

NEW MUSIC AND OTHER HAPPENINGS - 1972

Edward Diemente

We are into a liberation movement.
Politics, society and art are all being turned around.

Most isms are dead -
Most important Europeanism.
(She was a dear lady and we shall all miss her.)

Ideologies are replaced by freedom.
Composers are not simply evolving new techniques
and styles; they are redefining music.
And the changes are explosive rather than evolutionary.

Sound rather than syntax.

Exposition replaced by experience-seeking.

Tape, electronic and cinema methods flowing into
musical thinking (even in pieces which use only
acoustic instruments).

An exciting, poetic time to be alive.

AN INTERVIEW WITH DAVID BEHRMAN

JAY HUFF

J.H.: In view of the fact that it is difficult for any artist to remove himself from historical continuity, that is, to separate himself altogether from the past - even if "the past" is what happened only an hour ago - can we say that an avant gardist is one who at least wants the past of his own work to be minimal? Are you yourself, for instance, interested in having your work reveal a minimal past, or is the minimality of its past secondary to some other consideration, which would then entail a different definition of "avant gardist" than the one I implied just now? If the latter, then what is that consideration and the definition it leads to?

D.B.: I don't know how useful it would be to re-define the term "avant garde"...but I've always thought its meaning to have less to do with "minimality of the past," and more to do with "maximality of the future." My consideration is with the latter.

J.H.: But at times you do deliberately turn to the past, and when you do, it would seem to be for the purposes of humor. I'm thinking of Questions from the Floor, in which you exploit certain of the intrinsic absurdities of the 1968 presidential campaign (and campaigners), and of the little divertissement called Intermission Collage, in which you do roughly the same thing with (or to) what some would consider the emotional excesses of 19th century romanticism. Parody, of course, can be serious as well as funny. How seriously are these pieces meant?

D.B.: Both these pieces represent a specialized kind of music in which a composer takes formulas inherited from the past (in Questions from the Floor, actually rhetorical political formulas) and either mixes them with new ones, or recasts them in order to make them timely.

Such a procedure requires that the composer deal with the problem of "masking" (a term in information theory referring to the process by which the mind shuts off sensation from a source which would, if allowed to come through, become unbearable). A person who's lived a long time next to a truck route hardly notices the sound of the trucks any more; someone who's grown up with the perfect authentic cadence drummed into his ears thousands of times hardly gets its message of finality anymore. If you use old formulas, you have to do something to make them perceptible - to get past the masking effect. Some good music of this sort is being made by such composers as Mike Sahl (with old violin melodies, for instance) and Mauricio Kagel (with Beethoven). A good example is Ashley's Orange Dessert, which makes it possible for one to listen to muzak, by putting it in a very peculiar context, and thereby to rediscover how tawdry it is.

Intermission Collage is a little example of how the waves sent out by some 19th-century European music (Chopin prelude) could be caught on the rebound, so to speak, after they had circled the globe in the late twentieth. It was this idea of catching a rebound which qualifies this little recording, for me at least, as a "tape" of mine despite the fact that I neither played nor composed any of it. The Chopin tune was set to American popular lyrics in the 1930's; a girl growing up in the north of Japan learned these (in Japanese translation) in the 1940's; a Brazilian A & R man made a jungle bird record in which he mixed the birdsong with the prelude in the 1950's; I overdubbed the Japanese vocal line on to the Brazilian bird-and-prelude record in New York in 1970. I haven't negatively reacted against any emotional excesses on the part of Chopin, no; on the contrary, this prelude has acquired, for me, through the patina of age and cross-cultural resonance, a greater poignancy and beauty than it ever would have had again when played alone on the piano. So in this sense I would call the piece "serious" (or at least heartfelt).

Questions from the Floor is a play between new audio techniques (tape recording, tape delay, mixing, headphone monitoring, and public address vocal projection) and the venerable theatrical convention of puppetry. By having the live performer speak the words of our political demagogues at the same time that the demagogues themselves (on tape) are heard to utter them, the inane reality of their rhetoric, I think, is heightened...the masking effect, by means of which we've all learned to protect ourselves after thousands of hours of TV viewing, is side-stepped a bit. I'd say this piece is in earnest, too, because it points up our deep need for politicians who speak honestly.

If a working definition of humor is the putting together of things that don't belong but which display, when juxtaposed, some kind of unreal logic, then maybe these two pieces are funny, although I think the borderline between funny and peculiar is a tricky one - particularly in a performance situation. In any case, funniness and seriousness are not mutually exclusive.

J.H.: In recent years Herbert Brun has concerned himself considerably with the origin, development, use, and decay of languages, musical and otherwise. At least implicitly, he has prescribed that new music be, to some extent, "anticommunicative," meaning that it should operate somewhere beyond its listeners' prevailing "level of communicativity." Would you comment on this in relation to your own work and to new music in general?

D.B.: I think Brun uses the terms "communication" and "anticommunication" inappropriately, and, in any case, that he is playing verbal games around an idea which was applicable, if at all, to Western music of a previous era, and which is of no help in coping with the new kinds of experience that our artists are offering us these days. I prefer the definition of communication as a two-way intercourse between minds of equal size who have common symbols available for transmission (There is much interesting material on communication in recent writing, for example in John Lilly's *The Mind of the Dolphin*). When an artist presents sounds, sights, or other experiences to a person who is not invited to respond with the same means in real time, communication isn't taking place, because the transmission medium is going one way only.

Brun's idea that the artist should assess the "cultural level" of his audience, and then hand down something slightly beyond its grasp for this audience to chew on till it "gets it" seems elitist - and also outmoded on at least two counts: 1) we are multi-cultural, just as we are multi-lingual and multi-racial, and our minds can snap back and forth from one inherited system to another with as much ease as they can tackle or invent fresh systems; and 2) it assumes that the values and "meanings" in our inherited musical culture have to be honored, built upon, expanded, whereas I believe they don't. They can be brushed aside as irrelevant or tossed out as counter-productive. We need to throw out a lot of inherited cultural baggage today, God knows... how about patriotism, or male chauvinism?

Granted, a musician can choose to work with the formulas of the Western or other past if he wants to, and if he does he has to renew those formulas in some way - otherwise nobody will notice them. But there are other things for us to do in art today which are as little related to renewal of past formulas and inherited languages as interplanetary rocketry is to horseback riding. Alvin Lucier's *Vespers* and *I am Sitting in a Room* are two examples. Max Neuhaus' *Water Whistle* is a third. Pauline Oliveros' *Sonic Meditations* is another. All these musics explore situations and states which require no previous conditioning by inherited systems from the West or anywhere else.

J.H.: If a work were devoid of "anticommunication," in Brun's sense of the term, listening to it might well be a one-shot thing for a sophisticated perceiver, meaning one who has heard a certain amount

of new music. If this situation were to arise in connection with your own work or that of any avant garde composer, would it be of any concern to you? Take an example you've already mentioned: if Alvin Lucier's *I am Sitting in a Room* is terribly deficient in anticommunication, as was once asserted by a student composer at the Ohio State University, would it make any difference to you? Would it make any difference to Lucier?

D.B.: Let's rephrase the question, and ask whether Alvin's piece is new and, if so, whether its newness is useful to us; whether a "sophisticated perceiver" would need or want to hear it more than once in order to perceive it; and whether I or Alvin would care whether he would want to hear it more than once.

The piece does two things. One is to demonstrate how the acoustic properties of an indoor space can be made audible. This is done by letting those properties transform an external sound source through the use of repetitions miked live and successively re-recorded within the space (For a detailed description of the process, see SOURCE, issue #7). The other is to allow this process to eradicate (on tape) the composer's own speech impediment.

What's extraordinary about the piece is the way it combines these two processes, the one having to do with acoustic realities and the other with ritual healing.

So I'd say yes, the piece is new, and yes, its newness is useful to us. We're now obliged to dwell within oppressive spaces, standardized in construction and often impregnated by muzak. In revealing the hidden acoustic wealth of such spaces the piece may make them easier for us to bear; it suggests a better alternative to muzak, which some future society, less interested in the profit motive than our present one, may act upon. A second usefulness is that having gone through the experience of the piece one might begin to hear the resonances of a space one was in without going through the taped repetition process at all. As an analogy, consider there was a time when people didn't know about the overtone series and did not perceive overtones in the pitched sounds of their voices and instruments. One day somebody discovered overtones and demonstrated their existence; ever since, musicians have heard and understood harmonies and timbres in a new and more perceptive way.

If one understands English, it is enough to hear the piece once to know what it's about: the sound used for the acoustical transformation is a clear spoken explanation of exactly what the composer is doing (I think the idea that "serious" music has to be heard many times to be appreciated is old fashioned, and has to do with pedagogy, which is transmission of information from a superior or more developed mind to an inferior or less developed one). On the other hand, audiophiles may want to hear the tape more than once, as I do; but if they don't, I wouldn't quarrel with them, and neither would the composer.

J.H.: When you were guest lecturer in electronic music at the Ohio State University during the winter and spring of 1972, those of your works that were performed there met with a resistance and disapproval which seemed quite to exceed that normally accorded new music in a university situation, even in the midwest. Do you see this untoward hostility as having anything to do with either an excess or a deficit of 'anticommunication' in the music, or do you attribute it to something else?

D.B.: On the contrary, I'm delighted about my stay at the Ohio State University and feel that my pieces performed there met with many gratifying reactions, ranging from constructive criticism to genuine enjoyment, from a variety of people of different backgrounds and ages.

Those who disapproved rarely saw me and never spoke to me. My memory of them is fast fading.

J.H.: I'm sure those of your friends who were there at the time will be impressed with the tractability of your memory. Well, while I try to digest that answer, let's move on to this: at the present time, various composers, including yourself, seem to be interested in music which consists essentially of a single continuous event, or set of events, in which subtle changes occur over relatively long spans of time (e.g., your Sinescreen, Sine-rise, Runthrough) - music which Zygmundt Krauze calls, rather vaguely, "uniform and continuous forms." Electronic music of this sort lends itself particularly well to live performance (the three pieces I just mentioned fall within this category). Does your interest in live-electronics stem from a concern with "uniform and continuous forms," or vice versa? Or are the two only coincidentally related in your case? Also, do you, like Krauze, see an influence from music of non-Western cultures operative in such works?

D.B.: Given a new instrument, one's first musicianly impulse is to make sounds which are natural to it. Continuously sustaining sound is natural to electronic oscillators and sets them apart from acoustic instruments of the past. On the other hand, most musicians whom I admire tend away from building music to and from climaxes, in the old Western sense, whether they make electronic or acoustic sound. Electronics arrived on the scene at the same time as the return (in our culture) of the need for non-climactic forms - music on a plateau, to oversimplify - and that's why there is a connection (though not an absolute one) between the two. The pieces you mentioned just now are enmeshed somewhere in that connection.

There's no question about the influence of non-Western cultures though its extent and origin varies greatly from one individual to the next. To me the most relevant of all "other" cultures is the new one, barely glimpsed as yet, which we're all of us in the process of creating right now and all over the globe.

J.H.: What do you think that new culture will entail for music?

D.B.: Frederic Rzewski's idea comes to mind: he thinks the same thing may happen to music that did to Gardening after the seventeenth century. Gardening in France was at one time considered a high art, and its master practitioners had the stature of painters and composers... now it has become a people's activity practiced by millions; there aren't any star gardeners. What do you think?

J.H.: I think we should cultivate our gardens.

OF INTEREST cont.

works by Cage, Brown, Childs, Laderman, Whittenberg, Feldman, Fulkerson, Ligeti, Moryl, Powell, Riley, Schoenberg, Stockhausen, Stravinsky, Varese and Webern. For additional information contact: Richard Moryl, Director, Shirley Court, Brookfield, Connecticut 06804.

NOTATIONS cont.

In Feb., 1973, James Fulkerson, New York based composer-trombonist, will begin a one year residency as composer-in-residence in Berlin at the request of the city. Mary Fulkerson will also be joining

her husband as a touring member of the dance company, THE TROPICAL FRUIT. Mr Fulkerson, who will be missed in the New York area for his contributions to many new music concerts, will also be playing in the Donaueschingen Festival in October.

Music of Rodney Oakes was presented at Hancock Auditorium at USC in Los Angeles on July 31, 1972. Presented were SUITE FOR PIANO, CHAMBER MUSIC, 5 SONGS, DIALOGUE for Flute and tape recorder.

- TOM EVERETT.

VOICE cont

Malcolm A. Stone:	Lament of the Forgotten (med. High voice/pf.	1.10
Jerre E. Tanner:	Ruins (med. voice, Pf. & Harpsichord)	2.64
Robert S. Walker:	2 Songs	1.54
Harald Wiesner:	Two Poems of Walt Whitman (contralto/Pf)	3.30
John Worst:	Three Biblical Chants (alto or Bar., Fl. Hn., vln. and Str. Bass) (score)	3.74

CHOIR

William T. Allen:	In Rama (SATB)	1.54
Robert G. Barrow:	Three Psalms of Penitence (men's choir/organ)	2.42
Allen R. Bonde:	The Lord's Prayer (SSSSAAAA)	.88
	Gloria (SSSSAAAA)	1.54
Larry A Christiansen:	Psalm and Prayer (SATB and organ or strQt	1.32
David Cope:	Break, Break, Break (Double SATB, timp)	1.54
	3 Choral Works (SATB)	4.62
	Music for a Protestant Service (SATB/Organ)	5.06
Michael G. Cunningham:	Elizabethan Song Book (SATB)	2.64
	And Death Shall Have No Domain (SATB/Pf)	2.64
	The Nightingale (SSA)	3.08
	The Lord's Prayer (SSA)	1.10
	Nineteenth-century Mass (SATB)	2.86
David Eddleman:	Magnificat (SATB)	3.08
Dean Estabrook:	To Spring (Small SATB and Bassoon)	.88
Truman Fisher:	Magnificat (SSATB, Pf 4 hnds, Hp, Perc. RENTAL	25.00

	A Litany (SATB and Organ)	4.08
Charles I. FitzRandolph:	Parting Gifts (SSAATTBB)	1.54
Roger W. Harris:	Prelude (TTBB, 3trb.Bar.Hn.tuba)	.66
	score and parts	2.42
	Aspects of Love (SATB)	3.96

Trent Kynaston:	Corinthians 13 (Bar, choir, (satb) 13 brass)	15.00
	vocal score/Pf...3.64 Brass Parts RENTAL	15.00

James F. MacDonald:	Thirteenth Psalm (SATB/organ)	1.76
William J. McDaniel:	A Song from Solomon (SATB)	2.42
	Alleluia, Amen (SATB)	4.18
Hamilton G. McLean:	Bless the Lord (SATB)	1.98
Anthony Piccolo:	Introitus (male SATB & Str. Orch.)	1.86

	String Parts on RENTAL.	
Glenn Spring:	Missa Brevis (SATB, 2Pf., timp.) RENTAL	25.00
Frank G. Stewart:	Three Epitaphs (for mixed chorus)	3.08
Malcolm A. Stone:	Psalm 23 (SSAATTBB)	1.32

	Psalm 120 (SSAATTBB)	2.64
	Night Plane (SSA)	.66
	Kyrie Eleison (SSAATTBB)	2.42
	Three Little Surprises (SSAA)	.66
	Invocation (SSAATTBB)	.44

John Worst:	Psalm 117 (SATB tpt.hn.trb.tba)	3.30
	Brass Parts	1.32

	And Ye Shall Be Filled (SATB, 2tpt. 3flhn. trb. tuba)	1.76
	instrumental parts	.88

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