COMPOSITIONAL ISSUES
WITH CORIGLIANO, OLIVEROS,
AND KERNIS

DOCUMENT

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By

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ABSTRACT

The composers, John Corigliano, Pauline Oliveros, and Aaron Jay Kernis, were interviewed by phone on December 10th, 1999, June 8th, 2000, and September 4th, 2000, respectively. Through these interviews the author intended to obtain an accurate barometer on some of the mainstream, as well as, marginal compositional attitudes in the early twenty first century. These three artists represent a diverse and multigenerational cross section of American composers.

The introduction provides the author's personal reflections on some of the more crucial issues facing today's composer. What is the future of the orchestral medium, and how should composers use it? What should be the composer's role in society? Is there an over-saturation of CDs on the market, and to what extent should the composer use modern technology? Is it practical to combine elements of popular music with so-called 'high culture', and if so, which are more fruitful than others?

Some of the questions were specifically directed at the artists and their own works. For instance, Oliveros was asked what initially attracted her to the accordion and what is useful about the instrument from a compositional standpoint. She comments on how such an instrument plays a role in her improvisational approach to composition. Corigliano was asked if he had been influenced by Lutoslawski in his use of controlled aleatory, and if he had personal reasons for creating special notation, such as the 'Morse Code' symbol
found in the *Clarinet Concerto*. Kernis, representing a younger generation of composers, explains why he views 'eclectic' as a safe description of his style.

The conclusion provides further reflection on crucial issues and the author's observations drawn from the three interviewees. In addition, the final chapter incorporates contrasting views from composers Luciano Berio and Pierre Boulez to provide a more global perspective on the issues.
Dedicated to my family
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FOREWORD

The following document consists of an introduction which features the author's opinions on some of the more critical issues that he faces as a composer. This opening is then followed by three interviews which shed additional light on the issues, as well as other relevant compositional topics. The composers, John Corigliano, Pauline Oliveros, and Aaron Jay Kernis, were interviewed by phone on December 10th, 1999, June 8th, 2000, and September 4th, 2000, respectively. The three artists represent a diverse and multigenerational cross section of American composers.

All three individuals were asked to comment on issues such as: What is the future of the orchestral medium, and how should composers use it? What should be the composer's role in society? Does the over-saturation of CDs on the market affect the composer, and to what extent does the composer use modern technology? Some of the questions were directed more personally at the artists and their works. For instance, Oliveros was asked what initially attracted her to the accordion and what is useful about the instrument from a compositional standpoint. Corigliano was asked if he had been influenced by Lutoslawski in his use of controlled aleatory. Kernis, representing a younger generation of composers, explains why he views 'eclectic' as a safe description of his style. The document analyzes the views of three highly successful and diverse artists about the finer points of their craft.

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My motivation for selecting these three composers stems from common characteristics and modes of thought that I identify with in each individual. For instance, I have always admired and related strongly to the unique and sometimes theatrical notation used by Corigliano. Oliveros and I both share a kinship and passion for the accordion, a somewhat neglected and misunderstood instrument. We both believe the accordion to be a valuable compositional resource. As for Aaron Kernis, we are both very close in age and share some common musical aesthetics. He finds practical applications for many divergent musical genres, among these hip-hop and rock and roll. I find this approach useful as well for generating interesting source material for compositions. These three individuals have helped me to resolve some of the compositional issues with which I have been confronted in recent years.

The interviews themselves were conducted by phone over a period of approximately ten months. Various follow-up questions were then sent via e-mail to clarify certain points and to ensure that my information was as up-to-date as possible. For instance, a few months after the Corigliano interview, he was awarded the Oscar for his score in The Red Violin. I wanted to know at that point if any of his opinions (especially on film music) had fundamentally changed since we spoke. Apparently they had not, as he still considered himself primarily a composer of concert music.

Each interview began with essentially the same line of questioning. The composers were asked to describe their respective styles and to define their roles as artists. Where do they see themselves in regards to styles such as serialism and minimalism, and are they attempting to reach a certain population?
It was apparent that Oliveros would have more to say about topics concerning
improvisation and applications for the accordion. Her scores are quite non-conformist in
nature, reading more as recipes for performance rather than meticulous notational
artworks. Meditational practices are also at the very heart of her compositional life.
Being well-known orchestral composers, Corigliano and Kernis would obviously provide a
generous amount of commentary on the future of this medium. When asked to comment
on the current programming of the Cleveland Orchestra, Corigliano reacted strongly and
voiced strong opinions about particular conductors. Well known for his incorporation of
pop idioms, Kernis was asked to comment on why composers from his generation are
more comfortable in their adaptations of popular music sounds and gestures. I also
thought his views on the problems of incorporating operatic singers into a pop context
would prove relevant for the discussion.

The bulk of my inquiry regarding film composing and notation was directed towards
Corigliano. I was especially intrigued by his incorporation of theatrical terms; crystalline
is one such example. I was also interested in discovering what prompted the invention of
the ‘Morse Code’ notation found in several of his scores.

When queried about music technology both Oliveros and Corigliano sent me in some
unexpected yet interesting directions. Oliveros referred me to a speech she recently
composed for a conference on improvisation, Quantum Improvisation and the Cybernetic
Presence, while Corigliano had me refer to a program note describing his latest electronic
piece, Vocalise.

The epilogue provides the author’s observations and conclusions drawn from the three
interviewees. Views from Luciano Berio and Pierre Boulez are introduced at this point
to provide a more global perspective on the issues. One issue was the shared concerns
from Corigliano, Oliveros, and Kernis over the lack of evolution within the orchestra. Berio's views seem to be in direct conflict with this line of thought, especially in regard to orchestral and traditional instruments. Boulez' comments on the composer who tries too hard to communicate to the public provides an interesting polemic when compared with Corigliano's position-- that the composer is obligated to make his art as clear as possible and to avoid ivory towers.

The modernist views of Boulez and Berio provide a good contrast to the opinions expressed by Corigliano, Oliveros, and Kernis. Corigliano and Kernis both represent American post-modernist composers, while Oliveros represents the experimentalist composer.

Also included in the epilogue are some observations from Theodor Adorno. Although written in 1941, his study *On Popular Music* seems to parallel closely some of Kernis' indictments against the popular music industry. The notion of this music being products ties into Adorno's theories about the listener succumbing to conditioned reflexes.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the liner notes of a Scriabin CD, Edward Garden pegs the enigmatic composer as a kind of demigod, "he considers himself to be at the centre of the universe." In a sense, this is what most composers do. We create our own micro-universes and invite whomever is interested to share in the vision.

The challenges facing the 21st century composer are indeed varied and complex. According to Pauline Oliveros, "The human desire to record—to replicate and preserve resulted in 52,000 CD titles produced in 1998!" Composers must be increasingly resourceful in devising new ways for their music to be noticed, performed, and appreciated. The term networking, although overused and now somewhat banal, is a vital component of the contemporary musician's vocabulary. More successful and seasoned composers will usually advise the lesser-known to cultivate healthy relationships with performers and to build their own professional networks. "Always be sensitive to the needs of the performer" is a tried and true epithet often preached to the journeyman composer. While I do not reject such a notion outright, indeed it is a well-worn truism, there is an often overlooked facet of this fragile composer/performer relationship. What should we say about the composer's feelings, his/her personal vision, and the desire to innovate?
What should we say about the composer's feelings, his or her personal vision, and the desire to innovate? In light of this aspect, all too often, the relationship is seemingly one-sided against the composer.

In a recent performance of a piece which incorporated acting, poetry, and props, I called for the musicians to wear some modest theatrical make-up. The responses I received were everything from reluctant compliance to panicky dissent. I even received an impassioned e-mail plea from one of the percussionists to reconsider my request or he would abandon the piece altogether. At this point, I condescended and agreed to substitute strips of colored cloth.

The argument here is not to determine whether musicians should be willing to don make-up upon the request of a composer, but rather, should not the contemporary musician be willing to *perform* and not just interpret notes from the written page? Should not the performer and composer at least try to accommodate each other's needs?

Also indicative of the times is the necessity for composers and musicians to wear many hats. Besides her renowned reputation as a composer, Pauline Oliveros is also regarded as a poet, healer, author, and activist. John Corigliano is an educator, clinician, and adjudicator, as well as being an Oscar-winning composer. In addition to this, the composer must also be entrepreneurial. A more localized example may be a recent composition recital that I presented and organized. Not only did I write all the material, but did nearly all the copywork, scheduled all the rehearsals, paid certain musicians, bought dinner for certain musicians, set up and tore down equipment, designed and distributed all publicity materials, and presided over nearly every rehearsal (spread over a wide geographical area). Indeed, this was the composer as secretary and manager.
Equally bewildering is the composer's attempt to forge an original style without being pigeonholed within a particular 'ism,' but at the same time being accessible enough to nurture a supportive audience. A particular dilemma for American composers is popular culture's continuing appetite for fads and mediocrity. For example, a recent CD catalogue featured an entire section devoted to Celtic music, no less than 40 titles! Why not a category for Mariachi or Eskimo music? Music for truckers? The list could be endlessly trivial and egregious. This is not, of course, an indictment against any musical genre in particular but against the manner in which these genres are marketed.

One fairly recent compositional trend is to combine popular music with traditional opera. Such is the direction Michael Daugherty takes in his pop opera Jackie O. His apparent goal is to combine elements of popular and high culture. Some of the work is amusing, but much of it seems like a meager post-Warholian effort and smacks of irrelevance. Can pop and high culture musics be successfully combined, or is the label 'pop opera' simply an oxymoron of modern times? Corigliano would seem to opt for the latter, citing that today's popular music is strictly a performer's art and has very little to do with serious composition. Aaron Kernis, on the other hand, claims to find practical uses for pop idioms in his works, even admitting hip-hop. One can certainly notice a sly homage to disco in his work for string quartet and acoustic guitar, Dance Party on the Disco Motorboat (from the 100 Greatest Dance Hits CD). And one can find at least commendable examples of popular music in sometimes unexpected contexts. In Disney's animated feature Tarzan, I was immediately taken with a well-arranged Phil Collins soundtrack. Many of the songs are well-crafted and quite tuneful, with solid lyricism and pleasing harmonies. The Disney corporation is, and has been, known to incorporate fairly respectable music into many of their projects. The original Fantasia is an example which
features the music of Stravinsky and Tchaikovsky.

Another crucial area for today's composer is the nature of his or her relationship with the orchestra. Despite the orchestra's adherence to nineteenth century traditions, it still remains a stodgy measuring stick of greatness for the twenty first century composer. Stockhausen said of this medium in 1974, "Musicians in the so-called 'classical orchestras' know nothing about the recent electronic instruments, they regard themselves as specialists in one instrument, and will undertake nothing on their own initiative that will prepare them for the future." Nearly thirty years after this statement, a strikingly similar situation exists in today's symphony. Oliveros is optimistic about the orchestra's future, believing it is constantly evolving, while Corigliano suggests the need for radical reform to better serve the community at large.

Composers are often faced with hurried and unaccommodating rehearsal schedules, making the performances of new works sometimes painful and unsatisfying. Pierre Boulez will comment on this problem in the concluding chapter.

What kinds of repertoire are today's orchestras typically programming? A recent survey of the Cleveland Orchestra's 2000 - 2001 concert season reveals the following categories:*

- 18th century repertoire - 5 works
- 19th century - 24 works
- 20th century (including world premieres) - 46 works

Further analysis reveals:

- works written before 1950 - 36
- works written within the last 25 years - 7
most programmed works by a single composer: Beethoven (11)
runner-up: Sibelius (6)
second runner-up: Tchaikovsky (5)
works by living American composers - 2 (John Adams and Steven Stucky)

*figures obtained from the Severance Hall Group Planning Guide, The Cleveland Orchestra 2000 - 2001 concert season

Approximately forty-eight percent of the pieces were written between 1900 and 1950. Indeed, the first half of the 20th century is well-represented, but works by living American composers only comprise a meager 2.6% of the season's repertory.

If the symphony orchestra is no longer providing wide exposure for many composers, especially Americans, then perhaps writing for films has proved to be a more fruitful resource. Corigliano has achieved widespread recognition through such film scores as Altered States and the recent Oscar garnering The Red Violin. Oliveros composed the soundtrack for the award-winning Latino documentary Paulina.

Many audiences would not know about composers like Ligei, Bartók, or Penderecki if it was not for films like 2001 — a Space Odyssey or The Shining. Unfortunately, in Ligeti's case, a good amount of his music was used illegally by Kubrick.

"They took the music from my recordings. I knew nothing about it. When I heard about the film I wrote MGM and producer Stanley Kubrick (re: 2001 — a Space Odyssey). They wrote back: 'you should be happy. With this movie you have become famous in America.' I wrote back: 'I am not happy. You took my music and you did not pay me.' But I didn't want to sue. I am not so commercial. Lawyers met. In the end I got $3,500.""4

Aside from the dangers of possible exploitation, an even more profound issue faces the composer. In the complex medium of film writing, is it possible for the composer to do high quality work without sacrificing artistic integrity? After all, as Corigliano will remind
us, it is the director's vision that is being focused upon and certainly not the composer's.

Certainly an area that cannot be ignored by any composer is modern technology, or electronic music as it has been referred to in the past. Even if one consciously avoids the resources of MIDI, computer synthesis, sampling, or digital signal processing, it is quite likely that notational software will touch the life of any serious composer. Unless an individual is blessed with infinite blocks of time, he will need to (or hire someone to) utilize the resources of programs like Finale, Sibelius, or Score.

The technique of sequencing has also become a powerful organizing tool. "Even so well-established a figure as John Adams admits that he works out his orchestral pieces in a sequencing program." Since the 1980s the advent of sequencing technology has enabled the lay composer to sound very professional in the confines of the home studio or den. Kyle Gann remarks, "The tremendous sacrifices that such earlier American composers as Charles Ives and Conlon Nancarrow made to become self-sufficient are no longer necessary, thanks to the computer."6

As a musician who traveled and played popular music for a livelihood during the 1980s, I can say without reservation that electronic technology in the '80s was not only dominant among pop music circles, but a fashion statement as well. If you were in a band and not carrying around an arsenal of the latest electronic gear, you were looked upon as naively anachronistic. Gann considers the years from 1980 to 1985 to be one of the most significant eras in the history of music. Certainly, this was the period during which MIDI and all the essential types of software and hardware we are blessed with today began to take root.7

As for current compositional practice, interactive is a popular catch phrase with many composers. Using software such as MSP (Max Signal Processing), the computer can be
used as a tool to trigger all manner of sounds and sophisticated effects (like looping and panning) among acoustic instruments and voice. A recent example of such a piece would be Corigliano's *Vocalise*, which employs soprano soloist and computer effects. "The aural drama of *Vocalise* would be the acoustic and electronic sounds developing into and from each other, not simply alternating."^8

The current problem in this area is that there is a plethora of composers sharing the same software, that is, *MSP, Pro Tools, Logic*, etc., who come up with strangely similar results in the concert hall. Constant reliance on the panning effects of barnyard animals, church bells, sirens, and random chatter has become a cliché in this medium. It is worth noting that while Corigliano, Oliveros, and Kernis all acknowledge the importance and significance of music technology in contemporary practice, none of them consider it the focal point of their work. They choose to employ this technology only when it can be used as an effective tool to achieve compositional goals.

Interestingly enough, Oliveros manipulates the environment to come up with some very electronic sounds from decidedly *unelectronic* means on her ethereal *Deep Listening* CD. "The instruments—which are being played *without* any electronic processing—are accordion, didjeridu, trombone, voice and found metal pieces."^9 The musicians 'interact' with each other in the dank confines of a fourteen-foot deep cistern with a forty-five second natural reverberation.

In summation, the issues at the dawn of the twenty-first century, as I see them, are how do composers produce works of artistic merit and what is their fundamental role in a society over-saturated with recorded music; how do they view and approach today's symphony orchestra; to what extent does popular music have a place in serious
composition; and to what degree do contemporary composers involve themselves in music technology. These are the issues probed in this document—how Corigliano, Oliveros, and Kernis manage to forge uncompromised styles in this capricious, 52,000 - plus CD world, and how they utilize unique and distinctive compositional techniques.
CHAPTER 2

INTERVIEW WITH JOHN CORIGLIANO

Style and the Role of the Composer

DIJPRE: Steve Reich once said, "If music doesn't move people emotionally, it's a failure. I don't want people to find my music 'interesting,' I want them to be deeply moved by it." He also said, "when I'm composing, alone in my studio, I write for myself. I don't believe you can write what you think people want to hear without becoming a hack." Would you like to comment on this?

CORIGLIANO: Obviously, I think the first statement of his is correct. I'm surprised that he was the one to say that. As far as the second statement goes, everyone writes for himself, but it's a little naive to think that if you want to say something to people that they can necessarily come with the equipment to understand it. So, one of the things I try to do is make my music as clear as possible so that audiences can understand it, and that is not being a hack. That's being a professional, because all composers in the past, Beethoven more than anybody, revised and reworked to make their material as clear and concise as possible so that it could reach people. So, I think that statement [Reich's] is a very romantic one. If you write and try to say anything to anybody else, then you are pandering; therefore, if anyone likes your music, you're a panderer. I have a feeling that's a very old-fashioned, Germanic nineteenth century view that I do not share.

DIJPRE: Since his music enjoys such a large audience [Reich's], I would expect almost the opposite from him.
CORIGLIANO: I think his music certainly does [enjoy a large audience], but I don't think they go into it feeling in the same way that people feel for other kinds of music. I never thought of his music as being intensely emotional. It's more problem solving to me. When he says he writes for himself, the isolation of that, in a sense, means he's in an ivory tower. I don't believe in ivory towers. I believe the composer does have a job to do in addition to being an artist, which is to make his art as clear as possible.

DIPPRE: It appears that we're living in an age where serialism and minimalism have run their course. I see these as two extreme styles. Where do you see your style in relation to these, and how would you describe your compositional approach in general?

CORIGLIANO: I would certainly hope it doesn't become an 'ism.' I think all isms mean that there is a way of doing that with ease, a certain set of techniques that you can do, and just write like that. I think that while they're opposite, minimalism and serialism, the results they get are very similar. John Adams recently said minimalism was the last dying gasp of modernism. Modernism, serialism, that is, the idea of not just twelve tone work but all timbres being governed by a set of systems that you cannot hear, is another example of modernism. I think the idea of the modernists is dying, yes. I don't think they need to die. I just think they need to assume their place, which means that people who want to hear it can hear it, and people who don't, don't have to. That was not the case thirty years ago when they had to, because it was almost enforced. The problem with modernism is that it is rather totalitarian in its views, and that it does not allow for other art forms; therefore, a lot of modernist composers become, in power positions, quite intolerant of anybody who doesn't speak the language they speak—and censor.
For example, Boulez [changes programs], and he's doing it at this point in Carnegie Hall, to reflect his views of what music should be rather than what Ellen Zwilich did as the Carnegie Hall composer-in-residence before Boulez, where she allowed all kinds of music from Babbitt to me to whomever to be heard. That's the problems with those techniques [serialism]—they tend to be rather hardline. I don't mind them existing as long as they don't try to take over the world.

DIPPRE: I recently listened to a recent work by Penderecki, his Credo, in which the liner notes say he is searching for a "universal musical language." This work sounds very reminiscent of Verdi or Rossini. Is this a viable direction for composers?

CORIGLIANO: It's frankly odd that he would be Verdi or Rossini-like. When I last heard Penderecki, he was sounding like Szymanowski, which is a kind of Polish Romantic—a tonal Romantic in the late 19th century, early 20th century (like Scriabin). I thought it was kind of pretty, but I also wondered why a man who had developed so fascinating a series of techniques of making music sound interesting sonorically would abandon those things and not integrate them into his other music. The problem I think there is again is this problem of isms, and that is that Penderecki can't reconcile his more, not dissonant, but more original sonic language with the tonal world that he also loves. That he can't find a way to do them together is the problem. I think the solution is to [combine] both of those things into a piece, but I don't think Penderecki's very much on architecture. That's the big problem, which is why I don't think his pieces are as substantial as other composers like him, although I think he's offered a tremendous palette, almost dictionary, of sonority and textures and ways of making music sound that is quite
extraordinary. I think his contribution is basically that, and I don't [think] that as a thinker or architect in any other way that we can deal with as major, but he certainly contributed in a major way to our culture.

DIPPRE: Do you think it is practical, or even possible, for composers to pursue a "universal language?"

CORIGLIANO: I don't think I even understand what that means, because music is a universal language by definition. It is a language that any culture or any human being on the planet can understand in many ways without knowing how to speak it. It has been a universal language—it is the only universal language. So, making it one doesn't make any sense to me—I don't get that either. I think that's a strange thing to want, something that already is.

DIPPRE: You mentioned Boulez previously. Were people in the 50's and 60's, such as Boulez and Babbitt, pushing serialism as the dominant style?

CORIGLIANO: Babbitt is not a political power person. I know him. He teaches at Juilliard. Milton does what he does. If you like it, fine. If you don't like it, fine. I don't think we're talking about that kind of person (the one that pushes a particular ism). I think we're talking about the kind of people that get into the grants, the government awards, performances, and run organizations. There Boulez and Babbitt have nothing to do with each other. Milton is a composer who believes in a certain ideology and writes it. Boulez is a man who wants to enforce his music and the kind of music he likes on everyone else. That's a different thing, and I think you have to recognize that. I do think there was a time in this country where pretty much if you didn't write at least 12 tone, if not serial music, it was hard to get grants and awards. There certainly was that period, and I lived through it.
I don't approve of any kind of censorship—that kind of censorship or the censorship of the serialists either. I would be the first person to object to it, because I believe in a democracy—I believe there is a place for everybody. Their place may not be all in the same place. The New York Philharmonic may not be the place where Milton Babbitt should be heard, because his music is too difficult to prepare adequately for them, and because the audience is not the audience that he needs to reach. That doesn't mean his music shouldn't be played. It just means that might not be the venue for it. I think that if everybody accepts that, and they all find venues and they're happy with it, then we have a much better world. If people try to make every venue their own, then we don't.

**Evolution in the Orchestral Medium**

**DIPPRE:** Stockhausen said in the 70s that "musicians in the so-called 'classical orchestras' know nothing about the recent electronic instruments; they regard themselves as specialists in one single instrument, and will undertake nothing on their own initiative that will prepare them for the future."\(^{12}\) Some twenty years later it seems that nothing has drastically changed on the orchestral front. What is the future of the orchestral medium?

**CORIGLIANO:** I think that's more a social thing than a musical thing. The problem with the orchestra is its separation from the community around it. That isn't so much a matter of its music as a matter of the fact it stands for, or represents, basically the European cultures of the past. It represents this by constantly importing European and German maestros to come and conduct orchestras and do the same Bruckner and basically German repertoire. They're reinforcing this, and I think that, like alcoholics, who have to hit bottom before they can make their way up again, the major orchestras are finally going to have to close down before they realize the dead end quality of this curatorial institution.
They're going to have to become part of society, which means they're going to have to break up into smaller groups and play in communities, as well as an orchestra, more than they have. They're going to have to deal with young people and how to make young people interested in the music that they think is important in an intelligent way, not a stupid way—not to play Mozart for kids where they'll be bored, but, in fact, to get kids composing and to play contemporary music for them. They're going to have to get contemporary composers to write music that gives them the link to the community and the world around them. There are conductors that do this, like Leonard Slatkin and Marin Alsop. Basically the biggest orchestras tend to employ the kind of maestros that reinforce the other idea, the idea that the orchestra is basically a curatorial arena of greatness or [of] European (basically German) art of previous centuries. I think that's how it's going to die unless individual orchestras get out of it. I don't think it has to do with electronics, I really don't. I think it has to do with a mind set and a social thing [that] they are not accepting. [They must accept] that they have to become part of the world.

DIPPRE: So, this notion of the general (the conductor) directing the troops has to die?
CORIGLIANO: It's not just directing the troops. The German maestro is also reinforcing that [he is] conductor as artist. He's not. He's a conductor—an interpreter—that's all he is. It is by building performance up into creation they are doing something that just isn't true, and the audience knows it. So, you can't sell performance forever. The reason that the record business is slumping in classical music is because the only way they got away with selling performances as creation was to find a new method of recording them. First the 78, then the LP record, then stereo and dynagroove, and all those things... Then they flirted with quadraphonic sound, and they finally got digital sound and CDs.
Now they're stuck with perfect sound, and perfect sound means that everybody's got their record collection. They're not that interested in hearing what some guy has to say about a piece they have eight records of. So, they don't buy it. Now, the next thing they're going to do is take the surround sound of the home theaters and make surround sounds of everything again. They will desperately market that, and that's because it's basically the maestro idea, the whole idea of that quasi-religious Wagnerian view of the orchestra conductor and the music as godlike. That is basically how music is sold here and around the world. This illusion has been kept alive, and if it isn't alive, then they feel the music is going to die, and that's just not true. What's really going to happen is it's [the music] going to get healthy.

DIPPRE: That's an optimistic thought for me, since I'm thirty-nine and I'm still considered a fairly young composer—I'd like to know that I have some kind of future.

CORIGLIANO: The way to get a future is to go out and write pieces for orchestras that they need, [pieces] that involve the community, the world around you—and not to simply write your symphony as an ego trip. Write a piece that serves, just like in the past. People always wrote pieces that served, and the great ones lived on. The whole view now is that the composer is not supposed to be influenced by reality or the world around him. He is simply supposed to do what he does, as Steve Reich says, to please himself. Well, that's easy. It's pleasing yourself and others that's hard. If you want to function and get your pieces played, figure out a way where you're writing a piece the orchestra needs. Write something special. Write something celebratory. That's part of being a composer, being creative. They're not. You have to be.
Composing for Films

DIPPRE: One of the things that has fascinated me about your music is your writing for films. Some of my earliest and exciting musical experiences were, for instance, going to the Saturday matinee and taking in John Barry’s scores in the early James Bond films. The score was to me, just as—if not more so—bold than the movie itself. I once studied with a gentleman who felt this medium was a compromise for the composer. Do you agree with this?

CORIGLIANO: I would say that he’s right in one respect, in that you don’t always write what you want to write. In concert music you basically try to write what you feel you want, and then the conductor, concertmaster, and players try to realize it. When you get to opera, once it’s theatrical, you have lost some control but not one-hundred percent. Not only is there a librettist, but a director, a stage designer, divas, and producers that all have their say in cutting this and adding that—so you lose some control. When you get into movies, it’s basically the director’s vision. You have to be able to realize it as best you can by utilizing the music you want to write; but you have to realize it’s his vision. If you don’t, he’ll cut it. Simple as that, you are an employee. So, it isn’t the same. On the other hand, that doesn’t mean you can’t do good work in it. It just means that you’re not totally in charge. It’s not your movie. You are asked to fill in some gaps with some sound and to do that in a good way. If you can do that, fine, and if you can’t make the adjustment, then you can’t write film music. That doesn’t mean it’s bad, it’s just different. You are not the center of attention. The film and the director is, not the writers of the film. After all, who do you know who has written the words for a film [and] get any attention? And actually they wrote the scripts! Think about it. It’s like the composer or an author of a play. They don’t even get any attention. Nobody even cares about the writers. The only people that
get attention are the actors and the director, and the director rules the actors. So, basically if you're writing a film score, [remember that] the director is trying to make his film, and you better fit into it. In opera, more and more that's getting to be the case, where directors are telling composers what they want and making them do it.

DIPPRE: I've noticed that the Cleveland Orchestra had recently been programming selections from *Schindler's List* in some of their concerts. Is this a good or bad thing?

CORIGLIANO: I think it's neither good nor bad. The Cleveland Orchestra had until now a rather horrible music director named Dohnányi, who only played Germanic music in his new music thing. They probably did that as a futile attempt to get something more popular, because now he's leaving. He personally took my piece off the program in Paris when my symphony was supposed to be performed by the Orchestre de Paris. He had it removed because he wouldn't have my music played there. That's the kind of thing I'm talking about, even though he wasn't conducting that concert. This is where those people belong—back in Europe in the Middle Ages. The reason they play *Schindler's List* is because the programs he had, and the new music he picked was so unattractive, that basically they're trying to do something desperately to get an audience.

**Pop and High Culture**

DIPPRE: One more aesthetical question. In the liner notes of the CD *Jackie O*, Michael Daugherty describes this work as "a pop opera that explores the interplay of musical idioms associated with 'high' and 'popular' culture in America." He goes on to say that his background included playing in rock and jazz groups as well as doing gigs as a cocktail pianist. This is similar to my own background as a musician. Can there, or should there be, a successful blending of pop and high culture?
CORIGLIANO: Most pop songs are vehicles, just like Bellini is a vehicle for singers. So, musical content of the stuff is not very high. What's really high is the way the ornaments and things that performers do to make it interesting—the delivery, in other words. Now, if you write a bunch of that stuff and give it out to opera singers, who then have to forcibly learn something that was done with spontaneity, invention and naturalness by other singers, what you get is a very pale imitation. So, the problem is that most (pop) people do it better, and that his opera isn't as exciting as a good pop piece. This is not really a composer thing. If he wants to do that, he should get a bunch of pop people in and arrange around them and have opera singers come in and do what they do best.

DIPPRE: As I listened to this CD, I wasn't very pleased. It seemed like a very empty experience. Then it dawned on me, should this be something I should really be seeing?

CORIGLIANO: No, you don’t need to be seeing it. I don't think that's true. I don't think seeing it would have helped.

DIPPRE: I would be just as bored?

CORIGLIANO: Yeah, I think so. I think the reason you’re bored is that the people who are performing it are asked to perform things that aren't natural to them and that are improvised in a sense. It's like somebody writing out a jazz thing and giving it to a classical musician to play. It doesn't work. The whole thing about that has to do with the same way a classical musician who's played Mozart all his life or Chopin, let's say, understands the rubato of Chopin and does it naturally. If you try and teach this to a jazz player, they don't do it naturally, because they don't feel that. These are things that come out of a lot of playing, a lot of tradition, getting in your body, etc. They're hard to do well artificially, and they're very easy to do naturally, because you grow into it. So, with pop
singers that's what they do, and if you want to feature them, let them do the singing. It is not compositional. Pop music is just not highly composed music.

DIPPRE: I just heard that Elton John is going to do his version of Aida. What do you make of that?

CORIGLIANO: I think it's going to be Elton John's version of a story, [that Verdi originally composed]. I think the music is going to be much less interesting than the delivery. Again, what it's going to be is a performance thing in which Elton John's performance might really be interesting. He's not going to get Leontyne Price to sing like Elton John wants. He's going to get pop people, and when the pop people do it, it's basically going to be real simple. The music isn't going to be nearly as sophisticated, or interesting, or beautiful as Verdi, but the performance might be dynamite. That's what people will listen to, the performance, and the performance is the piece. If you look at bel canto, look at some of those operas by Donizetti and Bellini. The music is very similar to pop music—it's like three chords, the flute's playing parallel thirds (oom-pah-pah, etc)—that's what you get in the bass. What makes those pieces successful is the performers. It is not a piece like a Brahms piece, where the performer performs something intrinsically fabulous [that] someone else wrote, whether or not they play it. The piece [pop music] doesn't exist without a performer. It's what I call 'coat hanger' music, that is, it's music shaped like a coat hanger upon which glorious performances are hung. That's what pop music is like, and bel canto opera, and Paganini (things that show off the violinist). There are pieces in the classical world that are like that, but they're not highly composed pieces. They're mainly [intended] to show off people's abilities to do things, like sing higher and lower, faster, etc. It's all about performance.

DIPPRE: So, in other words, there can be good popular music, at least occasionally?
CORIGLIANO: What I hear *today* is that the best pop music has do to with how people do it. Many years ago when pop music was more alive, when musical theater and pop music were close together, you had Jerome Kern and people like that. The pop music was more alive with operetta and *composing*. It's *not* alive with composing anymore. It is a performer medium, and it is separated from that [composing]. All you have is disembodied rhythm and people improvising around it and [using a] very mild harmonic palette. So, what you're really getting from that is the vehemence and the delivery.

**Notation and Compositional Influences**

DIPPRE: Let's move on to some things that more pertain to your music. One of the things I really like about it is that it is a very personal style, and the terms that you use are very unique. You get your point across in *your* way. You seem to have your musicians improvising a lot, but always within a carefully mapped framework (the *Pied Piper Fantasy*, for example). Have you been influenced by Lutoslawski in this regard?

CORIGLIANO: Actually, I wasn't influenced by him. He did it in his own way, and I did it in my way. I use my own symbols, and he uses his own symbols, which I've seen later. I like Lutoslawski's ideas—I think they work very well. I think he's a good composer. I don't think he's as great a composer as some people do. He's very revered. I'm not sure about that [being revered]. I feel that when he tries to get lyrical and tries to do something beautiful, it all has a quasi-Bartókian world that he jumps into. When he's most original, he's like Penderecki getting sounds, and I don't feel that when he's [making the Bartókian sounds] it's as beautiful or personal. But, I do admire him. He has his symbols, and I have mine. We're both going after the same kind of thing, which is controlled aleatoric music. That is aleatoric music that is not like John Cage—say play anything for
ten minutes. It [my music] in fact gives you a restricted number of notes, a restricted number of rhythms, and various instructions on how to play it. Then the combination of those things provides a freedom that you don't get if you restrict every note, and part of this [lack of freedom] happens because notation has gotten so perfect. Now we can write performers right out of the picture, and it's an attempt to try to get vitality back into the music so that the performers have the freedoms and abilities to do things that are not so complex and so controlled that they have no voice. I'm just as opposed to composer total control as performer total control. I like the mixtures.

DIPPRE: I found an interesting word that you used in that score (Pied Piper), crystalline, used near the beginning and the end. What do you mean by that?

CORIGLIANO: Crystalline is like crystals—it sparkles. It's very jewell-like faceted, so it's the star things I ask for. They have points on them. If you look at a crystal, it has many symmetrical facets like snowflakes would have, for example. They're known for their remarkable shape, and sparkle, and clarity, and reflection. So, that kind of a word means to sound like that.

DIPPRE: So, you're painting a very visual image for the performer?

CORIGLIANO: No more than Debussy did in all the descriptions on how to play his stuff. He did the same thing—I'm just using English. People do that—it's not just allegro or vivace anymore. We say things on how we want it to sound in our own language. That's all I'm doing.

DIPPRE: I have also seen the term rudely in your scores. I use this in my music, and for the longest time I thought perhaps I was silly for using it until I discovered it in your music. I thought, "wow, someone else makes use of this."
CORIGLIANO: Sure. Any term you can get then will convey not only how to play it, but a kind of emotional line (like an actor). You also give a musician images. George Crumb does this like crazy, [which you'll see] if you look at his stuff. I've never seen anybody write more imagery for the performer as well as the listener. He sets up a piece so that at the beginning, you're already in the mood.

DIPPRE: In a sense you're requesting a certain attitude from the performer.

CORIGLIANO: Of course.

DIPPRE: Do you feel that you're getting into the area of instrumental theater when you do that?

CORIGLIANO: No, I just think that music is inherently theatrical. It's the alternating of opposites. It's the building and release of tension. So, I'm not getting into physical theater or the fact that the actor gets up and screams Shakespeare, but I am getting into the elements they have in common, which is theatricality. Which means, one weighs and balances all the time, and one is always setting up something for something else. That's part of the construction of all the great forms in music, the setting up of needs and fulfilling of them by supplying the opposites of what they had previously. Like toccata and fugue, ricecare, etc., all those pieces set up the need for each other in terms of the dynamics, the kind of mood they were in. And, it's the same thing with sonata form—the two opposed themes, then you work them out. If you write two similar themes, you're not doing anything. It's all theatrical. It's just that people don't think it's theatrical because it doesn't have words.

DIPPRE: It also seems that the contour of a line is very important to you, especially when it is improvised. Just for the sake of argument, why not just write out the pitches?

CORIGLIANO: Sometimes it would be much harder to play—for example, if you're
playing within a specific series of notes, and you're asked to play as fast as possible, say between C and F-sharp, and then you're asked to move that three lines down to another box and play it as fast as possible. If I wrote all those notes out, how many would I have to write for you? (compared to another player) The answer is I'd have to write what I thought was as fast as possible, and you would have to memorize two-thousand different notes just to get chromatic! Does that make any sense when the same result is achieved the same way by simply saying, 'play between these notes chromatically and as fast as possible, avoid runs and scales, and do vary the notes?' If I wrote it out, the player's eye would have to scan hundreds of notes of which whether they be F or F-sharp would be of no importance.


DIPPRE: When you hear these things being performed, do you get varying results from night to night?
CORIGLIANO: No. As a matter of fact, no more than a Beethoven symphony. In Three Hallucinations or The Pied Piper, they sound pretty much exactly the same when different people play them. You take four french horns and have them play as fast as possible in a diminished fifth area, and I challenge you to hear any difference from orchestra to orchestra, except for the quality of the horn playing. The point of that is that the notes are not important. The gestures are important. So, specifying notes there is not really what it's all about. It's about a surge and an energy that is released by a kind of playing around a series of notes that you restrict. So, if you write out those notes, they'll never play it with the energy. They'll be terrified, because they'll be reading notes rather than playing the gesture.

DIPPRE: Are there any jazz artists that have influenced your style?

CORIGLIANO: Only subconsciously, but not consciously. The whole idea of jazz as an improvised medium is interesting to me; but the fact is, its restrictions, having to do with the fact that the beat has to stay the same all the time and the chords have to be prearranged, makes it again a performer art form. I consider jazz a performer art, and therefore has to be simplified vastly from the kind of things that I'm interested in, because you can't improvise with constantly changing meters and have a bunch of people play together. You cannot do it in a harmonic world that is changing in rather strange ways. What you have to do is take several simple chords and a melody with a rhythm that stays the same, and then you can be free to play against it.

DIPPRE: So, anything that vaguely resembles John Coltrane is just a subconscious influence?

CORIGLIANO: No, I may have liked the energy of a passage like that, but I never would have gone about it the same way. He's a performer. They're performers, and if I like
something about a performer, I can write it into a piece. But that doesn't mean I would have done it in the performer's way of doing it.

DIPPRE: Let's discuss Gazebo Dances, something I listened to recently. I really had a lot of fun listening to that and reading through the score. I would imagine that's a lot of fun to perform (the band version).

CORIGLIANO: It was originally piano four hand music. I actually wrote that as four pieces for four friends—who were amateur musicians—to play at home. I wrote it eventually as a band piece, because I thought it would be a good subject for band. This is just like Barber did with Souvenirs; he wrote it for friends. The reason for four hand music, unlike two hand music, [is that] people used to play it at home. That's how they used to get the Beethoven symphonies—the four hand versions (Liszt made them all over the place). So, four hand music is not for professional musicians, necessarily. It's the kind of music that you play at home. So, I wrote these on no commission—just for various people, my mother being the first one. I wrote a series of four movements, dedicating it to friends who don't play in public but love to play. When I got the commission, I decided to apply it to the band.

DIPPRE: They're going to perform that (Gazebo Dances) in February at OSU.

CORIGLIANO: You might also listen to the last movement of that and then the second movement of my symphony [Symphony #1], and then see that the last movement [of Gazebo Dances] is dedicated to Jack Roman and Christian Steiner. Jack Roman is the person that died of AIDS dementia, and therefore, there's a strange version of that in the symphony which is a tarantella, also. That material relates to the happier time. He was the artist representative of Baldwin Pianos, but he was not a professional pianist. Fifteen years later, after he died, I wrote it as a memorial to him in the symphony. The tarantella
was originally a dance to ward off madness. The *Gazebo Dances* version of it is completely happy and innocent and has nothing to do with the blackness the other one has.

DIPPRE: As I listened to that piece, I heard a lot of Copland.

CORIGLIANO: I don't, but that's because I wrote it. Copland was an influence on me, obviously. So, when you say that, there are aspects of my music that will reflect that in the same way Bernstein has a lot of Copland in him—and Copland has a lot of Stravinsky in him! If you listen to Copland and you listen to Stravinsky, you'll see that Copland got his world out of the world of *L'Histoire du Soldat* and all of those pieces. Stravinsky, he assembled his world with that as a major influence. So, if you hear it, it's just because I grew up with a lot of that music and love it and it's a part of my language.

DIPPRE: I was also listening to the *Clarinet Concerto* (1977) on the Richard Stoltzman CD. The liner notes say that this was "the only concerto to enter the American repertory since Copland's in 1948."¹⁴ Have you noticed other composers writing more for the clarinet since this piece debuted?

CORIGLIANO: I know a lot of composers have, but I think it's due to the emergence of the solo clarinetist as a phenomenon, because earlier in this century the first desk always played the solos. The idea of James Galway as a flutist who plays with orchestras as a guest or Richard Stoltzman as a clarinetist who plays with orchestras as guest was not done. People like that have appeared, and because of that, more people are writing music for them.

DIPPRE: You use a pair of wavy lines to denote irregular repetitions of notes (the 'Morse Code' analogy). Have you ever fleshed out some of these notes in exact detail?

CORIGLIANO: If you look at the score, you'll actually see that between the first and the third movement I develop that idea.
I wanted to make a fanfare with irregular notes, because it was going to be played back and forth over space with the trumpets. I knew you couldn't synchronize it because of the slow speed of sound. So, I developed that Morse Code, so that I could write a single symbol, and they could do it.

EXAMPLE 2: CORIGLIANO, evolution of the 'Morse Code' notation in *Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra* (1977), 1st mvmt., rehearsal #10-11, horns, trombones, and tuba, and 3rd mvmt., rehearsal #5-6, trumpets, trombones, and tuba. Copyright 1978 by G. Schirmer, Inc. (ASCAP) International Copyright Secured. All Rights Reserved. Used by Permission.

If you look at the first movement, you'll see a place where the trombones play the Morse Code, but it's notated in what might be called the Penderecki-like manner, with irregular groupings of notes. I never went back and corrected it, but between the first and third movement I developed this other way of notating it, which is what I do from now on.
It's much simpler, because you can just look at the note value, follow the conductor's beat, and play these irregular notes. If it's a dotted half note, you play it for three beats. It's very simple, whereas the other way, you've got a bunch of irregular patterns of two's, four's, three's, five's, etc., and you also at the same time have to follow the conductor and come down on the next beat. So, it's much harder to do and not as good a notation.

DIPPRE: I noticed near the beginning of the third movement where the clarinet brings in the toccata figure—is this a tone row? It says 'computer-like.'

CORIGLIANO: It is. Yes, it's a tone row.

DIPPRE: So, occasionally those things serve your purposes.

CORIGLIANO: Of course! If you want chromaticism, there's nothing easier.

DIPPRE: When I heard it, the passage seemed very clear, very recognizable.

CORIGLIANO: Don't forget that when you write a tone row it does not mean it has no tonal implications. My piano concerto, the *scherzo* of that, written back in 1967, is twelve-tone, but it also has a harmonic center.

DIPPRE: It is a very intense and virtuosic piece. I really enjoyed that piece a lot (the *Clarinet Concerto*).

CORIGLIANO: Well, good! If you hear it live, you'll like it even more because of the players around the hall and the spatial quality. It's a piece to be heard live.

DIPPRE: Thank you for the interview.

**Music Technology and *Vocalise***

When asked to share his views on the state of music technology, Corigliano suggested I read the program note to *Vocalise*, a recently premiered work for interactive electronics and the New York Philharmonic. The work features electronically manipulated soprano
soloist as well as flute, clarinet, and trumpet.

The score calls for the four microphones (for soli flute, clarinet, and trumpet as well as for the soprano) and the sound engineer and his/her control panel to be conspicuously visible to the audience during performance. These would be electronics not as illusion, but as instrument: the shadow soloist in a not-quite double concerto.  

Since the use of electronics in *Vocalise* was a relatively new compositional experience for Corigliano, he suggested I contact his sound engineer, Matthias Gohl for additional information. I was informed that for the performance several speakers were distributed around the hall in a diamond shaped configuration. What was most significant is that Gohl considered himself an actual member of the orchestra, perhaps representing a new breed of musician.

I consider *Vocalise* an interactive piece in that the mixer [sound engineer] is in fact a member of the orchestra. Aside from pre-programming mixer and effect settings, he/she has to ride the vocal mic manually, dial in certain effects (such as overtone scales on the bass clarinet) and follow the conductor for cues just like any other player.

The creation of this piece represents growth and evolution for Corigliano. He appears to be rectifying a remark made near the beginning of the program note—"almost all of us have ignored this era's [the twentieth century] unique contribution to sound—electronics."
CHAPTER 3

INTERVIEW WITH PAULINE OLIVEROS

Style and the Role of the Composer

DIPPRE: First of all, where do you see yourself in relation to serialism and minimalism? John Corigliano stated that he would never want his music to be classified as an "ism." Do you resist categorization, or do you try to reach a certain demographic?

OLIVEROS: First of all, I'm not comfortable with categories. It's a box, and the real issues of whatever your work is are not addressed in the kind of detail that makes for decent understanding. Sure, some of my work you might put in this category and then another category—it moves around. If I do something, I'm not necessarily interested in doing it again.

DIPPRE: Is there a particular audience you are targeting?

OLIVEROS: I'm not doing that, either. I'm not targeting anything. Over the years people have found out about my work, and they come to the performances that I do, or not. I generally think of the small audience as being the best audience. I really like playing or performing for a few people. If it gets to be more than four-hundred people, then it begins to be a little distant. You lose a certain kind of intensity and experience.

DIPPRE: If someone unfamiliar with your music asked you for a general description of your style, how would you respond?

OLIVEROS: I would talk about whatever I do coming out of my practice of deep listening. It's listening to everything all the time and reminding myself when I'm not. It's a
balance between an inclusive kind of listening and an exclusive kind of listening. You have to have a focus, which is exclusive. You exclude the things that don't pertain to a certain focus. You have to balance that with inclusive listening, and inclusive listening is much more difficult (than focused listening).

DIPPRE: When you say inclusive listening, is this when you get your audience more directly involved with what's happening?

OLIVEROS: Inclusive listening includes everything, the sounds, the feelings, the sense of who is in the environment, what is happening, all sounds.

DIPPRE: In Corigliano's music, one finds carefully-controlled aleatoric elements. How does your approach to aleatory differ from his, and what kind of results are you desiring from this technique?

OLIVEROS: My work is coming from my listening, and if you listen to what is understood as a random soundscape, depending on how you listen, will become ordered or not.

DIPPRE: It is a perception issue?

OLIVEROS: Well, we create whatever we hear—listening is the process of creating from whatever has been heard. When you go into that, things change quite a bit. There is an assumption that if it is written down on a staff with notes and rhythms, then it's fixed. There are no chance elements, and I think that this is not true.

DIPPRE: I would tend to agree with this. I was surprised that Corigliano said he achieved virtually similar results from performance to performance (with his aleatory). No matter how world-renowned the musicians may be, is this even possible?

OLIVEROS: Right there is an assumption, that it has to be something that is exact or repeatable. That comes out of the Newtonian world of physics, that everything has to be
measurable and repeatable and predictable. That's what the paradigm is.

DIPPRE: So, we pattern our thinking around certain figures from the Enlightenment on certain musical issues?

OLIVEROS: We're not stuck with it, because there's a new paradigm. It's just that not everybody is understanding that. That [new paradigm] has to do with theoretical physics and the world of expanding, changing realities. It's alive.

DIPPRE: You're on a quest of constant discovery and trying to trigger new levels of awareness.

OLIVEROS: To expand the mind and open new pathways, yes.

**Evolution in the Orchestral Medium**

DIPPRE: Stockhausen said in the 70s that "musicians in the so-called 'classical orchestras' know nothing about the recent electronic instruments, they regard themselves as specialists in one single instrument, and will undertake nothing on their own initiative that will prepare them for the future."¹⁸ What is the future of the orchestral medium? Should composers even pursue symphonic writing?

OLIVEROS: That has become a very specialized world. It has been relatively closed, because the orchestras are concentrating on the 18th and 19th centuries—and maybe a little bit of the early 20th century. There's not any opening out of the medium to new works and to new means of presenting and being an orchestra. In other words, the orchestra is a conservative ensemble.

DIPPRE: Corigliano has been quite outspoken on this problem, lamenting that, "like alcoholics, who have to hit bottom before they can make their way up again," many orchestras refuse to acknowledge their aging and dwindling audiences. Have you
encountered resistance from these groups, or do you tend to avoid them altogether?

OLIVEROS: I don't avoid them altogether. I have done several orchestra pieces, but I'm asking them to play in a performance practice they have very little understanding of. I'm asking them to improvise and not play from written notes and things like that.

DIPPRE: Is there a particular director or group you like working with?

OLIVEROS: Dennis Russell Davies was one who did a piece of mine. It was the Cabrillo Festival Orchestra. [This was *Toshi Gomang for Orchestra* in 1981 at Aptos, California]. He did a couple of them, actually. Another is Peter Kotic of the S.E.M. Orchestra in New York. He arranged for performance and a week of rehearsals with the Janacek Philharmonic in Czechoslovakia to do my *Four Meditations for Orchestra*. I put this piece together out of different meditations that I had done.

**Performance Practice and Compositional Influences**

DIPPRE: Let's discuss the piece *Rose Moon* (1984). There is something very mysterious and enticing about the front cover with its four colors representing the elements (air, water, earth, and fire). To my four-year old daughter, it resembles a game. "How do you play this, Daddy?"

OLIVEROS: (laughter) It's a lot of fun, actually.

DIPPRE: Is there a particular locale or time of year you intend for this piece to be performed?

OLIVEROS: I think it would be really wonderful in May because of the full moon—on a big, green meadow somewhere...

DIPPRE: Any particular city you favor more than others?

OLIVEROS: It could work in a variety of places, but I would really like an open field
situation, where you could really see the moon.

DIPPRE: Although there are elements of randomness, you do specify certain movements to be carried out with precision: i.e. page four—specific instructions for cuers. "When you feel that the rhythm of the circling is well-established, begin to play one beat with your percussion instrument exactly when the runner passes your spine. This task is to be accomplished proprioceptively (sensing with the body) rather than visually." My question is are most musicians capable of this? How particular are you in choosing performers?

OLIVEROS: This piece was actually written for the Wesleyan Singers at Wesleyan College, (Middletown, Connecticut). Neely Bruce was the director, and they were terrific. People who have a certain freedom to sound and movement can work on this... Right now I have a big project up on the web called Lunar Opera. It takes place this summer, August 17th at Lincoln Center, New York.

DIPPRE: I've also noticed in Rose Moon that your performers must be gifted linguists—they are instructed to "know the names of the moon in as many different languages as possible." Again, do you find musicians as the best candidates for this type of thing?

OLIVEROS: I look for people who are open-minded. I prefer that. Sometimes I prefer people who have no musical training rather than the classical musicians, who are too closed and have too many things to unlearn in order to participate.

DIPPRE: What is the significance of the moon figures, and why are they nude?

OLIVEROS: First of all, they're in a tent, which is a very tall, black and white tent. So, you don't necessarily see them. They're inside and they're doing their vocalizing. The nudity is not a focus for the audience, but it's more of a freeing thing for the singers.
DIPPRE: So, the idea being that if they disrobe, they (the singers) will be less inhibited in the sounds they produce?

OLIVEROS: They're having to deal with emotional states, and peeling off your clothes gives you a different feeling, I'd say... (laughs)

DIPPRE: Maybe a certain vulnerability?

OLIVEROS: Yes, and more open to getting the information they need to do their part, their role.

DIPPRE: Among the non-verbal sounds called for are "laughing for joy, laughing sardonically, crying, screaming," etc. Are you familiar with Ligeti's Aventures, and are you at all influenced by his work?

OLIVEROS: My influences are different. I first met Ligeti in 1962, and he was the judge who awarded my Sound Patterns first prize for the best foreign work. He told me that it broke new ground. So, I think it's the other way around, that I influenced him.

**Accordion as Compositional Resource**

DIPPRE: What initially attracted you to the accordion?

OLIVEROS: My mother brought me one home when I was eight or nine years old, and I got fascinated with it.

DIPPRE: Did you take formal lessons on the instrument?

OLIVEROS: Oh, yes! I started soon after that, when Bill Palmer came home from the army in about 1945. I started studying with him.

DIPPRE: This name, Palmer, is familiar. Didn't he write some method books?

OLIVEROS: Yes, the Palmer-Hughes method—Alfred Music Company.

DIPPRE: What do you find useful about the instrument from a compositional standpoint?
OLIVEROS: First of all, it breathes. Secondly, the ability to sustain—the articulations. You have a variety of articulations that can happen, so it can be a very dynamic instrument.

DIPPRE: In reference to Trio for Accordion, Trumpet, and String Bass (early '60s), why did you pick this particular combination of instruments?

OLIVEROS: Trumpet and bass work really well with the accordion. There are something about the timbres that are very special.

DIPPRE: Were you listening to Webern or Babbitt during this time?

OLIVEROS: I was aware of Webern, more particularly, than Babbitt.

DIPPRE: You don't use any chord buttons in this piece. Is this because you don't want any obvious tonality or accordion cliches (the 'oom-pah-pah' analogy).

OLIVEROS: In this piece I probably could have used a chord button once. (laughs) It implies tonality so much that it just doesn't work. I use the free bass accordion, anyways.

DIPPRE: So, you voice all your left hand chords from scratch?

OLIVEROS: Yes, and if I do use the chords at times, I can convert to that. [Some accordions are equipped with a switch which can convert the free bass buttons to chord buttons.]

DIPPRE: I recently wrote and performed a piece for avant garde accordion and an unusual combination of instruments. How does the accordion fit in now with the types of pieces you are writing.

OLIVEROS: The word writing actually doesn't fit too well. More of what I do is improvisation, and I've been improvising with a whole lot of different configurations, which is wonderful. I've been doing it for years, and I just did it the other night in San Francisco. The combination was accordion, violin, and voice. Another combination that
was really terrific was accordion, trombone, recorders, and pedal steel. I'm interested in all kinds of combinations.

DIPPRE: Magnus Lindberg tends to write for the button-style accordion (buttons in the right hand). Are there any advantages to this?

OLIVEROS: Certainly there is a rapid technique, yes. You can move faster, and there's also interesting voicings that can happen with the buttons.

**Improvisation and Meditational Practice**

DIPPRE: You tend to favor long tones in much of your music. What is the significance of the long tone?

OLIVEROS: It's a whole world, a universe of sound.

DIPPRE: In *Approaches and Departures* ('95) you instruct vocalists to "sing a quotation from some other piece of music at a very soft threshold dynamic level."\(^{22}\) Is this an attempt to create a kind of subliminal effect on the listener?

OLIVEROS: Yes, it colors things and gives a kind of subliminal feeling.

DIPPRE: Would you ever combine this vocal approach with the singing or playing of the long tone?

OLIVEROS: I wouldn't rule it out, necessarily. It depends of the situation.

DIPPRE: Stockhausen recorded a piece in the late '60s called *Es or It*, in which he instructs musicians to play *only* when they have "achieved a state of non-thinking."\(^{23}\) Whenever one begins to think, one must immediately stop playing. Is this a technique that originated with Cage?

OLIVEROS: This is Stockhausen's reading of the meditation practice. In meditation one
is trying to let go of thoughts. When thoughts come up, they’re good cues to do something.

DIPPRE: Do you think Stockhausen had been influenced by your music when he did this?
OLIVEROS: Not necessarily. I think it was his contact with meditational practices. I think he went to Japan and studied some Bhuddist texts.

DIPPRE: Stockhausen did this recording in a cave. Do you also favor such unique locations? Do they achieve special results for you?
OLIVEROS: Of course. I’ve done a lot of stuff in caves and cisterns. Actually, I played a concert with Marcus Stockhausen three years ago in a prehistoric cave in Sauerland. I’ve always been interested in reverberation and reverberant spaces.

DIPPRE: After playing in caves, are you at all let down by electronic reverb produced by effects boxes?
OLIVEROS: It depends on the unit, and the settings, and the space that you play in. You can tune those things and get something very interesting, which is what we do in the Deep Listening Band.

**CDs, Technology, and Quantum Improvisation**

DIPPRE: Here's another practical issue. Corigliano has expressed a concern that there are too many CDs circulating around. Do you agree? Does this situation have any impact on your activities?

OLIVEROS: Why not just relax and let them produce CDs? It's a part of the times, a part of the age. It has impact on my activities, but it doesn't necessarily have to be negative. It depends on your attitude and how you interact with any technology.

DIPPRE: What direction is electronic music heading, particularly in computer synthesis?
OLIVEROS: I think probably the more interesting thing is the notion of the merging of humans and computers. Maybe by the end of the twenty first century it will be hard to tell the difference. We're already very dependent on computers for calculations, but computers are catching up in terms of pattern recognition. I have a composer friend who is only alive because he has an implant. The implant starts his heart up when it stops—it's not a pacemaker, but a fibrilator. I was with him once when he had a spell, and if the computer that turns his heart back on hadn't been there, he would have been gone. This is just a small example of what will become much more pervasive. This is talked about at some length in my article *Quantum Improvisation, the Cybernetic Presence* and can be found on my website under selected writings. There I describe what kind of musician I would want to be, what kind of enhancement I would want from cybernetics.

* * *

At this point I was obliged to read Oliveros' article about cybernetics. She spoke on this topic at the *Improvisation Across Borders* conference held at the University of California, San Diego in April of 1999.

She is especially interested in the possibility of machines assisting humans in achieving deeper levels of musical expression through improvisation. Music and especially improvised music is not a game of chess—Improvisation, especially free improvisation could definitely represent another challenge to machine intelligence. It wouldn't be the silicon linearity of intensive calculation that makes improvisation wonderful. It is the non linear carbon chaos, the unpredictable turns of chance permutation, the meatiness, the warmth, the simple, profound humanity of beings that brings presence and wonder to music.

The "enhancement" she previously spoke of would be theoretically accomplished by a "musician chip" (a kind of bio-implant for the not-too-distant future). These are some of the abilities she would desire from the enhancement:
Ability to recognize and identify instantaneously any frequency or combination of frequencies in any tuning, timbre in any tempo or rhythm, in any style of music or sound in any space.

Ability to produce any frequency or sound in any tuning, timing, timbre, dynamic and articulation within the limits of the selected instruments or voices used.

Ability to recognize, identify and remember any music—its parts as well as the whole, no matter the complexity.  

Much of the theory is based on the underutilized capacity of the brain's neo cortex. By the aid of computer implants, these untapped resources could be instructed and possibly evolve.

* * *

DIPPRE: Some twenty to thirty years ago, musicians like Stockhausen predicted that electronic instruments would eventually replace acoustic ones. This never happened, but what do you think the future holds? Will the orchestra always be with us?

OLIVEROS: Not in its present form. It's been evolving for a long time. Instruments are changing and will continue to change. If it could be engineered, I would really love to have an accordion in which I could set the tuning for any way I want—not electronically, but acoustically. You know what the accordion is like? It took three days to a week to tune my accordion in just intonation. But I would love to have it tuned to different intonations. Accordions have to be tuned all the time.

DIPPRE: You, of course, have the Pauline Oliveros Foundation on the world wide web. Do you feel the Internet has opened up a lot of opportunities for music people?

OLIVEROS: Yes, I think so. I put some scores up, *Four Meditations for Orchestra* and *Out of the Dark* and just let people take [download] them.

DIPPRE: You're not worried about stealing or infringements?
OLIVEROS: (laughs) Go ahead! Infringe! I like the idea of just putting it out there. How else are people going to get to know my music? So, I'm going to put more up there very soon.

DIIPRE: Great! I'll look forward to that.
CHAPTER 4

INTERVIEW WITH AARON JAY KERNIS

Style and the Role of the Composer

DIPPRE: Both Corigliano and Oliveros resisted having their music categorized. Corigliano stated he would never want his music to become an "ism," such as serialism or minimalism. Oliveros stated that once she's done something, she's really not interested in doing it a second time. Do you consciously stay away from the categories? If so, how would you characterize your style?

KERNIS: As far as I'm concerned, categories are for critics. These [categories] allow them, unfortunately, and sometimes fortunately for listeners, to pigeonhole certain pieces. Sometimes it's helpful. Composers tend to be incredibly uncomfortable, for the most part, with categories, because they're pretty static.

DIPPRE: Would you say it's a little like an actor getting type-cast into only one role?

KERNIS: Yes. I think that the process of writing music is always a journey of discovery. It's a very plastic, fluid artistic process, so any categories make people feel very constrained. The funny thing is that the most common category that gets used for my work is called eclectic. The reason it's not too bad is because it's pretty meaningless.

DIPPRE: It's pretty open-ended?

KERNIS: Exactly. It can be anything. It can include anything, and it can exclude anything. That doesn't make me [feel] too uncomfortable, unless it's used in a pejorative
way. It's hard to tell how these terms are used, especially in print. When they're spoken you can usually sense a tone of voice.

DIPPRE: Let me throw a quote at you, and it is from your CD *Love Scenes*. "Donald Grout had once described the goal of romanticism as an all-embracing state of ecstasy, at once sensuous and mystical. Remarkably, Aaron Jay Kernis, speaking a different musical language and living in another era has likewise reached these heights."27 Looking at this in retrospect, do you still see yourself at all as a romanticist, or do you see yourself in a completely different light now?

KERNIS: I would have to go back and look at a dictionary definition. I don't want to be aligned with being a *neo-anything*. Particularly, I don't think I look back at the nineteenth century and say, 'oh, I'm going to use this and this... and try to emulate this music...' I should just get a dictionary, so I have something to play off of... [goes to get dictionary] This definition [referring to dictionary] definitely links romanticism starting with the eighteenth century... "eclecticism, emphasis on imagination and emotions... emphasis on subjective emotional qualities and freedom of form marked by imaginative or emotional appeal."28

I like better "marked by expressions of love or affection." I don't like to be aligned with stuff from the nineteenth century, but my work is emotional. It's often imagistic. It's very personal. Sometimes it's formally free, and other times it's very classical in form.

Ultimately, none of these labels feel like it's the right one. A number [of labels] apply in combination, because I do many things. It's interesting that very, very few writers or critics know the range of what I do, and so sometimes when one hears my pop-related music, they think it was a different composer than the one over here that wrote the *2nd Symphony*. 
DIPPRE: And you're happy to see that?

KERNIS: Yes. I don't like to repeat myself, and I need to have a variety of interests... of things that compel me.

**Pop and High Culture**

DIPPRE: Let's talk about pop music. When I interviewed John Corigliano, he said that today's pop music is not a composer's art, but a performer's art. He said, "All you have is disembodied rhythm and people improvising around it and [a] very mild harmonic palette." What is your take on this, and do you feel there is a generation gap among composers?

KERNIS: Among each generation you grow up hearing and being attracted to and not being attracted to certain kinds of music, and for the next generation that kind of music that the previous generation likes or has an affinity to just doesn't apply, just doesn't connect. So, it really doesn't surprise me that John says that. I guess there's a generation gap among people in general. I can't imagine my parents, who love Frank Sinatra, having any interest to listen to hip-hop... (laughs) a very obvious example! Something that marks my generation of composers is that we're open to many styles. We're open to many different eras and influences. So, I'll be driving along in the car, and I'll be switching from station to station and be listening to a little bit of 40s big band, preferably some 20s and 30s... and then I'll turn on a hip-hop station to see if there's anything interesting going on there. I might also find a good arrangement of a Frank Sinatra song. There's good musical expression in each of those styles, and there's bad, too.

DIPPRE: So, in other words, you could see an N' Sync video and glean some useful bits and pieces from it?
KERNIS: If it interests me right off the bat. For example, a few weeks ago I was driving around and heard a very interesting rap tune, and I never found out what it was. Since that time I've been pretty consistently turning on the hip-hop station, hoping that something interesting will be on... and I haven't found it yet, whatever it is. The sounds are really great, and the timing is really bent. It really intrigued me and helped me to start a piece I'm writing right now. But, nine times out of ten, you just have DJs playing with the background and rap on top of that, and there's no musical interest.

DIPPRE: Something that's been going on in radio for at least the last twenty years is that you'll hear something that really catches your ear, and then there will be so many commercials layered one upon another that they won't even bother to tell you what you heard.

KERNIS: Yes. The largest problem I have with the last five years or so with popular music in actually utilizing interesting elements that's been waning a little bit is that it's such an industry, such a huge industry—such a product. Maybe that's more about how the industry markets than it is about individual artistic expression that each artist hopes to embody. But when you see the industry pushing groups like Hanson and the sixteen year-old teeny bop kind of stuff that's really just to capture that market, then it has no musical value (or very little). Then you can look back in the past at bubble gum rock and the overwhelming amount of rap and gangsta rap. It seems to me very socially harmful, terribly negative, but also, this gets to be a complicated political discussion about which rap is good and which is just stoking the fires of revolution—which is just talking about sexual exploits...

DIPPRE: Or just denigrating women for no particular reason...?

KERNIS: Yeah. I don't know the field well enough. I just try to tune in and see if
something interests me, so it's a complicated discussion. Anyways, I'm just concerned about some of the crap that's put out there, and that's not why I'm not a pop artist. There are some writers, I'm sure, who hope to make a career out of it, but it's very hard. They're very lucky if they make it to the top and make a living. I don't think it begins with one making a couple million dollars.

DIPPRE: That's very true. One of the reasons I asked this question is because I spent many years as a road musician playing top-40 music, and on a couple of occasions we were pretty close to getting signed. But even if you do get signed, it really doesn't mean much unless you generate millions upon millions within the first two to three years. Then, half of that is paying back the investors.

KERNIS: Right. I gained a bit of a different perspective on this fairly recently when I read a speech given by Courtney Love at one of the recent record industry conventions that was absolutely damning of the way the record industry handles artists and the way artists are prostituted as much as possible for the record companies, and artists are given as little freedom as possible.

DIPPRE: Let me throw out another name, and this is a much different end of things. When I was interviewing John Corigliano, we were discussing Michael Daugherty and some of his pop operas, particularly Jackie O. I bought the CD and had a hard time appreciating it. He was bringing in operatic singers to sing in a pop context, and Corigliano said this doesn't work, that you can't mix the two. Again, he feels pop music is more a performer's art.

KERNIS: I'm not actually interested so much in pop singers, but in kind of not so heavy operatic voices singing opera—less vibrato... it's a different kind of expression. That sort of interests me—the other way around I think is perverse. But, it's true (that) most of the
time operatic singers just layer this extra histrionic and highly vibratoed heap on top of popular music. There are some performers who can at times bring something to jazz or something to popular music, but I really don't want to hear Placido Domingo sing John Lennon.

DIPPRE: Do you think that also part of the problem is that opera singers are not trained to improvise or to do pop gestures?

KERNIS: I think they're trained to improvise as singers in Mozart's time or in bel canto times to improvise cadenzas. Most of the time now, there are few Baroque singers.... it's a sort of lost art. It has to be written down, and then they learn it from the page and add a few extra appoggiaturas and that's it. So, that is a kind of lost art among opera singers, whereas pop singers routinely play with tunes they're singing—I don't really mean jazz improvisation or much more evolved improvisation, but just improvisation in terms of timing, a more malleable approach to the tune.

DIPPRE: Do you think this is resulting from a person who is more self-taught and used to learning tunes off of a tape recorder? Are they going to approach it in a more flexible way than someone who would be learning just from reading music all their life?

KERNIS: That may be part of it, but I think also that in classical genre, of course, performers are taught to stay as close to what is written down as possible. So, let's say a reformer like Nadja Salerno Sönnenberg, who the critics disdain right and left, because she tries to be more fluid, to make some decisions that are different form those on the page—choice of dynamics, freedom of articulation. Audiences love her, and critics love to hate her.

DIPPRE: Because she's too popular?
KERNIS: It's not because she's too popular. She's actually a real romantic artist because she's taking liberties with the music that other performers are unwilling to do, because it would be violating the text—or because sometimes she's very creative.

DIPPRE: What do you think of an artist like Chick Corea? Do you see him as a sort of new breed of musician, since he is equally good with classical as well as jazz?

KERNIS: I have not heard him play classical, so I can't comment on him. Keith Jarrett I have heard, though I'm kind of mixed with it. Some of it he plays well, and sometimes I feel his technique playing classical music is not quite up to what I would like it to be.

**Evolution in the Orchestral Medium**

DIPPRE: Let me go on to another important issue. One thing I asked of the interviewees is what is the future of the orchestral medium. For instance, Oliveros said there is no opening out of the medium, and Corigliano expressed a concern that the orchestra is hopelessly curatorial. He thinks that they are going to have to break up and eventually reform and have some more direct involvement with the communities around them. How do you feel about that, and how do you think composers should approach writing for the orchestra?

KERNIS: Yes, I'm very worried about this, too. I've been working both through my music and my positions with the Minnesota Chamber Orchestra and Minnesota Orchestra. I've worked with these orchestras for awhile now, and luckily these orchestras tend to program a fair amount of contemporary music, but it's always within a traditional context, of course. I've really been concerned about the issue of the orchestra not evolving. The saxophones have not become an ordinary part of the orchestra. Really, with the exception of extra percussion instruments, there haven't been any new additions to the current
orchestra. It's not evolving and growing. Maybe it is preserving music of the past, and that's important and that's great, but it doesn't need to throw off what it's already doing. It does need to grow in certain ways. I would like to see an electronic orchestra emerge, but it is an enormous experiment that has not been tested very much because no one can afford it. Orchestras, for the most part, have grown into these huge mega-budget organizations where each partner is [considered] interdependent [shareholders]. There's only a certain amount of creativity that can be introduced because the basic bottom line must be maintained to keep the tradition going, bringing in the traditional audiences for the music they know and love of the past. Over time, they are becoming more involved in the community, but for the most part, to re-involve or to try to involve younger listeners—to put a spark in them to love classical music so in the future they might come back as audience members. They [the orchestras] are sort of doing better than I thought they would at this point. The budgets are holding steady. Philanthropy is holding up pretty well. Audiences are larger than at any other time in the history of these organizations. There are more of them. We saw some fail about ten years ago, some of the smaller and medium-sized ones—none of the big ones. But, let's say you have the same concert material performed three to four times per week. I'm seeing audiences being spread thin a bit, and the next step I see for that will be the reduction of the number of repeated concerts. Depending on what effect that has if it reduces further, then it will start to get scary. The salaries are so incredibly high for musicians, and they deserve good salaries, but they're really high. So, it's sort of going beyond the need to have that many concerts. I've heard the phrase, "there's too much product out there," which I hate.

DIPPRE: I guess you would hear that a lot in New York?
KERNIS: I think I have heard it in Minnesota a number of times, people referring to concerts as product. If there's too much of it and it's too easy to get, then the demand is less. So, we're seeing, I think, a very slow shift. What the future holds for the orchestra is of great concern for me, because so much of my music is orchestral. I love writing for the orchestra. I hope I'm not writing the stuff they'll play for a number of years and then just vanish, because they will grind to a halt. It's just too early to tell.

DIPPRE: Let me throw some statistics at you. Here is the Cleveland Orchestra's 2000 - 2001 season, and this is how it breaks down. Roughly forty-eight percent of what they're doing is from the 20th century, but it's prior to World War II—so it's early 20th century.

KERNIS: That is a big change actually. That's actually, believe it or not, been a little gratifying to see that there's less 19th century repertoire and a lot more concentration on the 20th.

DIPPRE: Perhaps that's the "slow shift" you were referring to?

KERNIS: As you say, it's not really concentrating on post war music. Understandably, excluding many composers, of course, between the war period and the '70s and '80s, there's a lot of work they [the orchestra] will still not accept, and they need to accept it. A lot of it is just not for that audience.

DIPPRE: When I broke this down further, the one composer they programmed the most was, surprise, surprise, Beethoven. Eleven out of seventy-five are his. The runner-up was Sibelius with six pieces, and second runner-up was Tchaikovsky with five. Unfortunately, the total amount of works being performed of living American composers—2!

KERNIS: That's bad for Cleveland.

DIPPRE: Yes. John Adams and Steven Stucky were the only two I could find.
KERNIS: I wonder if that's because they're in transition to a new music director? That's not nice to hear...

DIPPRE: In regards to works written in the last twenty-five years, there were seven. So, there were a few other living composers, mainly Europeans.

KERNIS: I would expect that orchestra to have a higher concentration of twentieth century composers and less Beethoven.

Notation and Compositional Influences

DIPPRE: I'd like to ask you some more specific questions about what you've written and recorded. I was looking at the score of *Musica Celestis* for strings, and about midway into the piece, you start up with a great deal of ascending motion. As I look at that, it seems there is a spiraling effect going on. Are you trying to create the sensation of the eternal?

KERNIS: I have a lot of pieces where I'm trying to go beyond, the uplifting or ecstatic, going beyond the everyday. I'm trying to capture something spiritual with personal expression.

DIPPRE: It's also a very tonal piece. When you use key signatures, do you find this as the most convenient vehicle for writing tonal music?

KERNIS: Not necessarily—it depends on the piece. The more chromatic pieces, even if they're extremely tonal, [have no key signature]. I have a lot of pieces which are in keys, but I won't use a key signature, because there's just too many unexpected changes too often—and then at a certain point when it becomes diatonic, I'll use a key signature primarily as an organizing tool.

DIPPRE: Let me ask you about a piece you wrote for accordion. I was listening to the
Guy Kluevsek CD which contained *Phantom Polka*.

KERNIS: Oh, *that* one! I have a really big piece for accordion that just came out... It's called *Hymn*, and the name of the CD is called *Free Range Accordion*. It just came out.

DIPPRE: Well, I'll definitely be looking for that! What do you find interesting about the accordion from a composer's standpoint?

KERNIS: The accordion piece I wrote [re: *Hymn* was inspired by] Guy [Kluevsek], because he's a great accordionist. He's a virtuoso player and a wonderful person; that's what really got me to write for it. What kind of intrigued me about this instrument is that it's like a portable organ almost. In the case of the piece you heard [*Phantom Polka*], it's used for comedic elements. It's really kind of a silly piece. I was commissioned to write a polka, so that's what I came up with. So, it's really about, and much of my music comes actually from, being fascinated and inspired by virtuoso performers.

DIPPRE: One thing I really got a kick out of was the blood-curdling moan at the end.

KERNIS: That's a very theatrical performance, and he [Kluevsek] will often sing and shout.

DIPPRE: That answers my next question—whether the moan was supplied by the performer or not? Was there any particular significance of the moan, or was it just added?

KERNIS: Oh no! That's in the music. It's sort of a ghostly, cinematic image of a ghost melting or dying (like *The Wizard of Oz*).

DIPPRE: Let me ask about another piece I've been listening to, *Colored Field*. In the third movement there were some things that reminded me of Prokofiev, particularly the real powerful brass you use with the dotted rhythms. It seemed reminiscent of his 5th Symphony. Are you at all influenced by his music?

KERNIS: I don't think so. That piece was pretty much [just] written, except for the
slightly klezmer and polka aspects of the second movement, I was not directly aware of influences or accordion influences when I was writing it. It was coming out of chords and gestures, and then I would orchestrate it. Actually, Prokofiev has never been a favorite of mine in my pieces! (laughs) But, people often mention Shostakovich. They can say whatever they like, but it's not a direct influence. The harmonies I use maybe would have been harmonies Shostakovich would have liked, but I'm not using them because Shostakovich would have liked them.

DIPPRE: I guess it's just the human tendency to want to cross reference everything and compare.

KERNIS: Yes, and that's helpful to some people, but it may not reflect what I've written or intended.

DIPPRE: I also noticed that, again, the word eclectic is used in the liner notes of the Klucvesek CD.\(^{29}\) Is that still an O.K. term for you?

KERNIS: It's bearable. Like most composers, I hate labels. It's really not helpful to anyone. I'd rather they would just listen to the music and make up their own minds. A single word doesn't describe the music.

DIPPRE: Getting back to *Colored Field*, towards the beginning I heard a lot of ethnic sounding gestures—something that reminded me of the dervish musicians who play very fast. What was that stemming from?

KERNIS: There's a certain point that is sort of quasi-improvisatory and that is one of the places that brings in the very frantic Semitic music. The piece relates very much to the experience I had visiting the concentration camps in Poland. It was very deliberate use of those scales to suggest a Judaic theme.
CDs and Technology

DIPPRE: We're getting towards the end now, and perhaps this would be a good way to round things out. There were over fifty-two thousand CD titles produced in 1998 according to an article I recently read.30 Bearing this in mind, what advice would you give for an emerging composer who is seeking to get recognition at this point in time?

KERNIS: In the last year or so we're seeing the major labels sort of falling apart, so I wouldn't even try pursuing them at this point. There are lots of smaller labels that turn out high quality work. So, you might want to look there or even self-produce. CDs are very important—it's very important to have that record of your work for people to hear. At this point, there's such an enormous glut of CDs everywhere that it may be more important for the composers themselves to get the music out to people directly or to use it as a marketing tool, rather than getting the CD out and waiting for this month's sales figures to come in. The CD is a great calling card for performers or people who want to hear it, providing it's produced well and the sound quality is good.

DIPPRE: What do you think of Pauline Oliveros, who has a foundation in which you can go online and download scores, even though these aren't traditional note scores, but scores nonetheless? She doesn't worry about anyone stealing or infringing, but sees this as a great way to promote her music. Is this a viable way for composers to go?

KERNIS: When the composer is as open and generous as my friend Pauline, that's great. But, the more specific you get, as in chamber pieces or orchestra pieces, over the next few years we're going to see web sites developing, publishing web sites where you can download scores to look at and peruse or actually download to print and pay for. The complicated part is how will it be bound? Orchestral scores, of course, will be different,
more labor intensive to download and print. But, certainly with web sites you are able to hear music and excerpts of music—that's already in use.

DIPPRE: Of course, they have had a big problem with Napster, with people downloading music for free. That, of course, is not going to stop.

KERNIS: No. That is a problem, of course. If composers want their music to be free, that's fine, but it is not free to make, to record and to produce—the costs are great.

DIPPRE: I thank you for your time and comments. I will definitely look for Hymn to order off the web. I think this will be a fun and engaging discussion for people to read.

KERNIS: O.K.! Good luck with it!
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS

The works of the three composers interviewed in this study, while vastly different in style and technique, have certain common characteristics which greatly contribute to their success. As most composers do, they all rigorously avoid categorization, yet they all have a very keen eye for who their audiences are and what compositional avenues tend to yield success. Since the views expressed were exclusively those of American composers, a more balanced view can be obtained by probing the opinions of composers Pierre Boulez and Luciano Berio. Taken from other interviews and collected writings, their thoughts will assist in establishing a more global perspective on the crucial issues.

Style and the Role of the Composer

Early in the Corigliano discussion he expressed the indictment that Boulez changes programs merely to suit his own tastes (p. 11). This criticism is not without justification, as David Schiff comments in a 1995 article for Atlantic Monthly:

Just among twentieth-century composers Boulez does not perform Prokofiev, Shostakovich, Britten, Poulenc, or Copland. And despite his highly publicized role as a defender of new music, he has ignored the works of the minimalists and post modernists, including Philip Glass, John Corigliano, and Alfred Schnittke.31

A difference in philosophy may explain why Boulez allegedly excludes Corigliano's music. Corigliano desires to make his music as clear as possible to the listener and avoids the "ivory tower" (p. 10).
Boulez, however, warns that the composer who tries too hard to communicate is in a dangerous position:

If composers are obsessed with just communicating, then they will never go anywhere, because the concern to "just communicate" will ruin their personalities— that's all! They will become a kind of transit station, no more than that: and I find there is nothing really genuine in that. They are like chameleons who want to take the color of the audience that is in front of them. They turn red with a red audience. They turn green with a green audience, and that is exactly what these people who want to communicate at all costs are doing, they want to please. There is no personal involvement, just mimicry.\textsuperscript{32}

Corigliano's pieces tend to exhibit sentimentality. The tribute to lost friends found in his \textit{First Symphony} and \textit{Gazebo Dances} are but two examples (see p. 25). Such an approach to composition would seem anathema to Boulez' views as found in his book, \textit{Orientations}:

What am I in fact trying to say about contemporary music? That there are a lot of tendencies—but I must eliminate from the start all that are backward-looking, all 'restorations,' which are not so much tendencies in fact as nostalgias. When one has had one's fill of experimenting, there comes a nostalgia for the past, a nostalgia for childhood, and attempts are made to camouflage this nostalgia by returning to certain things and integrating them as best one can in the world of today by means of a clumsy dialectic.\textsuperscript{33}

Although Kernis asserts that he consciously does not try to emulate the music of the past, writers at times describe him as a kind of neo-romantic (see p. 44). Kernis does not want to be considered a \textit{neo-anything}, and on this issue his views would seem to correspond with those of Boulez. The following statement is from \textit{Dialogues with Boulez}:

People who take refuge in the past or in the so-called neo-romantic... \textit{neo-romantic}—what does that mean? It means simply that you don't understand the romantics, really, who were people who were always going forward. I mean, the typical example of this music is Liszt and Wagner, more than Berlioz, at some point.\textsuperscript{34}

It is surprising that Boulez and Oliveros, two composers so stylistically different from each other, would share any fundamental aesthetic beliefs. Inherent in her compositional
philosophy, Oliveros subscribes to a belief in expanding or changing realities, a paradigm based on quantum physics. To her it is the process, the journey that really matters and not necessarily the end result. Of the three interviewees, Oliveros is the most decidedly non-conformist in her compositional approach. Sometimes laconic and elliptical, she seems to be trying to sound unacademic. Her music can be anathema to the theorist, offering little or nothing in the way of hierarchical levels of structure. Nonetheless, her improvisational view of composition does coalesce with the elements of Boulez' fundamental belief system, that the composer must accept the unexpected. In a recent interview, Boulez characterized the following remarks as his "philosophy of life."

I will answer in the language of physics, and I would say my belief system is like the theory of the quantum. You have a stream in flux, but within this stream many things happen which are absolutely unforeseeable. Certainly you have a goal. I accept the accidents, and I think that in life it is exactly the same. If you don't accept the accident, you are making life completely sterile.35

Boulez then mentions the two composers which he feels represent total organization and total chaos, Babbitt and Cage. He considers the styles of both composers "wrong," both representing two extremes.

You mention Babbitt and Cage. In my opinion, both are wrong—because if you are only obsessed with organization, then practically you arrive at chaos, because an excess of organization in physics brings chaos. Chaos alone does not bring any order. Therefore, I have to accept the stream, which is an order, and within this stream I must accept the unforeseeable elements, which you cannot control. But I have to make the best use of them that is possible. I think that in life that's exactly the same. You have opportunities which come which will never come back, for instance, and you have to see—to judge, even—if this opportunity will serve your purpose or not. If you see that it is of no value to you, or it takes away more than it contributes to your purpose, then you have to let the accident go. For me the fundamental fact of life is deterministic with a lot of aleatoric events that one sorts through.36

It is significant to add that even though Boulez' so-called "accidents" are definitely part of the Oliveros approach, the word "aleatoric" does not apply for her. Her work is
motivated by concentrated listening techniques that set the stage for improvisation.

Corigliano would probably consider that what Oliveros does is more performance oriented that it is compositional. But Oliveros intimately intertwines composition with perception; thus "we create whatever we hear." She is reinterpreting the very nature of composition through improvisation.

**Evolution in the Orchestral Medium**

Of those interviewed Corigliano is the most pessimistic about the orchestra's future, believing that most orchestras perpetuate the European model of previous centuries. He sees them as entities biding their time while awaiting eventual extinction. To him the only way to circumvent this slow decay is to embrace contemporary music and establish better links to the communities. Kernis, on the other hand, is cautiously optimistic, believing that financial support is holding its own, and that some orchestras are at least slowly beginning to incorporate a more contemporary repertoire. The true state of the orchestra may lie somewhere between the views of Corigliano and Kernis. While the institution is hardly breathing its last breath, its current status does appear precarious. The orchestra's capacity within the community at one time was not just to inspire and entertain, but to educate the young. A prime example of this practice in action was Leonard Bernstein's famous *Young People's Concerts*.

The high salaries that Kernis spoke of also represent another element of uncertainty for orchestras. If these organizations subsist on the good graces of philanthropy, then what happens when the economy takes a significant downturn? Indeed, the sluggish economy of the 1980s did contribute to the demise of some orchestras.

Although Boulez believes growth and change is necessary for the medium, he thinks a
kind of pragmatism must be maintained so that the orchestra can continue to survive.

It is simple to say that new concert halls should be built, that orchestras should be reorganized, or that the orchestra should be replaced by a kind of consortium of performers that could be drawn on for ad hoc purposes. As I have said, there is an economic factor in music, and this factor always tells in favour of conservatism. By this I mean that in any organization qualified for an activity of this kind it is very difficult to persuade people—simply from the point of view of intrinsic organization—that things can be organized differently without creating major problems in any well-regulated economy.37

Comments made by Luciano Berio in a 1981 interview reveal a certain conservatism and contrast when compared to the sentiments of Corigliano, Oliveros, and Kernis. All three have expressed concern over the sluggish evolution of the orchestra. Berio exhibits a distinctly European view of the situation and suggests that splendid instruments like the violin should be left alone.

No one has been able to change the violin. After 350 years it is still the same—if you exclude the bow and its technique and what the strings are made of, all of them (sic) things that have helped to increase its carrying power. I am very much attracted by this slow and dignified transformation of instruments and techniques across the centuries.38

Although a fervent supporter of digital technology and IRCAM, he expresses serious reservation over the attempts to improve the flute.

At IRCAM over the past few years, some musicians have been trying to change and "improve" the flute: they have moved the holes and given it different keys, and indeed, once it has been manipulated in this way, the flute is able to produce chords and some very unusual effects. But the wretches had to forget about Bach, Mozart, Debussy and even my own Sequenza. They couldn't even play a scale of C major in tune anymore.39

Even more condemning are Berio's views on Cage's prepared piano legacy.

I always thought that to "prepare" a piano was a bit like drawing a mustache on the Mona Lisa, even when the pretext was to explore a non-tempered space... one can always find a pianist who is prepared to decipher Cage's old fly papers. It makes no difference, the piano has remained the same, and it has certainly survived being violated by kind and smiling Americans.40
Oliveros expressed a concern that today's orchestra is so specialized: there is no "opening out" for new works and new modes of presentation. Boulez' solution to this problem is to encourage greater flexibility within the orchestra itself. He doesn't feel that the medium needs to break up and reform as some completely new entity. He believes the larger unit, the full orchestra, could be composed of several subgroups. Greater mobility could then be achieved.

What we have to face now are problems of multivalency. I believe our aim should be polymorphous groupings; within the larger group formed by the orchestra we should make it possible to tackle all the different repertories—solo, chamber music, normal orchestra, very large formations and vocal ensembles of all dimensions. This would restore to the orchestra—which would in fact be a co-operative of performers—its sociological function, because it would include all the different sectors and in addition provide a certain mobility, an ability to move about. As things are at present, orchestras resemble spiders sitting at the centre of their webs, waiting for clients and pouncing on any that allow themselves to be caught. We are approaching a point at which everything will have to be reconsidered in terms of mobile structures.41

Kernis addressed the issue of orchestral repertory when he suggested that there is still an appreciable amount of post-war music (after 1945) that many ensembles and audiences won't, but need to, accept (p. 51). Boulez' comments on newer repertory again reveal a certain pragmatism. He suggests that new pieces often fall victim to inflexible rehearsal schedules.

As things stand, we are blocked by the way rehearsal times are arranged. These are insufficient because they lack flexibility and are not adapted to individual needs, with the result that any difficult, complex piece that needs maximum rehearsal has to be sandwiched between the most familiar repertory works. These will be read at top speed, chiefly at the dress rehearsal, to ensure that everyone agrees on the conventional interpretation. People whose main interest is in the new piece have to listen once again to repertory works with which they are only too familiar, and the others, those who come to spend an hour of pleasant digestion, will be roughly disturbed from their nice little dreams by the sudden eruption of this horror (emphasis added) that they are obliged to swallow. You think you have struck a blow for contemporary music only to find that in the last resort you have done it the greatest disservice.42

63
Corigliano was adamant about the problem of larger orchestras perpetuating the outdated image of the German maestro and the orchestra as a “curatorial arena of greatness.” If we listen to the voice of Boulez as conductor, we truly get the impression that he is helping to eradicate the stodgy maestro image that Corigliano previously cited.

There are some scores that awaken no response in me, and these I never conduct. If on the other hand a score arouses an echo in me and chimes in some way with my own musical interests, I unhesitatingly undertake to conduct it, in the belief that I shall be able to communicate what I have found in it. When I accepted the invitation to conduct Parsifal at Bayreuth, even the least prejudiced expressed surprise at my risking my neck in such a stronghold of German music. Meeting Wieland Wagner halfway, I thought that the most useful thing I could do was to achieve for the music of Parsifal what he had achieved for the production—namely, free it from the pompous and funereal ritual with which it had been weighed down...  

In defense of Boulez, his composing is ineluctably bound to his conducting. This is his method of achieving personal satisfaction and artistic integrity. He asserts that his conducting gives him “freedom for composing.”

I don’t compose for recognition. I compose because I have something to say, and I want to express what I have to say in the best way possible. Therefore, generally I don’t accept commissions, or very rarely. If there is a commission, I never have a date imposed; if I say “yes,” I say when I have the time and the desire to do something. I find that my life is completely safe with conducting, as I have much freedom for composing.  

**Pop and High Culture**

On the subject of popular music, Kernis is not afraid to allege that he could be successful as a popular songwriter. He steers clear of the industry, though, seemingly because of its bête noire reputation in the treatment of the artist. He realizes how dauntingly brutal the prospects are for the artist attempting to “break in.”

He cites groups like Hanson as those who represent the less desirable aspects of popular music, the *product* which possesses little or no artistic value. In this regard, Kernis sounds like Adorno, who expressed these sentiments over fifty years ago:
The composition hears the listener. This is how popular music divests the listener of his spontaneity and promotes conditioned reflexes. Not only does it not require his effort to follow its concrete stream; it actually gives him models under which anything concrete still remaining may be subsumed. The schematic buildup dictates the way in which he must listen while, at the same time, it makes any effort in listening unnecessary. Popular music is 'pre-digested' in a way strongly resembling the fad of 'digests' of printed material.45

Kernis possesses the chameleon-like talent for composing symphonies as well as Superstar Etude, the whimsical homage to Jerry Lee Lewis on the 100 Greatest Dance Hits CD. Realistically though, the tribute to Lewis is quite a sophisticated and virtuosic composition that incorporates pop gestures and is a far cry from being pop music. In retrospect, Kernis really isn't doing things radically different from composers such as Mahler, who were sometimes criticized for embracing banality. In Mahler's Ninth Symphony the scherzo movement is essentially a ländler which becomes a waltz and finally a minuet.

Both Corigliano and Kernis seem to agree in their description of the popular vocalist as one who tends to be defined by a sparing use of vibrato and tendency towards improvisation. It is interesting to note that Kernis has a preference for a more temperate use of vibrato in general. This preference bears the stamp of his generation. Herein lies the very heart of the generational gap mentioned in the Kernis interview. Composers who grew up hearing the vocal stylings of The Beatles, Stevie Wonder, or Pink Floyd simply do not identify with Jerome Kern's 'Ol Man River. Kern was the very example that Corigliano cited as representing an earlier era that showed a more vital relationship between popular music and composition.

A technique used by Corigliano and Kernis, and discussed previously in the document, is the practice of referencing other musics and aspects of popular culture. Berio's Sinfonia
(1968) provides an interesting basis of comparison on how composers used the art of quotation in a previous era. In the third movement of *Sinfonia* we are confronted with an intriguing dialogue (found at rehearsal "L"):

I am listening... well I prefer that
I must say I prefer that
Oh you know, oh you, oh I suppose the audience,
well well, so there is an audience.
It's a public show, you take your seat and you wait,
perhaps it's free, a free show
you take your seat and you wait for it to begin,
or perhaps it's compulsory, a compulsory show.\(^\text{46}\)

Besides the entire movement of Mahler's *Second Symphony* ebbing and flowing, the majority of *Sinfonia*’s third movement is imbued with dialogue from Samuel Beckett's *The Unnamable*. This stream of consciousness, being executed by the Swingle Singers, gives the movement a cryptic and somewhat psychedelic underpinning. These subliminal references can be compared to the type of approach Corigliano uses in his *First Symphony*, where an off-stage piano reminisces over a lost friend to the tune of an Albèniz tango.\(^\text{47}\)

Berio's approach is less nostalgic than that of Corigliano and somewhat more convoluted. The familiar references to Mahler in *Sinfonia* are quite fragmented and surreal. Berio appears to be teasing the listener at times; thus, "The memory is continually stimulated and put to work, only to be contradicted and frustrated..."\(^\text{48}\)

**Notation and Aleatory**

Interestingly, Corigliano and Boulez share some common ground in compositional approach. They have both dealt with the problem of overly cumbersome or perfect notation which can rob the performer of joy or spontaneity. One difference between the
two composers appears to be that Corigliano tends to give greater freedom to the performer while Boulez tends to place greater freedom in the hands of the conductor. The following statement refers to Boulez' Éclat for fifteen instruments:

Éclat has self-contained sections ("enclaves") in which the order of motifs is determined at the moment of performance, and which are interruptive. The conductor cues the entrances according to his sense of what is appropriate at the time (emphasis added), and this sense triggers his actions in a partially unpredictable manner. From this unpredictability emerges the necessity of a reflex-gesture, which the instrumentalists carry out in a single state of tension and attention and which contributes directly to the performer's bursts of energy (the éclats).49

By way of contrast, Corigliano's Pied Piper Fantasy, ("Play very fast non-repetitive chromatic runs following the contours indicated"), provides an example of something Boulez would not do. It would put too much responsibility in the hands of the performer, as demonstrated in this Boulez comment on aleatory:

What actually happens, for instance, when players are given vague diagrams? I have a lot of experience here, and I know that if you give them schemes or diagrams, or even a number of notes to arrange themselves (emphasis added), you can be quite sure that they will always produce clichés, contemporary clichés, but clichés none the less. If the player were an inventor of forms or of primary musical material, he would be a composer. If he is not a composer, it is because he is by choice and capacity a performer; so that if you do not provide him with sufficient information to perform a work, what can he do? He can only turn to information that he has been given on some earlier occasion, in fact, to what he has already played. Since he cannot play C, D, E, F, G, A, B, C, he plays something 'modern' that he has played before and attaches precise schemas to the vaguer ones he has been given.50

Composers and Technology

In the area of music technology, Berio's views seem unusually fresh despite being voiced in a pre-MIDI era. He reflects on the problems of new technologies to produce great works. "The new technologies need above all to get closer to the work of performers, find a place within it and extend it, rather than opposing themselves to it."51
Specifically, he cites the main problem with the use of new technology as one of lacking "redundancy" or familiar musical contexts.

The new techniques and sounds of electronic music are particularly deprived of redundancy, not only because they don't make any reference to previously experienced models of behaviour and listening, nor even to familiar acoustic models, but also because there's no visible object or instrument producing the sounds, and you can't imagine anybody doing so either.52

Berio's solution to this problem of redundancy is to combine live performers with tape. In mentioning his Differences (1959), he seems to be circumventing the same types of problems that many electro-acoustic composers face even in present day.

To realize the tape for Differences (at the Studio di fonologia musicale in Milan) I began prerecording in Paris with the same musicians that would perform the piece in public just over a year later, sections for solo instruments or for different combinations of the live (flute, clarinet, harp, viola, and cello). Thus, when performing Differences a magnetic tape is synchronized with the five instruments playing on stage.53

Even some thirty years prior to interactive technology, Berio was operating in a similar context, but with magnetic tape instead of digital signal processing.

In Corigliano's Vocalise the sound engineer is very much a part of the performance ensemble. Boulez, likewise, believes that today's composer must accept the reality of "teamwork" in situations that involve electro-acoustic music.

I am also convinced that composition today presents problems that can really be solved only by teamwork. In the electronic field no one composer in isolation, working without help from experts and associates, can decide satisfactorily such questions as the aesthetic suitability of different sound objects, the relation of technique to invention, the mutual dependence of structure and automation, and the problems of transmission. Some individuals will always be more gifted than others, of course, but even they will be obliged to accept the discipline of a certain amount of teamwork.54

Each composer has different motivations for incorporating technology. Oliveros, for instance, is interested in different applications of reverberation as well as cybernetic enhancements, the merging of humans and computers. Boulez is interested in
"transgression," a term used to describe how electronic instruments exceed the capabilities of acoustic instruments.

You can transgress the limits of what we can do with our traditional instruments now, and we are finding new possibilities of performance. For instance, you can transgress with this new piece of mine for violin. I have some segments which are artificial sequences, which are triggered by the violin itself. And the pizzicati are at such speeds that you cannot do that with the fingers, yet you can very well hear it, because the computer is doing it. That's interesting— to transgress the limits of the instrument with the technology which is at our disposal today.55

Boulez is describing Anthèmes II, a newer piece for violin and computer. The pizzicati are computer generated samples which are triggered by the pitches of the violin.

In the area of recording technology, Corigliano suggested that the classical music business is slumping. The recording quality keeps improving, yet the majority of recordings marketed are from a narrow, well-worn repertoire. Oliveros was not overly concerned about the situation, admitting that the glut of CDs has some impact on her activities, but it is not necessarily negative. Kernis advised that composers may be better served to use the CD as a marketing tool rather than a generator of income. Boulez’ statement below appears to echo Corigliano's viewpoint on recordings, suggesting that technology is often used to preserve the culture of the past.

The economic processes have been set to produce their maximum yield where the reproduction of existing music, accepted as a part of our famous cultural heritage, is concerned; they have reduced the tendency to monopoly and the rigid supremacy of this heritage by a more and more refined and accessible technology.56

Postscript

This document has been a case study of three composers, all who have been quite reluctant to admit any obvious stylistic influences. After all, why should composers be in any hurry to sacrifice their mystique? Ultimately, though, certain stylistic roots eventually
make their way to the surface. Perhaps with the exception of Gazebo Dances, Corigliano does cite Copland as an influence and considers his style as part of his own musical language. In a convoluted sort of way, Kernis explains he uses harmonies in Colored Field that Shostakovich "would have liked." Oliveros casts herself as the influencer in certain regards to Ligeti, but does acknowledge an awareness of Webern in the formative stages of her career. Improvisation is now the focus of her oeuvre, but it is not a far stretch to detect particles of Cage in her sound. The insightful views provided by these three artists is valuable to either the experienced or fledgling composer. While their sagely advice and sometimes provocative outpourings have proved entertaining, Corigliano, Oliveros, and Kernis have helped me deal more effectively with issues of style, the orchestra, notation, and modern technology.
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