fields.

For me the visual arts are really foreign territory. I’m really not a visual artist, but a lot of people can actually work with both mediums, and are creating visual-skill and sonic components. There’s a whole area of installation, sound-installation, that is both visual and sonic. Even in the pop world you can’t have a song without a video. For the most part, it’s a great dialogue to have, and regardless if there are collaborations or not, I still try to stay connected. I went to an opening tonight. And this summer where I was in Massachusetts, we ran a summer music institute that’s housed in an art museum. So actually, for us personally, that’s our most direct connection. Because with Bang On A Can, that I organize with two other composers, we have a summer institute
that’s housed at MassMOCA, which is a contemporary art museum.

YB: I’ve seen it.

JW: Oh, you have seen it?

YB: Yes, with all the students, musicians, and young composers…

JW: …so in a certain way we are connecting it along in that context for the next generation…thinking about how the visual artists are thinking.

3) Many areas of twentieth-century musical progress were foreseen in the later nineteenth century (e.g., Wagner and chromaticism). In retrospect since about 1980, do you have any observations regarding musical trends that have since grown and may continue to do so in the next decade?

JW: I was just getting started as a composer in 1980. It was my last year of college. I first started thinking about composition in 1976. So, I was very young. The most influential pieces for me at the time were particular pieces by Steve Reich. *Tehillim*…that piece completely changed my thought about music…so pure and direct and powerful at the time. So I was definitely influenced by minimalism, which you could basically say started somewhere in the late 60s and came into full force really at around 1980. And that was much more pure, or, severe music - strict in its form and processes that were very clear. It was very powerful in how direct it was, in rhythmic drive, and clarity. It was very exciting at the time. Whenever I would wonder, “Why am I doing this?” I would just put on that particular piece and it would be, “Oh, right. This is why I’m doing it, because I love music.”

I think I first heard his music in dance class. We were warming up and stretching. They (the dancers) were the first people that really uncovered that music. I
think a lot of choreographers were beginning to dance to it, listen to it. I felt, “What is that music? It’s fantastic.” I would say it was dramatic when that music began. I think there’s a certain elemental power to that music that kicked off a different mode of writing. It clearly established itself as a real force (at least for me) and that was a real break from the education that I had before. Since then, my generation and the younger generation have gone different directions, but there’s definitely an underlying response to that music.

4) The appearance of non-European instruments has become more important to composers today (e.g., the use of the Chinese pipa, Indian sitar, African kora, and Australian didjeridoo in Glass’s Orion). How important is this type of progress to you?

JW: Pretty important. Regardless, if I’ve actually written for the instrument or thought about writing for the instruments, I think just hearing those instruments, the intonation, the manner of playing, the bending of notes, whatever…the particular character of the instrument has influence on how you even write for standard Western instruments.

YB: To paraphrase…regardless if you’re writing for a specific world instrument or not, you might, for example, choose an inflection on the clarinet that you heard on a pipa or…

JW: I was just thinking particularly with something like the shakahachi, which is a Japanese in-blown flute. It has such a different attack on the note. I can think of a few pieces I wrote that with no question about it came from the shakahachi being in our world, or us being in its world. I also have written for Harry Partch instruments. But they’re from another zone, not another country.
5) As the twentieth century has had many artists proposing new ideas via manifestos (e.g., Marinetti’s *Futurist manifesto*) and literature (e.g., Kandinsky’s *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Schoenberg’s *Harmonielehre*), are there any literary, political, philosophical, or spiritual sources in recent times that have had a significant influence on your work?

JW: That’s a really hard question. Everything I read has an influence on me. In terms of reading material?

YB: You can be specific or general. It can be just *ideas* from what has been written…

JW: Okay. I think Cage’s writings have definitely affected me, although he had a particular way of approaching music that was unique to him. Things started to really change when he started thinking about bebop music. Any of his writings have certainly changed my thinking. There’s definitely religious text that has also affected me in some way and is a part of my thinking. I can’t make a direct…

YB: The influence doesn’t have to hit you in the face…

JW: Politically…I did work with a theater artist Anna Smith, who is a very intelligent playwright about issues of race and things like that. Just watching how she works with text, and thinks about how to interpret a political situation theatrically - I think that has had an influence on how I think also.

6) As the many of the innovations and “progressive” currents in the past century resulted in many new subgenres of music (e.g., *serialism*, *minimalism*), what are the possible challenges that will result in this century from the continuing diversification of compositional approaches found in our “serious” music community? What could be the benefits?

JW: I think one thing that will be interesting to watch is how technology interfaces with creativity. It’s an amazing time technologically as well. So much is possible. Very
interesting things are going on with people working with sound music…making new music out of old music…cutting it up and doing all kinds of stuff to it…you hear it in Björk in the background of her music and independent rock bands, as well as composers. I have sympathy for people making music out of old scraps working in the same field as me, taking things from other things and reusing them, just the whole way of making music in sequencers. In some instances, they are taking what they created for the computer and then realizing it for live instruments, which I think is an interesting process. Mostly everything I write is for live instruments. So I have a particular soft spot for live performance. For me, it would be a loss if somehow that was lost. But, I don’t think it will, because most people feel that kind of visceral relationship to a live performance. I don’t really think there’s any danger of that going.

Will there be a virtual orchestra? Will everything be “computer?” I think the computer is just a tool in the same way a word processor is for writers. I don’t think any writer is sorry that they don’t have a good word program on their computer and need to go back to the typewriter. There are some challenges in staying close to the richness of live performance, not protecting it, but paying attention to it…foundation support…financial….and the people who are interested in giving a time and a space for that.

I think the diversity is great in music. I don’t think the diversity means you have lots more “better” music. You have the same problems before that you have now. In the past, there were generally kind of “mentor” figures, and their students would write music just like them. Some of those pieces would be interesting. Some wouldn’t be interesting at all. It was a little bit more interesting in a certain way, because it was dependent upon
these particular “leader” figures. Maybe it’s still like that in Europe to a certain extent. Certainly in America it’s broken way away from that. America has always had a certain “rugged-independent-individualist” presence.

You’re going to get some interesting experiments, and some not so interesting experiments. Diversity doesn’t necessarily mean it’s going to be better. It’s just less limiting, gives people more options of finding their modes of expression, and the freedom to explore things. For me it’s liberating.

7) In the twentieth century, American popular music and culture began to be incorporated into serious composition (e.g., the use of the slap bass in Torke’s *Adjustable Wrench*). Will this trend continue and how will it manifest itself in the twenty-first century? How important is this type of synergy in musical progress?

JW: I don’t know if it will continue. There definitely has been a shift in terms of thinking about music in a hierarchy - with Western Classical music at the highest (although I don’t know anybody that doesn’t believe the Beatles aren’t at the top of this list). There’s just different kinds of approaches to music and different goals. And so for me, I don’t have a hierarchy of music. If you accomplish *that goal*, well, it’s good music.

Part of it, I think is because I was not a child who was raised purely on classical music. I would hear classical music at home. My parents are big music lovers so I was exposed, but it wasn’t like, “This is my music.” There was much more rock n’ roll or folk music, and then I really found my way on my own to get interested in Beethoven, even though I had heard it before at home. *So for me*, it’s more that I’m incorporating *classical music into my folk music*. 53
A lot of people grew up this way. It is more unusual today (maybe not in the past) to be raised on the Western classical tradition, partly because you really have to make the effort….have your family go the concert series…buy the records. It is not in the culture of the general public. I think it is more so in Europe - that this would be more common in certain cities (not even everywhere in Europe).

YB: With your particular story in mind, do you think that it’s possible at some point that “serious” composition will exist with the incorporation of contemporary popular culture in a seamless fashion, without the need to take note of the different categories?

JW: Interesting. For me there is still a difference between music whose aim is maybe more towards entertainment and is generally more commercial oriented and is connected to a commercial aspect. When I say “commercial” I mean it is partly connected to sales and selling units, which the majority of companies are completely oriented towards - in terms of pop music, and classical music - they’re steering their artists towards crossover recordings.

So for me, the difference is partly between commercial and non-commercial. Basically what I feel that I write is non-commercial. That doesn’t mean I’m trying to write non-commercial music, it means that my impulse doesn’t come from a commercial basis. For example, I have a piece I wrote called, “Lick,” for the Bang On A Can All-Stars. It’s got a lot of Motown influence in it…James Brown. I love James Brown and I love his sense of rhythm. It’s kind of a tribute in my mind. I went to play some of my music at Juilliard a couple of years ago. Some of the students responded to it and said, “Oh yeah, I really liked the rhythms.” One student said, “Why do you just want to
rewrite James Brown?” - which I thought was amazing, because it is really nothing like James Brown.

YB: That person must not have heard a lot of James Brown’s music…

JW: …probably had never heard it. There were teachers in the room - Milton Babbitt and Samuel Adler. They didn’t seem unsettled by it, but I think there was a political motivation. But I thought, “you know, it’s funny,” because the language is connected to that kind of popular music. But, I’m not writing a song. I’m writing something that is about a different kind of experience. It’s less about the language and what you incorporate, and more about the form and structure in a way.

We started our own record label because we didn’t have to want to think in units. We want to sell records and we put a lot of energy into having an independent label. But even still, it’s a much different orientation than a large commercial entity.

8) Gradually the musical recording has taken on a greater influence than in the past. What new changes or opportunities due to technological progress (e.g., I-pod, Internet) will there be for the dissemination of new music? How will live concert presentations of new music be affected? As a newly made computer-generated composition is instantly ready for distribution via the Internet without the need for human performers and a concert hall, will composers turn more and more to the computer in twenty-first century composition?

JW: A large number of composers already have computers as a tool. That’s a much different thing than as a performer. I think people do very interesting things with the computer as a performer, but as I was saying earlier, I don’t think anything will ever replace live performances. There is something so special about it. Television didn’t replace going to the movies. You could have movies in your home and people still go
out to the movies for the experience of seeing the large screen, or going out with lots of people. There’s still Broadway and avant-garde theater. A huge amount of people still go to rock concerts. So, I don’t think we’re in danger from what I can tell.

For us, recording is fantastic. It’s not really a substitute for live performance, but it’s a way to reach people in very far away places. We got an e-mail from a radio station in Lebanon for certain recordings on our label, Canteloupe Records. That’s the power of the CD and having access to music that they wouldn’t normally get where they live. We find people listening to our music in Uzbekistan and Norway just because they picked the CD up. It’s an incredible way of reaching beyond the community that you know. And hopefully then what follows is that the “band” gets to go.

YB: I want to get more specific regarding composition. Do you think more people will compose computer music, especially when it immediately can be downloaded without the “laborious” process of rehearsals, performances, and recording?

JW: I’m not a super “tekky.” I don’t know everything that’s going on, but I still don’t believe you can still make the same music on a computer. You can get very sophisticated, and I’ve heard some amazing MIDI renditions - music that is made with live samples.

I write music on the computer. I mean, here I’ve got a piano and a computer. I work things out on the piano, and then I’m pretty much on the computer. I’ve got good sampled sounds, but there’s no way that it sounds like a performance. Not at all. Now some people are incredible technicians, and they could get it to sort of sound like a live performance, and then it might be interesting. But it’s a different type of music.
It’s computer music.

People want live performers. Some people want computerized music and sonic things. That’s great. And tape music - that’s interesting. But when you look at Nonesuch, and the Buena Vista Social Club - you are not going to be able to make that on a computer. That’s part of a culture, a sound, and energy. You just can’t replicate that. I don’t think one can replace the other.

I listen to people’s websites. I haven’t downloaded. I’m from the generation that doesn’t automatically go to the computer. I’m not necessarily against it. I think it’s great - that music is accessible and everybody’s trading music.

I guess the only politics I have about it is that I think artists need to be able to eat. So if it’s a question of people making interesting music, and then not getting paid and supported - that’s an issue. There is something to making music, and there is an art, and it should be respected in some way. I don’t really care how it’s supported. I don’t have all the answers. But, I think it’s fantastic: everyone’s listening, and wants to listen, and wants the music, and wants to send their friend the music.
CHAPTER 6

INTERVIEW WITH RICHARD DANIELOUIR

Richard Danielpour was born in New York City in 1956. At the New England Conservatory and Juilliard School he studied composition with Vincent Persichetti and Peter Mennin. As well, he has studied piano with Lorin Hollander, Veronica Jochum, and Gabriel Chodos. Since the late 1980s, he has become one of the most known and recorded composers of his generation. He also currently serves on the faculties of the Manhattan School of Music and Curtis Institute.

Date: Thursday, September 16, 2004, 1:00 p.m.
Location: Time Café, West 85th Street, Manhattan

1) Schoenberg and Stravinsky were only two composers from the twentieth century who referred to musical progress in their writings. How do you think “progress” will be defined in the twenty-first century?

RD: I think that progress in any way, shape, or form can only be determined by the power of the individual personalities who tend to write the most irresistible music. There are a lot of people who have spouted theories that we never really bother reading, because their music is boring, and ugly. But the music that tends to be interesting, and attractive, sometimes comes with the baggage of people who have written about it. From where I stand, if you look at Verdi, or you look at some of Puccini, you see at we would call verismo elements, but verismo came after the fact.

In the 1970s, Steve Reich was making his music the way he was making it, as was John Adams (Harmonium I think was in 1971), and yet the term, “minimalism,” comes afterward. These are not composers who belong to a “minimalist school.” They happen to be very powerful personalities who were responded to in such a way that people needed to find some compartment that so they would not be, God forbid,
overwhelmed by it, or maybe even just enjoying the experience of it. So, basically all that I’m saying is a roundabout way of saying that progress comes from the power of the *individual personality*. It does not come from a generalized attitude that people fit into. That’s a *fallacy*. Basically the tendencies of the times get dictated by the most powerful music and musical forces.

Sometimes you get a group of them, as you did in the middle of the nineteenth century in Paris. Sometimes, there is one or two - the way it was for instance in France at the very beginning of the twentieth century with Debussy and later Ravel. I also have a tendency to feel that because of the way communication is now, and the way music has become almost internationalized, that this “progress” which you speak of, and the power of these individual personalities, have a way of cross-pollinating with one another that they didn’t in the past, which makes the issue a lot more interesting and complex.

2) *It could be said that twentieth-century visual art (e.g., Kandinsky, Duchamp) had a significant effect on contemporary composition worldwide.* Will this continue in the twenty-first century? Will the boundaries between visual art and music continue to dissipate?

RD: I also think this a fallacy. I don’t believe that composers are really influenced by visual art. I think that visual artists and composers are both influenced by a third thing, which may have to with an inner compulsion to traverse orders not up to that time traversed. I think that what Kandinsky was trying to do was not all that different from what Stravinsky and Prokofiev were trying to do. But to say one was *influenced* by the other is a little bit over the top. To maybe say similar tendencies is far more accurate. And in noticing that, it would be as if one family member was saying to another,
“Yes, you’re on the right track...keep going,” or “Yes, this makes sense.” It becomes an affirmation rather than influence.

But, I think basically that composers, generally speaking (unless they’re very young composers who haven’t yet created their own wellspring of ideas), mature composers, tend generally not to be influenced by visual art. They tend to be attracted to it. They tend to be informed by it. And they almost might get a sense of approval for what they’re doing by the visual they see that in some way has common elements. But I don’t believe composers are ever really influenced by painters. (And I can tell you this for sure because my mother is a sculptor.)

YB: Let’s go back to that question a little bit. Certainly, there may be exaggerations that we commonly hear on who may be influenced by visual artists, but some people will say that John Cage took something from Duchamp, and some people will say that the mobiles of Alex Calder influenced...

RD: I still don’t think that these are influences. Stravinsky was a strong enough individual to have done what he wanted to do regardless of whether he saw mobiles or not, and I think Cage was a strong enough person that if he didn’t like what was rattling around inside him from the beginning, Duchamp wouldn’t have made any sense to him. These are only approbations. They are not influences. You should be very careful as a musicologist when you start talking about influence and how you use that word, because it’s a potent, powerful word that’s often over the past three hundred years misinterpreted. That’s why I’m making the distinction.
3) Many areas of twentieth-century musical progress were foreseen in the later nineteenth century (e.g., Wagner and chromaticism). In retrospect since about 1980, do you have any observations regarding musical trends that have since grown and may continue to do so in the next decade?

RD: Well, I think one thing that has happened a lot in America - you see I can only really speak as an American, even though I spent a great deal of time in Europe in the last twenty years. I never really lived in Europe for longer than a six-month period at one time. So, I’m not qualified to talk about it there. I can tell you what I notice over there as opposed to here, but I feel more qualified to speak of the tendencies that are going on here in this country.

One of them is that we seem to have recovered, collectively speaking, to some extent our sense of internal memory in music. And by that I mean that there was a period after 1945 in which a lot of music that was written, certainly not the best of it, but a lot of it that was written was composed without any self-referential sense of itself, meaning that if an idea was stated you would never hear the idea again in any way that was recognizable. It was as if music had a kind of shock treatment for many years.

I feel that it started to change in the 80s, and music started to gather and regather a sense of its own internal sense of memory. And it really doesn’t have to do with repetition so much as it has to do with a piece remembering itself. That’s one of the tendencies I’ve noticed that’s very strong and marked irregardless of style. You know, I think you have to be very careful when you’re asking about general tendencies, because you may find this one tendency to be found in one style of writing, and not in another.
But this is something that has pervaded all styles. Even composers who see themselves as serialists have recovered some of the memory that they seemingly lost after World War II. It’s incredible, but healing does happen, and people do somehow realize that it’s okay for music to remember itself. It is not considered a weakness at all. It’s actually considered in some cases a strength, and it might actually create a comprehensible structure for the piece if you know what you’re doing. To me the relationship between memory and structure is very powerful.

YB: You’re the first composer to have mentioned that specific aspect. In *Brahms the Progressive*, Schoenberg talks about the repetition of ideas and it seems...even on a smaller scale...less than “championed.”

RD: I want to say something about Schoenberg. Schoenberg is interesting, because he is probably the “most-talked-about-least-performed composer in the twentieth century.” I find that very interesting: that in a way the whole conundrum around him is sometimes more fascinating than the music itself. Normally when there is a lot of talk about a composer, it is usually because the music, itself, is performed a lot.

I also find very interesting how “down” Schoenberg was about *Wozzeck*, and how he thought it would lead Berg in the wrong direction, in how it was not a strong work, an inferior attempt. And, yet, it may be the one work of the Second Viennese period that has actually entered the repertoire.

*Pierrot Lunaire* is a great, wonderful piece. And all the music from that period in the teens, even the very early 20s, is admirable at the very least. But you don’t see *Pierrot* done very often. And I love that piece, but it’s not done very often and
that’s interesting to me - that this is somebody who is talked about incessantly, and the music is less and less performed. It’s been over fifty years since his death. I don’t think this has to do with the fact that people need to be educated. Charles Wuorinen talks all the time about how important it is for people to be educated about his music and then they will understand it. Maybe it’s just possible that sometimes there are certain things that are not worth being educated about. And I really think you need to look at that objectively. Why the hell am I bashing my head against the wall to understand this music when it’s not all that interesting in the final analysis?

Some of that music that he wrote after he painted himself into a corner is dreadfully boring to me. And the stuff that he was writing in short movements, what we call the “atonal” period, is fascinating. I’m talking about the difference between Pierrot Lunaire and the Woodwind Quintet. The Woodwind Quintet is fine for about sixteen seconds for me, and then I’m just completely bored out of my mind. But I’m never bored listening to Pierrot Lunaire, even a student performance.

For me the issue with Schoenberg is that he had been abused in public for so many years when he was writing wonderful works, that I think it became more important for him to be right than to be necessarily real. And being right depended upon on him having a system that could insure that nobody could prove him wrong about what he was doing. But it’s very interesting that a lot of you guys who come from school talk about Schoenberg incessantly when, in fact, to a professional composer, and to somebody who is writing music full time, that music figures very peripherally for a lot of us. Berg, on the other hand, figures much more intensively.
4) The appearance of non-European instruments has become more important to composers today (e.g., the use of the Chinese *pipa*, Indian *sitar*, African *kora*, and Australian *didgeridoo* in Glass’s *Orion*). How important is this type of progress to you?

RD: I actually used a few Persian instruments in a piece I wrote for the New York Philharmonic and Yo-Yo Ma that became my second cello concerto, entitled, *Through the Ancient Valley*. I used the ancestor of cello, the *kamancheh*, which is an instrument played with a bow tuned to the same tuning as the violin. It sounds more like a viola, but it looks more like a lute with an extended long neck. It’s played on one’s knees and with a bow held like the way German double bass players hold their bow. This was for me very interesting because it was an examination of my cultural ancestry.

But I think these instruments will have relevance to the composer obviously when they’re used in a way that speaks of a very deep identification with what these instruments represent. In the case of what Bright (Sheng) is doing it’s very clear. When they’re used as a kind of way to be hip and kitsch, it is immediately noticeable and it actually sort of smacks of a kind of inauthenticity. Fortunately the composers you mentioned come from a place of deep belief….what Philip Glass does with Tibetan instruments for instance.

YB: He studied them for many years.

RD: Yes. He spent a lot of time there. So, you see that there’s a real identification.
5) As the twentieth century has had many artists proposing new ideas via manifestos (e.g., Marinetti’s *Futurist manifesto* and literature (e.g., Kandinsky’s *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Schoenberg’s *Harmonielehre*), are there any literary, political, philosophical, or spiritual sources in recent times that have had a significant influence on your work?

RD: You know, I’m allergic to manifestos, because just on the other side of them is fascism.

YB: You’re probably referring to the Marinetti a little bit…

RD: …well, in general. I’m sort of skiddish about them, because when somebody uses a manifesto it usually smacks of a kind of fanaticism that can lead socially or politically to a kind of fascism. I believe that artists need to believe in the notion that anything is possible in order to do their best work. And I believe that at the moment one has pigeonholed one’s self into a school or way of thought, you’re basically shackling the human spirit. Has there been anything that has affected me?

I think artists for the most part have realized that manifestos about their art are kind of stupid. They’re a waste of time for everybody, but the people who write about them. However, one thing that has happened, which is very interesting, is that artists have seemed to get more and more involved politically, and have written more and more about political currents of the time. And their take on things is very valuable.

YB: Do you want to cite any examples?

RD: Well, you know, we’re living in an age where if you say something negative about the President of the United States, George W. Bush, you could be called in by the F.B.I., because of the fine print of the Patriot Act. God, I’m waiting for them to call me in one day. On the other hand, I’ve noticed for instance that my collaborator, Toni Morrison,
has from time to time written some very interesting articles in *The New Yorker* about the Clinton presidency and the way his impeachment polarized the country, or the way the Republican Right was making an attempt to polarize the country by becoming so dogged in the pursuit of trying to get him out of the office for the period of eight years. This is interesting to me, because in a way, many artists have this wonderful ability of being outside the political spectrum - to shine a light on the relationship between power and money. We’re like a neutral country almost. We haven’t really bought into either by being artists. We’re in a position, perhaps, much in the same way that the court jester in the king’s court is - able to call the King an “idiot” (which he often was). We’re able to see things with a certain perspective that, perhaps, other members of the King’s court cannot.

6) As the many of the innovations and “progressive” currents in the past century resulted in many new subgenres of music (e.g., *serialism*, *minimalism*), what are the possible challenges that will result in this century from the continuing diversification of compositional approaches found in our “serious” music community? What could be the benefits?

RD: The great challenge is, as it has always been (it has never really changed…maybe it has become a little tougher now) is for a composer to be himself. “To thine own self be true” carries a hell of a lot of weight in the twenty-first century. On the other hand, there are a lot more delicacies at the store to peruse, to try, and enjoy. I think sometimes when I say to my own students, “You’ll find your face by following what you love,” it’s good for a composer in a way to see so many different possibilities when they’re eighteen- or twenty-years old, because in a sense, he’s making choices from the very beginning of
what he’d like to hear more of in his own head - - and less of.

Those choices come first off by what he hears outside of himself. It’s not a bad thing, but I think the real challenge has really never changed and that is to remain faithful to one’s own inner groaning, to one’s inner desire to write music, to write what one loves, to write what one identifies with - not with respect but from love, not from trying to be impressive, but from the care and deep commitment and deep identification you have with the sounds you make, and not so much from trying to do the right thing and get ahead and get the next Guggenheim, but to basically do what feels true. That’s the challenge.

YB: Some young composer who reads this in the future will be glad you said that. I’m sure.

RD: This is not so much a challenge for a mature composer, because they’re going to do what they’re going to do anyway. I’m really speaking to young people, who have yet to make up their minds about which way they are going, or are in the process of changing their direction.

7) In the twentieth century, American popular music and culture began to be incorporated into serious composition (e.g., the of the slap bass in Torke’s *Adjustable Wrench*). Will this trend continue and how will it manifest itself in the twenty-first century? How important is this type of synergy in musical progress?

RD: Again, I don’t know if I can use that word in the context of any of these conversations. I don’t believe there is a “collective musical progress.” However, I do believe that there is a personal musical progress within each composer’s work over a period of years.
These things come and go. Jazz became a very big deal to composers right after World War II. Elliott Carter was writing pieces that come as a result of going downtown to the Village and listening to jazz musicians and what they were doing.

You know, we’re all garbage collectors basically - composers. The thing is that some of what we collect happens to be really good stuff. Some of it happens to be not all that great and we turn it into something better. Usually that’s what has to happen if the theft is to come to any benefit. We’re just collectors. All of us. Whether it’s a face, or whether it’s a composer in the 40s going to the Village Vanguard, or whether it’s taking a hip-hop rhythm, or Chris Rouse taking a track from the Beatles’ White Album, we all do this because we’re essentially influenced by our environment from the earliest days of our consciousness.

My generation is the first to be influenced by rock music in classical music. And so you see it in a very particular way in what we’re doing, starting with Chris Rouse, and myself, and Torke. With me, I tend to integrate it. I tend to hide it.

YB: There are overt ways to do it and then there are…

RD: I don’t like my scaffolding to show. I don’t generally prefer works that look like quilts where you can actually see the stitching of what you’ve borrowed and where you’ve sewn it. I prefer integrated things, but that’s just me. Other composers prefer the “patchwork quilt approach” that becomes part of the personality.

One of the things that makes composers who they are is they’re always fascinated by everything around them. If they’re fascinated by everything around them, they can’t help but notice most of things that are of real interest. They can’t help but to remember
and notice them. So in remembering and noticing them, they eventually become part of the composer. “You are what you eat?” You are also “what you hear” in that sense.

8) Gradually the musical recording has taken on a greater influence than in the past. What new changes or opportunities due to technological progress (e.g., I-pod, Internet) will there be for the dissemination of new music? How will live concert presentations of new music be affected? As a newly made computer-generated composition is instantly ready for distribution via the Internet without the need for human performers and a concert hall, will composers turn more and more to the computer in twenty-first century composition?

RD: Ticket sales to the San Francisco Symphony, an organization with a tremendously refined approach to programming, are up through the roof. Opera sales are up. But nobody buys opera recordings. Why is that?

I think it’s because there’s no substitute for the live experience. Why is it that with every New York Yankees and Boston Red Sox game being broadcast on cable TV that most of those games sell out in their home parks? It’s very interesting. People want the live experience. Why? Because we’ve become more and more alienated from one another as human beings, and we need more and more human contact - the human connection. So, the live performance will never be replaced, particularly in a time when people become more and more isolated, and alienated from one another. I think it’s going to be more and more crucial.

Live performance is what composers write for. I have twelve recordings that are out. I don’t write for recordings. As much as those recordings are very useful documents, I listen to my own recordings as documents. I listen to them because normally my performances are not great in terms of accuracy. In terms of actual
“aliveness” they’re wonderful, usually, but in terms of accuracy they’re usually very faulty. So a recording is great to have as a document. But is the recording music? Absolutely not.

The music is the live experience which in that moment cannot be described or talked about by the best of music journalists. It is that one irreplaceable moment that you have to be there for. This is why I think most of my colleagues and myself write music. It is for that moment - not for the moment that you experience on your super refined stereo system with your bionic speakers, and your acoustically perfect space. It’s not for that really. That’s a referential thing for listeners and artists alike.

There’s also something to be said for computer music. Roger Sessions said in one of his interviews that the tape is always the same in a computer piece. And so there’s no variation. There’s something about the fact that every performance is different although all the notes are the same in a Beethoven piano sonata, which is attractive to me. It may not be attractive to someone else, but it’s interesting to me. It’s exciting for me. I’m a control freak, but not to that extent.

I like to control what I do to some extent. I’ve also learned as I’ve gotten older that to think you can control these things is ridiculous. It’s going to be what it’s going to be once you release it. I don’t hear most of the performances I have. Part of the reason is because I’m going to hear something that I invariably hear not to my liking. At the same time, just because its not to my liking it doesn’t mean that it doesn’t have value. It doesn’t mean that it doesn’t have the right to exist. And, in fact, if my music could only be performed one way effectively, it would be pretty lame and monodimensional. So for
that reason, I’m a great believer in the live experience \textit{as well} as a great believer in the notion of having recordings continue, because they serve as a very useful documents.

Fifty years ago, it was more important for a composer, such as ourselves, to be published. Today, it’s really more important to be recorded. Part of the reason for that is that musical literacy is down. People are not as literate as they used to be musically. People don’t play at night. They watch cable TV at night, or they go on the Internet at night. So, because musical literacy is down, it’s a bit more passive generation. And as a result people will know about one’s music by the recording that is available most likely. Most of my music is known by my recordings and that’s fine, but it is very important to make the distinction that a recording is a \textit{document}. It is not what we write for.

I think what’s interesting is that the Beatles started out writing for live performance. And as they began to become familiar with the studio, and learned it better and better, they started writing \textit{just} for the studio. And the piece became the \textit{recordings}. I don’t think it would have been the same if it had been tried to realized live. You need a controlled environment to get that sound they were getting. That’s a rare example of a composer, or \textit{composers}, who wrote \textit{not} for the live performance. It’s very unusual…
CHAPTER 7

INTERVIEW WITH ERIC EWAZEN

Eric Ewazen was born in Cleveland in 1954. He studied at the Eastman and Juilliard Schools of Music with Samuel Adler, Milton Babbitt, Gunther Schuller, and Joseph Schwantner. He is especially known for the frequent performance of his chamber and orchestral works in major American music festivals. As well, he teaches at the Juilliard School and is a former Vice-President of the League of Composers-International Society of Contemporary Music.

Date: Tuesday, September 14, 2004, 5:30 p.m.
Location: The Juilliard School, private office

1) Schoenberg and Stravinsky were only two composers from the twentieth century who referred to musical progress in their writings. How do you think “progress” will be defined in the twenty-first century?

EE: Okay. Well, that’s such a big topic. It seems to me to be that it’s so much easier to listen, and to hear music by a lot of different composers. You certainly couldn’t do that earlier in the twentieth century. I remember Mr. Babbitt said that they would look for a score, and it would be such a rare thing to suddenly find a brand new Schoenberg score. It would be some special gift or something. Whereas now, it’s a little bit easier just because of stuff like the Internet. You can contact composers right and left. You can see, a lot of times, examples of their music at their websites, and hear examples of their music. It seems alive and well to me that you have a lot of groups performing.

Since I started in this field in the early 1970s until now, I see just as much new music happening now as it has ever happened before. And there are very interesting things happening here at Juilliard. For example, there is Joel Sachs, who runs the Focus Festivals, which focus on either very specific composers or composers from a specific
country, or region, or period. And these could be composers from earlier in the century. But sometimes he’ll do “Scandinavian” composers, or “Pacific Rim” composers, and suddenly we’re made aware of that music.

Now in an ideal world, we hear what’s going on in Denmark and in Spain by local composers, and they hear our music from the United States. Well, that doesn’t always happen. That ocean is a big one. It’s possible to seek this stuff out. I think that makes a difference. So, if we talk about where music is going, all I can think of is that you’re hearing more, you’re getting influenced more, and you’re learning new languages from which to choose. You also have the business of popular music, and those composers who are crossover types that will infuse jazz and popular albums in their music, probably just as composers from the past did, except for much of the twentieth century those things were just so separated. There are more and more of composers who have gotten recognized who indeed combine styles that way.

YB: Do you feel that perhaps someone’s definition of “progress” could come from the fact that today we can do so much more to learn about music which is disseminated in such a more profound way?

EE: “Knowledge is King.”

2) It could be said that twentieth-century visual art (e.g., Kandinsky, Duchamp) had a significant effect on contemporary composition worldwide. Will this continue in the twenty-first century? Will the boundaries between visual art and music continue to dissipate?

EE: All I can say is that I will go to the latest exhibits in the Museum of Modern Art. I always will be there to see that and get a feeling for that. How that influences us
in terms of style…like in the way you talk about the Impressionistic “style” of the music and the painting…the *painting* always seem to come first - Romantic painters and *then* Romantic composers. Also, there were things they had in mind…*exoticism* or the strong emotions that are felt.

When you think of the twentieth century, there’s so much. “Eclectic” is the word for it. There are so many different styles whether it’s *minimalism*, the *realism*, the neo-*Romanticism* that we have in music….You can still see that in paintings. There’s just so much there. When you talk about things blurring together, the kind of multimedia performances, that’s nothing new. That has been done before, but I can see how that is something that will continue. Artists like working with video. They even have courses on that here. Of course, there’s film scoring, combining it all together. When you go to a place like the Whitney, some of the exhibits that you see indeed combine these different elements. But, my gosh, they go all the way back to Varèse. So it’s not like this is something new.

There was a big revolution in the early 1900s and that revolution continues on. There are *still* audiences that are surprised by Schoenberg and that find *The Rite of Spring* as “cutting edge” kind of music - even though it’s been around going on almost a hundred years now. So, I still think we’re still maybe *part* of all this. So when it comes to the visual arts, maybe they (the composers) were influenced by those painters. They hung out. They had similar aesthetics. Maybe that will continue too.

YB: So we might not be done?

EE: Maybe we’re just in the middle of this.
3) Many areas of twentieth-century musical progress were foreseen in the later nineteenth century (e.g., Wagner and chromaticism). In retrospect since about 1980, do you have any observations regarding musical trends that have since grown and may continue to do so in the next decade?

EE: There are several forms that became established earlier than 1980—minimalism, the use of popular music, neo-Romanticism—becoming more and more sort of accepted. All I can say is when I was student in the 70s, I remember just being shocked listening to composers in the early 1970s. If there were composition majors writing music that was tonal, it sounded to ears then as being so old-fashioned, simply not being current. Whereas now, I don’t think you find quite that reaction anymore. I think there’s simply an acceptance of the fact that there are all these various styles around and tonal music being one of them. You still have atonal music. You still see neo-Romantic music. You still see minimalism. It’s all there. It’s a whole bunch of stuff, and it’s all equally valid.

4) The appearance of non-European instruments has become more important to composers today (e.g., the use of the Chinese pipa, Indian sitar, African kora, and Australian didjeridoo in Glass’s Orion). How important is this type of progress to you?

EE: The whole idea of world music - that changed. When I went to Tower Records in the 1970s, maybe world music was one small section, a shelf, or a couple of shelves. And now, they have whole areas, practically rooms of just world music. Finnish music...Finnish music? Southeast Asian...Thai versus what’s going on in Bali, or whatever. You can get recordings of that. And I was listening to music when I was writing a piece called Palace of Nine Perfections for a big percussion ensemble. It was based on a Chinese painting, so I listened to a lot of that Chinese music. Right now, I
am writing a piece called *Southern Landscapes* for wind ensemble, which is based on Americana kind of folk music, you know, from the blue grass area or the Great Smoky Mountains. I got a whole bunch of Appalachian CDs just to listen and some of that has the local or homemade instruments.

I’m always interested when I have students…I had a terrific student whose background is from Greece, Athena Adamopolous, who was born here. I’m pretty sure she is first-generation. Nonetheless, she goes back to Greece all the time and she’s heard a lot of that folk music. And sure enough, it ended up in her music - some of those rhythms and harmonic progressions, and sudden little shifts and changes that you can associate from the music of that country. If the folk instruments are also inspiring for that, I think that’s just wonderful.

I will do that a lot of that in my own music. I wrote a piece just based upon listening to blues, very specifically, from the areas around Charleston. That indigenous music is great to use.

YB: You mentioned the Chinese painting. This is a case where perhaps a composition was influenced by the…

EE: Oh yes…and the listening of the drumming sounds, and the rhythms perhaps, and the quality of the sound.
5) As the twentieth century has had many artists proposing new ideas via manifestos (e.g., Marinetti’s *Futurist manifesto*) and literature (e.g., Kandinsky’s *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Schoenberg’s *Harmonielehre*), are there any literary, political, philosophical, or spiritual sources in recent times that have had a significant influence on your work?

EE: No. The paintings? Yes. But in terms of manifesto writings? No. I like to go right to the music and study the score right away to learn, rather than the theoretical thing.

And a lot of times we talk about the theory. I mean, I teach theory. It’s a big part of what I do here. But the theory a lot of times comes after the music is written. So, while we’re in the middle of the music, you might as well just look at the scores and go to the concerts. I attend symposiums and stuff like that where composers can get together and chat. Actually that’s really important - to just share ideas. Written books? I know they’re out there. I just don’t personally take advantage of them.

6) As the many of the innovations and “progressive” currents in the past century resulted in many new subgenres of music (e.g., *serialism*, *minimalism*), what are the possible challenges that will result in this century from the continuing diversification of compositional approaches found in our “serious” music community? What could be the benefits?

EE: I always remember what Persichetti said in the 70s when he thought that more and better music was being written in the 1970s than ever before - in terms of the sheer variety, the number of new operas, and the composers working and experimenting. He was so upbeat. Too bad you don’t have him for this interview. He would have been just amazing, because he was a great man. And so the excitement of the subgenres and all very distinct approaches was the sheer fun of having the variety there. And then it’s confusing sometimes for certain composers with questions like, “What do I choose?” or
“Is this my voice?” or “If I change, am I changing because I’m not being hip enough, or experimental enough?”

YB: Do you find that to be a common problem?

EE: No, but I really do notice really impressive stuff being written. I think it goes back to what I said before. I think there are more sort of well-informed younger students who have access to new music.

And building repertoire for all these instruments…wind ensembles, bands (when I say “new instruments” I mean that prior to the twentieth century there weren’t that many brass quintets, or percussion music)…and so now composers are involved in working on that. That, I think, is incredibly important - building repertoire for all of these other instruments. And you know my music.

YB: Just because some of these movements have existed, and maybe flourished in certain periods, it doesn’t necessarily mean that we have enough repertoire.

EE: Exactly. That’s right. And now we have all these other combinations.

But getting back to those younger composers and “What is your voice?”: I learned this from a teacher, Eugene Kurtz. He said, “Be careful about saying ‘This is my voice’ and being too successful at one particular style, because then you get wanting to do that over and over again, and you sort of keep writing the same piece. And if we look through history, we can see that sometimes great composers “wrote themselves out.” Then where do they go?

But, then there is the comparison between Stravinsky, who could keep changing styles, and relished the idea of moving through neo-classicism to primitivism to
totally atonal music and serial technique, versus somebody like Copland, who never, 
*never* was all that comfortable in all those other styles. He had some great atonal music 
and stuff like that, but it was not just his thing as much as some other composers. 
Everybody’s different. So, with younger composers, the main thing is that they learn 
those different styles so their language can grow. And then they end up feeling 
comfortable with their choice. That’s why there are so many composers. There are so 
many directions you can take.

7) In the twentieth century, American popular music and culture began to be 
incorporated into serious composition (e.g., the use of the slap bass in Torke’s *Adjustable Wrench*). Will this trend continue and how will it manifest itself in the twenty-first century? How important is this type of synergy in musical progress?

EE: Yes, particularly if you want to be influenced at this particular time. In previous 
centuries, if Brahms is using Hungarian stuff, that was the rage then.

In the twentieth century is when division really happened, because jazz became 
such a distinct musical voice, and atonal music became such a distinct voice. And the 
two seemed to have nothing to do with each other - not so much the jazz didn’t, but the 
pop music didn’t …moving into the pop. The styles are very strong styles, so they didn’t 
overlap.

To use the styles? Fine. To be influenced by chord structures? Fine. Rock 
music is based on certain modes of folk music. A Mick Jagger piece or whatever….it 
boils down to being in the Dorian mode…or whatever. And if you can use it to speak to 
audiences, I think that’s fine.
Here at Juilliard now there is a jazz major. And if you will, let’s face it, jazz is more popular, meaning it touches more mainstream than classical music. Maybe they the jazz musicians would think the opposite. The idea of being influenced by pop music….I think that’s great. Do I know it will continue? I’ll bet it might.

YB: Do you find jazz and popular music progressively contributing in terms of certain…even…theoretical elements….

EE: …rhythm, the use of drums, the use of percussion. Absolutely. Harmony…it could be sort of structural…sound quality…particular feelings….an immediacy maybe to the music….a certain kind of repetition perhaps….and phrases….or the way things come back. That could certainly be an influence.

8) Gradually musical the recording has taken on a greater influence than in the past. What new changes or opportunities due to technological progress (e.g., I-pod, Internet) will there be for the dissemination of new music? How will live concert presentations of new music be affected? As a newly made computer-generated composition is instantly ready for distribution via the Internet without the need for human performers and a concert hall, will composers turn more and more to the computer in twenty-first century composition?

EE: Well, that just goes hand-in-hand with electronic music earlier. They had the same talks in 1930 with tape music when they were looking at a tape recorder on stage and saying, “Is this music?” or “Do you view it as a ‘sculpture in time’ that’s a set thing that doesn’t need the performers? It’s kind of its own art form.”

Obviously where it’s hurt the musicians the most is in the pop music field. The opportunities aren’t what they used to be. As upbeat as I like to be about music, it is always a struggle with the economy, and the classical music is “sort of holding its own.”
Orchestras are having trouble. This is nothing new. Is that a result of *electronics*? No.

YB: You don’t believe it is as competitive with classical musicians as it is for pop musicians?

EE: No, but the classical musicians are also a lot of the people who are the New York freelancers. They need to eat. And a way many of them would subsidize themselves was playing in the commercials and the film sessions. A lot of that stuff has dried up. Look at the Broadway shows. Instead of a multiple string section, you now have the added synthesizer. And those pit musicians…you can also bet they’re all also playing classical music. But they don’t necessarily make their living at that (classical music). They have to do both.

In the 1940s, there were jobs for those students that were graduating. Now that’s not true. It’s hard. And yet at the same time, if you go to the Midwest Convention, which is the band convention which attracts 16,000 people in December, that shows you how much music is going on. And there’s a lot of imaginative stuff happening. So obviously, ever since there were instruments, people have wanted to share their art. And audiences want to see the virtuosity. The electronics can augment it…can be sort of an additional thing…yet another aspect of the times. But it won’t supplant the traditional orchestra. Where it will supplant the musicians is in the commercial stuff.

YB: In the dissemination of new music, do you think…?

EE: Oh. One thing that really helps now is that it’s so easy to record now…and the quality is so good…to record your rehearsals…to record your pieces. Face it. Recordings - it’s like the way a person would use a business card. Other people can get
interested in your music that way.

In the old days, the old reel-to-reel recordings were cumbersome. You weren’t always going to get to record everything. Now you get a group of players. You want to find out what and English horn and a French horn and a piano sound like together. So, you go to practice room, bring your recording device, record a session, and go back and listen to it right away. You do that at a drop of a hat.

YB: There’s quicker progress made for the composers.

EE: Yes. I think so.

YB: And I think you kind of implied that you can also get feedback.

EE: You can get feedback. And then you have your product. There it is.
CHAPTER 8

INTERVIEW WITH FRANCIS THORNE

Francis Thorne was born in Bayshore, NY in 1922. Originally a pianist who specialized in jazz, he studied composition with Paul Hindemith at Yale University and David Diamond in Florence. Since the middle 1960s, he has become one of America’s most vital composers and also music administrators. In 1977, he became the principal founder of the American Composers Orchestra. He has also served on the Boards of the American Music Center, the Virgil Thomson Foundation, and is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Date: Wednesday, September 15, 2004, 11:00 a.m.
Location: American Composers Orchestra, 240 West 35th Street

1) Schoenberg and Stravinsky were only two composers from the twentieth century who referred to musical progress in their writings. How do you think “progress” will be defined in the twenty-first century?

FT: That requires a little bit of thought. A lot of people think...it’s not exactly “progress”...that orchestras are in a decline...that young people don’t want to hear the kind of music that we do. They want to hear hip-hop, rock, and all the music that sounds the same to me. So I’m not sure where the progress exists, unless you take the popularity of a Philip Glass or a Steve Reich, who have developed a new way of thinking of concert music. But progress? I don’t know. We’re in a very shaky condition here. The audience for the American Composers Orchestra seems to be declining.

YB: What would it take to reverse this decline?

FT: We’re working on it now. One important aspect of it, I think, is venue. We go into Carnegie Hall, which has 2800 seats, and it’s very depressing to look at a half-empty hall. It’s depressing for the players too.
So what we’ve done this year is we’ve changed our program. Also to save some money, we’ve gone from three concerts in the big hall (Carnegie Hall Main Stage, or, Isaac Stern Auditorium) and one in Zankel Hall, to now two in Zankel and one in Isaac Stern. We have done one concert in Zankel Hall (which sold out), and there’s something very invigorating about being sold out. 640 seats is a little different than 2800.

We’d also like to take a shot at Jazz at Lincoln Center Hall when that’s operating, which has a stage that can hold a full orchestra such as ours, and yet has only 1200 seats, which wouldn’t be so hard to fill as 2800. So I think by being absolutely practical about our venue we may be able to turn this thing around. We may lose some of the subscribers from Carnegie Hall, but we attracted a much younger audience at Zankel Hall, and that really is our objective: to get younger people to hear what we do.

YB: A lot of those people will perhaps come back to concerts later?
FT: Perhaps.

2) It could be said that twentieth-century visual art (e.g., Kandinsky, Duchamp) had a significant effect on contemporary composition worldwide. Will this continue in the twenty-first century? Will the boundaries between visual art and music continue to dissipate?

FT: It’s interesting that you ask that question. We’re doing a program this year which ties, in one way or another, to the visual arts. Perhaps the most popular part of the program is the Sondheim, which is based on Sunday in the Park with George. All these things on the program - De Kooning, Randy Woolf - they all are going to combine the point of view of this “merging” of art and music. It seems to be a very interesting direction to take. We had a whole festival of “technology and music” in 1999, so we’re
trying to place what we do in the context of the things that are going on in the cultural world. Hopefully, that will keep us fresh and on our toes.

You know, we depend an awful lot on fundraising and *fundraisers* (people who give money to organizations such as ours). They don’t want to give something unless it looks as though it’s on a *fresh* track, or a *new* track, or a *growing* track, or something very positive. And we have to be careful. Several years ago, we did *five* concerts, then we did *four*, and now we’re doing *three*. That doesn’t sound like we’re starting something new, but I think the fact is that we’re trying new venues rather than Carnegie Hall. (I don’t know many people particularly want to come there - unless it’s a big name.) My hope is that by trying these new venues, we can actually be on the positive, growing road.

We have a very small percentage of what we survive on in the box-office take - it’s less than a quarter. For most orchestras it’s more than half. And so we depend very much on foundations, corporations, and individuals who give to us as a non-profit organization.

3) Many areas of twentieth-century musical progress were foreseen in the later nineteenth century (e.g., Wagner and chromaticism). In retrospect since about 1980, do you have any observations regarding musical trends that have since grown and may continue to do so in the next decade?

FT: Off the top of my head, what you find happening is more and more “crossover” - concert music being influenced by rock music. Since the 1920s it’s been influenced by jazz. There’s nothing new about that, although maybe more and more of it. But all the other popular musics seem to have worked their way into a guy like Michael Daugherty
for example, whose music is very alive and intense with “rock.” (I’m not sure if that’s
the right word, but with popular aspects of music.) And I think there’s been more and
more of that. And I think it’s helped get a new century off on a more exciting foot. But
I’m still looking at it by what we’re doing here. Perhaps, I should be thinking about it in
more general terms.

YB: Certainly you can switch back and forth with what you do here and also look at it
just as a composer. You have a lot of experience, and particularly in jazz music.

FT: My early professional days in music were playing jazz piano in night clubs. It was a
180° turn for me, because I spent nine years on Wall Street - first in the “back,” and then
as a stockbroker. To make a long story short, Duke Ellington heard me play at a party,
and got me a wonderful job playing at one of the 52nd-Street jazz clubs called The
Hickory House. During the two years I played there, I began studying composition with
David Diamond.

Now David had no particular jazz influence in his own music, but he recognized
it in my music and encouraged it, which I think a lot of teachers would not have done.
David said, “Don’t ever deny it. Let it come out if it’s going to be there.” And my
music, when it gets fast, has a very strong bebop influence, which is, of course, late-
middle twentieth-century. It’s something I’ve always found rhythmically fascinating.
Well, it’s only one of many kinds of influences. But, this “crossover thing” is all over
the place now.

YB: You seem to have been a “crossover” person even quite a bit before this time.

FT: In life.
4) The appearance of non-European instruments has become more important to composers today (e.g., the use of the Chinese *pipa*, Indian *sitar*, African *kora*, and Australian *didjeridoo* in Glass’s *Orion*). How important is this type of progress to you?

FT: Anything new and different is progress. Even though it isn’t necessarily “progress,” it falls into that category: integrating a Big Band with a symphony orchestra, which is happening a lot, the use of the saxophone with an orchestra. (This is not so unusual, but it *wasn’t done* for a long time.)

With a lot of music of the pieces that we look at (We look at several hundred scores a year that come in from all over the country, because we give young composers a chance to hear their music.) the orchestra is very good at reading quickly, giving composers a chance to find out what it sounds like.

I think the *use of percussion* has been a very exciting development, and includes all kind of weird instruments or some of the normal ones. You get a lot of different sounds and combinations of sounds. I think the percussion aspect of our music is very important indeed.

5) As the twentieth century has had many artists proposing new ideas via manifestos (e.g., Marinetti’s *Futurist manifesto*) and literature (e.g., Kandinsky’s *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, Schoenberg’s *Harmonielehre*), are there any literary, political, philosophical, or spiritual sources in recent times that have had a significant influence on your work?

FT: It’s very hard to be specific. For example, I spent a good deal of time setting the last thirty-nine lines of Dante’s *Paradiso* for soprano and orchestra, but that it is a very
spiritual ending that refers to the eternal light that comes down from heaven. Is that spiritual? I’m not sure.

YB: Well, it’s very spiritual, but let me clarify: spiritual sources that have been written more recently…in the past few decades…or within the past ten years…

FT: You know, it’s funny. I was in a meeting yesterday with a woman who was thinking of directing a production of my one and only opera, based upon Thomas’ Mario and the Magician. She began asking me all kinds of questions about what I thought about this aspect of the story, and the spiritual aspect of the story. My mind doesn’t work that way. I was given the libretto. I set the words to music. I didn’t think very much about what they were all about - which is a terrible confession to make.

I think my style was developed very early on. I said to this William Schuman some years ago. We were talking and I said, “You know I feel like I’m repeating myself over and over again.” He said, “What you’re saying is that you have finally developed your personal style. And I wouldn’t worry about it.”

6) As the many of the innovations and “progressive” currents in the past century resulted in many new subgenres of music (e.g., serialism, minimalism), what are the possible challenges that will result in this century from the continuing diversification of compositional approaches found in our “serious” music community? What could be the benefits?

FT: Well, if your question would include the fact that film and other simultaneous effects that go with that…

YB: Sure.
FT: There’s more and more of that. In fact one of the reasons that we are operating in Zankel Hall is because they have unlimited facilities for doing all kinds of crossover and mixed media. That seems to be working quite well. I don’t know if I’ll ever incorporate video, film slides, or dancers in an abstract way - not ballet (although I’ve done ballet). The whole mixed media idea I think is very prevalent these days. To me it just opens up new avenues all the time. I used to say not so long ago, because people would complain about the cultural world we live in, “I think we’ve been in a golden age of cultural development. And fifty years from now people will look back on it and say, ‘Look at all of the wonderful things that were happening.’ ” I really do truly believe that.

7) In the twentieth century, American popular music and culture began to be incorporated into serious composition (e.g., the use of the slap bass in Torke’s Adjustable Wrench). Will this trend continue and how will it manifest itself in the twenty-first century? How important is this type of synergy in musical progress?

FT: It’s very hard for me to say, because there has been so much musical progress in recent years. It’s very hard to predict that it’s going to continue at this pace. Everything goes in cycles, and it may sort of retreat a little bit. In fact, I think in my own case that probably the most experimental work I ever did was in the 60s. For example, I wrote a piece called Liebesrock, which involved three electric guitars with orchestra, which in the 60s was something of an innovation. It would be nothing today. My hope is, without being too specific, that this accumulation of activity that’s been going on will continue. But, my suspicion is that we may go into a dry period for a while. Everything goes in cycles.
YB: You may know that from your own economic experience.

FT: Economics in general…when you look at the national budget, which had wonderful surpluses under Clinton….and now there are record deficits under Bush. I mean things do go in cycles. Guess who I’m going to vote for.

YB: Well, I’ll save that for the next writer who comes in here.

8) Gradually the musical recording has taken on a greater influence than in the past. What new changes or opportunities due to technological progress (e.g., I-pod, Internet) will there be for the dissemination of new music? How will live concert presentations of new music be affected? As a newly made computer-generated composition is instantly ready for distribution via the Internet without the need for human performers and a concert hall, will composers turn more and more to the computer in twenty-first century composition?

FT: Well, they already have. And I have rather strong feelings about this. As I said, hundreds of scores come into us every year, because they want their scores performed, or read, and so forth. Not only do they look the same, but a lot of them sound the same because with the fact of the computer…you can copy it out, you present the score, and it looks like it’s published, and so forth. I believe, and I may be wrong, that a lot of music is beginning to sound the same because it’s coming from the same easy process. Now the early part of the question was…?

YB: …regarding the dissemination of new music via the Internet and how it all possibly affects new music presentations.

FT: Well, it’s already affecting the normal presentation of concert music. It’s not as expensive. It’s easier to produce. An orchestral concert is a very expensive proposition, especially when you get into new negotiations with the music union and then you have to
pay more to the players. When you’re talking about eighty players that’s a lot. The fact that some orchestras are having a hell of a time, or the Metropolitan Opera, which is shutting down in the month of January because they’re running a big deficit…there has to be something causing that. There must be some reason. I think it’s the fact that young people are turning to these other means of expressing themselves rather than going through the trouble and the expense of what traditionally we’ve been involved in. And it worries me. It worries me very much.

Although, maybe people were worried in the early twentieth century, when it wasn’t just Mahler, but it was Schoenberg and people who were going atonal. And they were going, “Oh, my God, this is the end of our real music.” Something wonderful came out of it. You never know from where something marvelous is going to come, whether it’s a new technology, or different types of venues.

It boils down to the individual. If the individual has something interesting to say, it doesn’t really matter very much what venue that individual uses, or what medium. It’s going to be wonderful. If the individual doesn’t have anything very interesting to say, it’s not going to be very interesting. There will be always be artists that really have something to say. And I don’t think that will ever decline. They might have a little more trouble from time to time getting heard, but they’ll be there - and continue to be there.
CHAPTER 9

INTERVIEW WITH MILTON BABBITT

Milton Babbitt was born in Philadelphia in 1916. He studied the clarinet, violin, and saxophone growing up in Jackson, Mississippi. After studying mathematics in the early 1930s, he turned to music composition and studied with Roger Sessions. He is today universally regarded as a pioneer in serial composition and electronic music. He currently teaches at Princeton University and at the Juilliard School of Music.

Date: Wednesday, September 15, 2004, 10:30 p.m.
Location: Toriello Residence, 333 E. 49th Street
via speaker phone to Princeton, New Jersey

1) Schoenberg and Stravinsky were only two composers from the twentieth century who referred to musical progress in their writings. How do you think “progress” will be defined in the twenty-first century?

MB: The word “progress” by its very nature implies the evaluative. It implies in some sense “better.” It doesn’t imply just change. You can’t approach the word without defining something from which you derive these evaluatives. Was there progress from Bach to Beethoven? Give me a little more indication of what someone would regard is progress.

YB: If you’re talking about Schoenberg, he’s very specific in Brahms the Progressive as to what progress is - the abandonment, perhaps, of previously unnecessary stylistic repetitions of the past in regard to phrasing. Stravinsky is very loose. He discusses the “Religion of Progress”…

MB: You mean in the Poetics of Music?

YB: Yes.
MB: Oh, he didn’t write that. That was written by Roland-Manuel.\textsuperscript{15} Anyhow, it doesn’t matter. I regard Stravinsky very highly as a composer, but as a thinker not so highly.

The whole idea of progress has been discussed so many times by so many people in so many other regards. It is an evaluative term, and therefore, one has to begin with some descriptive term which one is going to derive from it. The word is such a \textit{loaded} word. Again, it is an evaluative term. And therefore, one does not want to commit any number of logical errors that have been committed by those…you know… it’s the same idea as deriving a “should” from an “is.”

YB: Well, that’s fantastic that you believe that, because in no way, shape, or form am I ever going to refer to “progress” as “something.” I refuse to say what it is. I will say that if \textit{you} think it is something, then certainly you can, but…

MB: No, no, \textit{progress} has so many unfortunate connotations: “We have \textit{progressed}.” One can speak of change in which change you regard is desirable change in representing progress. Well, that’s already \textit{another} kind of assumption. That’s a normative assumption outside of the issue, “What is progress?” But anyhow, look, what difference does it make? The cognitive content of most of those statements is \textit{very}, very slight anyhow. Somebody is either attempting to validate what they’re doing at the moment by calling it “progress,” or invalidating what somebody else is doing at the moment.

\textsuperscript{15}Milton Babbitt, \textit{Stravinsky Memorial} in \textit{The Collected Essays of Milton Babbitt}, ed. Stephen Peles (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 269, n.7. In Milton Babbitt’s \textit{Perspectives of New Music} memorial tribute to Igor Stravinsky, \textit{Stravinsky (1882-1971): A Composer’s Memorial} (9, no. 2-10, no. 1 (1971):103-7), he accepts Robert Craft’s insinuation that \textit{Poetics of Music in the Form of Six Lessons} was mostly ghostwritten by Roland-Manuel, a pseudonym for the composer and critic Alex Manuel-Levy. While this may be true, the status for the author as being Igor Stravinsky will remain here in consideration for at least his endorsement of this book.
by saying that it “isn’t progress.” So let’s take it from there.

YB: To sum it up in the twenty-first century… that’s your position…

MB: I never think, for example, of my music as representing progress, or anything of that kind. Ever. *Ever.*

YB: I can say that a lot of people would say it *is.*

MB: Because as I say, it is as you know a normative term, and implies in some sense that it is “better” in some respect. Then one would have to make it clear what that respect *is.*

2) **It could be said** (I’m not saying it “is.” I’m just saying it just as perhaps as a claim; as a given for this question.) that twentieth-century visual art (e.g., Kandinsky, Duchamp) had a significant effect on contemporary composition worldwide. Will this continue in the twenty-first century? Will the boundaries between visual art and music continue to dissipate?

MB: It has absolutely no effect on me. I don’t know in fact what you mean by that. What kind of principles of structure from the visual arts have been carried into music? I don’t know. I guess in some vaguely analogous way I guess people have done this. But as far I am concerned, it has not.

YB: You wouldn’t say it’s applicable in your own career, but one can look to Kandinsky and Schoenberg’s *Harmonielehre* and…

MB: I don’t think one had anything to do with one another. One can have a sort of synaesthetic aspect, but Schoenberg’s harmony book is nothing but a rehashing of Riemann with a few little twists. All you have to do is look at the beginning of the book and his “regions” are exactly Riemann’s. I’m the world’s greatest admirer Schoenberg’s music, but his thinking about music is not exactly disciplined by, one would say,
“rigorous concerns.” I don’t think there’s much in that harmony book that’s original. He ends up with what is supposed to be revolutionary chords in fourths. Well, that’s already the result of a sort of thinking about harmony that takes one back to the most rudimentary conception of chords, rather than a musical structure.

3) Many areas of twentieth-century musical progress were foreseen in the later nineteenth century (e.g., Wagner and chromaticism). In retrospect since about 1980, do you have any observations regarding musical trends that have since grown and may continue to do so in the next decade?

MB: Well, no, not since 1980. Many great things from the preceding era have been enlarged upon, and refined, and extended. But on the other hand music has retrogressed too. Let’s face it. I mean it’s tending more and more to the situation of popular music…when one doesn’t have an educated audience and music is not taught in schools and, therefore, not taught in universities. In order to get enrollment in universities you don’t teach “Introduction to Music” courses anymore, you teach “Introduction to Rock”- and now it will probably be “Hip-hop.” The fact is that popular music has declined too. And as long as there is any outside pressure upon music, and obviously, there must be if composers are going to survive….

YB: Well…there is a lot of education going on. I don’t know if…

MB: Oh, no…it’s been reduced. Music departments are being eliminated everywhere. Teachers in New York Public Schools, which had a marvelous education…it has been virtually eliminated. There is virtually no teaching of music in any serious sense in many, many schools…and to the people that are going to the universities. The big introductory music books no longer sell, and they’re no longer being published. Instead,
you have “Introductions to Popular Music.”

4) The appearance of non-European instruments has become more important to composers today (e.g., the use of the Chinese pipa, Indian sitar, African kora, and Australian didjeridoo in Glass’s Orion). How important is this type of progress to you?

MB: Not the slightest.

YB: Are you speaking just for you or…?

MB: I always speak for me.

YB: What do you think about…?

MB: Anything that extends the materials of music, fine. This is a very superficial aspect of music in any case. We have now people who are working with entirely computer generated sound, and that obviously is very important.

5) As the twentieth century has had many artists proposing new ideas via manifestos (e.g., Marinetti’s Futurist manifesto) and literature (e.g., Kandinsky’s Concerning the Spiritual in Art, Schoenberg’s Harmonielehre), are there any literary, political, philosophical, or spiritual sources in recent times that have had a significant influence on your work?

MB: Well, I am, for example, an unreconstructed logical empiricist, of course. And that certainly affects the way one talks, the way one thinks. One does not simply “work in hypothesis” or “does not.” One thinks in terms of one’s language. So, of course, that has always had an enormous influence upon my work. And with the little time I have left these days, I do still keep up a little bit with analytical philosophy. In terms of formulation, such as for example, dealing with the word “progress” - that has always been a primary influence on me and will continue to be. But one doesn’t simply have the
time to read what is a very demanding literature.

The literature on musical theory: When I was your age, there was absolutely no place one could publish an article on analytical theory. Now there are at least six places in this country and even one in England. And one can’t conceive, even if one were a so-called professional musical theorist, devoting one’s primary time to music theory….you can’t keep up with the literature. And that, of course, has affected all of us. Who could have imagined a David Lewin or a Robert Morris being published in 1935? There was no place, no magazine, no publisher. There was no place for a young theorist to work and where theorists could communicate with each other. It just didn’t exist.

YB: Well, I can only say I have seen some theoretical writings on the OSU shelves from the later 1920s, but…

MB: The one magazine that did consider itself serious was the Musical Quarterly, but that had no analytical articles whatsoever, and when it finally came up with an article on Schenker, it was written by a dilettante. In Germany, there was Melos, and they had articles of a different level, but you had to be able to read German, you had to able to read very difficult German, and you had to read it in the old print!

6) As the many of the innovations and - in quotation marks - “progressive” currents...(MB: Okay) in the past century resulted in many new subgenres of music (e.g., serialism, minimalism), what are the possible challenges that will result in this century from the continuing diversification of compositional approaches found in our “serious” music community? What could be the benefits?

MB: Well, I think the primary challenge is how to keep music alive at all. You have such a complete confusion of categories that the most rudimentary music is now
considered in some sense to be, call it what you will, “serious” music. These categories are very hard and jazz musicians always resent the use of the word “serious.” I mean, one is supposed to take composers seriously because he takes himself seriously. I am not interested in defining boundaries. I think the one place where serious activity will probably be is in “micro.”

YB: In what?

MB: Microintervals. I think that’s an enlargement of materials that will take place.

YB: Oh. There was an impressive presentation by Easley Blackwood on a project he did…

MB: Oh yes, we published that here.\(^{16}\)

YB:…and in New York there is an annual microtonal festival. Is there anything more specific you can say about microtonality?

MB: No, I really can’t. I mean, we remember Joseph Yasser and also (Alois) Hába’s book, his “Harmonielehre” (*Neue Harmonielehre*) with his divisions of “four” (quartertones) and what have you…but I can easily imagine that that’s the way it would go. It enlarges the materials very fundamentally, particularly with computers, which can generate microintervals easily. Regarding what is finally decided upon, there are many problems that arrive with microintervals. The speed of the piece has to be reduced. If you deal with microintervals, very soon, if you do something too fast, it sounds like a change of timbre. It’s very complex….I’m not talking in *electronic* terms.

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\(^{16}\)Although Mr. Babbitt was likely referring to *The Structure of Recognizable Diatonic Tunings* (published “here” at Princeton University Press), just for the record, my reference would have been Easley Blackwood’s work, *Microtonal Etudes for Electronic Music Media*, op. 28 (1980), which was presented by Blackwood himself at The Ohio State University in April 2003.
where *you* can hear and do it, and then *I* can hear and do it. It has its problems, but I do think it enlarges the materials of music and can probably be incorporated structurally into music composition.

But, I mean, I’m not one to say so. I’ve never *done* it. I played around with it only in a very primitive form maybe to hear what happens, or to create scales as I did for David Lewin (which would generate a way that the tonic scale does not, so that you generate the scale from any interval and not just the fifth). And I wouldn’t presume people have been thinking about this a great deal, but that is the way I could see music going.

YB: So it’s a great frontier?

MB: I think so. Yes.

7) In the twentieth century, American popular music and culture began to be incorporated into serious composition (e.g., the use of the slap bass in Torke’s *Adjustable Wrench*). Will this trend continue and how will it manifest itself in the twenty-first century? How important is this type of synergy in musical progress?

MB: Well, the thing to remember with popular music was that we once had a popular music which on the one hand had very gifted song writers and some sophisticated men - educated men, such as Jerome Kern, Richard Rogers - and I could go on. And on the other hand, you had performance levels that were *unbelievable*. You had individual performers and ensemble performers….going back to Jean Goldkette and going forward to Sauter-Finnegan. There are no people around who can play like that. The arrangements they played were so demanding.

YB: The genre of jazz itself - how important is that to musical progress (which we
haven’t agreed yet is…)?

MB: I don’t know what effect it has these days, because I have no relation to jazz and popular music as I once did, but I don’t see very much of it from serious composers. There’s much less influence than there once was…much less interplay than there once was. For example, there’s a jazz program at Juilliard and the young composers at Juilliard practically pay no attention to it. They regard the stuff as very stale and very rudimentary.

8) Gradually the musical recording has taken on a greater influence than in the past…

MB: Except nobody’s recording anymore…except the recording industry is going down the drain…

YB: How far? Really, really down the drain?

MB: Yes, I mean, because after all, the stuff is picked up for free. They can’t afford to record. Recording costs have gone up. Studios are going up. Everything is going to become much more expensive. And the stuff is all pirated.

YB: Continuing the question...(Question 8, continued)...What new changes or opportunities due to technological progress (e.g., I-pod, Internet) will there be for the dissemination of new music? How will live concert presentations of new music be affected? As a newly made computer-generated composition is instantly ready for distribution via the Internet without the need for human performers and a concert hall, will composers turn more and more to the computer in twenty-first century composition?

MB: How are they being paid for that? That’s the problem. I mean, obviously, computers are taking over. They’ve already taken over…though I’ve never touched a computer in my life. I came too late for that. But obviously, it’s taken over the printing of music, and for many people, the production of sound.
But the problem is that live concerts are practically dead anyhow. Do you realize that there are practically no live concerts in New York anymore? Once there used to be five or six recitals a night in New York. Try to go and hear a solo cello recital in New York now. Nobody can afford the halls and nobody goes if they play.

YB: Do you think live concerts are going to persist?

MB: Yes, they probably will. They will probably remain in schools, of course, as long as the schools can continue. This process of producing musicians who have no place to go, no place to play is already showing, and showing very severe results in New York.

I mean, the New York scene of 1935…with six or seven concert halls being used every single night…and the amount of music being played….and now you look around…..there is virtually nothing. You have to go way down in the Village under some uncomfortable circumstances to hear some music you probably don’t want to hear anyhow.

Look, recordings already have that effect, of course, and I am very happy with recordings, but not the recording we’ve talked about. It becomes so expensive and so susceptible to pirating that there is no recording being done now that isn’t being subsidized. Do you realize that the New York Philharmonic does not have a recording contract and hasn’t recorded in years? The Boston Symphony has no contract and hasn’t recorded in years. The Philadelphia Orchestra….none of those orchestras are recording anymore.

YB: Do you think it has anything to do with perhaps traditional repertoire having been recorded so much? How many times do we need to have a given quartet recorded?
MB: But, there are new quartets and new people playing them. They’re buying pop records. Pop records are being sold by the millions.

Let’s face it. This is pantarchy, which in pantarchial culture we only need to see how they’re regarded and how they’re rewarded. And it’s becoming more and more so. For example, at one time there were three journals in New York….not esoteric journals, Knick news journals that reviewed every concert that took place in New York.

YB: I was looking for a review of the concert that took place the other night that you were a part of…\(^\text{17}\)

MB: Oh, you won’t find a review of that. Much bigger concerts than that are not covered. The coverage of concerts is reduced. There used to be that every concert was reviewed by three or four newspapers. They were only journalistic reviews, but at least people became more aware of their existence. There was a *Musical Courier*, a *Musical America*, and there was *The Musical Leader*. All three of those covered every single concert in New York. They’ve all died long ago.

Very little is reviewed these days. For example, articles that get written on contemporary composers, if they are given to that sheet, the *New York Times*, the lady who runs what is called “Arts and Leisure” will tell you that they don’t have anything more to do with classical music. Now the *Times* is a notorious sheet, of course, and hasn’t been trustworthy with regard to music or anything else for fifty years, but

\(^{17}\)The Group for Contemporary Music, “*Poetry and Music,*” poetry reading and concert, New York, 13 September 2004. This event was part of the *Works & Process Series* at the Peter B. Lewis Theater of the Guggenheim Museum, which on September 13, 2004 featured the poetry of Paul Auster and five world premiere settings of his poetry to music by Karchin, Babbitt, Wuorinen, Reynolds, and Hyla. Babbitt’s setting was to the poem, entitled, *Autobiography of the Eye*, which was performed by soprano Judith Bettina and cellist Fred Sherry.
the other newspapers have disappeared. So where are you going to find a review? People review on the Internet, of course.

YB: What do you think we can do to reverse this?

MB: It starts with education. If you don’t have this musical education from the beginning, if you don’t have a body of people who learn to read music, who become musically literate at a very early age, and learn to hear music and care to hear music, directed by education in the lower grades through high school and into colleges, this will not be reversed. If they’re told that this unimportant, and they’re always being told now that it’s a matter of no consequence, then what you expect to have? You’re going to get hip-hop.

YB: But perhaps much of our field is for a small audience with small concerts?

MB: I would agree with that. The question is, how do you get the money to put them on?

YB: I don’t know.

MB: That’s the trouble. You see, remember, there are so many sources of support that have disappeared because music is regarded as so unimportant. The National Endowment for the Arts does not commission any more. Once, the Ford Foundation commissioned recordings and the Rockefeller Foundation not only paid for those famous contests, but also paid for the orchestras to have extra rehearsals for the new works. You see, you kids are not aware of this.

YB: I can only say, as one of many composers today, that we want more support. Maybe a corporation…Bill Gates?

MB: Oh, no. You know what Bill Gates listens to? He listens to rock. Just think of
it, the Library of Congress music division is being starved now. They can’t afford to
handle composers’ works like they once did.

YB: Well, all I can say is that I hope at some point in the near future you can…

MB: It will have to be the very near future…
CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSION

Individual Conclusions on Musical Progress

Although there were a few general similarities in how our eight composers chose or chose not to define the meaning of “progress,” one cannot help but notice the wide range of perspectives found in respect to this central question. In the context of music, there were even decisions to challenge the validity of its very idea by Milton Babbitt, Michael Torke, and Richard Danielpour. Indeed the term alone seemed to instigate a slight degree of unrest. While it could be arguably said that five composers were willing to accept the word, they did so with a freedom of interpretation that resulted in considerable variances in the perception of the word and the source of its generation.

The youngest composer, Mathew Fuerst, made reference to compositional limits in various twentieth-century technical developments, yet he still predicted twenty-first-century composers will choose to retain much of the past century’s achievements in creating individual syntheses. If the notion is accepted that the Baroque era came to a close in 1750 with the career of J.S. Bach, who crystallized the technical developments of the previous one-hundred-and-fifty years, Mr. Fuerst’s suggestion of a twenty-first-century technical synthesis is perhaps similar to the Baroque periodic arc in that the next half century could be akin to the “high Baroque,” though more individualized and in relation to our recent history.
While Fuerst discussed a more gradual *evolution* of progress in the twenty-first century versus the frequent *revolutionary* progress of the last, he still cited “progressive” happenings now (i.e., IRCAM and Boulez). To speculate again, it could be Fuerst’s more “evolutionary” period ahead that would be more suitable for the individual synthesis of techniques to create the “work of logic that is moving,” which he presents as our “biggest challenge.” Yet, he was perhaps very wise to dismiss the possibility of more revolution in considering the effects of staged works, technology, and music itself (i.e., *Four Organs*).

Eric Ewazen suggested the incorporation of new musical languages from around the globe is primarily driving our developments. He claimed we are “hearing more” and “getting influenced more” from various world cultures via recordings, modern communication (i.e., Internet), and through concert programs such as the Focus Festival. The benefits of this are perhaps best summarized in his quote, “Knowledge is King,” as “knowledge” expands compositional choice.

Another noticeable aspect in Ewazen’s optimistic outlook is that he sees potential development in many musical genres and movements that some may say have expired. He even suggested the possibility that we *still* are in the line of progress for various twentieth-century revolutions, pointing to the continued audience amazement for landmark pieces like *The Rite of Spring* and the fact many listeners are still “shocked by Schoenberg.” Ewazen also refused to accept that the repertoire of established instrumental genres, such as the brass quintet, have been exhausted or reached their peak. He also emphasized that there still is considerable exploration to be done in
regard to new instrumental combinations. Perhaps Ewazen’s references to Stravinsky’s dynamic career and to Eugene Kurtz’s quote in regard to “writing ourselves out” are details that provide us an insight into why he keeps his options available.

Julia Wolfe also touted the role of world music in the expansion of musical language, yet emphasized that it changes our perception of music itself, making us a “different kind of musician.” She highlighted, without assigning any moral judgment, the difference of incorporating new languages in a conscious way (done “beautifully” by Debussy) versus by the less conscious means possible in the twenty-first century through recording technology, having a global awareness, and living in a cosmopolitan environment like New York City.

It seems that it is through Ms. Wolfe’s broad exposure and fondness for a multitude of contrasting approaches to music (ranging from that of the Viennese Classicists, to African drumming, to Motown) that she has become convinced that the prerogative to conceive music without categories and stylistic hierarchy will result in “a more sophisticated understanding of what makes music interesting.” To her it is this realization that is “progressive.” She stated, “Some people think of it as the ‘deterioration of Western music.’ I think it’s progressive….the more you know, the more you’re exposed to, the richer your world.” An example of her belief in action was the shakuhachi’s influence in some of her own music.

Although the predictions of progress by Stefania de Kenessy exuded a daring degree of confidence, they came with a flexible conception of music historical development. In making reference to the limits of twentieth-century technical
achievement (i.e., exploring sonorities), she mentions that our century’s musical progress “will be defined as something that at some level will be a regression.” In this seemingly paradoxical relationship of terminology, we see not confusion, but rather a separation between the concept of periodic movement (which is regression in this case) and musical progress as a whole. And within her predicted “regressive progress” is a “ferocious return” to tonality in serious music. De Kenessey was also precisely clear that twentieth-century progress was generated from an overall spirit of modernism in the arts. So in consideration of this view, it is perhaps logical that she would choose a panoramic lens to survey a simmering of “progressive regressions” in an array of twenty-first-century arts as well.

Francis Thorne’s response to the first question centered around a “decline” in relation to the audience of the American Composers Orchestra, which he says is “not exactly progress.” However, these early comments are more related to the social and financial aspects of concert presentation. His first discussion on the meaning of “progress” came under the fourth question, when he stated, “Anything new and different is progress…even though it isn’t necessarily ‘progress.’ ” The dialectic in this statement is soon clarified by his appeal for the integration of concert mediums (i.e., Big Band and orchestra), which parleys to us that he is considerate of other definitions for progress. In his response to the sixth question, it seems that his goal in recent American Composers Orchestra programming is to apply this “other” progressive view through new orchestral syntheses with the visual arts, new percussion instruments, film, popular music, and multimedia. Although he mentioned there has been “so much progress” in recent years,
and that the prevalent “crossover” trend in composition has “helped get a new century off on more exciting foot,” he also referred to the cyclic nature of musical trends and occasional “dry periods” that recur. He indicated we could be headed for one. His final comments, however, brought our attention to the individual composer who has “something interesting to say” - which he said will “never decline.”

Richard Danielpour’s comment, “I don’t believe there is a collective musical progress,” came in response to the seventh question. Until that point we did not see an overt contention with this term “progress” itself. However, if he was even slightly accepting of that term until that point, he certainly rejected the idea that musical “progress” would be the result of collective compositional goals. He implied the opposite: “musical development” (which we will use here for the lack of a provided substitute) is solely the consequence of the creations of the most “powerful” musical personalities who expand the musical language through their works. It is their “irresistible” presentations that establish the definitive musical mannerisms for any given period. For instance, the stylistic elements of minimalism are only discussed today because they were the chosen elements and mannerisms of effective communicators during the late 1960s and 1970s when “minimalism” was said to have originated (i.e., John Adams).

Danielpour also indicated that various historical movements (i.e., verismo opera) are only “after-the-fact” conceptions, or, “compartments” provided for those who cannot simply grasp the isolated individual artist outside of the larger periodic context. Again in reference to the great-man theory of history (which was briefly mentioned on page “4”
of the *Introduction*) we can perhaps see that there are parallels between Mr. Danielpour’s “most powerful perspective” and past theories that espoused the important developmental role for the “great figures.”

Michael Torke was our first composer to simply reject the idea of “progress” in music. It was not that Torke chose to refute historical periods or recognize compositional developments (although there were challenges to those as well). It was due to his clear standard for the word which indicates a logical sequence of events; a precedent followed by an advance. The fact that history has “simplification” periods noticeable after heightened times of complexity, as represented in the music of Monteverdi, Mozart, or Philip Glass, counters the scientific notion of progress. He clearly did not desire a different set of criteria for musical progress than would apply in science or other fields where “progress” implies the advancement of concepts upon established facts that provide inarguable forward-moving results. Here are selected comments from Michael Torke’s “total rejection of musical progress.”

I think the notion of “progress” goes hand-in-hand with what dominated the twentieth century - the math and science people, especially the science people, the physicists…In science you can talk about progress, because you take the advancements of what’s gone before and you create new theories, which are proved, and *actual* progress is made. And so I think because people were so enamored by that - that science had made such strides, and technology became so important, that they wanted to *apply* that model to art - where it doesn’t belong. And so I would venture to say that there *isn’t*, and *never has been* progress. I would say it is a term that *doesn’t apply*. And when we do apply it, not only is it incorrect, but we run into all kinds of problems.

This critique by Torke leads us now to yet another composer’s rejection for the idea of “musical progress.”
Those who are familiar with the writings of Milton Babbitt will not find it surprising that he was reluctant to apply the word “progress” to music in his interview without first having “some descriptive term from which you are going to derive.” This I intentionally avoided. Nevertheless, he was the one composer who offered the most prolonged discussion on this term itself. In his commentary regarding this “loaded word,” which he mentioned as having an association with the concepts of “better” and “desirable change,” he avoided its subjective use in reference to music and refrained from endorsing such value-judgments. In his elaboration about the common “logical errors that have been committed” in the use of this word, he even scoffed at the notion that his own works “represent progress.”

Another interesting aspect of Babbitt’s commentary is that in his response to the third question, we see that he does indeed have an opinion on unspecified musical trends that have been “enlarged upon, and refined, and extended.” One can only wonder, in retrospect, if he would think those words were akin to a “reasonable” definition of musical progress. In response to that question on “musical trends that have since grown (in reference to 1980) and may continue to do so in the next decade,” he stated the following.

Well, no. Not since 1980. Many great things from the preceding era have been enlarged upon, and refined, and extended. But on the other hand music has retrogressed too. Let’s face it. It’s tending more and more to the situation of pop music.
Noticeable in previous passage is the past tense form of the verb “retrogress.” If this is in reference to having “moved backwards” or having returned to an “earlier state or condition,” Babbitt may also have an opinion in regard to the state of pop music’s “conceptual development.”

In regard to another area of twenty-first-century “development,” Mr. Babbitt was the only one to mention the potential for the greater role of microintervals in the future of music, as this frontier “enlarges the materials of music and can probably be incorporated into the structure of composition.” Remaining true to his principles in this context as well, “progress” was not declared.

Conclusions Drawn from Questions Two through Eight

Effects of Visual Art in Music

Now let us summarize the responses of the composers regarding the more vertical issues related to progress in the other seven questions. To start, we will discuss the first part of the second question, which concerns the effects of visual art in music.

Only Michael Torke gave us a specific example of where it was felt that visual art is directly transferred to music. He cited the case of visual artist Jeff Kunz and composer Todd Levin. With the possible exception of Eric Ewazen’s reference to a Chinese painting in regard to his own piece, it can be said here that the other composers’ opinions on this subject were, to varying degrees, short of endorsing the notion of direct

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connections between the arts can be related in an overall Zeitgeist, but there were no specific examples offered of visual art serving as a clear catalyst for musical creation. Milton Babbitt briefly considered the slight possibility of a “synaesthetic” connection between Kandinsky and Schoenberg, but he and Richard Danielpour were very clear that they did not believe such stuff was real. In Danielpour’s case, to say that visual art is an “influence” (“effect” was used in the question) upon music is nothing short of a “fallacy.” In referring to the music of John Cage and the possible influence of a visual artist like Marcel Duchamp, Danielpour suggests a substitution for the word “influence.” His reasons are the following.

“...I think Cage was a strong enough person that if he didn’t like what was rattling around inside him from the beginning, Duchamp wouldn’t have made any sense to him. These are only approbations. They are not influences. You should be very careful as a musicologist when you start talking about influence and how you use that word, because it’s a potent, powerful word that’s often over the past three hundred years misinterpreted. That’s why I’m making the distinction.”

Regarding the “boundaries” between visual art and music, Fuerst, Thorne, Torke, Ewazen, and Wolfe each made references to synergies between music and visual arts - ranging from a piece of mixed media, to the “merging of and music and art” in ACO programming, to the Bang On A Can Summer Institute being housed in the MassMOCA art museum. Yet, despite such references, Fuerst, Torke, and Wolfe indicated the dialogue between visual artists and composers has waned. Fuerst discussed this as a matter of “specialization, economics, and geographical location,” and he (via William Bolcom) and Torke both pointed to a decline in the Greenwich Village gallery scene, which one flourished in interdisciplinary discourse between musicians, visual artists,
poets, novelists, playwrights, and others. This sentiment also resonated with Julia Wolfe, yet she stated optimistically, “It has kind of fizzled off a little while, but I think, and hope it’s coming back.”

**Musical Trends since 1980**

In regard to this third question concerning observable musical trends that have grown since 1980, it is completely obvious that *minimalism* stands out in the responses. De Kenessey, Ewazen, Wolfe, and Torke all mentioned a noticeable presence of this trend *near* that year, though it was noted that it started prior to 1980. Likewise, De Kenessey and Fuerst respectively highlighted the “new-eclecticism” and “collage” technique (i.e., Schnittke’s *Concerto Grosso, No. 1*). None of these four composers claimed these two trends have even yet “faded.” However, they were still short of mentioning their new or recent growth in the twenty-first century. De Kenessey said the following about *minimalism* and *new eclecticism*.

I think both of these trends (minimalism and new eclecticism) were enormously liberating. But I also think that they are self-limiting…simply because the eclecticism - the idea that one can only write in styles that have already been established….certain pastiche, you know - “cut-and-paste-away” - is ultimately not going to be fruitful once it has been done for a certain number of years. And the same thing with minimalism.

Michael Torke would not suggest any musical tendencies as having grown since 1980. In the next excerpt on the following page, he also mentions not seeing “anything” in the present.
What are the big trends? Minimalism was before it (the year 1980). There was talk of this “New Romanticism,” which is meaningless. I think that there are composers using tonal material and writing expressive music and that it is not seen as dialectic; making an argument to something else, but you’re in fact just creating a piece of music for its own sake, which is a very different impulse. Even in my own music, which is sometimes talked about as being post-minimalist…whatever that means…

You know what? I don’t think there’s any “trend” going on. I just kind of think we’ve lost it. I really do. I don’t see anything.

Perhaps ironically, it is our senior composers who respectively mentioned the growing influence of rock music and the rise of hip-hop in our culture. Francis Thorne said the “crossover thing” is everywhere, citing Michael Daugherty. It was Milton Babbitt who mentioned hip-hop. However, with his reference Babbitt points to the decline of our nation’s music educational system, presenting it in correlation with the rise of hip-hop music. Here are Babbitt’s responses from the third and eighth questions.

Under Question 3:

Let’s face it. I mean it’s tending more and more to the situation of popular music…when one doesn’t have an educated audience and music is not taught in schools and, therefore, not taught in universities. In order to get enrollment in universities you don’t teach “Introduction to Music” courses anymore, you teach “Introduction to Rock,” and now it will probably be ‘Hip-hop.’

Under Question 8:

If you don’t have this musical education from the beginning…if you don’t have a body of people who learn to read music, who become musically literate at a very early age and learn to hear music and care to hear music, directed by education in the lower grades though high school and into colleges this (decline) will not be reversed. If they’re told that this unimportant, and they’re always being told now that it’s a matter of no consequence, then what you expect to have? You’re going to get hip-hop.

Richard Danielpour was the only composer who really seemed to have observed a trend that is noticeable across all styles, regarding musical “memory,” and that it did
indeed surface somewhere in the 1980s.

One of them is that we seem to have recovered, collectively speaking, to some extent our sense of internal memory in music. And by that I mean that there was a period after 1945 in which a lot of music that was written, certainly not the best of it, but a lot of it that was written was composed without any self-referential sense of itself, meaning that if an idea was stated you would never hear the idea again in any way that was recognizable. It was as if music had a kind of shock treatment for many years. I feel that it started to change in the 80s, and music started to gather and regather a sense of its own internal sense of memory. And it really doesn’t have to do with repetition so much as it has to do with a piece remembering itself. That’s one of the tendencies. I’ve noticed that’s very strong and marked irregardless of style.

The Use of Non-European Instruments

Only Richard Danielpour mentioned writing a piece of music that included a non-European instrument, which was the Persian kamancheh (from the area of his ancestry). Yet, with varying enthusiasm, all of the composers were supportive towards integrating non-European instruments with Western ones. Danielpour and several other composers chose to speak at length about this subject. Among those five, Eric Ewazen, discussed our ability to access recordings with these instruments via retailers, which has given him an insight into other cultures. Also, Julia Wolfe had these comments.

Regardless if I’ve actually written for the instrument or thought about writing for the instruments...I think just hearing those instruments...the intonation...the manner of playing...the bending of notes...whatever...the particular character of the instrument has influence on how you even write for standard Western instruments....I was just thinking particularly with something like the shakahachi, which is a Japanese in-blowed flute. It has such a different attack on the note. I think of few pieces that I wrote, with no question about it, came from the shakahachi being in our world, or us being in its world.
However, according to Michael Torke, the phenomenon of composers combining non-European instruments with Western instruments is simply “inevitable.”

That just means we’re less ethnocentric, and maybe in the advent of technology we’re more sort of aware of what others cultures are doing. I have a friend who was born in Seoul, but she studied classical music here. So, she knows all the Western instruments. So the puts them all together. Well, that isn’t any grand statement. It’s just that she knows those two areas and doesn’t see any reason not to use them. They speak to her and they speak to curious, open-minded concert artists. I think it’s sort of inevitable.

Also discussed were acoustical factors related to using the quieter, non-European instruments in the Western concert setting. It was Stefania de Knessey who presented some acoustical adjustments that could help secure the future of non-European instruments in concert halls. It was also notable that Fuerst, Danielpour, and Torke emphasized that composing for non-European instruments in our Western culture needs to be done with a sense of authenticity as to avoid “exoticizing” effects. Given this sentiment, it is no coincidence that the composers whom Fuerst, Ewazen, and Torke thought successfully combined Western classical and non-European sources were composers who descended from those related non-European geographic areas reflected in their instrumentation - China, Korea, and Greece (although Greece is debatably non-European). In a similar vein, Danielpour’s praise for Philip Glass’ use of Tibetan instruments comes with his awareness of the composer’s long-term study of non-European instruments, and also his sojourn to Tibet.
Recent Philosophical, Spiritual, and Political Sources

With the exception of one composer, the overall answers to the fifth question could either be put into the categories of “no,” “slightly,” or “otherwise.” It is felt here the answers to this question came with less passion in comparison to the others. Perhaps this is a sign of our times, or part of Mr. Fuerst’s suggestion of a less “revolutionary” period. Despite this, the “manifesto” suggestion clearly sparked some fervent political commentary by Mr. Danielpour.

Nonetheless, Mathew Fuerst and Milton Babbitt did give basic affirmative answers to this question with respective, non-specific references to postmodernist writings and analytical philosophy. Mr. Babbitt also mentioned the enormous general effect that “unreconstructed logical empiricism” has upon his work and his thought processes. Likewise, Julia Wolfe briefly mentioned the role that religious text and John Cage’s writings have had on her thinking, and as well as the experience of seeing playwright Anna Smith interpret political concepts upon the stage.

However, the exceptional answer in regard to the fifth question was from Stefania de Kenessey, who was affirmative and specific.

I would say the closest there is to something like a manifesto that is with accord with what I do is represented by Frederick Turner in his book, *Beauty, The Value of Values*, in which he argues that there is something to the concept of beauty which transcends time and space…a kind of Platonic ideal as it were, which is variable, culturally guided, and historically guided but nonetheless exists…much the same that Plato would say that the idea of beauty exists: we can only approximate it and know it through experience, and these experiences will vary from person to person and time and place. Nonetheless, that doesn’t preclude the idea of beauty actually existing…That’s pretty close to where I stand in terms of philosophical or aesthetic beliefs myself. He’s written a couple of books on these subjects, but that book I think has something like a twenty-page manifesto directed at all the arts. Interesting enough,
Fred himself is a philosopher and poet and he talks about music, architecture, and painting. It is an aesthetic manifesto as opposed to a simple musical set of principles.

**Challenges and Benefits of Compositional Diversity**

To be an artist and work in a field of diversity certainly can be liberating and encouraging to one’s unique expression. Yet, the feeling that can be taken from several responses to the sixth question is that the uncontested diversity that now exists in our field is at times perplexing. Here are selected comments from each of our composers.

**Stefania de Kenessey:** “If you just wanted to make a laundry list of the number of possible styles in which we write music today, it is stupefyingly vast! And I would argue much, much, more vast than any composer had to contend with in the fifteenth, seventeenth, or even nineteenth century. That is a blessing and a curse. Because when one sits down to write music, one simply cannot use every resource available to one’s self.”

**Mathew Fuerst:** “One trend...is a trend to try and bring various techniques together. I think that actually is the challenge, because you have this great freedom to do whatever you want....with all of this information and tools that we can use at our disposal. ‘How is it we’re going to take things and create a work of logic, and a work that will be moving hopefully to a listener?’ ”

**Eric Ewazen:** “And then it’s confusing sometimes for certain composers...like ‘What do I choose?’ or ‘Is this my voice?’ or ‘If I change, am I changing because I’m not being hip enough, or experimental enough?’ ”

**Julia Wolfe:** “Diversity doesn’t necessarily mean it’s going to be better. It’s just less limiting, gives people more options of finding their modes of expression and the freedom to explore things. For me it’s liberating.”

**Francis Thorne:** “...one of the reasons that we (the American Composers Orchestra) are operating in Zankel Hall is because they have unlimited facilities for doing all kinds of crossover and mixed media....The whole mixed media idea I think is very prevalent these days. To me it just opens up new avenues all the time.”

**Michael Torke:** “The pluralism gives us all greater freedom, but it also doesn’t offer any direction for anyone. And that is the plus and the minus.”

**Milton Babbitt:** “Well, I think the primary challenge is how to keep music alive at all. You have such a complete confusion of categories that the most rudimentary music is now considered in some sense to be, call it what you will, ‘serious’ music.”
Richard Danielpour: “The great challenge is, as it has always been (it has never really changed…maybe it has become a little tougher now) is for a composer to be himself. ‘To thine own self be true’ carries a hell of a lot of weight in the twenty-first century…..to remain faithful to one’s own inner groaning, to one’s inner desire to write music…”

Influence of American Popular Music

Mathew Fuerst, Michael Torke, and Eric Ewazen each made the point that the incorporation of popular music into serious composition is something that has been done for centuries, with such references as Ewazen’s that Brahms used popular Hungarian melodies that were then the “rage.” Also, there was Torke’s mention of the incorporation of “drinking songs” in the Renaissance.

As for the future, Ewazen seemed to indicate that popular music “might” continue to be an influence, as did Mathew Fuerst. Fuerst’s comment, later reverberated by Danielpour, was that the influence of popular music is not a matter of choice, but is environmental, stating, “Certainly, I’ve been influenced by some jazz and some pop. You can’t not be. It’s part of the world we live in and the music we hear every day. I don’t think you can avoid it really.”

Although there were some qualifications to her answer, Stefania de Kenessey, again, was the only composer who actually gave us a confident affirmative to the question of a “future” influence of popular music in serious composition. It is also notable that she used the word revitalizing, as it perhaps may specifically foreshadow an auxiliary role in the aforementioned return to tonality. Her notion, similar to Mr. Danielpour’s via his use of the word “integrate,” was that the incorporation of popular music, versus simply the “adding on” of popular elements to “pre-existing compositions”
compositions,” is the only path to real success. Here are her comments.

I think it’s going to be crucial for revitalizing twenty-first century music. I think it will continue. I think it will only be successful if somehow the underlying aesthetic values of popular music are incorporated into ‘serious music.’ So long as it’s just an ‘add on’…say ‘adding on’ an electric bass or a trap set to an other wise preexisting composition…I don’t think it will quite work. I think we’re all struggling with convincing ‘fusions’ of these kinds of influences. That’s the real task at hand - to not simply take bits and pieces of popular culture and glue them on to so-called ‘serious’ music. On the other hand the idea of using certain types of modalities and rhythms and perhaps variable instrumentation and improvisational type qualities - I think all of those will continue to make themselves felt in ‘serious’ music. I would suspect they’re going to be increasingly important. The challenge is to make them sound incorporated rather than simply borrowed.

Francis Thorne and Richard Danielpour were also similar in specifically mentioning the changing and cyclic nature of popular music influence.

Thorne: “It’s very hard for me to say, because there has been so much musical progress in recent years. It’s very hard to predict that it’s going to continue at this pace. Everything goes in cycles and it may sort of retreat a little bit. In fact, I think in my own case that probably the most experimental work I ever did was in the 60s…My hope is, without being too specific, that this accumulation of activity that’s been going on will continue. But, my suspicion is that we may go into a dry period for a while. Everything goes in cycles.”

Danielpour: “These things come and go. Jazz became a very big deal to composers right after World War II. Elliott Carter was writing pieces that come as a result of going downtown to the Village and listening to jazz musicians and what they were doing…whether it’s a composer in the 40s going to the Village Vanguard, or whether it’s taking a hip-hop rhythm, or Chris Rouse taking a track from the Beatles’ White Album, we all do this because we’re essentially influenced by our environment from the earliest days of our consciousness. My generation is the first to be influenced by rock music in classical music…With me, I tend to integrate it. I tend to hide it.”

Julia Wolfe’s development reversed the relationship of influence in the question. She explained, “I was not a child who was raised purely on classical music…there was much more rock n’ roll or folk music…and then I really found my way on my own to get
interested in Beethoven, even though I had heard it before at home. So for me, it’s more that I’m *incorporating classical music* into my folk music.”

And aside from Ewazen’s “list” of influential pop and jazz elements under the seventh question, and Thorne’s talk of “more and more” jazz influence in recent times (although he was more emphatic about rock), and even as well Danielpour’s brief reference to the Village Vanguard, overall, there was a very modest mentioning of recent jazz influence. Mr. Babbitt said student composers at Juilliard view the new jazz program as “stale” and “rudimentary.”

**Effects of Recording, the Internet, and Computers**

The recording itself was generally heralded by the participants, whether it Ewazen’s mention of using portable recording devices and the CD as a “business card,” Wolfe’s story of Bang On A Can All-Stars being heard on a CD in Uzbekistan, or Danielpour’s point that the recording serves a useful “document.” However, the dissemination of new music via the Internet, which Ewazen, Fuerst, and Wolfe saw as an effective way for composers to promote their music, raised some economic questions.

One concern was in regard to recording royalties. This can be summarized by Milton Babbitt as, “How are they (composers) being paid for that? That’s the problem.” He also mentioned that with Internet pirating and recording costs going up, the recording industry is “going down the drain.” Julia Wolfe, who is involved in operating the Canteloupe Records label, also sees a threat to composer royalties, yet slightly hinted, as this trend may not be reversible, that a new systematic means of compensation may be in
order. She stated, “So if it’s a question of people making interesting music and then not getting paid and supported, that’s an issue. There is something to making music, and there is an art, and it should be respected in some way. I don’t have all the answers.” Yet, this does not mean she was not somewhat pleased with the phenomenon of downloading. She added, “…I think it’s fantastic. Everyone’s listening, and wants to listen, and wants the music, and wants to send their friend the music.”

Wolfe’s concern for royalties also relates to De Kenessey’s comments predicting, “I would guess in the long run CDs will become obsolete and most music will be coming through the Internet. I don’t know how the royalties will work. I suspect those will go by the wayside as well.”

Michael Torke seemed to already envision the recording as becoming a kind of garnish to the live concert with minimal relevancy in terms of revenue potential. This will be due to living in completely digital future where a greater potency will exist for live music. He prognosticated, “Live music in fifty years will be the coolest and most important thing, because that can’t be digitized. Sure you can record it, but then it’s a copy of something. But to be there - when it happens!…We want to see a musician actually putting spit into his flute…Recordings will be free. They’ll just be given out at the concert.”

In regard to the future of live concert presentations, Francis Thorne said recordings “have already affected” live concerts, as they are more cost-efficient for producers. But he also praised technology in regard to expanding artistic choices stating, “…one of the reasons that we (ACO) are operating in Zankel Hall is because they have
unlimited facilities for doing all kinds of crossover and mixed media.” Milton Babbitt was also wary about the future of live performance. Yet, this seems very justifiable when reading his personal account of the New York concert scene in 1935.

However, the rest of the interviewees were quite confident for the future of acoustic live performances. No one seemed to believe the computer, recording, or any type of technology is a real threat. Richard Danielpour comments, “People want the live experience. Why? Because we’ve become more and more alienated from one another as human beings, and we need more and more human contact - the human connection. So, the live performance will never be replaced, particularly in a time when people become more and more isolated and alienated from one another. I think it’s going to be more and more crucial.” Again, just like in Torke’s vision, it seems that things will be getting better for live music.

Nonetheless, we should remember that this optimism for live concerts was directed more towards consumer demand for live performance. While live concerts may indeed survive, De Kenessey, Ewazen, Babbitt, and Thorne all mentioned the financial challenges of concert production that place technology and labor expenses at the core of financial problems. The results, of course, are fewer concerts, fewer premieres, and scarcer employment opportunities for musicians. De Kenessey explained, “I think composers already have turned in vastly larger numbers than ever before to computers, computer software, or synthesized sound…This is simply because labor is very expensive in this country. And as joyous as it is to work with live music and acoustic instruments, it is also a very expensive proposition.”
Eric Ewazen also presented another aspect of technology in regard to replacing personnel, stating, “Look at the Broadway shows. Instead of a multiple string section you now have the added synthesizer. And those pit musicians…you can also bet they’re all also playing classical music. But they don’t necessarily make their living at that (classical music). They have to do both. In the 1940s, there were jobs for those students that were graduating, and now that’s not true. It’s hard.” Yet, Ewazen also mentioned that technological replacements will be less threatening to serious composition presentations. He stated, “electronics can augment it (serious music)…can be sort of an additional thing…yet another aspect of the times. But it won’t supplant the traditional orchestra. Where it will supplant the musicians is in the commercial stuff.”

Milton Babbitt pointed to non-technological factors generating these challenges. He said, “Try to go and hear a solo cello recital in New York now. Nobody can afford the halls and nobody goes if they play.” Yet, he still pointed to the sanctuary of the music school and said, “They (concerts) will probably remain in schools, of course, as long as the schools can continue. This process of producing musicians who have no place to go, no place to play, is already showing, and showing very severe results in New York.”

Using computerized sound in the process of music composition was also discussed. Julia Wolfe highlighted how the computer is used in the later stage of her compositions after a piece has been “worked out on the piano.” In other words, it is for sound simulation. However, Francis Thorne hinted at a more general effect upon the compositional process itself. He explains this effect as the following on the next page.
Hundreds of scores come into us every year, because they (composers) want their scores performed, or read… and so forth. Not only do they look the same, but a lot of them sound the same because with the fact of the computer…you can copy it out, you present the score, and it looks like it’s published, and so forth….I believe, and I may be wrong, that a lot of music is beginning to sound the same because it’s coming from the same easy process.

When our eight composers seemed to be interested in using the computer, it was generally as a “tool.” Even the composer of the landmark Philomel only mentioned using the computer for the generation of microintervallic scales. It indeed does not seem that anyone in this group was currently active in making computer music, or, electronic music for its own sake. Perhaps Mathew Fuerst provides some explanation here.

You get the feeling in reading about the 1950s and 1960s, when there was sort of this burst of electronic music scene in Germany, France, and here in New York, that this ‘new thing’ would make performers obsolete. That has turned out not to be the case whatsoever. If anything, it seems that the ‘great works’ concerning computers are actually these initial works…Philomel, Gesang der Jünglinge, some of the Berio works. These are actually still the works that kind of stand out as really fine examples. I think one of the problems with technology is it’s moving so fast now. It’s very difficult to work in a medium like that without sounding ‘old hat’ within a span of even a couple of years.

Final Remarks

As the idea of “musical progress” may still elude us after these eight interviews, it is even more problematic to determine without a consensus of goals or direction for the eight composers. However, a particularly resonating chord is strummed when these composers are in agreement. One such unanimous case was in support for the integration of non-European instruments to expand our timbral palate (in an authentic and “non-exoticizing” way, of course). It was also shown, to different degrees, that these
composers value America’s own folk, jazz, and popular music, expressed in such testimonies as Mr. Babbitt’s for the abilities of Jean Goldkette and Sauter-Finnegan ensembles. There was also an overall faith shown for the future viability of live performance - which at its worst will “continue in our schools,” and at its best will flourish as it never has since “1815 Vienna.”

The most reverberating point, however, was that no one seemed to seriously consider challenging the proposed “stylistic diversity” of the sixth question. Whether our field was described as a multitude “isms” that are “all equally valid” or as a “complete confusion of categories,” it is clear in retrospect of these interviews that “To thine own self be true” may indeed become a mantra in this new century - and in the eternal stream of macroprogress.
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